

OBITUARY

MARGARET HELEN (PEG) ANTHONY

1925–2017



That dedication and skill can achieve miracles within a sadly depleted acquisitions budget is shown by the work done by Peggy Anthony at the State Library of Victoria over some two decades.¹

Peg Anthony led the State Library's Acquisitions Department² from the time of its 'long overdue' formation in 1960³ until her retirement on 17 November 1983⁴ and did, indeed, achieve the miracles Wallace Kirsop suggested in the lines quoted above. She did this quietly, working from her small, cluttered office, always – it seemed – with a lighted cigarette at hand.

To those who worked in her department, Peg Anthony was, at least until after her retirement, 'Miss Anthony', a little distant, but with an elegance and independent spirit that was genuine. She was my first boss at the State Library and I came to admire her very much.

Derek Whitehead, who worked with Peg for almost a decade, remembers her as 'a remarkably generous boss' and 'a great person'; she supported his ever-broadening interest in multicultural library services, and allowed him space to undertake staff union duties.⁵ Linda

Notley and Louise Mate remember her deep knowledge of the Library's collections, her fair-minded approach and her kindness.⁶ For Joyce McGrath, the Library's Arts Librarian, it was 'Peggy' and her commitment to excellence that enabled the Arts Library to develop 'into the largest art collection in a public library in Australia', with 'a first-rate reference facility recognised worldwide'.⁷ To outsiders, it was the likes of Peg who helped create 'the rambling State Library of Victoria in Melbourne', as the Sydney-based scholar John Fletcher wrote in 1970, 'home of the most curious and comprehensive general collection of books in Australia'.⁸

Peg rarely spoke of her background. It was Joyce McGrath who first told me that she was the child of a soldier settler, from Barmera, in South Australia's Riverland.⁹ Alastair Anderson, a son of Ron Anderson, Peg's work colleague and long-term close friend, also filled in some details.¹⁰ Peg was born on 14 May 1925, the only child of Harold and Margaret Jane Anthony. Around the age of ten, when her mother was seriously ill, Peg went to live with relatives in Melbourne.

She attended Presbyterian Ladies' College then the University of Melbourne where

Photographer unknown, Peg Anthony during her retirement at Birregurra. Reproduced courtesy of Birregurra Historical Centre, Birregurra, Victoria.

she gained an Arts degree. After her mother's death,¹¹ Peg began work at the (then) Public Library of Victoria, in April 1949, and, 11 months later, left for England.¹² There she worked with Phyllis Cutting, a graduate in arts and commerce from the University of Melbourne, who was in charge of the Information Service and Library of the British Institute of Management.

Peg returned to Melbourne and the Public Library in 1953. Over the next 30 years, as the Library's *Annual Report* for 1983/84 noted, 'she made a most distinguished contribution to the development of the State Library's collections, and her unrivalled knowledge of them will be sorely missed'.¹³

Her father, who lived into his nineties, was cared for by Peg at her home in St Kilda. In her retirement she did considerable volunteer work in the library of the Royal Society. Later Peg moved to Birregurra in rural Victoria, where she 'became a quiet but active member of the small community', as a local tribute stated. Also noted in this tribute was how, on learning that the Birregurra Historical Centre had lost its home, 'Peg very generously purchased the building at 45 Main Street', providing the centre with a new home.¹⁴ Her ongoing generosity extended to the State Library as well, particularly through Peg's subscription for deluxe, limited edition books produced by the Gregynog Press in Wales.¹⁵

Walter Struve



Photographer unknown, Library Training School 'Class of 1955' (Peg Anthony is fifth from the left, back row), in the Palmer (or Monash) Hall, Pictures Collection, H36745

Back row: R Brown, FJ Perry, Myra Jones, L Gordon, M Anthony, JA Feely, L Baxter, J Evans, M Cord[?] and M Smales; Front row: M Stewart, U O'Connor, SE Howard, CA McCallum, CG Kemp, J Addison and MC Bowman