

CONFERENCE REVIEW

Australian Historical Association Xlth Biennial Conference
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Ever since the first 'Sporting Traditions' conference in 1977 and the publication of a journal by the Australian Society for Sport History (ASSH) in 1984, there have been periodic calls for members of the Society to engage more actively and more closely with the broader historical profession. The most recent of these calls occurred in July 2001 at 'Sporting Traditions XIII' in Adelaide, where Richard Cashman urged sport historians to become more actively involved in the historical debate surrounding the centenary of Federation, a challenge he and his co-editors formalized in print in the introduction to their recent anthology, *Sport, Federation, Nation* (Sydney: Walla Walla Press, 2001). If they have not already done so, there are several means by which members can respond to this challenge in general terms. Firstly, and most obviously, ASSH members can and should be members of other historical societies, be they local, national or international. Secondly, members of ASSH can and should be publishing their work in specialist journals other than *Sporting Traditions*. Thirdly, ASSH members should be taking the opportunity to present their research at conferences other than 'Sporting Traditions'. To this end, the most convenient and sensible arrangement for Australian-based ASSH members is to become involved in the Australian Historical Association (AHA), the peak national body for historians in Australia. The following conference review alludes to some of the benefits of such a relationship, both in a personal sense and in terms of the potential future involvement of the Society.

The AHA was founded in 1973, but its inaugural conference did not take place until 1982. Although a member of the AHA for many years, the first conference of the Association that I attended was in July 2002, at the Mercure Hotel in Brisbane. With more than 240 active delegates in attendance from around Australia and overseas, the conference program was made up of 160 papers based around streams from various affiliated bodies, including the Queensland History Teachers Association, the Religious History Society, and the Australian Mining History Association. There were also a number of sessions and book launches on the theme of trans-Pacific Chinese. The overarching conference theme was 'Crossing Boundaries', and at any given time slot, delegates could usually select options from up to eight parallel sessions. Given the sheer number and range of papers, it is was difficult to gain a feel for the quality of research in all areas, but the smorgasbord effect of so much choice was rather tantalizing. Only one session was directly devoted to sport, but even so, two of the four presenters, namely Julia Martinez ('Aboriginal and Chinese Sporting Stories in Darwin:

Crossing Ethnic Boundaries') and Narelle McGlusky ('The Willow and the Palm: Cricket and National Identity in Fiji'), had never attended an ASSH conference, while the Chair, Ian Tyrell, had not returned to 'Sporting Traditions' since a foray in the late 1970s. The other two presenters, Stephen Alomes ('Political Football: Australian Football and the Challenge of Racism') and myself ('Sport, Culture and Ethnicity: The Chinese Community and Australian Rules Football'), had presented aspects of our work at other sport-related conferences, but not to the AHA. While other papers were not specifically related to sporting themes, it was beneficial, to say the least, to attend, for example, a session devoted to 'Visual Histories', where excellent papers were presented by Joanna Sassoon ('Return to Sender: Postcards as Visual Sources'), Kate Evans (Stepadders and Camera Boxes: The Work of Photography'), and Philip Pares ('Back to the Future: The Early Use of Photographic Images in Australian Print Media'). Similarly, the session on 'Chinese San Francisco and Australian Comparisons', with contributions by Yong Chen, Tony Peffer and Alan Mayne, was enlightening in terms of the debate over sources and how some historical 'voices' are deliberately privileged over others. A panel session devoted to 'Publishing History', and featuring editors from *Australian Historical Studies*, the University of Western Australia Press, the *Queensland Review*, the University of Queensland Press, and Melbourne University Press, was also informative (and feisty!), raising a number of issues about publishing, peer review and postgraduate writing that could easily be explored further by the ASSH Publications Committee. Four keynote sessions and four colloquia (as well as a range of social events) periodically brought delegates together *en masse*, although the weight of numbers meant that lunches and morning teas were held in two separate venues. The various affiliated bodies (along with the AHA), also held their annual meetings during the conference, a convenient and expedient arrangement for all concerned. It must also be said that catering, accommodation and administration for the five day event were all first class, including pre-conference communication via the Association's website, a testimony to the hard work of the conference conveners, Regina Ganter, Wayne Hudson and Mark Finnane, as well as their organizing team.

The time is ripe, I believe, for the AHA and ASSH to forge closer links with each other. The AHA currently stages a major biennial conference and a smaller regional conference (not necessarily in July) in the alternate year. Given that the idea of annual 'Sporting Traditions' conferences has already been officially mooted by the President of the Society, it would make sense for ASSH to formally affiliate with the AHA, either co-hosting a conference with the Association every second year, or at least organizing a number of sessions devoted to sport history themes as part of the regular AHA conference program. The required annual meeting of ASSH could also easily be held as part of the AHA conference. In line with such a scheme, the number of sessions devoted to sport history at any given AHA conference would obviously increase or decrease depending on the level of interest, but ASSH would obviously not have to bear the burden of either financing or

organizing the conference in its non-biennial years. In return, the Society could continue to hold its major biennial meetings, but perhaps make greater efforts to invite and involve 'general' historians such as Graeme Davison, Jill Roe and Stuart Macintyre. The time is ripe in other respects, for following the September AHA regional conference to be held in Mildura in September 2003, the XIth Biennial Conference of the AHA is scheduled for Newcastle in early July 2004. The convener for this conference is Martin Crotty, an ASSH member and contributor to *Sporting Traditions*. In terms of a major collaborative event between the Society and the Association, it would seem an opportunity too good to pass up.

Editor's note: Rob Hess has made an excellent suggestion in this piece, one that was discussed at the recent ASSH AGM. ASSH President, Richard Cashman, has already contacted Martin Crotty about this suggestion and it appears that there are no major impediments to ASSH involvement at the AHA regional conference in Newcastle in 2004. Further details will be published here and on the website as the date approaches.