

## First alumni branch in North America

By Ken McNaughton, BE(ChemEng) 1962

*The first meeting of an alumni association for an Australian university in North America was held in New York City on November 29th, 1988. This is the story of how that happened and about some of the colorful characters who peopled the first eight years of the University of Melbourne Alumni Association North Eastern American Branch, or UMAANEAB.*



**First meeting of an alumni association of an Australian university in North America, 50th floor, McGraw-Hill Building, New York City, November 29th, 1988, with the Empire State Building in the background.**

I was working for the McGraw-Hill Publishing Company in New York City in 1988 and began to think it would be nice to meet with fellow graduates in the United States. After spending more than two decades away from Melbourne, David Boger was the only person I knew at Melbourne (see Musical Chairs, below). I met with him on August 9th, 1988, during a return trip to Melbourne. He arranged a luncheon with Joanna Motion, then executive director of the Alumni Association. Her office had been contemplating the idea of starting branches overseas and so she gave me about five hundred names and addresses of graduates living in the US. When I got back to New York I mailed a letter to some of the alumni in the north east, inviting them to meet on November 29th. Seven of us had lunch on the fiftieth floor of the McGraw-Hill building.

At this meeting we read part of a letter dated Nov. 17th, 1988, from Joanna saying 'Yes, I can confirm that this will be the first ever official meeting of the University of Melbourne Alumni Association in North America.' The seven graduates each signed the charter I had drawn up (see below). Toward the end of the meeting Bruce Bambrough asked me to leave the room. When called back I was informed that I had been elected the first president of UMAANEAB.

On Australia Day, January 26th, 1989, there was a buffet dinner at my apartment on Roosevelt Island in New York City. The Rt Hon Chris Hurford, Australian Consul General, came with his wife and spoke. He had recently arrived in New York and, in June of 1988, in conjunction with James Black, founded the Australia Society, which energized the Australian community. Hurford was a controversial politician from Adelaide who became immigration minister in the Hawke government.

### **First Charter**

WHEREAS we the undersigned have gathered together on the fiftieth floor of the McGraw-Hill building at 1221 Avenue of the Americas in New York City for a luncheon on this, the twenty-ninth day of November, 1988, and WHEREAS we are graduates of the University of Melbourne, Australia, and WHEREAS this is the first time there has been an official gathering of alumni of the University of Melbourne in North America, and WHEREAS we would like to encourage the development of the Alumni Association in North America, We do hereby recognize that this occasion marks the official inauguration of The University of Melbourne Alumni Association in North America, and the founding of the North Eastern Branch, and do further recognize that we are therefore charter members of the North Eastern American Branch. To witness the occasion, we herewith sign our full names, and do solemnly undertake to do whatever is within our power to see that this Branch and this Association shall prosper, so that graduates and friends of the University of Melbourne in North America more easily may be able to celebrate their roots, to enjoy the fellowship of other alumni and to support the alma mater.



(l-r): Bruce Bambrough (BA (Hons) 1947); Penny Bambrough (BA (Hons) 1955); Karen Judd-Smith (BSc 1980); Ken McNaughton (BE(ChemEng) 1962); Heather Greenaway (BAppSc 1966); Dr Bruce Williams (BSc); Dr Ernest Korchak (BE(ChemEng) 1958).

In the first two years we held a number of luncheons in the McGraw-Hill building. On March 7th, 1989, Bruce Bambrough was elected treasurer of UMAANEAB. Our guest speaker was Drew de Carvalho, an energetic director of the Australia Society who told us of upcoming events and invited us to participate. Neither group realized that the Australian community in New York City was about to enter a golden age.

The Australia Society had just organized an Australia Day celebration in Manhattan. The guest speaker was author Thomas Keneally, most famous for *Schindler's Ark* (1982). There was a surprise appearance and impromptu concert by Peter Allen, who wrote and was acting in *Legs Diamond* on Broadway and came by after the show. I was so excited I ran up and sat on the edge of the stage; HSV Channel 7 was present and my nephew in Melbourne, Tony Hudson, saw this on television.

UMAANEAB grew quickly, reaching a membership of 50 within twelve months. For the first two years Bruce and I organized all the meetings, mostly over the telephone. We found lots of willing helpers, hosts and guests. Our guest speaker on June 6th, 1989 was Dr. Patrick McCaughey, who had been art critic for *The Age* in Melbourne, Head of Visual Arts at Monash University, Director of the National Gallery of Victoria, and Director of America's oldest art museum, the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut. He spoke about art galleries in Australia and the US, some contrasts and

challenges. At a luncheon in the McGraw-Hill building on November 15th, 1989, our guest speaker was Michael Cook, Australian Ambassador to the US.



