

Information Update

Vol2 No.1

From the Director's Desk ...

The warm response we received to our inaugural edition of the JCPML *Information Update* has been very encouraging. Once again in this issue we will be sharing news of our progress with you.



Focus for 1997

As we prepare for the completion of the building, our focus for the coming 12 months is directed towards preparing the JCPML for its public opening. So it is timely that we have undertaken a review of the JCPML Program Statement. This publication has served us well over the past two years, but with the appointment of our full-time Archivist, Kandy-Jane Henderson, we have begun the process of re-examining our

collection focus. Over the next few months this will involve a series of meetings with key external groups.

Kandy-Jane has also been working in conjunction with the Capital Planning & Projects Office to carefully plan the fitting out of the new building.

This has involved a lot of hard work and discussion to ensure that appropriate furnishings, equipment and systems are installed before our move later in the year. Because of the nature of the JCPML collection—which encompasses original and unique items—secure storage to ensure its continuing preservation has been essential.

Once again several significant donations have been made to the collection, and some of these are highlighted in this issue. Of particular note are the very generous copyright donations made by those who have given John Curtin Memorial Lectures in Western Australia. This has enabled us not only to make the original paper copies available for research, but to also undertake to make this material available electronically.

The year ahead promises to be exciting and innovative for the JCPML!

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Building Progress

These pictures show the progress being made on the building site of The John Curtin Centre.

For details regarding the fit-out of the building, see inside story.



Side view of the John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library ▲



◀ Side view of The John Curtin Centre



Fitting Out the New Building

With construction work on the JCPML building now being finalised, the Archivist, Kandy-Jane Henderson, has been involved with the detailed planning and preparation required prior to identifying necessary items of furniture and equipment for the new building.

Extensive consultations with the Capital Planning & Projects Office in regard to the fit-out of the JCPML commenced late in January, 1997. The fit-out stage, which ranges from selection of chair material to installing an appropriate security system, is due to be completed by the middle of this year.

Of particular importance are the

storage system requirements for the archives. The largest area of concern is the archive stack which will house the JCPML collection.

The correct storage of each media format—paper, film, photographs, audio cassettes, electronic records—is essential in ensuring the preservation of the collection. Also to be considered are the specialist requirements for the processing room, secure store and cool room.

Ensuring that adequate provision is made for the JCPML's technology requirements has been another of Kandy-Jane's tasks. This has involved her researching the following key areas:

- computer equipment for access to current and future digital projects;
- appropriate equipment to access microfilm; and
- an appropriate system to access the JCPML oral history collection.

Consultation with researchers has also taken place to ascertain what facilities are important to them for the reading room in providing, for example, access to technology, a comfortable work environment and appropriate reference sources on site.

Spending time now to plan carefully for the future will ensure the JCPML makes the best use of its resources.

Review of Collection Focus Underway

A Program Statement covering the vision, structure, responsibilities and collection focus of the JCPML was published in 1994. In this initial development stage the focus of the collection concentrated on aspects of the history and politics of Australia most closely connected with the life and work of John Curtin.

Since then the JCPML has undertaken a significant promotional program to alert the public to the existence of The John Curtin Centre and the JCPML. The promotional program has also been aimed at targeting possible donors of Curtin-related material and accepting items into the collection. While the collection is not large, significant material has already been donated.

With the appointment of an Archivist and the imminent opening of the new JCPML building to the public, a timely review of the collection focus statement, particularly in the light of collection priorities for the next three to five years, is now being undertaken. This process involves a series of meetings which will be scheduled over the next few months. While the Focus Group meetings are not intended to be comprehensive or to include all stakeholders, key external groups have been identified—such as academic historians, the Australian Archives and the Library and Information Service of WA (LISWA).

Once a new draft of the Program Statement has been compiled more input will be requested before the final Program is published. ■



Archivist Kandy-Jane Henderson (left) and JCPML Director Vicki Williamson with one of the items in the collection

Collection Corner

Author Makes Donation to JCPML

Author Stephen Holt has generously donated a signed copy of his recently published book, *A Veritable Dynamo: Lloyd Ross and Australian labour 1901-1987*, to the JCPML. This biography forms an interesting addition to the JCPML collection as its subject, Lloyd Ross, the Australian trade union and Labor activist, was the man officially appointed by the Australian Labor Party to write a biography on Prime Minister John Curtin.

According to Holt (page 104):

Ross was Labor's leading man of letters. In 1945, just before Curtin died, the ALP in New South Wales invited him to write the Prime Minister's biography. He was soon publicly identified with the project. On the evening after Curtin died he took part in a commemorative program on the ABC which also featured Dame Mary Gilmore. He then set about the task in earnest, contacting a wide range of Curtin's friends and associates for information and advice. The biography was intended to provide only a semi-official account in which Curtin would be shown warts and all.

