

Inaugural Meeting of Overland Society

Mt Eliza, 1.00pm, 20 November 1988

Minutes

Present: Nita Murray-Smith, Barrett Reid (Chair), Rick Amor, Michael Dugan, Ken Gott, Robert Harris, Vane Lindesay, Stuart Macintyre, John McLaren, Max Marginson, Geoff Serle.

Apologies: Nancy Keesing, Fay Zwicky, Chris Wallace-Crabbe, David Murray-Smith, Cleve Murray-Smith, Joanna Murray-Smit.

Correspondence: Fay Zwicky.

Reports: Barrett Reid reported that the arrangements for producing Overland 112 and 113 were proceeding smoothly. The meeting with Rosemary Wighton and Tom Shapcott on behalf of the Literature Board had been generally amicable, and the worries of the Board about Overland's future had been thoroughly canvassed.

John McLaren presented a statement of accounts and a projected budget which showed that the journal could continue to operate in balance, provided that levels of subsidy and of readers' donations were maintained. It was agreed that the subscription for 1989 should be raised to \$22.

Nita Murray-Smith explained to the meeting that she wished Overland to continue and wished to maintain her close association with the journal, but that she did not wish to remain the owner.

The reports were accepted on the motion of Barrett Reid and John McLaren.

After a general discussion of the future of Overland, and consideration of the arguments raised by Fay Zwicky and others for its termination, the meeting unanimously resolved that, in accordance with Stephen Murray-Smith's wishes, the journal should continue publication.

Moved Geoff Serle, seconded Max Marginson.

Constitution of the Overland Society.

The meeting adopted the following motions:

1. That this meeting constitute the Overland Society to own and publish Overland.

Moved Nita Murray-Smith, seconded Geoff Serle.

2. That the Society request Mr T.H.Leggatt of H.L.Yuncken and Yuncken, Solicitors, to draw up the formal articles of association and arrange for the incorporation of the Society as legal entity under the Companies Act or as appropriate.

Moved John McLaren, seconded Barrett Reid.

3. That the articles and constitution of the Society provide for the following:

3.1. The name of the Society shall be the Overland Society.
Moved Geoff Serle, seconded Ken Gott.

3.2. The membership of the Society shall be the members of the Murray-Smith family and those people present at the founding meeting or whose apologies have been accepted by this meeting, together with any people accepted by any subsequent meeting of the Society or its Executive; that membership be not more than twenty people at any time; that all new members shall be approved by a general meeting of the society before becoming voting members.

Moved John McLaren, seconded Barry Reid.

It was agreed that this clause should be so drafted as to allow maximum flexibility for the operation of the society, while guarding against the possibility of a take-over by a small group.

3.3. The aims of the Society shall be to publish the quarterly journal Overland, to appoint the editors and officers of the journal and advise on its policy, and to carry out any other activities appropriate to the support of Australian writing and intellectual life.

Moved Robert Harris, seconded Vane Lindesay.

3.4. The affairs of the Society shall be conducted by an Executive comprising a Chair, who will be the Publisher of Overland, Secretary, and Treasurer, together with any members co-opted at any meeting. The Editor and Associate Editor will be ex-officio members of the Board. This executive will constitute the Editorial Board of Overland, which will advise on policy and assist the editors in the production of the journal.

Moved Michael Dugan, seconded Geoff Serle.

3.5. The Society shall conduct an Annual General Meeting to receive accounts, authorize an annual budget, and appoint office bearers, who shall normally hold office until the following Annual General Meeting.

3.6. The quorum for a General Meeting is five members, and for an executive meeting three including the Publisher and the Editor. Decisions of the Executive may be made on the basis of a telephone vote of Victorian members.

3.7. Between General Meetings the Executive shall have full power to conduct the affairs of the Society, and to delegate these powers to the editors and office-bearers to act on its behalf.

Clauses 3.5, 3.6, 3.7 moved John McLaren, seconded Rick Amor.

4. That the following Executive and Editorial Board be appointed to hold office until the first Annual General Meeting, which shall be held before the end of 1989:

Chairperson and Publisher: Nita Murray-Smith
Secretary: John McLaren
Treasurer: Michael Dugan
Others: Rick Amor
Robert Harris
Ken Gott
Vane Lindesay
Stuart Macintyre
David Murray-Smith
Barrett Reid
Nancy Keesing
Fay Zwicky

5. That Barrett Reid be appointed Editor of Overland for the period until the end of 1991.

Moved Michael Dugan, seconded Rick Amor.

6. That John McLaren be appointed Associate Editor of Overland for the period until the end of 1991.

Moved Michael Dugan, seconded Rick Amor.

7. That the Editor be empowered to appoint interstate and overseas correspondents to assist with the production and promotion of the journal.

Moved John McLaren, seconded Stuart Macintyre.

This provision was intended to allow the editor to augment the work already being done by the Contributin Editors. There was no suggestion that any of these should be replaced.

