

Life sentences

It's time to update an important register of eminent people in Australia's history, as Professor MELANIE NOLAN , PhD '89, explains.



The *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (ADB) project was begun in the 1950s and now there is general agreement that its earliest volumes need to be revised.

Not only has more information about many of the subjects become available, there is also a glaring gender imbalance in those volumes – women account for only 1.8 per cent of entries in volumes 1 and 2. If you take the whole colonial period, women fare slightly better, with four per cent of entries.

To improve the gender balance we have decided to add 1500 new entries to the dictionary of women who flourished during the colonial period. As a first step, we are compiling a list of possible candidates for inclusion.

Eora woman Barangaroo, a consort of Bennelong, is on the list. It is thought Barangaroo (c.1791), a fisherwoman and woman of great authority, was present at the meeting of Aboriginal women and white newcomers in February 1788, an event painted by William Bradley. The Sydney suburb Barangaroo, which is part of the territory of her people, is named after her.

Lucy Hannah Applewhaite (1833-1909) is another candidate. She featured in a recent episode of the SBS program *Who do you think you are?* about the forebears of singer, former MP and political activist Peter Garrett.

Lucy and her husband took up positions at the Immigration Office and Depot in 1861. A year later she was appointed head matron of the Hyde Park Asylum, making her one of Sydney's first professional 'working mothers'. Her husband and their nine children lived on the second floor of the asylum.

Following her husband's death she married William Hicks and had another five children—while continuing to work. With a salary at its peak of £250, she was one of the highest paid female public servants in NSW.

Mary Penfold's (1820-1896) role in establishing the internationally-renowned Penfold winery has been largely unacknowledged. She not only helped manage the estate when her husband was alive but was a partner in M. Penfold & Co (and in a later partnership Penfold & Co) following his death.

She exhibited wine five times for the colony of South Australia, winning numerous awards – locally, internationally and intercolonially, including at the 1878 Paris Exposition Universelle and the 1880 Melbourne International Exhibition.

"If you would like to nominate women who flourished in the colonial period for possible entries in the ADB, please send their names to ncb@anu.edu.au and include a brief summary of the candidate's achievements and their birth and death if known.

Read more in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* at adb.anu.edu.au