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What Munn Missed: The Queensland Schools of Arts

Abstract

American Librarian Ralph Munn's historic tour of Australian libraries in 1934 is well documented. Along with Ernest Pitt, Chief Librarian of the State Library of Victoria, he spent nearly ten weeks travelling from Sydney and back again, visiting libraries in all the state capitals and many regional towns throughout the country. Munn's trip was funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, which was then, through its Dominions fund, turning attention to philanthropic opportunities in the Antipodes. The resulting report, *Australian Libraries: A Survey of Conditions and Suggestions for their Improvement* (commonly referred to as the Munn-Pitt Report) is often credited with initiating the public library movement in Australia. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Australia, Ralph Munn, Ernest Pitt, public libraries, Queensland, Carnegie Corporation, University of Queensland

Disciplines

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What Munn Missed: The Queensland Schools of Arts

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American Librarian Ralph Munn's historic tour of Australian libraries in 1934 is well documented. Along with Ernest Pitt, Chief Librarian of the State Library of Victoria, he spent nearly ten weeks travelling from Sydney and back again, visiting libraries in all the state capitals and many regional towns throughout the country. Munn's trip was funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, which was then, through its Dominions fund, turning attention to philanthropic opportunities in the Antipodes.¹ The resulting report, *Australian Libraries: A Survey of Conditions and Suggestions for their Improvement* (commonly referred to as the Munn–Pitt Report) is often credited with initiating the public library movement in Australia.

Shortly after their arrival in Sydney on 21 May, Munn, Pitt and their wives, Anne Shepard Munn and Kathleen Buxton Pitt, departed for Brisbane. They checked into Lennons Hotel on George Street on the evening of 27 May and began their tour of libraries the next day. On 30 May, they returned to Sydney. By any definition, it was a whirlwind visit to Queensland. Two days was not nearly enough time for a comprehensive survey of the schools of arts that dotted the Queensland countryside in 1934. In fact, Munn never visited any country towns. Pitt arranged the itinerary and concentrated the time in Brisbane, touring the Public Library of Queensland, the University of Queensland, the Parliamentary Library, the Brisbane School of Arts and the Workers' Educational Association Library. Much of Munn's attention was devoted to the Public Library of Queensland on William Street. His depiction of the facility, collections and management was famously dismissive. As he wrote:

Anyone wishing to carry away a favourable impression of the Public Library of Queensland should never make the mistake of entering it . . . Any fair and considered appraisal will place it so far below the state libraries of every other state, except Tasmania, that exact comparisons become futile. Western Australia, with one-half Queensland's population, supports a state library which is immeasurably better in content, administration and service.²

In his assessment of Australian libraries, Munn paid particular attention to finances. He observed that during 1932–33 the Queensland Public Library purchased only thirty books at a cost of £10: 'This sounds more like the report of a private citizen's home library than that of the library of a great state of nearly one million people. The entire book collection shows every evidence of financial starvation.'³ Munn wrote to John Russell at the Carnegie Corporation of New York that he

