

# Preface

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Ingereth Macfarlane

## 1977–2017: *Aboriginal History* journal celebrates 40 years of publication

The first volume of the journal *Aboriginal History* was published in 1977, 40 years ago. The cultural tenor of that time is evoked by remembering other events of '77 – the publication of Helen Garner's first novel, *Monkey Grip*; the first *Star Wars* film; the release of the Ranger Uranium Inquiry report; Premier Bjelke-Peterson's ban on street protest in Queensland; the formation of the Australian Democrats by Don Chipp; and the passing of the NSW *Heritage Act*. It was the year the Apple II computer and the Voyager satellite were launched. It was a time of innovation, upheaval and consolidation of postwar social changes. Tom Stannage, on *Aboriginal History's* first Editorial Board, saw the establishment of both *Aboriginal History* and the feminist journal *Hecate* in 1977 as part of a shift in the questions being asked by historians, a 'rejection' of 'the older established ways of presenting Australian history'.<sup>1</sup>

Our 40th anniversary offers an opportunity to reflect on the history and future of the journal, and to celebrate the landmark of its foundation and its continuance. This chance was embraced on 27 October 2017, in the form of a masterclass on writing and publishing for early career researchers in the field, and a symposium of past contributors. Their insights and perspectives will be published in a future volume of the journal.

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1 Stannage 1979: x. This can be seen to be building on the pioneering historical work of Beckett 1958 [2005]; Inglis 1962; Barwick 1963; Reay 1964; Corris 1968; Gale 1972; Curthoys 1973; Markus 1974; Reece 1974; and the landmark publication in 1970 of Charles Rowley's *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society, Outcasts in White Australia* and *The Remote Aborigines*.

Bain Attwood has previously written an extensive account of the origins of the journal.<sup>2</sup> As one of the journal's editors, I add some reflections here on what I think are principles and perspectives that have guided the journal's ethos, approach and content.

The possibilities for the foundation of a new journal were laid out by its prime initiator, Pacific historian Niel Gunson in 1975:

**Foundation of the Board and general policy meeting**

Thursday 4 September 1975, Staff Centre ANU

The first object of the Journal is to provide a much-needed vehicle for the publication of articles and information in the area of Australian ethnohistory ... The Journal will serve as a publication outlet for the increasing number of scholars working in the field of Aboriginal history, bringing together material which now tends to be scattered and to go unnoticed in more general periodicals. The existence of the Journal could stimulate further interest and research in Aboriginal history ... considerable importance will be attached to Aboriginal oral tradition, vernacular writings etc. Through its Notes and Documents section – with unpublished MSS, oral traditions, archives, bibliographies – the Journal will also serve as a means of recording Aboriginal history from its source. Another important object will be to provide Aboriginals with readily accessible information on Aboriginal history ... Finally, there is increasing public interest in Aboriginal history, both in schools and in the media. In this way the Journal is likely to achieve a wider readership than other scholarly periodicals and will thus serve a valuable social function.<sup>3</sup>

Hence, the primary goals were to foster research in the history of Aboriginal Australia, bring together academic publication in the area and to make accessible otherwise difficult to find records and documents for Aboriginal and other informed general readers.

It is telling that the origins of the *Aboriginal History* journal were in the Department of Pacific History of The Australian National University. Pacific historians working in that department, in particular Niel Gunson, Harry Maude and Greg Dening, had been confidently working with missionary, government and trade documents since the late 1950s in pursuit of Pacific histories that overtly included the perspectives of the Islanders – ‘a whole unexplored world of culture-contact and pre-European history in the Pacific with its own methodology and rationale’.<sup>4</sup> They saw this ‘world’ as an expansion of the more traditional historical interests in ‘colonial history and contemporary politics’, and hoped for ‘history written by the Pacific

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2 Attwood 2012.

3 Memo circulated to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies in November 1975 (letter to Shirley Andrews, 10 November 1975), and to the Research School of Pacific Studies, seeking set-up funding. Aboriginal History archives, in the possession of Niel Gunson, Canberra.

4 Gunson 1978: xii.

Islanders themselves’, with ‘an emphasis on the importance of Indigenous source material, both written vernacular and oral’.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, at this time few Australianist historians were using parallel materials towards such goals. It was this gap in mainstream Australian academic historical work that *Aboriginal History* aimed to remedy.

