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Arthur Cousins 1866-1960

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Arthur Cousins

1866-1960

He was that "rara avis" in Australian historiography, the devoted local historian who has a realisation of the broader implications of regional development.

So wrote Sydney University Archivist D.S. Macmillan in an obituary notice published in the October 1960 number of the *Union Recorder*, commemorating the death of Arthur Cousins on Wednesday, 17 August, at his Cremone residence, aged 94 years. Though having known him for only a brief period at the end of a long life, Macmillan had developed a degree of admiration and respect for this elderly gentleman, who, along with G.E. Hall and others, had worked towards the creation of the Sydney University Archives, where Macmillan was appointed first full-time archivist in 1954. However this was only one of many noteworthy achievements, in a long career during which Cousins was a schoolteacher, local historian, parent, and Honorary Archivist of Sydney University.

Arthur Cousins was born at Kiama, on the south coast of New South Wales, on 14 January 1866. His father, Christopher Cousins, was a bootmaker and dairy farmer then aged 25, whilst his mother, formerly Jane Barnes, was 24. Both had been born and raised in the Colony. Arthur's paternal grandparents Thomas and Hannah Cousins had arrived in Sydney from Stroud, England, as free immigrants aboard the **Bussorah Merchant** on 3 September 1839. Their son Christopher (Arthur's father) was born in Sydney in 1841 where Thomas worked as a bootmaker. In 1851 Thomas and Christopher headed to the New South Wales goldfields to try their luck. This proved unrewarding and they returned to Sydney, living for a period by the Lane Cove River before moving to Jamberoo in the late fifties. There they met up with the Barnes family. In 1862 Thomas Cousins opened a boot warehouse in Kiama, a business which was carried on by him and his sons Christopher and James until the turn of the century. They also had a branch store at Gerringong, where Thomas and Hannah lived until their deaths in 1891 and 1900.

Arthur Cousins' maternal grandfather, James Barnes, arrived in Sydney aboard the **Roxburgh Castle** on 25 May 1839. Following the death of his father, wife and son during the voyage, and of another son 1 month later, he went on to marry Winifred Henley at Parramatta and a daughter Jane (Arthur's mother) was born there in 1842. James was initially employed as a brickmaker in Sydney, before moving to Jamberoo in the mid forties where he worked as a maltster at the Woodstock brewery and flour and timber mill complex. During the late fifties, about the time the Cousins family arrived in the district, James Barnes took to farming near Stockyard Mountain. It was under such circumstances that young Christopher Cousins and Jane Barnes became acquainted, and were eventually to marry on 26 June 1860. Over a period of twenty years the couple bore eight children, with the boot and shoe business and a small dairy farm providing the family's livelihood. Arthur learnt much from his father in regard to both these professions. The young lad grew up in the vicinity of Kiama and the small town of Jamberoo, located to the west near the head of the Minamurra Rivulet and nestled within the lee of the Illawarra Escarpment. It was an area of lush vegetation, heavily wooded with sub-tropical rainforest on the surrounding hills and inhabited not only by farmers such as the Menzies, Waugh, Marks and Dymock families, but also by remnants of the local Aboriginal tribe. In a 1952 manuscript on the history of the Menzies family of Jamberoo, Arthur records how in 1881, just above Minamurra House,

There were plenty of wallabies on that hillside then, and dingoes too, while the curlews made the evenings eerie with their mournful cries.... The Mills which used to be the most outstanding feature of this scene have gone for many years. But the view, with its gentle slopes, beautiful shade trees, happy villages, lush grass, well conditioned cattle, is a charming one. And on the mountain side in summer time those blazes of flame - the Illawarra Flame Tree - add unexpected beauty to the borders of Jamberoo, which name the writer was told by a black 75 years ago, means "Stand up straight like a Soldier."

