

**Inky Stephensen's internment experience in Australia:
Letters to his wife (1942-45).**

**Georgina Fitzpatrick
(Australian National University)**

Abstract: *P.R. or 'Inky' Stephensen (1901-1965), author of The Foundations of Culture in Australia: An Essay Towards National Self Respect (1936) was once well known as an advocate for Australian culture. Midwife to Xavier Herbert's Capricornia, publisher of finely-printed books in his and Jack Lindsay's Fanfrolico Press, adviser to the indigenous committee for the 1938 Day of Mourning, he came to the attention of the Security Service as the business manager, contributor to and later editor (1936–1942) of The Publicist: The Paper Loyal to Australia First. This article focuses on the period when his placing Australia first, ahead of Britain and America, led to his internment in camps at Liverpool (NSW), Loveday (SA) and Tatura (Vic.) from 11 March 1942 until 17 August 1945, two days after the Pacific war ended. His case was the most publicised at the time but was one of some 50 cases of 'British-born' Australians interned for their dissident opinions or behaviour and placed in the same camps as internees of enemy alien ethnicity. Based on the extensive correspondence between Stephensen and his wife, Winifred, over the three and a half years of his internment under Regulation 26 and supplemented by the official security files on him held in the National Archives, I suggest markers for a social history of internment in Second World War Australia.*

I have already written you a couple of letters, but, although I tried hard, I could get no information as to your address, and so could not post them. This morning I rang up Police Headquarters, and asked them to please try and find out for me where you were. They were very courteous and rang me about ten minutes later, giving me this address, and they also told me that I could go and see you any afternoon between two and four, but as you know dear, such a long journey for me is impossible at present ...

I have not had a letter from you since you left, and I do hope to hear from you soon... I will write to you again on Sunday.

My very best love dear, Always Your Win XXXX.¹

Three days earlier, on 10 March 1942, Winifred's husband, Percy Reginald Stephensen (1901-1965), had been taken from their Rose Bay flat by four

policemen at four am to begin life as an internee. Thus began a separation that endured for three and a half years, broken only by a handful of visits but sustained by hundreds of letters.

In Second World War Australia more than 8000 men, women and children were held in internment camps without charge or trial. Nearly all of these internees were enemy aliens or naturalised British subjects or 'British-born' of enemy alien background.² However, I have discovered 47 men and three women who were not only 'British-born' (that is, British subjects at birth), but were also of British background.³ Interned for their dissident political or social views or practices, they were placed in the same camps as those of Italian, German and Japanese background for varying lengths of time between 1939 and 1945. Historians of internment have focused on the experience of the naturalised and the alien, casting that experience within a narrative of the immigrant 'other'.⁴ However, my forthcoming dissertation argues that the 'internment narrative' needs to be extended to include the voices of this group of 50 'British-born'.⁵ Accustomed to British traditions of free speech, *habeas corpus*, and the separation of powers, the impact of arrest and confinement on these articulate political activists carries a different resonance, deserving exploration.

P.R. Stephensen, whose letters are the subject of this article, was one of those 50 'British-born' dissidents. For the historian, the length of his internment and its location in three of the major camps — Liverpool (NSW), Loveday (SA) and Tatura (Vic.) — together with the survival of a very large exchange of letters between Stephensen and his wife, provides a fortuitous window into the wider internment experience. None of the historians of the immigrant experience of internment has discussed a similar cache of letters from the internees they study. Indeed, I am not aware of such an archive surviving from internees of enemy alien background. Until now, these letters, housed in the Mitchell Library in Sydney, have not been used to any great extent. They were not available to the original historian of the Australia First Movement, Bruce Muirden, in 1968.⁶ Craig Munro, biographer of Stephensen, and Barbara Winter, a recent historian of Australia First, passed only lightly

over this sequence as a source for their respective chapters on the internment experience.⁷ In this article, I intend to show how Stephensen's letters, supplemented by official sources, enable a reconstruction of daily life in the camps – the routines, activities, friendships, hostilities, boredom, food, facilities and the bonds between internee and camp personnel – and indicate differences between the three camps. I will argue that the uniqueness of this archive not only brings us closer to the internment experience than any aggregate analysis could do but that this type of text provides an invaluable corrective to the other genres of survivor testimony – the published account or the oral history interview – that have been used as evidence by other historians of internment.

Letters as Testimony

In recent years, the study of the genre of letters, particularly by historians of migration, has set out the particular value of this type of evidence. While a sequence of letters from one individual cannot represent the interests and views of the whole group, such letters, according to David Fitzpatrick, can 'supply facts, assertions and responses to experience which cannot easily be found elsewhere'.⁸ Like immigrant letters, I believe that internee letters may provide a 'salutary corrective to glib generalizations'.⁹ Such letters, argued Patrick O'Farrell, offer an 'intimate insight' into what was 'actually thought and felt, expressed without constraint, and with the honesty and candour appropriate to close family situations'.¹⁰ Private correspondence, written at the time of the experience, to a close family member, may well reveal greater subtleties of mentality than the forms of public or semi-public testimony relied upon by historians of internment. Admittedly the 'facts' contained in letters need to be interpreted in context but the use of this type of material avoids the pitfalls associated with memory and self-representation; pitfalls set out by theorists of memory such as Susannah Radstone and Katherine Hodgkin.¹¹ Until now, historians of internment have relied upon the testimonies provided in published accounts by former internees. Some wrote pamphlets soon after release with the intention of seeking exoneration and compensation. These require great vigilance in interpretation.¹² Internee accounts continue to be published even sixty years after the experience, with all the problems of recall

