The History Council of NSW is pleased to award the

• JOHN FERRY AWARD •

for 2008 to

Stephanie Louise Hanson

‘Electrical Wonders of the Present Age’: Cinema-going on the far South Coast of NSW and rural perceptions of modernity

Awarded 13 September 2008

by: __________________________

Christine Yeats
Treasurer, History Council of NSW
There were five submissions entered for this year’s John Ferry Award. All contained valuable original research in Australian local history, and each illuminated stories that are likely to generate interest in the particular communities concerned. We felt that the stronger entries, however, also had the potential to speak to a larger audience, relating the particularities of a local history to the larger forces shaping Australian and even global history. The winner of the John Ferry Award for 2008 is Stephanie Louise Hanson for her essay “Electrical Wonders of the Present Age”: Cinema-going on the Far South Coast of NSW.”

The judges also highly commended the following entrant:

*Banksstown Soldier Settlement 1917 to 1923*
By Glenys Maree Allison

This is a moving account of the experience of soldier settlement in a western Sydney locality in the years following the First World War. It is well written, based on a sensitive reading of a diverse body of sources, and makes a strong case for the significance of physical and mental disability in undermining the efforts of soldier settlers in this area to make a success of their enterprises. The study, in its close examination of a well-defined locality, makes a very useful contribution to the literature on soldier settlement while also adding to our understanding of the grave difficulties experienced by so many returned men after the Great War.

Judges report prepared by A/Prof Melanie Oppenheimer and Dr Frank Bongiorno
13 September 2008
The History Council of NSW
is pleased to award the

**ANNUAL HISTORY CITATION**

for
2008
to

**Baiba Berzins**

in recognition of her significant contributions to
the professional practice and interpretation of
Australian history.

Awarded 5 September 2008

by: ........................................

Professor Emerita Jill Roe AO,
President, History Council of NSW
Baiba Berzinshas been prominent as an Australian historian in a number of different fields for over four decades. She has made significant contributions to the professional practice and interpretation of Australian history in a distinguished career as an archivist and librarian, researcher and author, and as an academic and teacher.

Baiba was born in Riga, Latvia and migrated to Australia in 1949 as a young child with her family. She attended Methodist Ladies’ College, Burwood where her mother was a teacher, and she graduated with honours in history from the University of Sydney in 1965. Baiba went on to be awarded a Master of Arts degree as a young child with her family. She attended Methodist Ladies’ College, where she concentrated on Australian 19th and 20th century economic, political and local history. Strong formative influences were her mother’s strong cultural background, connections with Latvian community and her own staunch membership of the pioneering feminist movement.

Baiba obtained a post-graduate Diploma in Archives Administration from the University of New South Wales and throughout the 1970s her professional interest in the management, as well as the research use of institutional archives, developed. She held positions as archivist at the University of Wollongong and with the Archives Office of New South Wales, before being seconded as a research officer for the review of New South Wales Government Administration led by Peter Wilenski.

In May 1980, when employed as Lecturer in Archives Administration and Records Management in the School of Librarianship at the University of New South Wales, Baiba was appointed to the position of Mitchell Librarian. She brought to this eminent position an unusual combination; at least in the library world; of academic, research and practical professional knowledge; skills and experience of a high calibre; and was of a younger generation who honoured the past while responding to changing work and social environments and influences. Her fine mind, scholarly achievements and her integrity as an administrator brought great benefits to the Mitchell Library, its staff and its readers during the years of her tenure.

Baiba’s legacies as Mitchell Librarian were many, but her most enduring achievement was a significant contribution to the 1988 Bicentenary of European settlement in Australia with a ground-breaking exhibition and accompanying book. The exhibition was displayed in the newly refurbished galleries at the Library at the same time as the opening of the new wing of the State Library on Macquarie Street. In ‘The Coming of the Strangers: Life in Australia 1788-1822’, Baiba moved away from traditional interpretations, presenting a new approach to the Library’s historical collections and setting new standards for curatorial work at the Library.

Throughout this period, Baiba maintained her commitment to the archival profession. She had been a founder of the Australian Society of Archivists in 1975 and served four terms on the ASA Council, including a term as President from 1983 to 1985 and two terms as Managing Editor. She was a Fellow of the Australian Society of Archivists from 1979 to 1981, and has remained a regular contributor to the Journal and speaker at the Society’s conferences. She held the position of Executive Officer of the Archives Council of Australia from 1991 for a number of years. In August 1998, Baiba was honoured as a Fellow of the Australian Society of Archivists for her dedicated contribution and to the archives profession in Australia and her outstanding achievements as an archivist.

From an early stage of her career, Baiba developed and pursued a strong interest in developing the relevance of archives for multicultural and Indigenous people. Her advocacy in these fields not only influenced the adoption of more progressive policies and practices, but also led her to a new position which she held from late 1987 to 1990 as Principal Archivist of the Northern Territory Archives in Darwin.

On returning to Sydney, Baiba resumed many of her professional connections and also began a rich output of historical research, writing and publication on Australian historical and political subjects which continues to the present day. Notable titles include her history (with Peter Loveday) of the Northern Territory University and its predecessors published in 1999, ‘Baiba’s northern secret: tourism in the Northern Territory, 1920s to 1980s, published in 2007 and her much acclaimed ‘North Coast women: a history to 1939, published by the Royal Australian Historical Society in 1996. This was the first comprehensive history of the experiences of women living in this region. It covers the period from the earliest days of contact between Aboriginal and white people up to World War II, and encompasses an area from the Queensland border south to Taree and west to the Great Dividing Range. Over 800 biographies of women from a wide range of cultural and social backgrounds are represented, some of whom were interviewed by Baiba in the course of her research.

