

PAUL WENZ AND FORBES

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Readers of *Explorations* have already encountered the French-Australian writer Paul Wenz (1869–1939), both in an article devoted to him by Maurice Blackman a decade ago,¹ and as a leitmotif in the special issue celebrating the work of Jean-Paul Delamotte.² They may also have seen, and perhaps acquired, the edition of Wenz's *Diary of a New Chum and Other Lost Stories* in which Blackman and Delamotte played major roles.³ In other words, even for those of us who have been onlookers, Wenz has been a presence, one memorialized sixty years ago by Erica C. Wolff in what was the first humanities PhD (at the University of Melbourne) ever completed in Australia.

In the autumn of 1994 I had occasion to stay overnight in the town of Forbes on my way to Orange. Aware of the district's French connections—Joseph Bernard Reymond (1834–1918) was Mayor and a local Member of Parliament at the end of the nineteenth century—I did a little exploration in the cemetery. Then, to while away the time before the bus for Orange arrived, I took refuge in the Public Library. To my surprise—because I knew of a collection in the Mitchell Library in Sydney—I discovered a Paul Wenz Room containing a substantial amount of material left by Wenz's widow Hettie in 1959. In particular there was an item of special interest to a historian of reading: an album entitled *Books I Have Read* and published by Dodd, Mead and Company of New York in 1905. This had been filled out conscientiously by Wenz himself, while his wife worked on a parallel volume of *Birds I Have Seen*. Needless to say, the Paul Wenz Room was known to the Australian and French experts on the work of the writer. On the other hand, people studying reading practices and records whom I consulted some months later in North America seemed to be only vaguely aware of the Dodd, Mead phenomenon. I filed the question away for future attention along with many other matters that arise from my general inquisitiveness.

By the time I returned to Forbes in the latter part of 2007 the Paul Wenz Room had been swallowed up by the Public Library's need for computer-terminal space, and the collection itself had been relegated to a store-room. I discovered that a catalogue/checklist had been prepared by Merrill Findlay as part of the Paul and Hettie Wenz Project. There is, in fact, great local pride in this aspect of Forbes's heritage. *Books I Have Read* was still there, and I was able to study it effectively with a view to producing quite

quickly an article opening out this facet of the recording of reading. (The acquisition from the USA of another sample has been of assistance in this.) I am working with Merrill Findlay to help secure better housing of the material, and I applaud the recent creation—in March 2008—of the Paul Wenz Society. Those interested should get in touch with the Secretary of the Society, Sabine Pierard at PO Box 260, Willoughby, NSW 2068; phone (02) 9958 5008; mobile 0412 136 292; sabinepierard@yahoo.com.au. No doubt future numbers of *Explorations* will carry further news of the Society's doings and plans.

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Notes

1. "Transculturalism and hybridity in the French-Australian writer Paul Wenz", *Explorations*, n° 23, December 1997, pp. 3–11.
2. See in particular Jean-Paul Delamotte, "Reciprocity", *Explorations*, n° 24, June 1998, pp. 18–37.
3. Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1990.