and reconstruction that that time lapse suggests.¹³ Historians of internment in Australia have also interviewed surviving ex-internees and children of internees in recent years.¹⁴ These oral history testimonies must be used carefully, in the knowledge that memory and inherited memory operate within the current political context concerning multiculturalism and the place of the immigrant in the formation of Australian identity.¹⁵

This is not to suggest that correspondence is without its own problems. As Fitzpatrick points out, private letters to family members may contain their 'own strategies of dissimulation and manipulation' but he suggests that 'the private... domain of personal correspondence encompass[ed] a far wider range of questions and answers than the public discourse'.¹⁶ In the archive of Stephensen letters, 'dissimulation and manipulation' seems to have occurred at times, particularly in the knowledge that a third pair of eyes was privy to the exchange between husband and wife: the censor.¹⁷ On one occasion his wife, Winifred, made three attempts at her letter, 'trying to conform to the supposed requirements of a censored letter'.¹⁸ She even attempted to telephone the censor, 'to ask him just what it is I am supposed or not supposed to write'. She later admitted that she found it a challenge to avoid anything political, as required, 'because our lives at the moment are entangled in internment, anxiety, sadness and publicity, which no one can pretend is the ordinary natural life one normally pursues'.¹⁹ Such constraints need to be borne in mind when working through this collection.

As in the case of immigrant letters, the survival of such a large archive is most unusual if not unique. During the 41 months of Stephensen's incarceration, he sent approximately 360 letters to Winifred, at the rate of two per week. She averaged about three per week, so her tally was at least 540.²⁰ As these hundreds of letters survive in the Mitchell Library, this treasure trove is valuable to all historians of Australian internment, irrespective of the ethnicity of internees that they study.

Stephensen's path to internment

Also known as 'Inky', Stephensen is perhaps now forgotten. Author of *The Foundations of Culture in Australia: An Essay Towards National Self Respect* (1936), he was once well known as an advocate of Australia. He was midwife to Xavier Herbert's *Capricornia*, and publisher of finely-printed books in his and Jack Lindsay's Fanfrolico Press. He was also adviser to the Indigenous committee for the 1938 Day of Mourning and business manager and later editor (1936–1942) of *The Publicist: The Paper Loyal to Australia First*.²¹ Although he had been of interest to the authorities since his student Communist days, it was his later role with the *Publicist* that led to his internment. The *Publicist*, besides promoting Australian culture and politics, was also notorious for its anti-Semitic, pro-Hitler, pro-Mussolini and pro-Japanese views in the pre-war period.²² Stephensen took over as editor in January 1941 when its owner and former editor (W.J. Miles) died. Stephensen's *Publicist* articles, the 'Fifty Point Program' of the Australia First Movement (AFM) that he founded in October 1941, and his public speeches were collected by the infant intelligence services for his dossier. Subsequently, these items were used to intern him as a potential fifth columnist, likely to assist the Axis powers, in particular the Japanese.

In late 1930s Australia, it was unusual to express pro-Japanese views.²³ Stephensen, and the AFM that grew out of the *Publicist*, argued that Australia needed to pursue its own foreign policy independent of that of Britain or America. He and the AFM argued, some fifty years before Keating, that Australia should recognise that it was part of the Asia-Pacific region and should formulate economic and foreign policies with such countries as Japan to acknowledge this geographical fact. A consequence was that his public statements could not only look pro-Japanese but also anti-British. Added to this, there could not have been a worse timing for the official launch of the AFM, a mere two months before hostilities began in the Pacific and when Britain had only just been joined by the USSR in the struggle against an all-conquering Nazi Germany. To an Anglophile Australia, certain of its Britishness, Stephensen's position was seen as unpatriotic. It was understandable that Frank Forde, Minister for the Army in the Curtin

government, signed the order for Stephensen's internment in March 1942. By then, Hong Kong, Malaya and the supposedly impregnable naval base of Singapore had fallen to the Japanese in rapid succession, raw Australian conscripts were trying to stop the enemy advance in New Guinea, and Darwin had been bombed. Australia was under attack. What was unusual was the prolongation of Stephensen's internment beyond the crisis year of 1942: he remained incarcerated in one of three major internment camps until 17 August 1945, two days after the Pacific war ended.