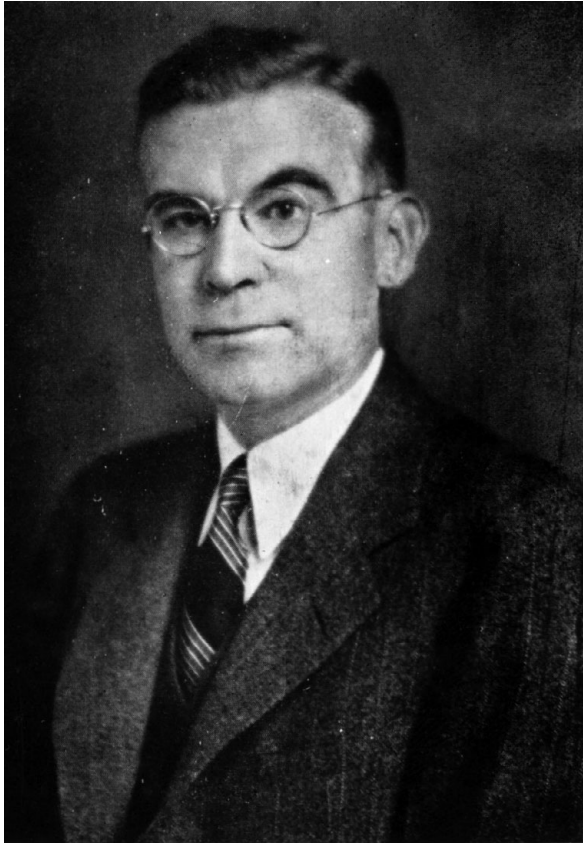


Figure 1 *Ralph Munn, 1938*
Source: Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.

had found ‘deplorable conditions in Brisbane . . . the worst I have seen in the English speaking world’.⁴ Munn had ample evidence to write as he did about the Public Library of Queensland, having spent a day touring it. He consulted with its librarian, examined the books and studied the data. He observed how readers used the collections. He wandered through the draughty reading room and took note of staff members performing their duties. He got the full picture in Brisbane.

But what about the town libraries Munn never even entered? He did not travel 90 kilometres north to Esk. There he would have entered a two-room, wood-frame building with seating for ten. The Esk School of Arts was open from 9.00 a.m. to 9.00 p.m. each day, which would have given Munn ample time to call on Joseph Barr, the library’s honorary secretary and librarian. The Esk School of Arts had seventy-five dues-paying members — a highly respectable percentage for a community of 800 residents, especially since each of the paying members probably represented a family of four or more.⁵

Community appreciation for its library was also evident at the Boonah School of Arts in the Fassifern Valley. The 1,000 residents of this agricultural region worked hard to keep their School of Arts afloat. Again there was a high percentage

of membership: 120 families paid their annual subscription and raised additional funds by sponsoring concerts and plays arranged by their governing committee.⁶

Munn never saw Bundaberg's elegant, two-storey, eight-room, brick building with its handsome arched façade. The Bundaberg School of Arts contained a stately reading room, a lending library with 20,000 volumes for adults and another 500 books for children. Children's collections were uncommon in Queensland at this time, and Bundaberg stood out as one of the few providing reading matter for juveniles.⁷

Had Munn and his survey team travelled just an hour north of Brisbane, they could have stopped at the Yandina School of Arts, a vibrant little library with a heavy schedule of social and cultural activities. He and Mrs Munn could have attended a lecture, complete with lantern slides, viewed the latest 'talkie', enjoyed a concert or attended a dance. They might have been lucky enough to be in Yandina on a night when the Cheerios, a local drama club, was performing to raise money for books and magazines, and to pay the library's utility bills.⁸

Munn never visited any of the town and country libraries of Queensland. Small towns and rural areas merit just one paragraph in the Munn-Pitt Report. Munn dismisses the Queensland Schools of Arts as poor and 'not sufficiently strong to serve their communities properly'.⁹ He highlights gross under-funding, the imbalance of fiction over non-fiction and a lack of professionalism. While his observations may be true, there is more to the story when it comes to the country Schools of Arts in Queensland. By not visiting any of them, Munn missed the multitude of ways in which these institutions were serving their communities. To begin with, the rural Schools of Arts made possible access to books, magazines, current newspapers and reference works that otherwise would have been unavailable in most communities. They may not have been impressive libraries with well-balanced collections. They may not have had professional librarians at the helm. But they were, in a very real sense, the centrepiece of many communities — providing a space for people to gather, offering reading matter and making a visible contribution to the intellectual and cultural life of the districts in which they were located.

