Diane Barwick

As this volume was going to press we were shocked to be informed of the sudden death on 4th April, 1986 of our friend and colleague Dr Diane Barwick, foundation editor of this journal and principal guiding force throughout its existence. We publish the following letter, which expresses sentiments shared by members of the Board, from the Foundation Chairman to the current chairman as the Board’s tribute to one who has inspired us throughout the last decade. A further appreciation of her work and contribution to Aboriginal Studies is to be presented in a later issue.

'I wish to put on record an appreciation of Diane Barwick as a foundation editor and planner of *Aboriginal History*. When it was decided to start an interdisciplinary journal of Aboriginal history within the Department of Pacific and Southeast Asian History Diane Barwick was the first person we thought of to join us at an editorial level and to help at the planning stage. Diane was at first hesitant. I had struck this kind of hesitancy before, particularly by senior anthropologists only too well aware that failure of an Aboriginal-oriented project tended to reflect adversely on the Aboriginal people rather than on those organising the project. Expectations, so I was told, were raised and could not be lived up to.

But Diane’s hesitancy was shortlived. Once convinced that those involved were committed and that finance was available, she quickly made the project her own. Editorial conventions were worked out to suit several disciplines, scholarly procedures were laid down for reviewing articles, and longterm plans were made for regular publication. Needless to say Diane’s contribution was a major one. Her own exacting standards soon became journal standards, and her wealth of contacts and breadth of vision ensured interdisciplinary success.

From the first Diane had a large say in choosing the members of the Editorial Board, many of whom were handpicked as valued and trusted colleagues with the right sort of qualifications. Diane was also responsible for inviting interested Aboriginal members to our committee, so that we early benefited from their experience and expertise and have had at least one Aboriginal editor. That we had a larger number of women on the committee than on other comparable committees was also due to Diane, though it was a reflection of a balance of talents rather than any conscious policy. That two of our most valued committee members, both women, have recently obtained chairs is an index of this. Diane herself, I had always hoped, would one day be given a chair of Aboriginal history.

It is ironical indeed that for seven years Diane Barwick edited *Aboriginal History*, exercising all her professional skills, without salary or remuneration of any kind, bringing a certain amount of credit to the University, while the University itself, despite its National designation, has never officially endorsed an Aboriginal project. When Diane
resigned as an editor in 1982, due to her Bicentennial and other commitments, she thanked Peter Grimshaw and myself for establishing ‘a new journal and a new discipline’. While we may have created the opportunity it was in fact Diane who founded this discipline.

As a foundation editor Diane was conscientious beyond the call of duty. Not only did she carefully scrutinise every article and correspond with every author, but she also did all the copy editing, proofreading and liaising with the press. Her word was law, but in the main everyone respected her and appreciated the time and energy she put into each production.

I have already received several letters from Diane’s early colleagues on the Board who speak of her in glowing terms. They sometimes fell out with her but she had their love and respect. They saw her as a great encourager, as a guide and a sympathetic friend. I cannot recall ever having fallen out with her, though she would sometimes give a gentle break. ‘How is it, duckie,’ she would say, ‘that historians turn yesterday’s anthropology into today’s history?’ Her knowledge of Aboriginal history sources was extensive, and she gave considerable assistance to scholars all over the nation. Even vacation scholars visiting A.N.U. from state universities benefited from her expertise and bibliographical knowledge given freely and gladly.

The role of Diane Barwick in the wider world of Aboriginal affairs will be described by others. One was always conscious of her wide and humanitarian commitments. Although concerned for social justice and equality of opportunities she had individually thought out views on most issues. She had a broad empathy for all Aboriginal people: she did not divide them into categories according to political beliefs but saw them all as a people with their own dignity and corporate traditions. I believe that Aboriginal people have benefited by her work for Aboriginal History.

On this Board there is no doubt that her demise is our insuperable loss. Her wise counsel, knowledge and contacts, her dedication and, above all, the distinctive impress of her personality, will be sorely missed, though in our hearts we know that she has lit a lamp for us to follow. Her memorial must be our renewed dedication.

Sincerely,

Niel Gunson.