**UMAANEAB picnic, Lighthouse Park, Roosevelt Island, New York City, September 9th, 1989 (l-r): The Australian flag, Penny Bambrough, Richard Stanley, Terri Pez, and Laurie Weisheit (with no shirt).**

The first UMAANEAB picnic was held in the delightful grounds of Lighthouse Park on Roosevelt Island on September 9th, 1989. It attracted 30 people and featured boomerangs and didgeridoos, fishing, swimming, a catered dinner in the Rivercross building, an Australian sing-along with a professional keyboardist, and heart-warming stories of how these expatriates finished up in the US.

On January 26th, 1990, UMAANEAB bought two tables at the Australia Day Dinner Dance organized by the Australia Society and held in the Grand Ballroom of the New York Hilton with the Stephen Scott Orchestra. On March 14th, Thomas Keneally was the first 1990 luncheon guest in the McGraw-Hill building. Thomas Pickering, permanent US representative to the United Nations, gave us a D-Day talk on June 6th. He won a Fulbright Scholarship to the University of Melbourne and received a master's degree in 1956, later serving as US ambassador to numerous countries, including the Russian Federation, India, Israel, El Salvador, Nigeria and Jordan.

On September 9th, the Bambroughs invited us to picnic at their country house on Kittatinny Lake in Branchville, New Jersey. I remember jumping out of a boat and attempting to swim ashore through the weeds and not being certain, without my glasses, in which direction to swim. On November 14th we had dinner at the Fortune Garden Chinese restaurant in New York City and made a private tour of 'Court Arts of Indonesia,' an art exhibit at the Asia Society on Park Avenue, guided by the curator, UMAANEAB member Dr Helen Ibbitson Jessup, an architectural historian and a specialist in Indonesian art.

On March 26, 1991, our luncheon guest was Ross Terrill, a professor at Harvard who is a China specialist and author whose books include several on China and, more recently, *The Australians*. The Alumni Office in Melbourne suggested that new committees should be elected for two-year periods, so the first phase of UMAANEAB was drawing to a close. It had been such a pleasure to work with Bruce Bambrough. He was funny, quirky, warm and realistic. I asked if he would like to continue as an office holder but he was adamantly opposed. On April 1st, 1991, we handed over authority to a new committee. Bruce died four days later. We missed him dearly, but still felt his loving, laughing presence. Bill O'Reilly became president, Annette Webb-Neckers secretary, Helen O'Reilly treasurer and Lesley Pryde vice president. On a beautiful sunny day in May, alumni, friends and relatives gathered with Penny Bambrough for a memorial in the garden of her home in Tenafly, New Jersey.

On May 28th, UMAANEAB had its first visit by dignitaries from the University of Melbourne. Three staff members attended a luncheon at the 60 East Club on 42nd Street in Manhattan; the speaker was Kwong Lee Dow, Dean of the Institute of Education. Kwong grew up around the corner from me and my sister in Burwood and went to school at Ashburton State at the same time; his mother taught kindergarten down the street. He went on to become Vice Chancellor of the University of Melbourne in 2004. At the start of August, the Sydney University Graduates Union in North America held their inaugural meeting in Oregon, so we had almost two years' start on them.

On September 7th, Annette Webb and Charlie Neckers hosted the annual picnic, held at their home in Upper Saddle River in New Jersey. The swimming pool was a big attraction and numerous raids were made on Charlie's extensive wine cellar. In November, Geoffrey and Shirley Watson hosted a gathering in Princeton that included a tour of the world-famous Princeton campus. Geoffrey took a degree in mathematics at Melbourne (1942) and received a DSc in 1964. He became chair of the statistics department at Princeton, where he specialized in applying mathematics to the natural sciences and wrote five books. For the second year in a row UMAANEAB joined forces with The Australia Society to host a holiday-season song recital in the Koala Room at the Australian Consulate in Manhattan by soprano Lesley Pryde, wife of John Haley, molecular biochemist.