Arthur was obviously an intelligent child. In 1879 both he and his brother Thomas George passed the Junior Public Examination conducted by Sydney University for the Department of Public Instruction. For a period thereafter Arthur worked in the Kiama boot shop with his father. However on 26 August 1881, at the age of 15, he was appointed probationary pupil teacher at Jamberoo Primary School, and remained there until January 1884 when he transferred to George Street, Redfern. By the end of that year he had progressed through to the level of Class I probationary teacher and the following year was admitted to Teacher Training School. After graduating in 1886, he spent the next forty five years of his life as a teacher and headmaster at various schools throughout New South Wales. He was Assistant Teacher at Newtown (1886), Fort Street, Sydney (1887), where his father had been a student in 1849, and Gordon (1888); and thereafter headmaster at Macleans Ridge (1888-90), Rouse (1890) and Wardell (1891-8) in the Richmond River district. In 1898 he was promoted to Inverell Superior Public School (1898-1903), before moving to Adamstown (1904) and Neutral Bay (1904-20). Whilst there he enrolled as an evening student at Sydney University in 1908, graduating in 1911 with a BA and First Class Honours in history. This was the beginning of a long period of association with that institution, primarily in connection with the Union and the University's archival collections. From Neutral Bay he moved to Bathurst (1920), Cessnock Intermediate High School (1921-2), Granville (1923-6), Fort Street Junior Technical (1927) and Ashfield Junior Technical High School (1928-30). He retired on 13 January 1931. During this period, Arthur married Amy F. Glasgow of Lismore on 16 December 1890. Together they raised a family which included daughters Oenone Glasgow, Amy Eileen, Myra, Valda and Alice Elaine.

Following his retirement from teaching in 1931, Arthur was able to devote more time to his interest in local history. The first result of this work was the publication of *The Northern Rivers of New South Wales* during 1933. He described it as 'a small history of the Tweed, Richmond and Clarence Rivers, for children.' Also during that year, at the request of W.A. Selle, Acting Vice Chancellor of Sydney University, Arthur took up an appointment as Acting Honorary Archivist, working on the World War I Memorial project, alongside fellow graduate and engineer George Edward Hall (Robinson, 1991). This project was to take up their energies during the remainder of the decade, culminating in the publication during 1939 of the 649 page *Book of Remembrance of the University of Sydney in the Great War, 1914-1918*. This mammoth work listed, with brief biographies, all the members of the University who had served overseas during the War. Its compilation involved much dedicated and meticulous research on the part of Hall and Cousins, with the latter commenting to members of his family how frustrating it was that many ex-WWI soldiers and their families were vague or had little knowledge of precise war service records, due to secrecy requirements and the prohibition against keeping personal diaries. Both honorary archivists were formally honoured by the University as a result of their efforts, although it was ironic that, in commemorating 'the war to end all wars', the book was published in a year which saw the beginning of an even worse conflagration.

Following the publication of the *Book of Remembrance*, Cousins and Hall continued their work collecting relevant records of war service by University personnel and alumni, and assorted archives. On 7 July 1941, they were elected Honorary Archivists for World War II by the University Senate. However, the job was not as demanding as previously and Arthur was able to put his mind to the compilation of his next major work, namely a history of the Illawarra district of New South Wales during its first century of white settlement, from 1815 to about 1920. This was to prove a daunting task, with its eventual 328 pages covering the history of the area from Helensburgh and Stanwell Park in the north, through to Wollongong, and south to Kiama and the Shoalhaven. An offshoot appeared in 1945 in the form of a small book entitled *The Letters of Michael Hindmarsh of Alne Bank*, being the reproduction of some letters from the 1840s and 1850s relating to the property Alne Bank, near Kiama. Articles on aspects of Illawarra local history also appeared in the *Illawarra Mercury* around this time. Much of this material was eventually incorporated into Arthur's book, which proved to be a combination of his own memories, along with published and manuscript accounts by others such as Judge Alfred Macfarlane, Francis McCaffrey and Alexander Berry. The process of compilation and research was a lengthy one, and a former librarian at the Mitchell Library, Miss Margaret McDonald of Wollongong, remembers Arthur Cousins during the 1940s as a "gentle, courteous old fellow", as he quietly went about the task of acquiring material and researching aspects of Illawarra history.

Arthur Cousins' *The Garden of New South Wales* - by which title Governor Richard Bourke had described the Illawarra district after a visit there in 1834 - was published at the end of 1948 by the Producer's Co-operative Distributing Society, Sydney, a forerunner to Dairy Farmers. It quickly became a much sought after, and rare book, remaining to this day the most readable and comprehensive general history of the Illawarra region of New South Wales. Like most histories of that era, it has deficiencies - topics such as the treatment of the local Aborigines, the role of women in society, and commonplace social and industrial issues were rarely touched upon. Its emphasis was on the big three concerns of the nineteenth century - cows, coal and cedar, with much space given over to discussing the development of the Illawarra Shorthorn breed of cattle, and the appearance of various Dairy Co-operatives, reflecting the interests of the publishers and previous writers such as Frank McCaffrey. Despite these shortcomings, *Garden* represents a solid foundation for studies of the history of the Illawarra region, and remains a standard reference to this day, forever a testament to Arthur Cousins' skill and dedication as a researcher and local historian. Its appearance in 1948 meant that the newly formed Illawarra Historical Society, whose first meeting had been held on 5 December 1944, could concentrate on investigating in more detail aspects of local history not addressed in Cousins' work.

