



Historical Society of the Northern Territory

Patron: The Hon Austin Asche AC

NEWSLETTER October 2021

PO Box 40544, Casuarina NT 0811

Mobile: 0487 413 709 www.historicalsocietynt.org.au

Email: hsnt@iinet.net.au Newsletter Editor: Bev Phelts

HSNT Committee – President: Matthew James; Vice President: Bev Phelts;

Secretary: Wendy Asche; Treasurer: Lyn Reid; others - Brian Reid, Judy

Boland, Ian Anderson, Derek Pugh, Rosemary Chalmers, Robyn Smith,

Clayton Frederickson & Libby Siebert

FUTURE EVENTS

Saturday 2 October - HSNT bookstall at Parap Markets

Drop in and say hello to Janie who will be running our book stall

Tuesday 5 October - Book Launch - *Mess to Mayhem* by John Meyer

To be launched at the Alice Springs Aviation Museum, 6 Memorial Drive. The book is about John's life as a pilot with Connellan Airlines during the 60s & 70s. He delivered passengers, freight & mail to various Territory stations and even as far flung as Kununurra. See attached flyer for centenary celebrations for the first flight into Alice Springs.

Wednesday 6 October - Book Launch at NT Library - 5.30-7pm

Join Dr Adelle Sefton-Rowston to launch her new book *Politics and Poetics: Race Relations and Reconciliation in Australian Literature* with CDU College Dean, Professor Ruth Wallace, followed by a Q&A with audience members.

The 1990s saw a renewed surge of support for reconciliation, with protests as well as policy change occurring across the country. Indigenous and non-indigenous Australians began imagining race relations in new ways, and articulations of place, belonging and being together were informing literature of a unique genre.

Tuesday 12 October - Speaker - Carolyn McLennan - 8.30-9.30am - Eva's Cafe, Botanical Gardens.

This is an Australian Museums and Galleries Association event. Guest speaker, Carolyn McLennan is an Independent Art Conservator / Community Museum Consultant

Tuesday 19 October - Droving Days by Roger Steele, NT Archives at 5.30pm

For almost a century, droving large mobs of cattle overland on horseback was essential to move herds from the Territory's inland to far-distant markets. However by the late 1960s, droving was almost entirely displaced by road train transport. Not long after, mythology gave rise to yarns about droving and the drovers themselves. Droving trips became legendary because of the size of the herds and the unpredictable challenges of keeping cattle alive on the road.

Drawing on his own droving experience between Wyndham, Western Australia and Dajarra in Queensland, Roger will describe his encounters with well-known outback identities and a way of life that will never be repeated.

Sunday 24 October at 3pm - HSNT Oration at History House - Speaker Michael Wells

This will be the Historical Society's 3rd Oration. Michael Wells is the Director of the NT Government's Heritage Branch, and will be talking about a unique archaeological site in Litchfield National Park – the wreck of a Spitfire fighter aircraft that has remained virtually untouched since the aircraft crashed in June 1943. Research carried out after the discovery of the wreck led to valuable insights into the loss of the aircraft, and there is a poignant personal story attached to the events that occurred in 1943.

Refreshments will follow Michael's talk

History House is located at 1/16 Charlton Court, Woolner. Charlton Street is off Bishop Street (look for pink building - Middis Lighting). Turn into Charlton Street then first right into Charlton Court. History House is at the bottom of the court.

Sunday 24 October at 7pm-9pm. - Quiz Night at the Trailer Boat Club

Friends of the Botanical Gardens is running a quiz night starting at 7pm. A plant-themed test of general knowledge - no botanical expertise required.

Every team member will receive a \$10 voucher towards plants at any "Friends" plant sale within the next 12 months. Some of the prizes are \$50 voucher from Eva's Cafe, wine and vouchers from Serrata Landscape Architects, Territory Native Plants and Tiger Pots.

To attend - book at www.trybooking.com/BSVMH

Saturday 30 October - History Colloquium, NT Library

Note this date in your diaries. The annual History Colloquium organised by the Professional Historians Association will be held at the NT Library. More information including the program will be provided closer to the date.

The Looming Sesquicentenary of the Overland Telegraph Station by Derek Pugh



HSNT Members will be well aware of the Territory's importance to 19th century communication with Old Blighty. Coming soon is the sesquicentenary of the day a small group of talented technicians and bushmen gathered under a tall pole near Frew's Ironstone Ponds, deep in the Northern Territory bush. At 12 noon, Engineer Robert Patterson, who had led the northern telegraph construction teams, climbed a ladder and grasped two end of telegraph line in order to join them.

He promptly received an electric shock¹.

This delayed the joining by a few minutes. Patterson found a handkerchief and tried again. Wrapping the wire with the cloth, he soldered the southward facing line of wire to its mate. The O.T.L. then stretched 2,839 kilometres as a single wire from Palmerston on the north coast to Port Augusta on the south, and 300 kilometres more to Adelaide. It joined a network of telegraph wires spread across the eastern states from far Northern Queensland to Tasmania. The OTL allowed Australia to join the modern world.

The telegraph was as important to our ancestors as the internet has become to us. And its arrival is something worth celebrating. Events are being planned – both for 7 November (the day the undersea cable arrive in Darwin) and 22 August next year – the joining day. At the time of writing there is no official calendar of events but keep an eye out in future weeks.

Daly Waters Pub is hosting a Variety Club bash and a gathering of the Mates of the Murrarri on 22 August 2022, so the celebrations at the joining point near Frew's Ironstone Ponds seem assured. Check out <https://www.matesofthemurrarri.com.au/> if you are interested in the history of that area.

1. Many Aboriginal people became very wary of the 'bite' of the line, and, as Jeannie Gunn suggested, this may be why it was mostly left alone by the people in the bush (Gunn, 1907)

HIGHLIGHTS OF PAST EVENTS - Day Trip to Pt Stuart

HSNT members Allan Mitchell and Bev Phelts visited Pt Stuart Ranger Station and were guests of Ranger Steve. Steve kindly spent the day with us taking us to visit Shady Camp, North Rockhole, Couzens Lookout, Pt Stuart Lodge and to the Pt Stuart Cairn where John McDouall Stuart and his party reached the northern sea. We were most keen to visit the site and inspect the condition of the Cairn. We then had morning tea with the Fish Camp owners, Terry Holse and Heather. On the way home we dropped into the newly renovated Bark Hut and visited the rock sculptures done by Mitsuaki Tanabe which are just off the Arnhem Highway near Mt Bundy Station. Tanabe, a Japanese sculptor who started the work in 2010 with the cooperation of the Australian government. Tanabe dedicated his art to the importance of wild rice and other organisms in the preservation of biodiversity, and his works dot the globe, often depicting seeds. This particular work is meant to raise awareness of the Northern Territory's wild rice varieties. For 10 years, Tanabe travelled to Australia during the dry season to work on the project. However he passed away before he could finish the work, but his son, Taka Tanabe, along with some sculptor friends, completed the pieces in 2016.



Ranger Steve, Allan Mitchell & Bev Phelts at the Pt Stuart cairn



Allan Mitchell, Ranger Steve & Bev Phelts at the northern sea where John McDouall Stuart and his party arrived after 3 attempts.



The Pt Stuart Ranger Station - Rangers Terrace and Daniel



One of the many rock sculptures carved by Mitsuaki Tanabe