Prior to Munn's arrival in Australia, Pitt distributed a four-page survey to every library, Mechanics' Institute, School of Arts and Literary Institute he could identify. At least 100 surveys were mailed out in Queensland. Seventy-one were returned, providing details about everything from size of collection and staff to subscription rates, hours and spending patterns. Beyond statistics, the individual 'personality' of many of the schools of arts became evident in the correspondence that accompanied the returned survey.¹⁰ The Mount Morgan librarian wrote that his library had burnt to the ground not once, but twice. The community built again both times — on the second occasion adding a children's section.¹¹ The Babinda School of Arts emphasised its cooperative arrangements with the local state school, calling attention to special memberships for young people designed to establish the habit of lifelong reading. The Babinda School of Arts librarian, J. G. Eastwood, wrote to Pitt:

Our Institution is conducted and financed entirely by private individuals, yet all the school children in the district, on reaching the fifth standard or class, are allowed to borrow the books from our Library, free of any charge whatever. This is done to give those children who are nearly leaving school all the opportunities



Figure 2 Members of the 'Cheerio Club', Yandina, on an outing to Coolum Beach, ca 1925. The Club regularly organised plays and concerts, donating the proceeds to the Yandina School of Arts. Source: Picture Sunshine Coast, Sunshine Coast Libraries.

possible to acquire and keep up a love of reading and so getting information for service in later life.¹²

One librarian talked of reducing the membership price to make it more affordable because of the hard times people faced during the economic depression. Thomas

Farrell, Secretary and Librarian of the South Johnstone School of Arts, explained how his institution had extended a hand to non-members: 'The reading room is practically open to everyone, and during the depression has been freely availed of by the unemployed.'¹³

Several librarians wrote to discuss arrangements, hoping that Munn and Pitt would visit their library. For instance, Gladys Stephens, honorary secretary of the Cardwell School of Arts, implored the men to drop in while the train stopped in the station. She was so anxious for Munn and Pitt to see her library that she offered to meet them at the railway station. She wrote that her committee 'will make arrangements for you to be met and conducted to the School of Arts *while* the train is at the Station. It stays here for twenty minutes and the School of Arts is only about fifty yards from the station.'¹⁴

With such a tight schedule, Munn and Pitt had no time for the 3,000 kilometre round-trip journey to Cardwell, north of Townsville. Yet the Cardwell School of Arts was typical of the smallest of rural libraries in Queensland at this time. According to the survey data, the Cardwell School of Arts served a community of about 100. The 20 foot (6 metre) by 18 foot (5.5 metre) one-room structure had ten seats and was open just two and a half hours per week. Ninety-five per cent of the collection was fiction. In 1933 the library had only twenty-one subscribers, who paid a total of £13 in membership fees. The School of Arts' total earnings came to just £19. An examination of their balance sheet showed expenses at £32 for the same year, clearly exceeding income, and creating an unsustainable financial situation. But Stephens proudly mentioned that all £19 of their income went to purchase sixty-one new books and six magazine subscriptions. It is also worth noting that the tiny Cardwell School of Arts spent more on books in 1933 than the Public Library of Queensland.

The sixty-one new books that Stephens procured were probably popular fiction. It is clear from examining the surveys that fiction dominated the shelves in the Queensland Schools of Arts. It was rare to see collection statistics where fiction represented less than 80 per cent of the total. In most cases, it was 90 per cent or more. Munn took issue with this choice. Throughout the published survey of Australian libraries and in numerous newspaper interviews, he complains of the high fiction content in libraries, at one point referring to it as 'tripe'. Munn perhaps missed the point that readers in small towns and agricultural communities sought entertainment through books; fiction was a welcome amusement.

There is ample evidence that rural readers appreciated the escapism provided by popular fiction. The Queensland Bush Book Club, a Brisbane-based philanthropic group that provided reading matter for families in the outback, documented rural reading habits in its annual reports for over forty years.¹⁵ Bush Club members, spread throughout the most isolated parts of Queensland, most often asked for romance, murder mysteries and adventure books. Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie and Zane Grey were much in demand. Romances by Ethel Dell and Elinor Glyn topped the list for rural subscribers, who requested 'Love stories please — because you get all the other things in real life — but not love stories.'¹⁶ Life in agricultural communities could be grindingly hard and small towns could be boring. Many communities in Queensland were isolated, linked only by a daily train passing through. Fiction provided an antidote to a dreary life; fortunately, it was readily available to Schools of Arts from large distributors like Mudies of

London.¹⁷ In his quest to improve the condition of Australian libraries, Munn under-estimated the value of fiction in the schools of arts libraries.