Foundation editor, Canadian-born anthropologist Diane Barwick wrote to fellow anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner regarding his study of early settlement at Sydney,<sup>6</sup> published as the first article in the first volume of the new journal, saying his paper was:

unique in emphasising the Aboriginal perception of historical events. This is precisely what we want for the journal – this perception that Australian historians have not – probably cannot – provide ... I haven’t been so enthralled by a story since ‘The guns of Navarone’. It would help Aboriginal kids a lot; when they have to suffer the textbook recitals of that first encounter they must suffer an identity crisis.<sup>7</sup>

In the 1975 proposal above, the emphasis was to provide historical records and scholarship *for* Aboriginal people, but this rapidly shifted to an emphasis on ‘self help’. By 1979, as Tom Stannage wrote in the introduction to the *Handbook for Aboriginal and Islander History*: ‘Already research on Aboriginal history is changing our one-sided perception of Australian history, and Aboriginal authors are giving us all a new understanding of the past’. The *Handbook* was ‘dedicated to the proposition that Aborigines and Islanders will write their own history, and rewrite the history of Australia. Many are already at work recording the oral history of their own communities. It is these pioneers who have prompted us to publish this manual’.<sup>8</sup> The *Handbook* was Aboriginal History Inc.’s first monograph, republished four times to 1986. It was put together by 32 researchers in diverse fields who saw the need to set out in detail how to access and use different kinds of historical documents, from archives to museum collections to archaeological sites.

Another unfamiliar form of history-telling promoted in the journal was in collaborative papers, or ‘eye-witness accounts’ as Tom Dutton and Luise Hercus, linguists and editors of *Aboriginal History* Volume 9, called them.<sup>9</sup> These are historical accounts given in full in their Indigenous language, transcribed and translated. These are at once a record of language, a telling of a story important to the teller in their own terms and a history with important implications made available for those who have not lived or heard it. Dutton and Hercus stated that ‘the text with the gloss is, after all, the closest we can get to what people said and thought. In the field of oral

5 Gunson 1978: xiii.

6 Stanner 1977.

7 Letter Barwick to Stanner, 12/12/76. Aboriginal History Archives, in possession of N. Gunson, Canberra.

8 Stannage 1979: xi.

9 Dutton and Hercus 1985: 3.

history, it represents an historical document'.<sup>10</sup> These are interdisciplinary historical documents that would not customarily be published in standard historical journals, and would not be readily available outside technical linguistic ones. Editor Diane Barwick commented on the article 'Rib-bone Billy' included in Volume 1:<sup>11</sup>

I think the use of Aboriginal language texts is very important for the proposed Journal of Aboriginal History. They emphasise that there is an Aboriginal perception of history and will help show other Australians that Aboriginal languages are not mere 'lingo' or pidgin or doggerel, but are worthy of preservation and analysis. Texts and translations are almost unavailable except in technical linguistic journals and monographs and are almost unintelligible to the rest of us. BUT – they may be difficult to publish, technically difficult with special fonts, extra cost? Need to be consistent in orthography. Can such mss stand alone rather than being submerged in an 'oral history department' as somehow separate (inferior?) to white-man-history.<sup>12</sup>

This is a reminder that these kinds of text are not straightforward to produce or to publish – they required a reorientation of the priorities of publication, with a clear emphasis on the primacy of Indigenous voices and perspectives. One part of this involved developing special fonts and a system of referencing that suited a mix of disciplines, which Diane Barwick and co-foundation board member Bob Reece spent a great deal of time working out, and which is still retained.

An additional form of encouragement for work by Indigenous historical researchers are the two scholarships that Aboriginal History Inc. administers – the annual Sally White–Diane Barwick Award and the Stanner Award, which was helpful to now Professor John Maynard in his early exploration of the field.