Stephensen's letters

Under camp regulations, an internee was allowed to write two specially designed lettercards a week, on one side only, of twenty-two lines (no writing between the lines permitted).²⁴ Stephensen normally used his weekly quota for Winifred. Although the lettercards were so restricted (and, of course, subject to the camp censor), they yield rich word pictures of life in camp, Stephensen's hopes and expressions of affection, and his cheerful courage. His letters also contain many references to less well-documented internees whom he befriended, both 'British-born' and naturalised.²⁵

On receiving his letters, Winifred would pass on his news from camp to his extended family: his mother and sisters in Tasmania, her sister in Melbourne and various friends such as Miles Franklin, Ian Mudie and Frank Clune. This maximised the limited communication permitted him but it also saved the others from potential abuse. Official lettercards could not slip through a letterbox unnoticed. They were obviously from an internment camp. Annotated with the internee's number and name near the recipient's name and address and covered with red censor stamps, there could be no disguising that one's relative was deemed a potential traitor. Early on, Stephensen decided not to write directly to his mother 'as it may embarrass her with the neighbours, postmen etc.'²⁶

Winifred was not limited in the number of letters she could send him. Some days she wrote him three. Initially she posted about four or five per week and occasionally they were as long as five pages. However, when he was moved

interstate, the expense of airmail postage had to be taken into account in her straitened circumstances, and the frequency and length of her letters lessened. Winifred's letters provide detailed insights into her emotional, physical and mental health and her critical financial state as she battled with the inflationary prices, rents and deprivations of wartime-rationed Sydney. To chart the impact of internment on the non-interned spouse, these letters are an invaluable source.²⁷

Liverpool internment camp

Stephensen was sent first to Liverpool on the western outskirts of Sydney. There he was allocated the number N 1634, which appeared on all subsequent files and letters about him.²⁸ The authorities used the huts of pre-war rifle clubs near the Holsworthy army camp, a space used for the same purpose in the First World War. Stephensen and fifteen other male AFM internees were allocated the two-room hut of the Mosman Rifle Club and at once christened it 'Australia House'.²⁹ 'The food, though plain, is good and simple,' Stephensen wrote to Winifred. 'We have four blankets and a straw palliasse on a bedstead. I sleep on a verandah. We have a big yard for exercise'.³⁰ In another letter he softened the description for his wife to 'a cottage with a large enclosure'. He presumably meant to be reassuring when he continued: 'As we are all Australians, and not yet charged with any offence, we are interned in a part of the camp away from aliens'.³¹ Their daily life followed army routine with an early rising, morning roll call, inspection, regular meals, evening roll call and 'Lights Out'. In effect, the internees led a life little different from that of army recruits, albeit without the training and fighting. This was signalled by the use of an over-stamped Army Service and Casualty form containing language such as 'marched in ex Loveday' for charting their internment details and movements.³²

Although incarceration was a shock to these mostly middle class Australians, my impression is that Stephensen made the most of his time. He had experienced the homosociability, as well as the privations, of Spartan men's colleges at the Universities of Queensland and Oxford (where he was a Rhodes Scholar in the 1920s): useful preparations for life behind the wire. In

some ways Stephensen almost enjoyed himself, particularly while he had his friends and indeed one of his brothers, Eric, interned with him. They studied and wrote poetry and performed at camp concerts.³³ Stephensen asked Winifred to 'please send me some white chalk sticks or coloured crayons for blackboard. I intend to conduct a study class in "Logic" among internees to occupy some of the evenings'.³⁴ Such activities were encouraged by the authorities, with one of the camp orders stating: 'The Camp Commandant will encourage as much as possible the organisation of intellectual and sporting pursuits by internees'.³⁵ The Official Visitor to Liverpool Camp, Mr. Justice Davidson, reported approvingly in August Stephensen's assistance in establishing a library, using canteen funds: 'An expenditure of £32 has been made on 96 books which were selected admirably on the advice of Mr. Stephensen'.³⁶ Later in his report he noted, 'Mr. Stephensen has made arrangements for classes directed to tuition in the English language'. As leader of his men in his hut and as a natural organiser of the cultural life of the wider camp, Stephensen had some empowerment, despite the loss of his liberty.

While he remained in Liverpool in 'Australia House', Stephensen was cushioned by the fifteen friends and associates interned with him. He was still in a leadership role. However, thirteen of the others were released in spring 1942 after Attorney-General H.V. Evatt, on his return from overseas, had examined their files.³⁷ Since Liverpool was a reception and transit camp only, Evatt had to decide with his officials where to send the remaining three AFM internees, Stephensen, Kirtley and Cahill. After some discussion, the advantages of sending them to Loveday outweighed the dangers of incarcerating these three supposed traitors in one place where they might combine to subvert the other internees.³⁸

The letters give an insight into the shock experienced by Winifred when she learned of the transfer from a journalist, placing her husband out of range of visits.³⁹ Her health plummeted. She wrote to her husband, 'The strain and worry and lack of care which I have undergone in the last seven months has resulted in the TB becoming active again. I was very ill the day you left for

South Australia'.⁴⁰ Even had her health been up to the strain of such a long trip from Sydney, wartime regulations rationed train travel for non-essential journeys.⁴¹ More than ever the exchange of letters became a lifeline and a substitute for personal contact between them.