The author was aged 82 at the time *Garden* appeared, although his life was far from over. Throughout the 1940s both he and George Hall continued working at Sydney University on the various war archives, with the latter transporting him there in his car. When Hall died early in 1952, Arthur resigned as Honorary Archivist and helped raise the issue of the appointment of a full-time replacement. A letter to the Vice Chancellor in June 1953, along with pressure from the administration and history department, put into train the series of events which culminated in the appointment of D.S. Macmillan as University Archivist on 3 May 1954.

As usual, Arthur continued to pursue his interest in local history. Around this time he prepared a manuscript on the story of the Menzies family of Jamberoo, based on the 1839 diary of Margaret Menzies (now in the National Library of Australia collection), and interspersed with his own childhood reminiscences of the area from the 1860s and 1870s. After he died in 1960, a section of the manuscript was published locally under the title *The Story of Dr. and Mrs. Robert Menzies and their home Minamurra House, 1839-1861*.

On a personal note, we know little about Arthur Cousins apart from that which is outlined above and various other personal reminiscences scattered throughout *Garden* and the Menzies manuscript. Fortunately Mr A.N. "Neville" White of Hurstville, now in his eightieth year and a nephew of Arthur Cousins, recounts boyhood memories from the 1920s of when his 'Uncle Arthur' would come over to play chess with his father. The two men would sit for hours, in near total silence, occasionally making a considered move. Neville and his brother, unaware of the complexities of the game, thought their action (or rather, lack of it) amusing, and took to mimicking father and uncle. They would set up a board on the floor by the adults, and take up a motionless position for half an hour or so, before moving their pieces and thinking themselves rather funny, all the while not having a clue what they were doing. Young Neville was somewhat in awe of his seemingly aloof 'headmaster' uncle, though of course he remembers him fondly. D.S. Macmillan, in his obituary notice, said of Arthur that right up to the time of his death he was 'in full possession of his faculties, an able talker, keen-minded and still interested in the problems of local history.' We are indeed fortunate that Arthur Cousins, in his retirement years, should so ably address aspects of New South Wales regional history, being one of the first university trained historians to apply his skills to this important strand of Australian history.

Michael Organ
3 March 1994

Works by Arthur Cousins

The Northern Rivers of New South Wales, Shakespeare Head Press, Sydney, 1933, 107p.

G.E. Hall & A. Cousins (eds), *Book of Remembrance of the University of Sydney in the Great War, 1914-1918*, University of Sydney, 1939, xliii, 556p.

The Letters of Michael Hindmarsh of Alne Bank, Suburban Herald Printery, Crows Nest, 1945, 84p.

'Kerosene Works at American Creek', *Illawarra Mercury*, 30 May 1947.

The Garden of New South Wales, Producer's Co-op. Distributing Society, Sydney, 1948, 328p.

'Thomas Cousins and Family - Genealogical Notes', typescript, n.d., 5p.

The Menzies' of Minamurra, Unpublished manuscript, Wollongong City Library, c.1952, 41p.

The Story of Dr. and Mrs. Robert Menzies and their home Minamurra House, 1839-1861, Wollongong, c.1962, 13p.

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'Arthur Cousins' [Obituary notice], *Sydney Morning Herald*, Thursday, 18 August 1960.

Barnes, Audrey, *The James Barnes Story*, Unpublished typescript, October 1984, 4p.

Illawarra Family History Group, *Illawarra Pioneers Pre-1900*, Kiama, 1988, 211p.

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Robinson, T.J., 'Origins of the Archives of the University of Sydney. Part One: The Honorary Archivists', *Record*, University of Sydney Archives, No.1, March 1991, 9-20.

---, 'Origins of the Archives of the University of Sydney. Part Two: The Appointment of a Professional Archivist', *Record*, University of Sydney Archives, No.1, March 1992, 4-17.