A prime characteristic of the journal's and monograph series's content is their diversity of theme, region and approach. And where there was a gap, a special volume was put together to fill it.<sup>13</sup> This diversity was enhanced by the inherent, necessarily interdisciplinary qualities that follow from what is required to access and represent histories of Indigenous Australia. Social, cultural and economic historians, anthropologists, linguists, archaeologists, cultural geographers, sociologists, educationalists, political scientists and demographers have all contributed. The Editorial Board's membership also reflects this diversity. Many members have had long-term commitments to the journal, but at the same time it has gained from the input of many short-term academic visitors to the ANU who serve on

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10 Dutton and Hercus 1985: 3.

11 Hercus 1977. Other examples include 'Afghans and Aborigines', Murray and Austin 1981; a Jiwali account of Halley's comet, Butler and Austin 1986; and 'Leaving the Simpson desert', Hercus 1985.

12 Editorial comment 24 March 1977, in Aboriginal History Archives, in possession of Niel Gunson, Canberra.

13 For example, Volume 5 about Asian–Aboriginal contact, Volume 8 on south-eastern Australia, Volume 9 on linguistic studies, Volume 16 on Aboriginal people in the armed services, Volume 19 on international comparisons with interrelations in other settler societies, Volume 25 on the concept of genocide and Volume 30 on Indigenous forms of history telling.

the board during their residency. Reading through the lists of board members gives a panoramic view of those who have worked to bring histories of Indigenous Australia to light.

Our 40th anniversary is an opportunity to acknowledge the long-term stalwarts of the Editorial Board who helped establish the journal and have carried it through consequential changes in Indigenous politics, in university politics, in publishing modes and expectations, and a great expansion in writing and readership in the field: Niel Gunson, Luise Hercus and Isabel McBryde.

Diane Barwick so injected her energy, editorial rigour, wide network of contacts and her vision for the journal into its structure that its influence has not waned. Her husband, zoologist and artist Dick Barwick, designed the journal's covers from the beginning until 2009. They chose the Laura rock art image, which he re-drew to form the Aboriginal History Inc. logo, because it expressed 'protest and reaction as well as the everyday life of Aboriginal people'.<sup>14</sup>

Aboriginal History Inc. has always been independent, but has been given vital support by the Research School of Pacific Studies and the Research School of Social Sciences, initially through Peter Grimshaw, the business manager, who enabled crucial initial funding and went on to be treasurer from 1977 until 2002. The Australian Centre for Indigenous History, through board member Ann McGrath, and the ANU History Department have provided support and a home for the journal since 2003.

There has been consistent input into the Editorial Board's decisions from Indigenous members, including Charles Perkins, Marcia Langton, Gordon Briscoe, Mick Dodson, Kaye Price (Chair), Robyne Bancroft, Bill Jonas, Frances Peters-Little, Steven Kinnane, Lawrence Bamblett, Ricky Mullett, Dave Johnson and Shino Konishi. The Heads of the Tjabal Indigenous Higher Education Centre have been on the board and generously hosted Aboriginal History Inc. meetings. The ANU is currently developing an Indigenous Heritage Trail with Dave Johnson, and Aboriginal History will be included in this.

Since 1981, Peter Read has been a board member and chair, and editor of many volumes and monographs. Maria Nugent is a creative editor with Shino Konishi, and is now chair. I have been a member of the board since 2000, and was managing editor for seven years. May McKenzie was the secretary for most of the years from the beginning until 1993. Archaeologist Rob Paton has been the secretary and then treasurer from 1994 to the present.

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14 Pers. comm. July 2006, Canberra.

There has always been a dedicated team of people who volunteer or work for tiny amounts of money to produce books and journals of high quality. Bernadette Hince and Geoff Hunt have been meticulous copyeditors. Rani Kerin has overseen the publication of many high-quality monographs. Tikka Wilson, now secretary, has been on the board and typeset the journal with flair for many years. Trish Boekel and now Thelma Sims have been indispensable sales agents.

Aboriginal History Inc. has enjoyed a constructive relationship with ANU Press, who have actively supported the journal and monograph series to transition to digitisation and electronic publishing.

At a rough count, Aboriginal History Inc. has published an average of 100 articles and 10 monographs per decade. A large number of these would not otherwise be available to the world. All of these are now freely downloaded from the ANU Press website by tens of thousands of readers. To boost the accessibility of the journal articles, we have created an index of the contents of *Aboriginal History* journal from 1977 to 2016. This is available as a Word and Excel document on our website at [aboriginalhistory.org.au](http://aboriginalhistory.org.au).