Loveday internment camp

Stephensen recorded his impression of Loveday soon after his arrival in his first letter to his wife: 'This is a big camp and apparently well-managed. I have already met many men whom previously I had met at Liverpool, so I have plenty of friends and companions'.⁴² He was placed in Compound 14D with Italians and several other 'British-born'.⁴³ Unlike Winifred, who did not curb her accounts of her difficulties and poor health in her letters to him, Stephensen invariably seems to have put the most favourable gloss on his situation when writing to her. Loveday camp was very flat, treeless and dusty, but in another cheerful letter he reassured her, 'The climate is dry and at present mild... Camp routine and food are about the same as in the Army (except we have no drill or leave!)'.⁴⁴ But Loveday was riven by tensions which discomforted him: 'I intend to make application to be transferred to another camp (pending my release) as this camp contains too many mixed political elements from Europe, including refugees etc. who have not enough sense to settle down quietly and forget their old quarrels'. This was written only a matter of weeks before Francesco Fantin was murdered by Fascists in Compound 14A on 16 November 1942.⁴⁵ Stephensen hoped to be transferred to the family camp at Tatura, where he might be allowed to teach interned children who were preparing for exams and where Winifred might be permitted to join him.⁴⁶

While Stephensen waited, he began to garden and to study. He had a new interest: learning German. Having asked Winifred to send him a German grammar on 25 September, he subsequently requested more German books 'such as are used for leaving certificate'. He acknowledged the arrival of a parcel of books in late October.⁴⁷ This venture by Stephensen, liable to misinterpretation, went into the Loveday 14D Camp report in December 1942: 'Parcel. N1634 Stephensen P.R. This internee has received a German

Dictionary and other books in German. He states that he intends to learn the German language'.⁴⁸ He was taking tuition from a German internee who had apparently confessed in an interview that he wanted Germany to win the war.⁴⁹ What was Stephensen's motive? Learning a language to stave off boredom is understandable, but his particular choice seems to have been a deliberate provocation.

In any case, he fell foul of the Loveday Camp Commandant when he attended a September protest meeting about camp food and payment for labour, three days after his arrival from Liverpool. Such meetings were expressly forbidden in the Camp Regulation that stated: 'The holding of demonstrations, political meetings... is strictly forbidden'.⁵⁰ Inclined to be a bush lawyer, Stephensen had not learnt to resist an opportunity to perform. It seems he advised his fellow internees, mainly German and Italian, to appeal to the International Red Cross visitor; he pointed out that if the German Government thought its nationals were not being treated according to the Geneva Conventions, it might decide to retaliate against British POWs in its camps.⁵¹ This sounded like a threat and was represented as such in the Camp Intelligence reports to the Director-General of Security who passed it on to the relevant Ministers, Forde and Evatt. However, it may well have been just an observation of fact on Stephensen's part.

From then on, every activity by Stephensen was suspect. When he wrote letters for Italian internees in January 1943, the Camp Intelligence report noted: 'It is thought likely that this service is being offered as part of Stephensen's campaign in the Compound'.⁵² The camp authorities assumed that he was seeking election to be the next Camp Leader, a position in each internment camp granting certain delegated powers to administer internal internee affairs and to liaise with the Camp Commandant. In Loveday, the camp authorities put the worst gloss on his actions.

That no hint of this entered his correspondence with Winifred serves as an example of the 'dissimulation' noted in immigrant letters.⁵³ Instead, the Loveday letters are filled with instructions to her about winding up the

business affairs of the *Publicist* and requests for clothing items, pocket money and various comforts. Rather like an anxious immigrant, Stephensen began to number his letters in Loveday, concerned that they were going astray. When he had not yet received a letter from Winifred, two weeks after his transfer from Liverpool, he suspected censorship problems and instructed her to give him 'personal news items in plain language, nothing cryptic, or of a nature to cause delay at the Censorship Office'.

A consequence of Stephensen's intrusion into politics in Loveday was that it convinced the Director General of Security (Brigadier Simpson) that 'internment camp is the only safe place for Stephensen during the war'.⁵⁴ Simpson arranged for Stephensen to be transferred in February 1943 to Tatura near Murchison, Victoria, giving him, as one public servant wryly pencilled, 'a new nationality to work on'.⁵⁵ Simpson also wanted to separate Stephensen and his new friend, Edward Quicke, a fruit farmer from Balingup, Western Australia, who had arrived in Loveday 14D two months after Stephensen.⁵⁶ He had been one of the four accused of plotting to assassinate politicians and negotiate with a Japanese occupying force, who was interned after a jury found him 'not guilty'.⁵⁷ Assigned bunks next to each other, they became great friends, a circumstance reported by Camp Intelligence with some alarm.⁵⁸ Such was the control of the interning authorities that they could attempt to break up a friendship of which they did not approve.

