

Book Reviews

Sean Brawley, *Vigilant and Victorious: A Community History of the Collaroy Surf Life Saving Club 1911-1995*. Collaroy Surf Life Saving Club, Sydney, 1995. Appendices, illus. pp. 410, \$29.

Following British example Australians were not legally allowed to swim at coastal beaches in daylight hours during the nineteenth century, such behaviour being considered immoral. After William Gocher's famous challenge of the law at Manly Beach in 1902 such draconian laws were rescinded and the surf lifesaving movement evolved. Collaroy Surf Life Saving Club is one of the earliest surf lifesaving clubs formed on Sydney's northern beaches. There are approximately 250 surf lifesaving clubs in Australia.

Sean Brawley has written a history which considers both the internal history of the Club and outside influences which impinge on it, the Club's relationship to the National Surf Life Saving Association, together with its State body, local authorities, community and business groups. This is an admirable book which succeeds in placing the Club firmly in its social context.

Another strength of the book is that Brawley intertwines the Club's strengths with its weaknesses. The book documents patrol inefficiencies, internal Club Committee squabbling and membership downturns. One Club Annual Report aptly noted that 'no voluntary organisation can go through 75 years without making many mistakes'. The author recalls three occasions when the Club was suspended from competition for various indiscretions, including in 1962 when Collaroy was suspended for three months. However, the Club learnt from this experience. When Collaroy returned to club competition, it resurrected past competition glory, including a March Past team that was to dominate the national scene for decades. The book also introduces the occasional reckless behaviour of the public and the various misdemeanours of the surf lifesaving fraternity. The tragic drowning of a South Narrabeen member at Collaroy in 1956 is a classic example. Brawley also writes lucidly about the many courageous rescues at Collaroy Beach, including one in 1931, when club member, George Greenwell died.

Vigilant and Victorious also deals with contentious social issues faced by the surf lifesaving movement. There was considerable acrimony between surf lifesavers and board riders in the 1960s, which continued afterwards. The efforts to involve women in the club fraternity was

opposed in some quarters. By the mid-1990s, however, 'active female members outnumbered active male members'.

The book is also spiced by some humorous anecdotes which will appeal to Club members. For example on one occasion, in 1952, after a hair-raising sea voyage by Club members to the State Surf Titles at Byron Bay, one member on arrival at the destination, promptly jumped ashore, never to be seen within the Club again. On another occasion, a patient lost his false teeth and trousers during a traumatic rescue in 1959, while the wreck of the ill-fated vessel was surrounded by sausages and butter.

Due to lack of documentary evidence, Brawley has made extensive use of oral history techniques: 170 people were interviewed for this project and over 200 hours of recordings were made. Brawley has made skilful use of oral history sources. The writing is complemented with large suitably-captioned photographs and there are 30 pages of appendices which list Club administrators and those who won Australian, Branch and Club Championship titles. A subject and name index are included.

This is an excellent book written by an author who has been active in the surf lifesaving movement and is familiar with its ethos. *Vigilant and Victorious* will become the benchmark for future surf lifesaving histories. Brawley will publish another club history in 1996, that of the Palm Beach Surf Life Saving Club (NSW). I eagerly await that publication.

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