However, Ross ran into a variety of difficulties and far from being able to provide a first draft by 1946, the book languished for another thirty years. After his retirement Ross battled cataracts, Parkinson's disease and the loss of his wife to persevere with the Curtin biography. It was finally published in 1977. Due to the continuing lack of published material on John Curtin, Ross' biography of Curtin is still widely referred to by researchers. ■



Isla Macphail (right) interviews Mr Harry Krantz for the JCPML oral history collection

"Curtin was a great leader and a great man who didn't have any pretensions whatsoever—a very simple, good man that anyone could deal with." That is the way Harry Krantz, one of the candidates for the 1943 elections, remembers Prime Minister John Curtin. Mr Krantz, who has been involved with the Labor movement since 1938, has just completed an oral history interview with the JCPML which will be a valuable addition to the collection.

Mr Krantz was a Sapper in the second AIF in 1943 when he became the endorsed Labor candidate for the Federal Division of Barker in South Australia. At just 24 years of age, Mr Krantz was the youngest candidate and had already been Secretary of the Federated Clerks Union of Australia, South Australia branch, for two years.

One of Mr Krantz's first recollections of Curtin is at a 1941 by-election in South Australia when Curtin supported the Labor candidate at the Melba Theatre. After the meeting Mr Krantz caught the tram home.

"And who should be on the tram but John

Curtin—Leader of the Opposition!" Mr Krantz remembers. "There weren't any other Labor Party people who got onto the tram with him—he was on his own. Any rate we had some conversation with him on the tram trip into town."

This anecdote is an example not only of the austere times, but of the unassuming character of John Curtin who, without fuss or ceremony, went about his job. As Mr Krantz remembers, there was very little ceremony for John Curtin even when he became Prime Minister of Australia and he believes it reflects on Curtin's absolute sincerity.

"He didn't want anything else except the purpose that he was given—which was to lead Australia in the war," says Mr Krantz. "He was a principled person—quite decisive. I liked him because he was a simple man. He could walk with kings and keep the common touch. He had an intellect which enabled him to move in the various areas of life which he came in contact with. And I think that's about it. There are no more superlatives left for me with Curtin."

"I think it's awful that we've discarded our history; allowed it to be unrecorded and unspoken. I'm really thrilled to bits that the Library has been established."

The John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library welcomes enquiries from people who have material associated with John Curtin or who knew our wartime Prime Minister.

Ph: (09) 351 7549 or (09) 351 7205

JCPML Vision of an Electronic Archives

In line with the JCPML vision to provide an electronic archives based on the latest technological advances available, several digital projects are currently underway which, it is hoped, will provide an innovative approach to access, storage and retrieval of material held within the JCPML collection.

One of these projects, which is now being completed, is the digitisation of the John Curtin Memorial Lecture Series.

In 1995 the Australian Labor Party (ALP) of Western Australia donated its paper copy of the lecture series to the JCPML collection. The JCPML has assumed responsibility for maintain-

ing and preserving these lectures for the purposes of research.

The inaugural John Curtin Memorial Lecture, sponsored by the University of WA branch of the ALP, was given by Dr Jim Cairns in 1960. The lectures were conceived as an annual commemoration of Prime Minister John Curtin; although there were some years when either no lecture took place or no copy of the speech was obtained.

To enhance access to this collection, the JCPML began investigating a means to make the material available in a digital format. Copyright holders of the speeches were approached and generously donated

their copyright to these lectures so that the content could be made available to researchers (*see list of donors below*). Biographies, including photographs, of all the lecturers have also been included in the digital version.

The project has provided valuable insight into overcoming various problems involved in converting a paper collection to an electronic version and this information will be useful in future digital projects undertaken by the JCPML.

In our next issue we will feature a report on the digital project undertaken in conjunction with the Australian Archives. ■

Contributions since October 1996

The JCPML acknowledges the following individuals from all around Australia who have actively donated material to the collection:

***Peter Baldwin
Lance Barnard
Brian Burke
Dr James (Jim) Cairns
Clyde Cameron
Moses (Moss) Cass
Samuel Cohen
Keppell (Kip) Enderby
W Hall
Nicholas Hasluck
Robert (Bob) Hawke***

***William (Bill) Hayden
Stephen Holt
Brian Howe
Barry Jones
Harry Krantz
Carmen Lawrence
Robert (Bob) McMullan
Susan Ryan
E Gough Whitlam
Neville Wran***

The JCPML acknowledges the following groups which have actively assisted in the search for material for inclusion in the collection:

***Air Commodore and staff of the
Victoria Barracks
Australia Remembers Council,
Western Australia
The Returned and Services
League, Victoria***

Active JCPML Supporters:

***N Bicks
Clive Harvie
James Bernard Maher
Jack Mulholland
Phil O'Brien
Alan and Mavis Salisbury***