Tatura Internment Camp

Stephensen seemed to accept moving again as another challenge although he was leaving behind his two AFM associates from NSW, Kirtley and Cahill, as well as Quicke. He had been keeping Kirtley and Cahill in 'tobacco money' while they shared his life in Loveday: money he had requested from his almost destitute and ill wife.⁵⁹ Writing to Winifred in his first letter from Tatura he remarked that 'On first view I think I shall like it here much better than at Loveday, by which I mean that this is a more pleasantly situated camp, with hills and trees and birds and bush scenery, whereas the other was flat, dusty, treeless semi-desert country'.⁶⁰ A later letter added that Tatura had 'a more congenial atmosphere' and was 'by far the best camp I have been in'.⁶¹

He threw himself into the cultural life of the new camp, enjoying the musical activities of the German and Italian internees and continuing his German reading course, for which he ordered a number of books.⁶² A German internee, Robert Carl Ludwig Grothey, painted his portrait. As he explained to Winifred: 'I am very "busy" here now, as I sit for my portrait each day, and have had "sittings" also with the dentist, in addition to studying German, and reading all through the material Frank [Clune] sent me. The days pass, and I am very patient and not worried or even downhearted in the slightest'.⁶³

One major improvement in Stephensen's life as an internee was the decision to allow him to write, working up some research notes for Frank Clune's latest book on bushrangers. When first mooted in Loveday, the Commandant there had refused permission. This had meant that Winifred was unable to rely on that income 'to catch up on the bills' accumulating due to his internment, and her 'helplessness through TB'.⁶⁴ After a quite extensive correspondence from Clune, the Director General of Security, Evatt and many public servants, the Tatura Commandant was prevailed upon to reverse the Loveday decision. Internment was not supposed to be a punishment but a precautionary measure, and internees were encouraged for the sake of their morale to take on paid work in the camps as carpenters, plumbers, dentists, doctors and agricultural workers. It was also believed that 'an internee such as Stephensen will be less troublesome if given suitable employment'.⁶⁵ While at Tatura, Stephensen ghosted eight titles for Clune, who was the only friend who visited him there.⁶⁶ The Commandant took an interest in his literary work and indeed Stephensen found him obliging, in allowing him to buy books: 'we now have a catalogue and price list from a bookshop in Melbourne. I have ordered six books, which will cost me about 30/-'.⁶⁷

In Tatura he continued to take an active role in improving the lives of his fellow internees as he had in Liverpool and had tried to do in Loveday. Many of the requests to his wife were on behalf of others, such as seeking locks and latches for suitcases being made by an internee because '[t]his man has no friends or acquaintance in Australia whom he could ask to do or get things for

him'.⁶⁸ In Tatura, Stephensen began to make friends with the aliens (such as this unnamed man), a change of attitude from his earlier assurances to Winifred about his separation from such people. This change was not merely to stave off loneliness following the release of nearly all the other Australian internees. It would seem it was a deliberate change of heart because he kept in touch with some of them after the war.⁶⁹

From Stephensen's letters, Tatura was a more congenial camp than Loveday.⁷⁰ He was usefully employed in one of his pre-internment occupations as a writer, he had made new friends, he was in a new setting in scenery he vastly preferred to that of Loveday and he had never been healthier: 'I have actually put on 19 lbs of weight since coming here. We have an expert cook, who dishes up the rations very tastily'.⁷¹ Among the cooks were interned Italian chefs from the best Melbourne hotels. His letters were so cheerful in tone, so bustling and energetic, that he conveyed the impression that, apart from the loss of liberty, life was good.⁷² While it is likely he adopted this tone deliberately to raise Winifred's spirits as well as his own, it was galling for his wife. As Winifred pointed out, he did not have the daily worries of the Home Front: 'you are spared the trials of civilian life, the lack of proper food etc. No eggs, rationed this and that...'.⁷³ The contrast between the protected life of an internee and the struggle of the non-interned spouse is very apparent in this sequence of letters; an aspect ignored in the literature on internment.⁷⁴

When Stephensen's friend from Loveday, Edward Quicke, was moved to Tatura in February 1945, their friendship resumed. It was there that Quicke painted his portrait of Stephensen and entered it for the Archibald Prize.⁷⁵ In July 1945 when compounds were being amalgamated in Tatura, Stephensen was disturbed by being moved from Camp Number Two to Camp Number Three: even internees make homely spaces that they do not want to leave. 'Naturally', he wrote to Winifred, 'it was a bother having to move after 2½ years in the other camp, and I am not "settled down" in this camp, which is a "family camp". It's a change to see scores of women and children, but otherwise conditions are the same as I've got used to'. The one compensation

was that Quicke shared his room.⁷⁶ Quicke was released at the end of July but in a rather mean-spirited gesture by the authorities, Stephensen was not released until two days after Japan's capitulation. In delaying release until then, the authorities were indicating that they never felt he had become less of a risk and that he was only released because there was no longer an enemy to assist.

Internment marked Stephensen and even shaped the social networks of his post-internment life as evidenced by his correspondence.⁷⁷ A fascinating indication of the extent of this came to my attention among the condolence letters sent to Winifred after Stephensen died suddenly in 1965. In the letters of sympathy was one from Thomas A. Miles, Commandant of his first camp at Liverpool. Miles, by then a retired Brigadier, revealed:

As one who was associated with him in what were perhaps some of his darkest hours, I have always admired the brave way he bore his unjust and unwarranted detention. It was a great pleasure to me that I was able, in latter years, to establish a friendship and association with him... I shall never forget the practical advice and wise counsel he gave me and I would like you to know this.⁷⁸

It would be intriguing to know how many such friendships developed and continued between internee and camp personnel and how many of the latter would admit that an internment was 'unjust and unwarranted'.