8. That the records of the Association be kept by the Secretary.

9. That the records of the journal be kept by the editor.

10. That the accounts of the Association be kept by the Publisher and Treasurer, who shall jointly authorize all expenditure.

It was agreed that the ownership of the records should be further discussed with the lawyer.

Clauses 8-10 moved John McLaren, seconded Michael Dugan.

11. That the budget proposed for the 1988-89 financial year be accepted.

Moved Barret Reid, seconded Rick Amor.

Policy

The draft policy statement was adopted subject, despite John McLaren's vigorous defence of his classical intent, to the deletion of the metaphor of cultural janitor. The policy as adopted forms Attachment 1 to these minutes.

Moved Michael Duan, seconded John McLaren.

It was also agreed to ask Fay Zwicky to expand the ideas in the second paragraph of her letter as an article for Overland, with the intent of starting a debate on the place of slogans and the meaning of democracy in the present political climate. This could be the first of a new series of letters to Tom Collins. It was suggested that perhaps we should rephrase our slogan to read "Bias Australian, temper offensively democratic." Some members felt that, for the time, the struggle for recognition of Australian culture may have been won, and that the problem now was a too narrow or strident nationalism. On the other hand, the principle of democracy seemed to be under increasing political and intellectual assault.

The meeting agreed to thank Fay for taking the time to express her ideas to us.

Discussion now became more general, and agreement was reached on most matters without formal resolution.

Covers: Barrett Reid reported that the Gallery Directors had offered to supply transparencies of recent art for use on Overland covers during 1989. The first painter proposed was Rick Amor.

Design: A general discussion of the design of Overland ensued, and Rick and Vane agreed to talk further and come up with firm proposals. It was agreed that any changes should be gradual, changing the emphasis rather than seeking a totally new look.

Annual dinners: Agreed that these should continue, but members paying their own costs. Janet Turner Hospital was suggested as guest for the 1989 dinner in October.

Future meetings: Agreed that the board should meet after the publication of each issue.

Lloyd Davies advertisement: the meeting discussed the issues involved in the submission of this advertisement, and reaffirmed the general principle that the journal has the absolute right to refuse any advertisement without giving reasons, and that this right should be exercised by the editors in consultation with the publisher or any board members concerned.

The meeting formally adopted the following resolution:

that the Board endorses the decision not to publish the advertisement submitted by Lloyd Davies.

Moved Michael Dugan, seconded Rick Amor, carried with Ken Gott dissenting and requesting that his dissent be noted.

The meeting closed at 4.00pm, after recording a unanimous vote of thanks to Nita Murray-Smith for her hospitality.

Overland

Editorial Policy

Adopted by the inaugural meeting of the Overland Society, Mt Eliza, 20 Nov 1988

Overland should continue to follow the policies established by Stephen Murray-Smith when he founded it as a journal of the left, temper democratic, bias Australian.

However, the character of Overland did not and cannot remain unchanged. When challenged that Overland was no longer what it used to be, Stephen would respond, "Neither are we." As times changed, so did Overland, and if we are to remain true to Stephen's vision the journal must continue to change. Yet despite its revolutionary origins, Overland's changes were always evolutionary, and so there should not be any sudden breaks with the past.

In trying to see what made, and makes, Overland distinctive, it is hard to go past Stephen's personality. Overland was his journal. Yet a part of his personality was to nurture a loyal band of friends and supporters, and the Overland we have is a product of the dialectic between them and Stephen. The task of the successor editors will be to maintain these close relationships, to keep the quality of the journal as a friend, the centre of a family, rather than merely as a medium.

The Overland family has always been opinionated and quarrelsome, and these qualities should be maintained. Beyond the radical commitment to a democratic Australia, we should avoid any 'correct' Overland line. This means writing should be

published because it is good, because it contributes to debate, because it helps to shape the way we see ourselves, and not because it reinforces the prejudices of the editors or subscribers. This does not, however, mean that Overland can be merely eclectic. Our democratic commitment means that we must remain a journal of the left, extending the opportunities of ordinary people to work together to take control of their lives. This implies a continuing interest in all aspects of our life -- in scientific, environmental, historical and political writing as well as poetry, fiction and criticism.

Above all, Overland must continue to be a journal where new writers -- people like Frank Moorhouse, Michael Wilding, Peter Carey, Georgia Savage, J.S. Harry, Lily Brett, Timoshenko Aslanides, Jenny Boulton, Komninos, Eric Beach, Shelton Lea, Jennifer Maiden, Robert Harris, James McQueen, to name just a few innovators who had publication in Overland -- can find room to break the expectations of their readers and reshape our ideas of Australia, a place where commentators like John Herouvim, Craig McGregor, Drusilla Modjeska, John Docker, Sean Regan, Amirah Inglis or Fay Zwicky can develop ideas, where oral history and reminiscence form a whole with the latest styles of criticism, poetry and fiction. At a time when journals are becoming increasingly specialist and academic, in the narrow sense, it is important for Overland to keep its role, not as literary gatekeeper, but as door opener.