If high circulation is a measurement of satisfaction, then the subscribers to Queensland's Schools of Arts were well served by the fiction-heavy collections. While many of the libraries did not report their annual lending on the surveys, those that did showed that the number of checkouts per borrower was in the fifty-five to eighty volumes per year range. That equates to more than one book per week. In fact, the libraries with high percentages of fiction also had the highest circulations per user, including Nudgee at ninety, Gympie at ninety-one, Rockhampton at 121, Bundaberg at 166, Maryborough at 171 and Mourilyan at 172.

The Queensland schools of arts offered a wide range of flexible borrowing privileges. Most libraries loaned three or four books at a time. The Howard School of Arts loaned up to eight. Esk allowed six per fortnight. Some schools of arts permitted country customers more volumes: for example, Goondiwindi allowed three books for town residents and six for country residents. Many loaned magazines along with books, and some libraries, such as the Wallumbilla School of Arts, allowed anyone in the community to borrow newspapers.

The Schools of Arts were not free public libraries. In order to borrow books, members paid a subscription fee, usually ranging from 10 shillings to £1 per year. In some libraries, members were allowed to pay in instalments. Half-yearly or quarterly options were common. Some offered individual and family rates. At the Yarwun School of Arts, for instance, the cost was 10 shillings annually or 15 shillings for the whole family.

Some institutions made provision for those who just wanted access to the reading room. The Watsonville School of Arts charged a quarterly fee of 5 shillings for the reading room or 6 shillings for both reading room and library borrowing privileges. Some offered a juvenile rate. The Wynnum and Manly School of Arts charged 1 shilling and sixpence for children. The Laurel School of Arts charged 5 shillings for adults and 2 shillings for a child's membership. Except in the cities, few Schools of Arts had a separate juvenile section, although many had a cluster of shelves containing reading matter appropriate for children.

In some libraries, subscribers would pay by the number of books they wished to borrow. For example, patrons at Mount Morgan paid 21 shillings a year to borrow three books at once, less if they were satisfied with only one or two books at a time. The Windsor School of Arts charged threepence per each volume checked out. Flexible payment arrangements made subscriptions affordable.

Individual governing boards were responsible for balancing the books in the Schools of Arts. They had a tough job as borrowers fell away, unable to pay fees as the Great Depression of the 1930s took hold. Many boards tried to be sensitive to the financial plight of families hit hard by the loss of income. A subscription was a luxury, quickly eliminated, and some boards responded by lowering subscription rates. The Gympie School of Arts posted a public notice of a meeting to discuss a reduction of fees.¹⁸ Other Schools of Arts reduced subscription rates as more people joined.¹⁹

The idea was to make borrowing books affordable and still pay the bills. It is clear from examining the survey data that no School of Arts was *making* a profit in 1934. Subscription fees also had to cover the cost of utilities, building upkeep, mortgage and staff salaries.²⁰ To help reduce expenses, board members often persuaded local



Figure 3 *Kin Kin School of Arts Hall, 1931.*
Source: Picture Sunshine Coast, Sunshine Coast Libraries.

newspapers to donate a copy to the reading room. The boards tried to keep fees in line with local conditions. Community Schools of Arts seemed anxious to enrol new members, and advertised reasonable membership fees. The biggest problem was that membership fees rarely covered costs of operating a School of Arts.

The boards also wanted to provide for their future readers, concentrating efforts on young people. A number of libraries offered prize memberships to school children. Kangaroo Point School of Arts awarded memberships to four boys and four girls attending state schools every year. Mount Morgan initiated a scholars' program for primary school children, which allowed more than 200 young people access to the library.²¹

With the exception of one-room libraries, most Queensland Schools of Arts had a hall or other public space that could be used for social events, dramatic productions, classes or games and tournaments. These were important sources of income for the library. In some larger Schools of Arts, there were small shops on the first floor whose rents added to the revenue. The combination of commerce and entertainment hastened the evolution of Schools of Arts from stand-alone libraries to important community centres.