When a Camp Commandant conveyed a congenial disposition, it made all the difference to the way internment was experienced. The willingness of Commandant Miles to grant Stephensen a role in organising the cultural and educational activities in Liverpool and the amiable interest of the Tatura Commandant in Stephensen's work for Clune made life in those camps tolerable. Loveday under Commandant Dean, however, was not so congenial for him. Stephensen did not convey in his letters the picture of the jolly country camp that Dean portrayed in a post-war pamphlet, compiled for his AMF

garrison as ‘a happy reminder of the years we spent together’.⁷⁹ Both the political tensions in Loveday and Stephensen’s personal differences with Dean precluded that depiction in his letters of comfort to his wife.

Conclusion

This large archive of letters provides a valuable map for reconstructing daily life in the main internment camps of Liverpool, Loveday and Tatura between 1942 and 1945. Through Stephensen’s eyes one can personalise the official files and chart the routines, activities, friendships, hostilities, boredom, food, facilities, and the bonds between internees and camp personnel. Differences between the three major camps are also indicated, for example, in the landscape, the activities permitted and the stances adopted by Camp Commandants. While I can only touch on these matters in such a brief article, I suggest that the Stephensen letters enable the construction of a social history of internment in Second World War Australia in a way not provided by the public and semi-public genres of post-war testimony used by other historians of internment. As a genre, these letters avoid the problems of memory and inherited memory. As a body of evidence, these letters offer a unique window into the internment experience for both the interned and the non-interned spouse. Further analysis of this archive is warranted.⁸⁰

¹ Letter to P.R. Stephensen (hereafter PRS) from his wife, Winifred, 13 March 1942, Stephensen Papers (SP), Manuscripts Set 1284 (hereafter MLMSS 1284), Mitchell Library, Sydney, Box 2. This is one of the first of hundreds of letters they exchanged during his internment.

² Ilma Martinuzzi O’Brien states that there were 8,100 interned of whom 1,191 were naturalised British subjects and 460 were Australian-born British subjects. See Ilma Martinuzzi O’Brien, ‘Citizenship, Rights and Emergency Powers’, *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 53, No. 2, 2007, p. 208 and p. 214. Her statistics are more nuanced than those given by Margaret Bevege, *Behind Barbed Wire: Internment in Australia during World War II*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1993, Appendix A, pp. 238ff.

³ These individuals have been identified by me from the Internee Service and Casualty Forms in the series MP1103/1 held in the National Archives of Australia, confirming the estimation by Martinuzzi O’Brien of ‘about fifty of British stock’ (p. 214) which were included in her statistics of 1651 British subjects (see note 2).

⁴ See, for example, the work by Kay Saunders including her “‘Inspired by Patriotic Hysteria?’ The Internment of Enemy Aliens and Prisoners of War in Australia during the Second World War”, in P. Panayi (ed.), *National and Ethnic Minorities in War in the Twentieth Century*, Berg, London, 1992, pp. 287-315; Ilma Martinuzzi O’Brien, ‘The Internment of Australian Born and

Naturalized British Subjects of Italian Origin,' in R. Bosworth and R. Ugolini (eds), *War, Internment and Mass Migration: The Italo-Australian Experience 1940-1990*, Gruppo editoriale internazionale, Rome, 1992, pp. 89-104; and Yuriko Nagata, "A Little Colony on our own": Life in Detention Camps in Australia in World War II', in Kay Saunders and Roger Daniels (eds), *Alien Justice: Wartime Internment in Australia and North America*, UQP, St. Lucia, 2000, pp. 185-204.

⁵ My doctoral dissertation, entitled 'Interning "British-born" Dissidents during the Second World War in Australia: a social history' is being undertaken in the History Program, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University.

⁶ Bruce Muir, *The Puzzled Patriots: The Story of the Australia First Movement*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1968.

⁷ Craig Munro, *Wild Man of Letters: The Story of P.R. Stephensen*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1984, chapter 13; Barbara Winter, *The Australia-First Movement and the Publicist, 1936-1942*, Glass House Books, Brisbane, 2005, chapter 9.

⁸ David Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation: Personal Accounts of Irish Migration to Australia*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1994, p. 25.

⁹ David Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation*, p. 25.

¹⁰ Patrick O'Farrell, quoted in David Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation*, p. 25.

¹¹ Susannah Radstone, 'Reconceiving Binaries: The Limits of Memory', *History Workshop Journal*, Vol. 59, 2005, pp. 134-150; and Katherine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (eds), *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory*, Routledge, London, 2003, pp. 4-7.

¹² For example, Keith Bath, *Injustice Within the Law*, K.P. Bath, Sydney, 1948; and Charles Willyan, *Behind Barbed Wire in Australia*, C. Willyan, Murchison, 1948. Such campaigning pamphlets seem to be peculiar to the Anglo-Australians interned.

¹³ For example: Helga Griffin, *Sing Me That Lovely Song Again*, Pandanus Books, Canberra, 2006, who was interned in Tatura as a child and teenager. Earlier personal accounts include Emery Barcs, *Backyard of Mars*, Wildcat Press, Sydney, 1980; and Oswaldo Bonutto, *A Migrant's Story*, H. Pole, Brisbane, 1963.

