



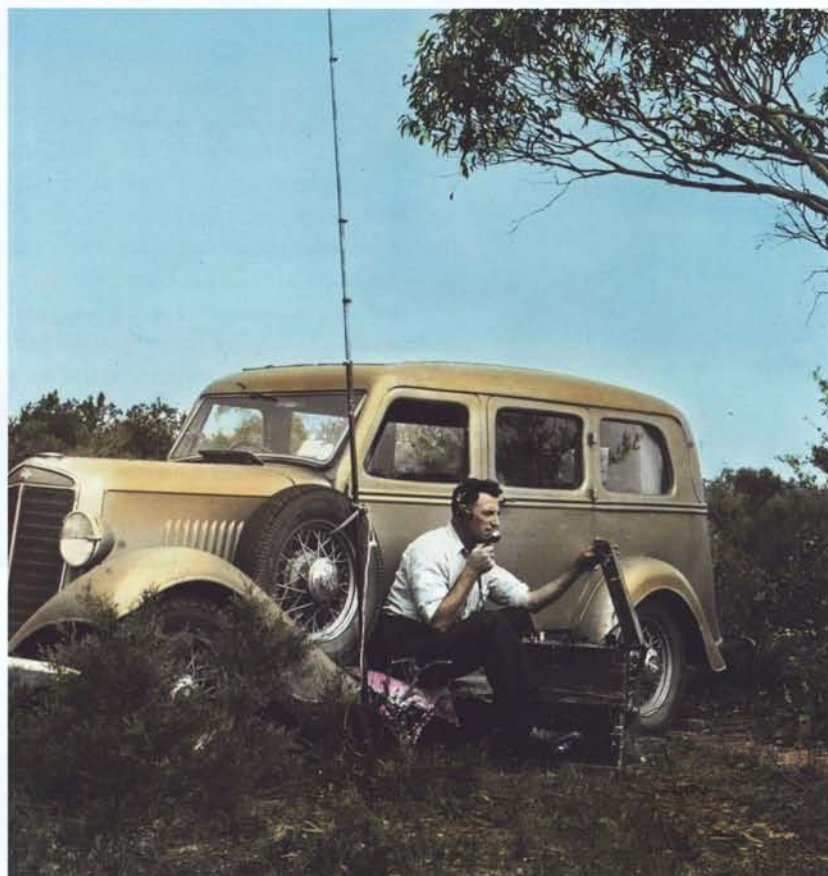
Cultural GIFTS

Penelope Layland uncovers the largely hidden community of benefactors whose generosity helps to enrich the cultural life of institutions such as the National Library

The National Library has always been justifiably proud of the relationships it forges with the Australians who use its collections. But even the most seasoned of Library staff were left awe-struck when one of those lifelong friends, Carol Mills—herself a librarian, bibliographer and book historian—recently made the National Library of Australia a six-figure beneficiary in her will. Her extraordinary generosity makes her the Library's most significant financial donor 'by miles', says National Library of Australia Director-General Jan Fullerton.

The bequest comes at a time when institutions such as the National Library are increasingly looking beyond government funding in order to build their collections. Even when public funding is maintained or is growing in real terms, collecting institutions are finding that there are ever-greater demands upon their finite resources.

Aspects of their work, such as preservation, have become infinitely more sophisticated in recent years, but not cheaper. Works are appearing in electronic media that did not exist a generation ago—and they must be collected, somehow. And most public collecting institutions—including the National Library—are taking the issue of access far more seriously than



ever before, reaching deeply into the community to contact new audiences that would once have been undetected by the institutional radar.

It all costs money.

Australia lacks the well-developed philanthropic tradition of the United States, where many an Ivy-League university or cultural collection is financed by wealthy families, whose names can be found attached to the campus library or discreetly displayed in small type beside the masterpiece in the gallery.

