

From horse and cart to heritage building

Mary Schmidt and Fairlie Stanish, librarians, NSW Teachers Federation Library

From a horse and cart to a heritage building, the story of the New South Wales Teachers Federation library reflects the growth of the Teachers Federation itself.

The NSW Teachers Federation represents teachers employed in public schools, TAFE colleges, and other workplaces with teachers, such as the NSW Department of Sport and Recreation. It was officially registered as a trade union in 1919 and moved in 1999 to its current heritage-listed premises in Surry Hills, Sydney.

The library originated in 1922 when the Teachers Federation accepted a collection of books and journals from a retired Senior Inspector of schools, Mr DJ Cooper. Conscious of the isolation of the teachers he visited in rural areas, Mr Cooper took with him, in his horse and cart, books and journals that could provide professional assistance to teachers. It was this collection of resources that formed the nucleus of the Cooper Library, as it was known until 1941.

The wealth of history associated with the library is a constant fascination for staff and members. Early teacher handbooks gave instructions, for example, on how to keep flies out of a cesspit or how to tether a horse in the playground.

Not so long ago, the wives of teachers in charge of a primary or central school were expected to teach needlework — but the allowance for this was paid to the husband! (Source: *Handbook: Instructions and information for the guidance of teachers, 1962*. Sydney: Government Printer, 1962.)

Transformed from a centre offering professional reading for classroom



Librarians Mary Schmidt and Fairlie Stanish with 'Union Camp, Barcardine, 1891' as featured on this month's cover.

teachers, the library's first priority now is to provide an information service for Teachers Federation officers and for members on official Federation business. Client groups also include a very active Retired Teachers Association, the Teachers' Sub-Branch of the RSL, members pursuing higher degrees, academics researching the history of education in the state, and Federation staff.

Central to providing information throughout the Teachers Federation is the library's Current Awareness Service. Information needs profiles for the forty-eight elected officers, based in Surry Hills and in regional offices around the state, are maintained on a regularly reviewed database. Library staff monitor printed and digital information sources and officers are alerted to relevant information. Some of the main sources monitored include: journal literature; federal and state govern-

ment gazettes; industrial gazettes; Hansard; legislation; monographs; government reports, budget papers and newspaper clippings (through the Media Monitors service).

The research work of the library can range from simple factual checks to extensive and complex information searches. Recently, the library compiled lists of the state's 2200 schools, matched with 50 federal electorates, to support the Federation's public education campaign for 2001.

Other requests have included researching the provision for teachers' maternity leave in both public and private sectors in all states and territories of Australia and establishing the identity of the Aboriginal inhabitants of the Surry Hills area where the library is located.

The development of the library's collection has benefited through the advice of subject specialists such as the Federation's women's co-ordinator, the aboriginal education co-ordinator and the multicultural officer. The library is also fortunate to be able to work collaboratively with information professionals from other unions through ULIN (the Union Library and Information Network) and LOTSS (Libraries of the Social Sciences group).

New South Wales Teachers Federation library,
First floor, 23–33 Mary Street, Surry Hills,
Sydney 2010, phone: 02 9217 2113,
fax: 02 9217 2481, libdesk@nswtf.org.au ■

Library overview

Staff:	Librarians 2; Library Assistants 3
Client base:	48 elected union officials; 63 500 members Access for non-members is by application.
Collection:	12 000 volumes; 350 serial titles
Electronic subscriptions:	AUSTROM, DIALOG, Internet, Dow Jones, CCH Industrial Relations Law Library, LawNow, Kinetica
Subject speciality:	Education policy in NSW and Australia Aboriginal issues Women's employment
Historical collections:	NSW Department of Education publications Australian history Australian literature Records of the NSW Teachers Federation
Software	Libero Library Management System Imagic