Patrick McCaughey hosted UMAANEAB for a day at the Wadsworth Atheneum Art Gallery in Hartford, Connecticut, on Anzac Day, April 25th, 1992. This included a delicious meal at the Museum Café. The picnic in 1992 was held at the home of Laurie and Libby Weisheit in Merion, Pennsylvania. The outdoor spa was a big hit, as was the excursion to the nearby Barnes Foundation, which held one of the world's largest collections of Impressionist, PostImpressionist, and early Modern paintings, as well as important examples of African sculpture.



**Robert Tyson (center), Australian Minister for Congressional Liaison, Washington DC, addressed a luncheon at the 60 East Club, New York City, April 1st, 1993, as Bill O'Reilly (r) handed the presidency of UMAANEAB back to Ken McNaughton.**

On April 1, 1993, Robert Tyson, Minister, Congressional Liaison, Washington DC, addressed a UMAANEAB luncheon at the 60 East Club in New York City. He spoke about the need to enhance links between Australia and the US and detailed his role as spokesperson for Australia in Congress. Robert Tyson had a distinguished diplomatic career, and later became Australian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia and the Russian Federation. At this meeting the committee changed hands. I became president again, and was about to relocate from Manhattan to Maryland. The new treasurer, Yvonne Paterson, lived in Philadelphia, as did the new secretary, Libby Weisheit; Penny Bambrough of New

Jersey and Margaret Meyer of Manhattan became vice presidents. UMAANEAB was spreading out along the north-eastern corridor.

The best-attended event ever organized by UMMNEAB was when Jinx Nolan was guest speaker on April 23rd, 1994. Jinx, daughter of Australia's famous painter, Sir Sidney Nolan, addressed ninety people at Ci Vediamo, an Italian restaurant on the corner of 81st Street and Third Avenue. This Anzac Day event was to celebrate the exhibition of Nolan's paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. After lunch and the talk, we walked to the museum to tour the exhibition. Jinx, who is also a painter, spoke about the Ned Kelly mythology that Nolan so graphically brought to life in the series of paintings featured in the exhibition.



**Lunch at Ci Vediamo, New York City, before touring the Sidney Nolan Exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, April 23rd, 1994 (l-r): Margaret Stanzler, Jinx Nolan, Ken McNaughton, Jenny Dobbin.**

Although most of us grew up with these paintings, it was a remarkable experience to hear Jinx describe some of the facts and stories surrounding the Kelly gang, and to hear of Nolan's painting technique. She also spoke about her relationship with her father in response to a question from the audience. Jinx is a warm, lovely person and we were all charmed by her presence. At the exhibition she continued to talk with us about the paintings, which made an extensive and impressive display. Catalogs, posters and post cards were on sale and were eagerly bought; Jinx kindly autographed many of these.

That summer I launched the UMAANEAB Newsletter, which was published three times each in 1994 and 1995. The main purpose was to advertise upcoming events, but there were also photos and reports from previous events, feature stories about the University of Melbourne, paid advertisements, and letters to the editor. In the second issue we reported: 'The Burmese Barbeque in Allentown on June 25th more than lived up to its advance publicity. Many thanks to Terri and Guido Pez, who put on a fine feast, with daughter Julie adding to the culinary delights. A lazy afternoon was spent lounging on the lawn playing bocce ball and reminiscing in the inimitable style at which our members are so good. The sumptuous feast was held around the baronial family table, and meandered through an endless array of Thai and Burmese dishes, with a grand finale of delicious ice-cream cake from Bhutan and Sambuca.'



**Meeting in the office of Professor David Penington, Vice-Chancellor University of Melbourne, Gerlinde Scholz and Ken McNaughton, August 19th, 1994.**

In the December newsletter, I wrote: 'In a series of meetings with officers of Melbourne University this year I was able to convey some of the problems we face at UMAANEAB in fulfilling our charter as an overseas alumni branch. Gerlinde Scholz, Manager, Alumni and Development Unit, visited me in Ellicott City and we talked at length about some of the satisfactions and frustrations of this operation. We arranged for a meeting with the ViceChancellor in Melbourne at the same time I was making a trip for some reunions. Professor Penington was very gracious and is keeping a close watch on the progress of the Alumni and Development Unit and its ability to service the branches. He will be visiting North America in mid-1995 and hopes to meet with us if it can be arranged.'