During the course of her several varied and distinguished careers and in all she has undertaken, Baiba has been recognised as one of the most influential Australian researchers, archivists, writers, scholars and historians of her generation. She has always set and attained the highest professional standards for herself and has been exemplary and generous in sharing her knowledge with others from many walks of life. Perhaps Baiba’s greatest achievement of all is to have shown how a practising historian can make a lasting difference to the lives, attitudes and understanding of others, while remaining true to her own high principles.
Prime Minister Andrew Fisher’s cry in July 1914 that Australia would support Britain to ‘the last man and the last shilling’ is often seen as emblematic of the total military and economic commitment that the young dominion offered to the ‘mother country’ in this great world crisis. Yet the winner of this year’s Max Kelly Medal, Grant Mansfield, peers behind this response to illuminate that not all took Fisher’s clarion call literally. In the first weeks of the war there was growing public and political anxiety that the business community were taking advantage of the war and opting for profit over patriotism. Dramatic price increases were greeted as an affront not only to the hip-pocket but to the notion of a ‘just-price’, which lay at the very heart of the idea of a moral economy in British communities. The public view was that economic self-interest too should make way for patriotism. Mansfield shows that – in a country where government intervention to protect the consumer from monopolies and other unsavoury business practices had become an article of faith – the advent of war added a new layer of patriotic fervour to public expectations of how businesses ought to act. Governments were again placed under enormous pressure to step in and Mansfield points out that the matter of price regulation topped the agenda at the emergency Premiers conference held one week after war was declared.

While sections of the labour movement saw the price rises as confirmation of an evil capitalist war, Mansfield shows that this was an argument less between capital and labour than one which raged within the business community itself. Concerned at being depicted as unpatriotic, many businesses – publicly at least – expressed the view that price rises were against the spirit of the time in which sacrifice was to be endured by all. Nevertheless this rubbed uneasily against another view which held that while wars come and go, the imperatives of business endured. These fractures and fissures within the business community were not easily resolved. And as time wore on, Mansfield shows that the statements of sound intent by businesses ‘increasingly looked like little more than cynical public relations exercises designed to curry public favour, rather than firm undertakings to be guided by patriotism in their dealings with consumers’. A growing public backlash, led and fed by the mainstream press, thus reveals a more complex and complicated approach to the notion of economic patriotism in the early weeks of the war. In essence, this led to the articulation of what Mansfield suggests was a ‘practical patriotism…a philosophy that, in effect, provided a practical cover to aggressive and exploitative business behaviour’. Increasingly, the consumer became the meat in the sandwich as the issue of price-fixing and price gouging sparked a blame game between retailers and wholesalers. The essay shows that the business community were judged to have acted outside the boundaries of what was considered an acceptable patriotism in which sacrifice was seen to extend to all realms of society, including the economic sector.

A hallmark of the essay is its clarity of expression and its ability to convey the essence of a sometimes complex debate in plain, jargon-free English. The scholarship is founded on rigorous primary research, combining an extensive coverage of both the major metropolitan and regional print media with some useful archival material. The argument is tightly focussed and Mansfield goes some distance in convincing us to take a more careful look at the early weeks of the war. Not all, it seems, wanted to see the ‘last shilling’ disappear from their own coffers.

Awarded 5 September 2008
Fifteen entries were received for this year’s Max Kelly Medal. The judges found the standard to be high. The winner of the Max Kelly Medal for 2008 is Grant Mansfield for his essay “The Costs of War: patriotism and price-fixing during the opening months of the Great War in Australia”.

The judges also highly commend the following entrants:

“An Incubus upon the district”: Private property, civilisation and the Field of Mars Common
By Jane Taylor

This is a challenging, incisive, well researched and richly contextualised piece of historical writing, opening up a new front in the history of land reform in Australia. Jane Taylor shows how the Report of the NSW Government’s Select Committee on the Field of Mars Common in 1862 was intimately connected to a set of broader anxieties and fears concerning the colony’s future. Exploring the link between private property, morality and order on the one hand, and communal ownership, disorder and criminality on the other, Taylor rescues the question of the commons from obscurity and places it firmly back in the front-line of historical inquiry. Taylor illustrates that far from being a dry argument about land tenure, many thought that the progress and the civilisation of the colony itself were at stake. An impressive achievement.

US citizenship for Australian war brides: its impact on their lives
By Robyn Anne Arrowsmith

This lively and sensitively written piece explores the dilemma for Australian World War Two brides who returned to America with their new husbands and took up American citizenship, but in doing so forfeited their rights as Australian citizens. Robyn Anne Arrowsmith draws on a rich vein of oral history to show how these women – an estimated 15000 Australian WW2 brides went to the US – dealt with the loss of citizenship and nationality upon marriage. It was a painful process for many. As Arrowsmith shows they had become ‘aliens in their adopted country’. The result is a compelling and engaging study of citizenship and the role of the war bride as wife and mother.