It is true that Australia, with fewer than 10 billionaires to boast of, has had neither the historic tradition nor the wherewithal for such philanthropy on a large scale. What it does have is a largely hidden

John Flynn (1880–1951)
*Reverend Fred McKay Operating a
Pedal-powered Wireless in Unknown
Location: Scenes of Tennant Creek and the
Northern Territory, Beltana, Oodnadatta
and Other General Scenes*
[between 1912 and 1951]
colour lantern slide; 8.2 x 8.2 cm
In: Australian Inland Mission Collection
Pictures Collection, nla.pic-an24652404

'community' of benefactors, without whom institutions such as the National Library would be unable to do much 'value-adding' to their core business. This benefaction comes in various ways: some as straight financial donations with no strings attached, some as donations for specific purposes, some in the shape of items for the collections.



*Portrait of Kenneth Myer,
21 December 1990*
black and white negative; 35 mm
Pictures Collection, nla.pic-an24164172



Damian McDonald
*Portrait of Norman McCann,
Non-Executive Member, National Library
of Australia Council, 20 August 1999*
Pictures Collection, nla.pic-an23371968

One of the National Library's greatest benefactors in its first century has been the Myer family, in the form, variously, of the Sidney Myer Trust and Kenneth Baillieu Myer. Kenneth Myer spent more than two decades as a member of the National Library of Australia Council, including many years as chairman. His personal contribution began with a donation of \$150 000 in 1993, to be spent at the discretion of the director-general.

Kenneth Myer's generosity has funded, among other things, an annual lecture. The 2003 Kenneth Myer Lecture was delivered by Australian of the Year, Fiona Stanley. Previous lecturers have included scientist Sir Gus Nossal, prehistorian John Mulvaney, historian Nugget Coombes and feminist philosopher Elizabeth Reid.

Another council member who proved a valuable friend to the Library was Norman McCann. His \$30 000 donation enabled the Library to establish the Summer Scholars Program in Australian history and literature, offering summer residencies to scholars undertaking advanced

degrees. After Norman McCann died unexpectedly last year, his widow, Pat, generously added another \$20 000 to the program. Over the first two summers of its operation, young scholars have researched such topics as federal election campaigns, 1890s republicanism and E.G. Wakefield's emigration scheme. The McCann program is a perfect complement to the Harold White Fellowships that the Library offers to established, mid-career scholars.

Former Director-General Warren Horton chose a unique method of leaving his mark on the Library. While still at the Library, he commissioned the artworks that now hang in the Library's main reading room, dedicating the donation to his wife, Patsy. While the Library's collection of original artworks includes more than 40 000 items, these works remain the only pieces of public art the Library has acquired in this fashion.

Former Library Chairman Morris West was another who remembered the Library with fondness, establishing a trust fund that has enabled the Library to publish, among other things, the multi-volume Donald Friend diaries.

The Harold S. Williams fund is another discrete trust fund, this one with a very specific purpose: the purchase of items that relate to the experience of foreigners in Japan. Harold Williams travelled to Japan as a young man and, apart from a stint in the Australian Army, spent the rest of his long life there. He was especially fascinated by the experience of foreigners in his adopted land. Williams' personal papers are now held in the Asian Studies Collection, and the Library's Harold S. Williams Collection of monographs contains over 3000 volumes. Its particular strength is the history of foreigners and foreign settlements in Japan.

Helen Kon is the Library's Assistant Director-General, Public Programs. She points out that the beginnings of the National Library—and the state libraries, too—were very much based on benefaction. In the case of the National Library, one of the most crucial additions in the early decades was the collection of Sir Rex

Charembac Nan Kivell, better known to generations of National Library users as Rex Nan Kivell. His collection was on long-term loan to the Library from 1949 until its eventual partial purchase in 1962.