All these publications have been written by authors and refereed by reviewers whose generosity and hard work keeps the discipline and its publications fresh and up to the mark. At the core of all of this are the Indigenous story-holders telling their histories in the journal so as to make them available to the world.

We look forward to the next decade of the journal's long and valuable history, and all the books and papers it will nurse into the world – a burgeoning future.

## Overview of this volume

Volume 41 was edited by Ingereth Macfarlane and Liz Conor. Many thanks to all those involved in the production of the journal – the helpful referees, book review editors Luise Hercus and Annemarie McLaren, Geoff Hunt for his copyediting, Maria Nugent and the Editorial Board for their experience and input, and the patient team at ANU Press.

This year's articles bring to light historical sources from the colonial frontier in Tasmania (Nicholas Brodie and Kristyn Harman) and South Australia (Skye Kirchauff) to provoke reassessments of colonial attitudes and expectations. Karen Hughes brings into focus little-known, intimate aspects of Indigenous women's experience with African American servicemen on the World War II Australian home front. Diana Young's study of accounts of Pitjantjatjara women's careful productions in the Ernabella craft rooms in the mid-twentieth century deepens our understanding of a relatively neglected aspect of the art history of 'first generation, postcontact Indigenous art-making among Australian Western Desert peoples'.

Nikita Vanderbyl explores records of tourists' visits to Aboriginal reserves in the late 1800s and early 1900s, focusing on the emotive aspects of the visits, and making the links between such tourism and colonialism. Janice Newton provides a close examination of the cross-cultural signs implicated in a documented ceremonial performance in early Port Phillip. Heather Burke, Lynley Wallis and their collaborators compare a reconstructed stone building in Richmond, Queensland, with other reputedly fortified structures and find that the historical and structural evidence for this interpretation are equivocal, pointing to imaginaries of the violent frontier as much as tangible experience.

## Vale

It is with great sadness that we mark the loss of two major contributors to the field of Indigenous history and to Aboriginal History Inc., Professor John Mulvaney and Dr Tracey Banivanua Mar.

### John Mulvaney (1925–2016)

John Mulvaney, AO CMG FAHA, who passed away last year, was renowned as a founder of professional archaeology in Australia, but was equally amongst the first to insist that there was a continuous history of that presence into contemporary times. He was a long-term correspondent for the Aboriginal History Editorial Board. In 1985, Volume 8 of the journal was dedicated to him for his 'outstanding research and leadership in studies of the Aboriginal past'. He contributed articles to the journal, and the monograph *The Axe Had Never Sounded: Place, People and Heritage of Recherche Bay, Tasmania* (2007). An obituary will be published in Volume 42.

### Tracey Banivanua Mar (1974–2017)

Tracey Banivanua Mar passed away this year, so very much too early. Liz Conor, who worked with Tracey and knew her well, says:

Tracey Banivanua Mar was prolific, empathic, trailblazing, prizewinning, versatile, wickedly wry and fiercely assured of her deeply informed and located politics. She was also unstinting and altruistic in her determined challenges to other's understandings. In her seminal contribution to *Aboriginal History*, Volume 37, brilliantly conceptualised as 'Imperial Literacy', Tracey showed her unerring eye for protest and solidarity. These were central to her analysis and to her exemplary engagement with the world she inhabited. Her work upends perceptions of the colonial archive and the critical significance of the Pacific as interconnected sites of resistance. Her analysis is an awakening corrective to the forces of colonialism bearing down on people's will to survive. Instead, from the most unlikely sources, she showed the myriad and creative forms of defiance her Islander people and other Indigenous peoples together invented and shared to resist dispossession. Her readers

and reputation will continue to grow, not least on the basis of the central argument of her latest book: 'Both colonisation and decolonisation are imperial projects, but decolonisation is a concept that has been configured by Indigenous and colonised peoples as an elemental and intergenerational process – a stateless and manoeuvrable site of independence and sovereignty'. She is acutely missed by all who knew her and her incendiary work.

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This text is taken from *Aboriginal History, Volume 41, 2017*,  
edited by Ingereth Macfarlane, published 2017 by ANU Press,  
The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.