¹⁴ These interviews have been conducted invariably with those of enemy alien background, as the 'British-born' were older when interned and died before oral history entered the normal repertoire of an historian.

¹⁵ Richard Bosworth, 'The Internment of Italians in Australia', in Franca Iacovetta, Roberto Perin and Angelo Principe (eds), *Enemies Within: Italian and Other Internees in Canada and Abroad*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2000, pp. 227-55. He warns of the subtle changes wrought by memorialisation within the immigrant communities. Bosworth himself has published four interviews: 'Oral Histories of Internment' in Richard Bosworth and R. Ugolini (eds), *War, Internment and Mass Migration*, Gruppo Editoriale Internazionale, Rome, 1992, pp. 105-16. Other historians collecting oral testimonies include Kay Saunders and Yuriko Nagata: see note 3.

¹⁶ David Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation*, p. 25.

¹⁷ Indeed, several pairs of eyes read the extracts copied into ministerial files and security dossiers held in various Australian cities.

¹⁸ Letter from Winifred to PRS, 8 May 1942, SP, MLMSS 1284, Box 2.

¹⁹ Letter from Winifred to PRS, 16 October 1942, SP, MLMSS 1284, Box 2.

²⁰ This is an estimate.

²¹ See Craig Munro, *Wild Man of Letters*.

²² The full run of the *Publicist* is in the National Library, Canberra.

²³ See P.B. Murphy, 'Australia and Japan in the Nineteen Thirties', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, Vol. 65, No. 4, 1980, pp. 230-45, which charts the changing relationship, particularly in trade, by the late 1930s, as Britain exerted imperial control. Pam Oliver also notes the chill wind that blew through hitherto friendly Japanese-Australian relationships within Australia. See her 'Japanese Relationships in White Australia', *History Australia*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2007, pp. 05.1-05.20.

²⁴ Rule 3 (6). National Security (Internment Camps) Regulations, A472 W1503, National Archives of Australia (NAA) Canberra. Rule 2 (1) had instituted the special stationery in February 1941. See Figure 1.

²⁵ He corresponded with them after the war, making it possible to explore the post-war readjustment of these other ex-internees once they disappear from official surveillance. See SP, MLMSS 1284, Box 1.

²⁶ Letter from PRS to Winifred, 30 October 1942, SP, MLMSS 1284, Box 122. See Figure 2.

²⁷ This is an aspect discussed at length in my doctoral dissertation – see note 5.

²⁸ N was used for internees from New South Wales, Q for Queensland, V for Victoria, etc. F was added to denote females.

²⁹ See Figure 3. Adela Pankhurst Walsh (NF 1679) was interned 10 days later in a separate female compound within Liverpool Camp. She had been expelled from the AFM the previous December.

³⁰ Letter from PRS to Winifred, 16 March 1942, SP, MLMSS 1284, Box 122. See also Craig Munro, *Wild Man of Letters*, p. 224.

³¹ Letter from PRS to Winifred [n.d.], SP, MLMSS 1284, Box 122.

³² Internee Service and Casualty form for P.R. Stephensen, Prisoner of War/Internee: Stephensen, Percy Reginald; Date of birth – 20 November 1901; Nationality – German [sic], MP 1103/1 N1634, NAA Melbourne. Stephensen was not German, despite the classification on his file.

³³ Craig Munro, *Wild Man of Letters*, pp. 229-31, reproduces one of their satirical ballads.

³⁴ Letter from PRS to Winifred, 7 May 1942, SP, MLMSS 1284 Box 122.

³⁵ Orders - National Security (Internment Camp) Regulations, No 24, A472 W1729, p. 27, NAA Canberra.

³⁶ Official Visitor's report, Liverpool Internment Camp, 25 August 1942, MP 508/1 255/714/284, NAA Melbourne.

³⁷ See Bruce Muirden, *Puzzled Patriots*; Craig Munro, *Wild Man of Letters*; and Barbara Winter, *Australia-First Movement* for a discussion of this decision.

³⁸ See A373 4522B, pp 47-53, NAA Canberra, for the discussion for and against the choice of Loveday. This camp was 45 kilometres from Renmark, South Australia and was run with exquisite military efficiency by Lt. Col. E.T. Dean.

³⁹ She told him 'I did not know you were gone until the Monday night following your departure, when I was asked by the Press to verify it'. Letter from Winifred to PRS, 28 September [1942], SP, MLMSS 1284, Box 2.

⁴⁰ Letter from Winifred to PRS, 6 October 1942, SP, MLMSS 1284, Box 2.

⁴¹ Permits had been introduced on 1 July 1942. See the eight categories of priority listed in S.J. Butlin and C.B. Schedvin, *War Economy 1942-1945: Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1977, p. 255, note 6. A spouse of an internee probably fell into category 7: 'Persons travelling in cases where special hardship would result by prohibition'.

⁴² Letter from PRS to Winifred, 22 September 1942, SP, MLMSS 1284, Box 122.

⁴³ See Figure 4.

⁴⁴ Letter from PRS to Winifred, 11 October 1942, SP, MLMSS 1284, Box 122.