'During my visit Gerlinde arranged a series of strategic meetings, including the inaugural meeting of the UMAA Branch Liaison Sub-Committee, at which I was invited to speak on the topic "Being a UMAA branch volunteer abroad: Issues, lessons, trials and joys." Since that time this committee has met several times and has recently made some resolutions about helping overseas branches, for example, with official stationery and a small annual cash allowance. Many thanks to Gerlinde, her staff, and all the people who helped to make my visit so enjoyable and fruitful.'

'I was also able to attend an emotional farewell for Joanna Motion, the outgoing Manager ADU and Executive Officer of the Alumni Association, who is returning to England. When I visited Melbourne six years ago I told her "I want to start an alumni association in North America." Joanna said "That's funny, so do we." She got us going and has done a great job. Her moving farewell speech was introduced by the Chancellor, Sir Kenneth Woodward, and was heard by a large group of University celebrities. We wish Joanna well.'

In this same newsletter issue Margot Paul wrote: 'Great company, surroundings and food! This reviewer awards top honors for the Ellicott City picnic in September, splendidly hosted by Ken McNaughton in his delightful townhouse, ten miles west of Baltimore. Guests were treated to the most scrumptious Maryland crab cakes, thoughtfully chosen Australian wines, and tempting petit fours. Frank Cseri deftly wielded the tongs for the barbequed chicken and created a very popular gathering spot for talkers (he was supposed to be working but seemed to be having a lot of fun). Margaret Meyer and Ken's daughter Candace concocted the crab cakes (the recipe was highly sought after) and Margaret managed to get them all perfectly cooked—no mean feat, I can assure you, speaking as one hungry observer at her elbow!'



**Picnic at Greystone, Ellicott City, Maryland, September 10th, 1994 (l-r): Frank Cseri, Margaret Meyer, Robert Tyson, Annette Webb-Neckers, Ernest Korchak.**

'Bob Tyson, Australian Minister for Congressional Liaison, gave a brief talk about the state of the relationship between our two great nations, but sadly arrived too late for the crab cakes. BIG mistake! The day was delightful, as September often is in the northeast, so there were strolls into the quaint historic township, damage to the pocket in the antique shops and general lolling around chatting and stuffing of faces throughout the afternoon. Guests from further reaches stayed overnight in the area, then next day explored nearby spots such as the Baltimore Harbor, while others went to Washington for a concert. Well, this will be a hard one to top, so thanks to all who came. Ken, you are in grave danger of having to repeat this particular exercise!'

We also published a letter to the editor from Charles Moorhouse, who was Professor of Electrical Engineering at the University of Melbourne from 1948-76 and Dean of Engineering 1950-52 and 1961-65: 'Having seen in the North American Alumni newsletter sent to my daughter, Caroline Hannaway, with whom I spent some time in April and May, that your September picnic is planned to be held in Ellicott City, I thought you might be interested in the enclosed copy of a painting of the Post Office—one I have done since my return (I have another in progress of part of the Main Street). I visited the old city twice while visiting my elder daughter in Columbia where she is temporarily located. I tried, in three or four places, to find postcards; the only one I ran to earth, in the Maryland Shop, was of the railway station. I decided to pay another visit, armed with camera and sketch book so that I could have my own record of the place.'

The March 1995 newsletter reported: 'About 35 people came to our Australia Day party in Manhattan. Richard and Pamela Stanley opened up their home on the Upper West Side. Those present enthusiastically dipped into the delicious food and Australian wines and beers. Some newcomers arrived through the Australia Society and Jill Biddington, the secretary, also came. She has been a big help to us and has just resigned to take a position elsewhere. We wish her good luck. Pamela Wood of the Australia Catalog Company kindly donated a basket of Australian goodies for a door prize. The lucky winner was Alicia Bliszczyk and each item was lovingly appreciated.'



**UMAANEAB At Home in the Manhattan Upper West Side apartment of Richard and Pamela Stanley on Riverside Drive, January 14th, 1994.**

‘Ken McNaughton, the outgoing president, announced the new committee for 1995-1997. Yvonne Paterson, the incoming president, gave a speech and paid tribute to our first treasurer, founding member Bruce Bambrough. John Hayton, the new Australian Consul in New York attended and gave a speech. This quickly became a lively debate about how Australians in America should be able to obtain dual citizenship. He advised writing to Canberra about it.

‘As the sun drifted down and filtered through the Australian flag hanging out the window plans were made for the evening. A group of ten went on for dinner at Yellowfingers on the east side; survivors from this event watched a show and danced to a disco beat at Tatou. Others sampled the many delights of the Manhattan smorgasbord and more than one felt that this was a really wonderful weekend in Manhattan. Many thanks to our new vice-president, Richard Stanley, and his lovely wife Pamela, for their charming hospitality.’