The massive, 15 000-item Rex Nan Kivell Collection focuses on the early history of Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific. It includes Dutch and French maps, items from the three Cook voyages, and precious glimpses of how European eyes first beheld the strange southern land, in the shape of sketches and paintings by historical figures such as Captain Samuel Wallis, Captain John Hunter, John Webber, William Ellis and Augustus Earle.

Other extremely significant donations over the years have included the Harold Cazneaux photographic collection, conservatively valued at \$2 million and containing about 270 exhibition-quality prints and more than 4000 glass negatives; Dame Merlyn Myer's donation of oil portraits of historic figures, including Cook, Banks and Solander; and the Reverend Fred McKay's donation of Inland Mission manuscripts and pictures.

The Australian Government has long encouraged the donation of significant cultural items to institutions such as the National Library through the Cultural Gifts Program. The program, which celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2003, provides tax incentives for individuals who donate significant items to the nation's heritage collections. Since it was established, more than \$290 million worth of cultural gifts have been made. An online gallery (<http://www.dcita.gov.au/cgp/anniversary.html>) set up to help celebrate the program's first quarter century gives a glimpse at the range of gifts made over the years.

Items donated to the National Library under the Cultural Gifts Program include the Don McMurdo Collection, which deals with opera, ballet and theatre performances at the Sydney Opera House between 1976 and 1990, a facsimile *Book of Kells*, historian Manning Clark's personal papers, and collections of the political cartoons of Alan Moir and Geoff Pryor.



Harold Cazneaux (1878–1953)
Fishing off Rocks, Bondi 1904
photograph; 17.8 x 24 cm
Pictures Collection; nla.pic-an2384527

Of course, very few Australians will ever be in possession of items of such historic importance or interest. But that does not mean that every Australian cannot play a role in the development of the collections. Over the years, the Library has come up with some innovative ways of encouraging participation by ordinary Australians in the building of the collection, and often at little cost to the giver.

One area in which the public can be extraordinarily useful is in 'plugging' gaps in the collections—donating missing editions of serials or magazines that the Library collects, perhaps, or pieces of sheet music the Library has been seeking, or simply keeping an eye out for sought-after volumes of out-of-print books at white elephant stalls. The Library maintains an online list of items 'missing' from its collections (www.nla.gov.au/collect/booksearch.html). People have been known to

walk in off the street, unannounced, bearing a 'wanted' item, and it is not uncommon for anonymous parcels to arrive in the post containing a vital piece of the national heritage jigsaw.

Another simple device for encouraging greater public philanthropy has been the publication of a simple brochure, distributed towards the end of the financial year, reminding Library users and visitors of the institution's tax deductibility status.

The National Library is a complex organisation, and the relationships that it develops over time with its users are equally complex. The relationship the Library might have with someone on an interstate bus tour 'doing' the sights of Canberra is different, qualitatively and quantitatively, from the relationship it nurtures with a lifelong scholar who uses its reading rooms week in, week out, for decades. And that relationship is different again from the one the Library develops with an interstate user whose only contact is online, or with the Canberra local who patronises the bookshop and the

exhibition spaces but who rarely has the need to enter the reading rooms.

Yet each of these relationships is important—and potentially valuable.

The relationship between the Library and the nation's scholars is particularly profound and there is seldom a serious scholarly work published in Australia that does not make some reference to the Library's collections. Scholars who have spent a considerable part of their working lives in the Library's reading rooms are acutely conscious of the breadth and depth of the collections. Not infrequently, they perceive that they can make a personal contribution, either by donating related material from their personal collections, or by writing the Library into their wills.

But not all of the Library's good friends are long-term scholars or former chairmen or wealthy philanthropists. Some of its best friends are Friends with a capital 'F', the Friends of the National Library. Most major collecting institutions have seen the emergence of 'friends' groups, collections of individuals who come together for intellectual and social stimulation and who enrich the

cultural life of the institution by holding functions, hosting speakers and—importantly—raising money.