⁴⁵ Letter from PRS to Winifred, 25 September 1942, SP, MLMSS 1284, Box 122. The compounds were near enough that when 198 Italian internees arrived in 14D (where Stephensen was interned), they could hear the Fascist song, the '*Giovinezza*', coming from 14A in welcome. See: Clive Morton, 'Francesco Fantin, Watime Murder and Cover Up', *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland*, Vol. 18, No. 6, May 2003, p. 264.

⁴⁶ However, unlike some of the internees of enemy alien background, none of the 50 'British-born' was permitted to have spouses join them in the family compounds (which were in Tatura).

⁴⁷ The initial request is in his letter to Winifred, 25 September 1942. See also his letters to her: 7 October and 16 October. See his acknowledgement in the letter of 30 October 1942 in SP, MLMSS 1284, Box 122.

⁴⁸ Intelligence Report for No. 14D Internment Camp, December 1942, A6119 557/REFERENCE COPY, p. 279, NAA Canberra.

⁴⁹ Intelligence Report No. 193, February 1943, A6119 557/REFERENCE COPY, p. 269, NAA Canberra.

⁵⁰ Orders - National Security (Internment Camp) Regulations, No. 57, A472 W1729, p. 35, NAA Canberra.

⁵¹ Memorandum, 3 November 1942, A6119 557/REFERENCE COPY, p. 300, NAA Canberra. An official noted 'Stephensen appears to have lost no time in taking his line in the Compound'.

⁵² Extract from Intelligence Report, 19 January 1943, A6119 557/REFERENCE COPY, p. 272, NAA Canberra.

-
- ⁵³ David Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation*, p. 25. See discussion above.
- ⁵⁴ Letter from the Director General of Security to the Attorney-General, 9 March 1943, A373 4522B, p. 166, NAA Canberra.
- ⁵⁵ Memorandum from the Director General of Security, 8 February 1943, A6119 557/REFERENCE COPY, p. 274, NAA Canberra.
- ⁵⁶ Memorandum from the Director-General of Security, 26 January 1943, A373 4522B, p. 34, NAA Canberra.
- ⁵⁷ See: Barbara Winter, *Australia-First Movement*, chapter 8, for an account of the 'plot' by four people calling themselves 'Australia First'.
- ⁵⁸ Report, No. 183, 8 December 1942, A 6119 557/REFERENCE COPY, p. 284, NAA Canberra. Stephensen met two more of the 'WA Four' in Tatura camp for the first time.
- ⁵⁹ Letter from PRS to Winifred, 8 December 1942, SP, MLMSS 1284, Box 122.
- ⁶⁰ Letter from PRS to Winifred, 11 February 1943, SP, MLMSS 1284, Box 122.
- ⁶¹ Letter from PRS to Winifred, 17 February 1943, SP, MLMSS 1284, Box 122.
- ⁶² Letter from PRS to Winifred, 20 March 1943, SP, MLMSS 1284, Box 122.
- ⁶³ Letter from PRS to Winifred, 20 April 1943, SP, MLMSS 1284, Box 122.
- ⁶⁴ Letter from Winifred to PRS, 18 January 1943, SP, MLMSS 1284, Box 2.
- ⁶⁵ Memorandum on Internee N1634 – PR Stephensen, 9 February 1943, A6119 557/REFERENCE COPY, p. 273, NAA Canberra.
- ⁶⁶ Craig Munro, *Wild Man of Letters*, p. 239.
- ⁶⁷ Letter from PRS to Winifred, 6 April 1943, SP, MLMSS 1284, Box 122.
- ⁶⁸ Letter from PRS to Winifred, 23 October 1943, SP, MLMSS 1284, Box 122.
- ⁶⁹ There are a great number of letters to ex-internees in SP, MLMSS 1284, Box 1 and Box 2, including some written in German.
- ⁷⁰ Letter from PRS to Winifred, 24 March 1944, SP, MLMSS 1284, Box 122.
- ⁷¹ Letter from PRS to Winifred, 1 May 1943, SP, MLMSS 1284, Box 122.
- ⁷² Indeed he specifically stated this in his letter to her, 22 October 1943, MLMSS 1284, Box 122.
- ⁷³ Letter from Winifred to PRS, 26 May 1943, SP, MLMSS 1284, Box 2.
- ⁷⁴ This is the focus of chapter 4 of my doctoral dissertation. See note 5.
- ⁷⁵ See Figure 5. This is in the National Library, Canberra. See: <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an2292667>.
- ⁷⁶ Letter from PRS to Winifred, 24 July 1945, SP, MLMSS 1284, Box 122.
- ⁷⁷ The narrowing of the circle of friends is, of course, connected to the question of shame and stigma – a matter I discuss in my dissertation – see note 5.
- ⁷⁸ Condolence letters, T. A. Miles to Winifred Stephensen, 19 June 1965, SP, MLMSS 1284, Box 125.
- ⁷⁹ *Internment in South Australia: History of Loveday. Loveday Internment Group, Barmera, 1940-1946*, Advertiser Printing Office, Adelaide, 1946.
- ⁸⁰ See chapter 2 of my forthcoming doctoral dissertation.