*[Image of Ferguson on screen]*

**WHO WAS THIS MAN?**

**WHY DO WE NEED TO KNOW ABOUT HIM?**

**WHAT IS HIS CONNECTI0N WITH THE LIBRARY ACT OF 1939?**

New South Wales residents of a certain age, present or former, may recognise him as Jack Ferguson, Labor MP in the New South Wales Parliament, and Deputy Premier and Minister for Public Works in the Wran government . Jack came from working class Western Sydney and remained in and of Western Sydney. He had served in World War II and had been trained as a bricklayer after the War. He joined the Labor Party: ‘*If a party is good enough to give a bloke like me a chance, it’s good enough for me’,* he said. But he was a working class intellectual like his idol, former Premier Ben Chifley. He left school at 13 but had been a great reader: *‘I had read out the Guildford School of Arts by the time I was 16’*, he later said, and after the War did his best to accomplish this in the newly established Parramatta City Library.

In 1973, to what seems to have been general public surprise, Jack Ferguson was appointed by his Party as Deputy Leader (to Neville Wran); and when Labor came to power he found himself in Cabinet both as Deputy Premier and Minister for Public Works, a position perhaps not inappropriate for a former bricklayer.

As to Ferguson’s possible connection to the passing of the amendments to the Library Act of 1939, I have no information, but as to his part in the building of the new Macquarie Street building for the State Library of New South Wales, there is a story to tell, sometimes told by me but never, I think, in print or in a public forum.

The new Macquarie Street building had a long gestation period. When I became Principal Librarian in 1973 (the name State Librarian came with the amendments to the 1939 Act) I wrote a brief for an architect not then appointed, for a building not yet approved even in principle, to cope with the overcrowded spaces of the existing building. For those of you from other States I should explain that the library building had its beginning before the Great War of 1914-1918 as the Mitchell Library (now sensibly referred to as the Mitchell Wing); it was added to later by the Dixson Wing, and by the building of part of the proposed total building for the mostly non-Australian General Reference Library. This latter part was opened in 1942 (yes, there was still a war on) and the General Reference Library which until then had remained in its nineteenth century premises, migrated across Macquarie Street. The 1960s saw the Library building completed with three stack floors intended at that time for the State Archives, still mainly administered by the Library. It was then in its final form as a four square building, elaborately decorated on the 1942 exterior walls. For this and other reasons it was now a complete and finished building, quite unable to be added to.

Although the grand new Reference Library Reading Room of 1942 (now re-used and renamed as the Mitchell Library) seemed adequate for readers, the Mitchell reading rooms overflowed with researchers, and it was very clear indeed that future room for books, pictures, and other library materials, whether Australian or not, was never going to be found to be found in the existing building. The State Archives departed , but the stack floors they had occupied which were then taken over by the Library did not satisfy the pressing needs even at that stage. Substantial collections were already in off-site storage, staff numbers had grown and were uncomfortably housed, and there was no room for new activities. The very fact that a commodious Special Collections and Rare Books reading and exhibition room had to be turned into the Acquisitions Department within two or three years after completion of the building gives some idea of the mounting pressures for space for library collections and their use and control.

It took ten years, from 1973, when that first draft of an architectural brief was written, mostly by me, to 1983 when approval was given, at least in principle, for the construction of a new and additional Library building.

No opportunity had been lost in those ten years to demonstrate to Parliament and to the public the absolute necessity of actually doing something. Amongst these opportunities were the leaking to the *Sydney Morning Herald* the Library Council’s *Annual Report* well before the Report was tabled in Parliament; it contained scathing comments on the need for action (written by me, of course) and perhaps a more spectacular opportunity, in an ABC *Four Corners* television documentary where, while showing the reporter the overcrowded Mitchell stacks, my foot ‘accidentally’ slipped and tore open a painting wrapped in brown paper. The Mitchell Librarian of the time was horrified but a point was made, to an audience of very many thousands. (The painting itself was undamaged).

A public announcement, of sorts, what a former Prime Minister might have termed a ‘non-core promise’ --was made in 1984 stating that the Government proposed a new building--- a statement made not by the Premier as one might have expected but by his wife. The Government Architect was instructed to prepare plans, hopes were high – but still nothing happened. Then luck struck.

It so happened that the Premier, Neville Wran, had accepted an invitation to attend an official dinner—regrettably, my memory is unclear; was it held in honour of the world-wide organisation of writers, International Pen, or perhaps even more surprisingly, was it even on the occasion of the Premier’s Award for Literature?. Unfortunately, however, it was found that Premier Wran had been double-booked and was instead to attend a function which had something to do with football---which may say something about cultural versus political values. I was asked to represent the Premier at the dinner. So my wife Janet and I went, and were seated on either side of Jack Ferguson, Deputy Premier and Minister for Public Works. Jack was affable, obviously having had a relaxing drink or two after normal working hours. He said he was disappointed at having to be at the dinner, since he had hoped ‘*to go home for a Chinese meal with Mary’,* his wife. I don’t recall what we ate, or indeed where we ate, but it was certainly not Chinese.

At any rate, we made conversation, and as soon as Jack found I was State Librarian he began to speak in glowing terms of his local Parramatta City Library. I told him about our State Library building plans, which appeared to be going nowhere. He said, *‘come to my office tomorrow with the plans’*. We did just that – me and our architect Andrew Andersons. Ferguson must have had his own officials there too, of course.

No promises were made, but I have always believed that the State Library building progressed from that time onwards because it was supported in Cabinet by Jack Ferguson, bricklayer, politician, avid reader and user of public libraries...and the rest, as they say, is history. His support was vital, since some Members of the Parliament believed that the site, adjacent to the new Parliament House, should be kept for some future but un-defined Parliamentary use. Premier Wran decided that the proposed building was too high. ‘*Take a story off the top’,* he said. We did, and put it on the bottom!

--- Oh, and I doubt that Jack would have been so enthusiastic about the State Library if the City of Parramatta had not provided him with such an excellent library, under the umbrella, so to speak, of the Library Act of 1939.

Jack Ferguson died in his beloved Sydney on 17 Septmber 2002.

I should now add that since I decided to submit this brief story about Ferguson, I learnt that the Library Council of New South Wales had added, in the Macquarie Street foyer on 2 December 1913 – the 25th Anniversary of the Macquarie Wing -- a new plaque in the series recognizing others notable for the building. I am grateful to Alex Byrne, the State Librarian, for alerting me to this, and for sending me a copy of the relevant excerpt from *Hansard* of 23 November 1983 when the Premier stated that the site was vested in the Minister for Public Works, Jack Ferguson, and that in consequence, and I quote from that statement, ‘*the people of New South Wales will have an addition to the State Library and the Mitchell Library for the bicentennial of 1988’* ... and I also thank Alex for sending me a copy of his Minute to the Library Council recommending the design, manufacture and installation of the plaque which was unveiled on 2 December 2013.

Go and look at it. Jack would probably have been embarrassed had he lived to see it, but I am sure he would have been glad that he had been instrumental in helping the State Library of New South Wales to continue as a vital part of the network of the State’s network of libraries for the people.

*Russell Doust, State Librarian 1973-1987*