

University of Melbourne Archives (UMA) Collection Review and Related Priorities 2008

Accommodation for a dynamic and growing collection has always dominated the Archives' search for funds. The issue of inadequate accommodation was brought to a head in the mid 1990s by the University Square development. Closure of its repositories in Leicester, Pelham and Barry Streets, Carlton, meant a new location had to be found. As a result, a \$2.9m investment in the collection was made on the purchase and refit of a facility in Dawson St Brunswick which opened in 1999. The collection, while occasionally audited, has never been comprehensively reviewed. Accordingly this year we aim to confirm and re-examine decisions made regarding the worth and value of material acquired over nearly half a century.

To enable this in the coming year, there will be a temporary freeze on accessioning. This will give us the opportunity to examine our holdings and allow us to plan for future acquisitions. This will be complemented by a comprehensive reappraisal and possible de-accessioning of collections, and the disposition of University records which have previously been accepted prior to sentencing, or are duplications of publications held elsewhere. Any items identified for de-accessioning will undergo a rigorous process of examination, involving consultation with donors and a panel of expert historians and others. After which, items or collections will be appropriately re-located in accordance with the *Policy and Minimum Requirements for Management of Cultural Collections (Cultural Collections Committee 2004)*. Additionally, the Archives will be reducing reference services temporarily to ensure all available staffing can be released for collection review. It is for this reason that the Archives is closed on Mondays and Tuesdays.

The Archive's holdings extend over 15 kilometres and collect and preserve the records of the University and also of Victorian business for historical research. The University's official records date from its foundation in 1853. The business collections document the enterprises of Victorian businesses across all industrial sectors. Additionally, the Archive also collects material of trade union and other labour-related bodies, professional associations and community, women's, peace and political organisations. Complementing all of these organisational collections are the personal papers of individuals prominent within them. During 2008, we aim to develop and implement a staged collection review methodology.

Records Services staff will be assisting us with this – many University records which were transferred in the early days were not routinely sentenced according to disposal authorities administered under the provisions of *The Public Records Act 1973* by the Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) as now occurs.

Michael Piggott has approached the Law faculty to assist with determinations on the usefulness of retaining voluminous case files from legal firms, which are rarely accessed by researchers. As for the business collections, only low use collections will be targeted and we are establishing a sub-committee of the Archives Advisory Board to assist in this matter. We also hold a number of finance-related collections which in effect contain records of a type that are substantially similar and do not differentiate one collection from another. Professor Jeff Burrows is being consulted for his accounting expertise on which records are the definitive ones to document the

historicity of the discipline. We are also critically questioning the need to retain non-archival collections such as those comprising purely published materials.

Concurrent with the review we will be designing and implementing an Integrated Archival Management & Access System (IAMAS), and converting the current cataloguing accession-based system to the Series System, a documentation system adopted by the Commonwealth Archives in the 1960s and now the industry standard. The commencement of this project is an additional factor in implementing a pause to accessioning and processing activities, as well as data clean up of collection documentation prior to migration to the IAMAS.

Helen McLaughlin
Principal Archivist