

# Foreword to the New Edition

This book was only possible because The Australian National University was willing to grant me a PhD scholarship, and its History Department was willing to accept my application, despite the novelty of my topic, and the absence of supervisors without any direct knowledge of it. When I commenced my work on it in 1958, ANU was still relatively new and its only students were doctoral students. It was a stimulating academic environment and we had considerable free rein.

My pioneering work was not assisted by well-kept archives – either by people or institutions. The keeping of systematic records over any period of time was a rarity. Inevitably, I had to develop an archival system of my own, within which I could place whatever relevant records I could find. The work was often slow and tedious: chasing up missing minutes and annual reports (if they ever existed); sometimes copying by hand what I did locate because it was the only copy (photocopying was not yet available); persuading people to hold on to material; and so on.

The whole project obviously was a considerable challenge, only made possible by the amount of goodwill and cooperation I received at the time. The only disappointment was how little serious comment the book elicited subsequently, and its manifest failure to stimulate further historical research into the profession. Only twice since have others asked for access to my extensive data collection for this early period. In 1979, Laurie O'Brien and Cynthia Turner did produce *Establishing Medical Social Work in Victoria* (Department of Social Studies, University of Melbourne), but without any help from my collected data. At least partly assisted by my 'invaluable archive', Elspeth Browne produced *Tradition and Change: Hospital Social Work in NSW*. (This was commissioned after a 1995 celebration in Sydney of the centenary anniversary of the establishment by the

Charity Organisation Society of hospital social work, at the Royal Free Hospital in London.) In 2011, Jane Miller, president of the alumni association of social work graduates of the University of Melbourne, spent a few days staying with us to study files in my archives in preparation for her PhD on American influences on social work education in Melbourne 1920–60. This was successfully completed in 2015, and I have appreciated the opportunity to give her considerable assistance along the way. Her historical interest had been aroused by realising how little had been written about Jocelyn Hyslop, the first director of social work training in Melbourne. I am aware that the University of South Australia has had a project to collect material on social work history in that state, and recently I have been told about a joint AASW and university historical social work project for which ARC funds were being sought.

In 1976, I wrote an introduction to the published proceedings of the 14th National Conference of the AASW, which brought up to date the historical story of the profession in Australia, but no one has attempted anything of a general kind since. According to the editors, I was, without question, ‘the foremost authority on the history of Australian social work today’. It was cold comfort, for I considered Australian society and the profession itself needed a considerable amount of continuing serious historical work by a substantial number of scholars for enlightenment and this was not yet forthcoming.

What is needed is for this to be an ongoing group enterprise for social work historians in the schools of social work, working in close collaboration with other historians, and with archivists to develop a national system of social work archives and historical research. Without such a system in place, assumptions and generalisation about professional social work in Australia cannot be confidently grounded.

On the initiative of the AASW, this lonely pioneer study is being republished by ANU Press, as part of the celebrations of the 70th anniversary of the national professional association. If this is a clear sign of an emerging awareness of the need for historical study, I would suggest the following steps to build on the initiative:

1. Appointment of a Steering Committee by the heads of schools of social work in Australia and the AASW to establish a National Standing Committee on Australian Social Work History.

2. The National Standing Committee would have a national convenor, and have coordinators in each of the States and Territories, who may or may not be members of the national Committee.
3. The National Standing Committee would report to interested parties (these to be determined) at least annually on:
  - The development of a national system of social work archives:
    - where the archives are held, in what form, and conditions of access
    - steps to improve these as part of a national and international system
    - steps to make social workers and their employing agencies more archive-conscious, as an essential professional responsibility.
  - The development of social work history
    - in social work schools, schools of history and other schools
    - publications
    - current research.

The problem needs to be tackled by appropriate national organisation, not to restrict genuine historical research, but to stimulate it as effectively and efficiently as possible within its national and international contexts. Resources should not be a difficulty. Currently, with accredited social work courses in about 30 Australian universities, and an AASW of more than 9,000 members, resources could be found to study the historical processes which have shaped the size and nature of the profession in this country. When this book was written, there were only four schools of social work and an AASW of less than 1,000 members. (It reached 1,158 in 1968.) Surely the time has come to tackle this societal task. I believe we owe it to our profession and the people we profess to serve.

No attempt has been made to update this historical publication. It stands as it was written.

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