

HISTORY FOR OUR TIME

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"In their promotion of Australian history the societies were generally well ahead of the university and school curricula."

And so the tradition continues. Given that historical research must always be a time capsule, coloured by the period in which it takes place and the interests and obsessions of its community so our journals and other records are revealing of ourselves.

It was with great interest and pleasure that I recently discovered a new history journal, firmly rooted in past traditions, encompassing the widest range of fascinating

Editor Dr. Peter Rickwood describes the new journal's origins and his expectations of its contributors:

'In 2007 I was President of the Blue Mountains Historical Society. My responsibilities precluded full-time research but I was nevertheless looking for a project of significance and envisaged a vehicle to publish 'substantial' papers on aspects of the history of the Blue Mountains—i.e. papers longer and more comprehensive than articles then being published in the newsletters of various organisations. Anticipated topics were likely to be too specialised for publication by the Royal Australian Historical Society and no other suitable outlet already existed.

Early in 2009 a proposal was put to the Committee of Blue Mountains Association of Cultural Heritage Organisations Inc. (BMACHO) which was strongly supported by the President, the late John Leary OAM, and agreed at the BMACHO committee meeting on 1 June 2009.

Work on a mock-up was completed in September 2009 by Peter Hughes who had previously established a website for BMACHO and an eminent editorial advisory committee was appointed with Dr. Rickwood as journal editor. The President's report at the BMACHO 5th AGM announced that prospective writers and researchers had been invited to contribute papers for the first volume which was scheduled for June 2010, supported by a grant from the RAHS enabling its publication online.

And so The Blue Mountains History Journal has been published since August 2010 under the auspices of BMACHO. It is essentially published annually and interspersed with it are similar volumes of Occasional Papers that derive from presentations at BMACHO conferences. Issues are available online for free download.

Guidelines: The Journal contains refereed, and fully referenced, articles on the human history and related subjects of the Greater Blue Mountains and neighbouring areas.

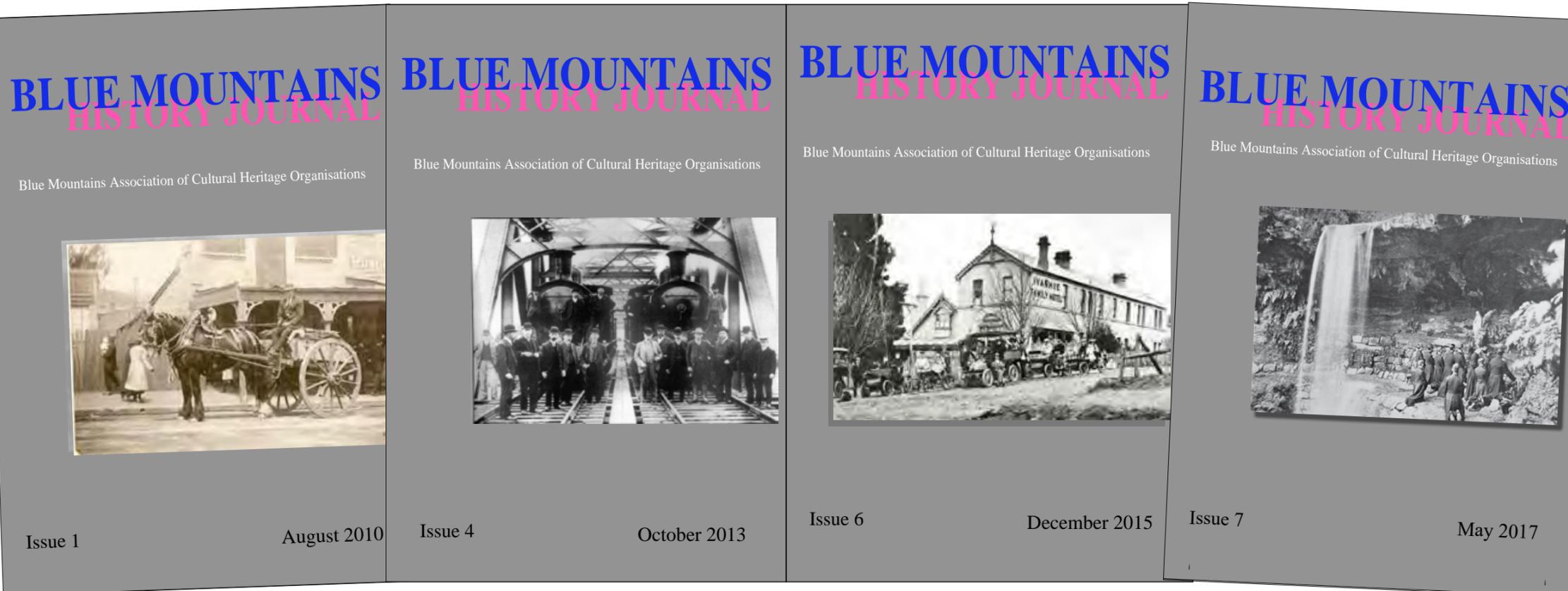
This Journal is not competing with societies for short articles that are appropriate for their newsletters. Hence submitted articles normally must be between 1500 and 6000 words in length (illustrations additional) but longer articles have been considered. Hence, anyone may submit a paper which is 'intermediate' in size between a newsletter contribution and a book chapter, but the intention is not to publish detailed family trees.

Printed copies of all published articles are archived in the National Library of Australia, the State Library of NSW, the Royal Australian Historical Society, the BMCC Springwood Library, the Lithgow Regional Library and with the Blue Mountains Historical Society Inc.

Reviewers (usually two per paper) are asked to regard the material as confidential until it is published and authors are not told the identities of their reviewers so as to encourage frank criticism. Emphasis is on accuracy, so as Editor I expect all sources to be revealed. I sight as many of those references as possible and I particularly check quotations for errors, as paraphrasing can project a completely different intent to that which an author wished to convey!

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I first remember hearing that 'every generation writes its own history' when I was at university doing south-east Asian studies, but many academics, writers and philosophers have expressed this same view, probably since mankind first started recording our histories. It reminds me of the Buddhist story of the blind men describing an elephant, different descriptions depending on which part of the animal they were feeling, said to illustrate a range of truths and fallacies—that our subjective experience can be true but is always limited.

If you look at history as an investigation using written records, in most parts of Australia you don't have to go back very far and of course the cultural heritage of the writer is clearly reflected in the manner in which those records are made.

This description from Don Garden, 'Historical societies', in Graeme Davison, John Hirst and Stuart Macintyre (eds) 'The Oxford Companion to Australian History', (OUP 2001), describes our state societies which were "initiated, and in their early years dominated, by male elites, often professional men, interspersed with gifted amateur historians, writers, the occasional professor of history, and the descendants of early settlers. ... The history they recorded was a congratulatory record of progress; undesirable or unrecognised elements such as convicts, Aborigines, working people, and women were left out."

These societies began collections whose significance grew over time, they organised regular meetings at which research papers were read and they published journals. Garden adds:

subject matter and exploiting new technology by offering its articles free online.

The current issue, No.7, has a cover photo of Lourdes Grotto in Springwood (see above) c. 1934, illustrating an article by John Dunkley on some of the sandstone caves of the Blue Mountains, 'in part a description and documentation of the caves but also evaluating their 'aesthetic, historic, scientific, social and spiritual values.' In the same issue is part 2 of a survey of horse troughs to be found in the area by John Low. Then there are papers describing extant buildings in the area. Architect H.P. Oser's group of mid-20th century buildings in Blackheath is the subject of some intrepid research by a descendent of the owner of one of those houses, Chris Betteridge.