**Picnic at the home of Roger and Betty Rodrigue, Wilmington, Delaware, April 8th, 1995 (l-r): Ken McNaughton, Yvonne Paterson, Danielle Rubinstein.**

The new committee was: president Yvonne Paterson (PhD Biochemistry 1979); secretary Margot Paul (BA 1967); treasurer Frank Cseri (BComm) and vice-presidents Margaret Meyer (Victorian Teachers’ College) and Richard Stanley (PhD Medical Biology 1970).

‘What are your ambitions with regard to UMAANEAB?’ we asked the vice chancellor of the University of Melbourne, Professor David Penington, on his visit to the US. The occasion was the June 18th, 1995 picnic at the home of UMAANEAB president Yvonne Paterson and her husband Milt Rossman in Philadelphia. Professor Penington’s answer was very simple— ‘Help us with fund-raising



and with graduates in the U.S.’ The occasion of Professor Penington’s visit was marked with two financial gestures by UMAANEAB. At the picnic Yvonne formally handed to the VC a check for \$500—the amount given to us in 1988 to help start the branch. At dinner the next night in Washington, DC, ten alumni guests jointly presented Professor Penington with a further donation. In Philadelphia the VC learned that alumni in America are more likely to attend a fundraising occasion if a celebrity is involved— people will come to attend something that they consider a real ‘event.’

On September 9th, 1995, Laurie and Libby Weisheit hosted a tasting of Australian wines at their new home in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. On January 1st, 1996, Professor Penington stepped down and Professor Alan Gilbert took over as vice chancellor at the University of Melbourne. UMAANEAB held its Australia Day picnic at the home of Jean-Pierre and Margot Paul in Harrington Park, New Jersey. On April 1st, 1997, Frank Cseri became President of UMAANEAB.

Wonderful social occasions continued to happen up and down the East Coast, including a day on the beach to support a team of Australian surfers at Cape May, New Jersey; a visit to Winterthur, the 1,000-acre Du Pont Gardens and Estate in Delaware; a return to Manhattan at the home of Margaret Meyer; an excursion on a train and a pub sing-along at New Hope, Pennsylvania; and gatherings at the home of Frank and Annette Cseri.

Some time after this, all Australian expatriates were welcomed at meetings, which expanded the local audience but diluted the University identity. Eventually the organization morphed into the Australia Society of Philadelphia, which met regularly in that city. The fortunes of UMAANEAB have waxed and waned since then, but those first eight years will always be very special for the first alumni association of an Australian university in North America.



**Picnic at the home of Yvonne Paterson and Milt Rossman, University City, Philadelphia, June 18th, 1995 (l-r): Frank and Annette Cseri, Professor David Penington, Dr Sonay Hussein.**

**Musical Chairs**

Why did I contact David Boger when I wanted to start an alumni association for the University of Melbourne in the United States? See if you can follow this. When I graduated in 1962 with a BE(ChemEng), Dr Owen Potter was Reader and Head of the Department of Chemical Engineering for both the University of Melbourne and the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, where we spent a lot of time in fourth year. When I became the first graduate of the Engineering School at Monash University in 1964, Dr Charles Sinclair was head of the fledgling Chemical Engineering department. His administrative assistant, Elizabeth Mannix, and Jennifer Wittmer, administrative assistant to the head of the Civil Engineering department, typed my Master's thesis. After I transferred to University College, London, to do postgraduate research in biochemical engineering, Dr Potter obtained the Chair of Chemical Engineering at Monash and Dr Sinclair joined me in the chemical engineering department at University College. David Boger, who grew up and took degrees in chemical engineering in the US, joined the staff at Monash, married Elizabeth Mannix, and later obtained the Chair of Chemical Engineering at the University of Melbourne. When I returned to Melbourne in 1988, he was the only person I knew there. David had a class of fluids named for him—Boger Fluids—and received the 2005 Prime Minister's Prize for Science.

**Copyright**

This work is copyrighted and may not be reproduced in whole or in part in any medium without the express permission of the author, Ken McNaughton, 3778 College Avenue, Ellicott City, MD 21043; phone/fax: 410-418-9340; kjmcmn@comcast.net (September 25th, 2007).