The Friends of the National Library have done plenty of that over the years. For example, the association contributed a total of \$35 000 in 2001 and 2002 towards the construction of a Treasures Gallery in the Library, in which some of the institution's most iconic pieces will be put on permanent display. The Friends have also helped fund the purchase of particular items, including a recent contribution of \$10 000.

The Library is extremely conscious that not all donations are monetary or physical. The 75 or so volunteers, who conduct guided tours and who help make a visit to the Library a richer experience, donate something just as valuable as money: their time and their knowledge of the institution.

And 'donations' come in other forms, too. As Helen Kon points out, the deeper and more widespread the Library's connections, the more it gets back from the community it serves. For example, the broader its community 'contacts', the more chance there is that someone, somewhere among those contacts, will be able to help the Library secure a critical interview for its Oral History and Folklore Collection, or an expert speaker for one of its seminars, or an authoritative source to write an introduction to a forthcoming publication.

This kind of contribution is particularly valuable in an age when institutions such as the Library are being expected to be more things to more people. Doreen Mellor, the National Library's Director of Development, says that, like other cultural institutions, the Library has had to expand the services it offers to the public. Expectations have changed. It is no longer sufficient for an institution to regard itself simply as a repository. Access is of growing importance—getting the collections to the community and getting the community to the collections. And whether that be in the form of digitising the collection or mounting travelling exhibitions, access costs money.

Another 'sign of the times' that is placing greater pressure upon Library resources is the increasingly aggressive marketplace for heritage items. Many of the items the Library would dearly like for its collections are only to be found at international auction. Publicly funded institutions do not always come out on top when they are bidding against private collectors with millions at their disposal.

One solution is to collaborate with private philanthropists, as the Library did when the Freycinet Collection was auctioned in London last year. In the lead-up to the auction the Library wrote to a number of potential donors, alerting them to this historical opportunity to acquire important items of Australiana.

Thanks to the generosity of a number of donors, the Library was able to acquire one of the earliest detailed charts of Tasmania's Derwent River, drawn by expedition artist Martin Petit, based on a survey undertaken by Freycinet and Peron; four late eighteenth-century pencil and watercolour renderings of birds; and an illustration of an Aboriginal burial ceremony by Samuel Leroy.

Such direct appeals to the generosity of individuals are not uncommon when it is known that particular potential donors have an interest in a

specific area of the collections. But Doreen Mellor says there is an urgent need to encourage greater philanthropy from a broader range of people, firstly, so that pleas for assistance are not always directed at the same individuals and, secondly, so that when items come up for auction, or a Library initiative needs to be funded, the money is sitting there ready for use.

The Library maintains a number of trust funds for different purposes, to which members of the public can contribute. One is an Acquisitions Trust Fund, which is used to purchase items for the collections. The General Trust Fund can be drawn on for other needs, such as exhibitions or conferences. And the dedicated Treasures Trust Fund is helping to raise the \$2 million the Library will need to build its proposed Treasures Gallery.

An institution such as the National Library is pieced together, bit by bit, by the society whose documentary 'life and times' it captures and preserves. It follows that the greater the contribution the whole of society makes to such a repository, the more comprehensive and representative it will be.

PENELOPE LAYLAND is a Canberra writer



A Lifelong Friend

Born in Sydney in 1942, Carol Mills grew up in a house with few books. Yet books were destined to become her life work.

While librarian at the University of Canberra between 1968 and 1984, Carol Mills produced a four-volume bibliography of Northern Territory literature, and published many articles on early Australian writers and book illustrators.

From 1984 until 2000 she was librarian at the William Merylees Library at the Wagga campus of Charles Sturt University, apart from two years in the mid-1990s, when she was seconded to the University of the South Pacific, in Suva. While in Suva she wrote many articles dealing with the practicalities of preserving books in the tropics.

In August 2002, Carol Mills deposited her personal papers with the National Library's Manuscript Collection and she is recording her life story for the Oral History and Folklore Collection.