Acknowledgments

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Chronology of Arthur Cousins

- 1860 26 June: Christopher Cousins and Jane Barnes marry at Jamberoo
- 1866 14 January: Arthur Cousins born at Kiama.
Father - Christopher Cousins, bootmaker, age 25, born in Sydney
Mother Jane Barnes, age 24, born in Sydney.
- 1881 26 August: Employed on probation as a pupil teacher, Jamberoo Primary
- 1882 8 February: appointed as a Pupil Teacher
10 October: promoted from Class IV to III
- 1883 1 October: Placed in Class III
- 1884 9 January: removed from Jamberoo Primary to Redfern Primary
1 October: promoted from Class II to Class I
- 1885 13 June: Exam for training School
13 July: admitted to Teacher Training School
- 1886 1 July: Awarded Class IIA. Provisional training session ending
3 July: Temporary attendance Newtown P
- 1887 8 March: Temporary attendance Fort Street Practising School
- 1888 28 February: Temporary attendance Gordon P
9 April: Appointed teacher of Maclean's Ridges P IX
- 1889 4 March: authorised to employ Mrs Talbot as teacher of sewing
- 1890 15 May: Provisional certificate of IIA confirmed
5 September: Instructed to act as teacher of Rouse P VII
16 December: marries Amy F. Glasgow
- 1891 30 June: instructed to act as teacher of Wardell Pub VI
- 1897 28 June: examined in point of attainments for Class IB.
- 1898 1 July: promoted to Class IB
17 October: instructed to act as Teacher of Inverell Public IV

- 1903 1 July: promoted to IA
- 26 October: instructed to act as teacher of Adamstown II
- 1904 8 April: instructed to act as teacher of Neutral Bay II
- 1909 10 May: attention drawn to defects at inspection
- 1910 16 August: defects at inspection. Explanation partly satisfactory. Urged to aim at greater efficiency in conduct of his school
- 1911 BA (Sydney University)
English
History - Honours
Maths
- 1920 29 December: Teacher, Bathurst Class II
- 1921 25 May: Teacher, Cessnock Class I
- 1923 17 January: Teacher, Granville Class I
- 1926 22 November: services retained 12 months from 14 January 1927
- 1927 19 May: Teacher, Fort Street Class II
- 5 December: Teacher, Ashfield Class I
- 1928 16 February: services retained 12 months from 14 January 1928
- 1929 18 February: services retained 12 months from 14 January 1929
- 1930 February: services retained 12 months from 14 January 1930
- 1931 13 January: Retires as teacher
- 1933 *The Northern Rivers of New South Wales* published by Shakespeare head Press. 107p.
- February: A. Cousins appointed Acting Honorary Archivist at Sydney University by Acting VC W.A. Selle.
- 7 July: A. Cousins reports on his work to the University's Senate War Memorial Carillon Committee
- 1939 Sydney University *Book of Remembrance* published. Compiled by Arthur Cousins and George Edward Hall, having been started around 1932 and supervised by both Union and Senate committees
- 1941 24 June: E.R. Holme of War Memorial Executive Committee to A. Cousins, nominating him as University Honorary Archivist for WWII with Hall
- 7 July: Report to Senate by Professor G.F. Sutherland calls for Cousins and Hall to be

honoured and asked to continue their work as Honorary Archivists. So moved.

- 1948 *The Garden of New South Wales* published in Sydney by the Producer's Co-op. Distributing Society. 328p.
- 1952 Hall and Cousins (86) continue working as Honorary Archivists until early this year, when Hall dies.
- 7 February: A. Cousins to VC Prof. Stephen Roberts, officially resigning as Honorary Archivist
- 15 February: VC Roberts to Cousins accepting resignation and referring to future appointment of a replacement Archivist
- 1953 27 June: A. Cousins to VC raising issue of lack of work on the archival records he passed over in 1952 and other matters
- 9 July: Acting VC Prof. A.D. Trendall replies (written by Registrar W.H. Maze), noting that he will look into issue of appointment of an Archivist, and inviting Cousins to assist
- 22 September: A University Senate Archives Committee meets, discusses the previous work of Hall and Cousins, and the appointment of a new Archivist. D.S. Macmillan appointed in position on 3 May 1954
- c1960 *The Story of Dr. and Mrs. Robert Menzies and their home Minamurra House, 1839-1861* published in Illawarra. 13p.
- 1960 Wednesday, 17 August: Arthur Cousins dies at his residence, 2 Prospect Ave., Cremorne
- Thursday, 18 August, *Sydney Morning Herald*: obituary notice
- 6 October *Union Recorder*, University of Sydney. Obituary notice by Archivist D.S. Macmillan
- 1991 Keith Jones, 'The Sydney University Union Records of World War I', *Record*, University of Sydney Archives, No 2, September 1991, 4-9. Refers to Arthur Cousins' work as an honorary archivist.
- 1992 Tim Robinson, 'Origins of the Archives of the University of Sydney. Part One: The Honorary Archivists', *Record*, University of Sydney Archives, No.1, March 1992, 9-20.
- Tim Robinson, 'Origins of the Archives of the University of Sydney. Part Two: The Appointment of a Professional Archivist', *Record*, University of Sydney Archives, No.1, March 1992, 9-20.