The underlying philosophy of the Schools of Arts movement was the promotion of a better trained workforce: the prosperous should educate and uplift the masses.²² The Maroochy River School of Arts stated it specifically: 'Our object is to provide a library and centre of recreation for the district, and generally to advance the moral and intellectual welfare of the community.'²³ The Yandina School of Arts stated its purpose as 'the establishment and maintenance of a Library, Reading Room and Recreation Room, classes for amusement and instruction, and the diffusion of general knowledge'.²⁴

The surveys and associated correspondence provided evidence that the Schools of Arts served important educational and entertainment functions. In Stanthorpe and Gympie, classes were offered in cookery. The proceeds went to the building fund. Lectures were common. The medical superintendent of Gympie Hospital

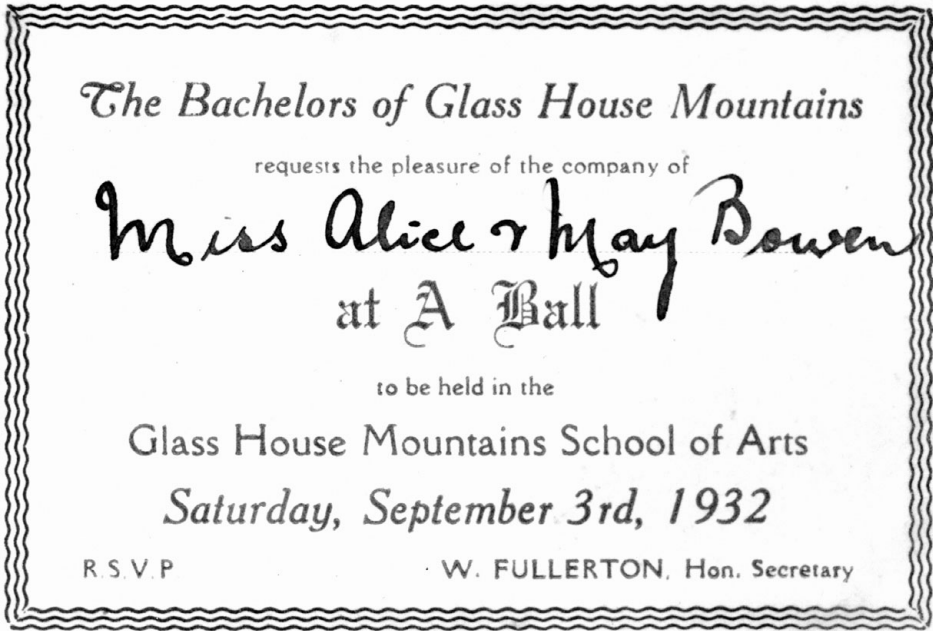


Figure 4 Ball invitation from the Bachelors of Glass House Mountains, 1932. Many schools of arts in Queensland sponsored fancy dress balls to raise funds for the library.
Source: Picture Sunshine Coast, Sunshine Coast Libraries.

offered a lecture series on the physiology of animals. Instructors would charge a fee for lectures and give a portion of their earnings to the sponsoring School of Arts.²⁵ The Gympie School of Arts also held classes on practical topics such as bookkeeping, typewriting, shorthand and dressmaking. It offered lessons in mathematics, chemistry, mineralogy and other scientific courses as well as classes for personal enrichment, such as singing, drawing, watercolour and oil painting.²⁶

The Yandina School of Arts provided a home for church congregations, sports clubs, military, patriotic and political groups, dramatic societies, service clubs, hobbyists and progress associations. A variety of social events are recorded, from lectures and concerts to fancy dress balls, dances, wedding receptions, Anzac Day services, morning teas and dinner parties. The Mourilyan School of Arts was outfitted with a piano made from Atherton Tableland walnut, a gramophone and a wireless set. The Maroochy River School of Arts charged for the use of the hall, piano and crockery. Fees for events or building use figured importantly into the bottom line of the library.²⁷

The Kangaroo Point survey indicated that the cost of building upkeep, insurance premiums, and lighting was such a heavy burden on resources that to meet expenses it would augment finances by concerts, bridge-parties and games.²⁸ Billiards was particularly popular, and the librarian often did triple duty as librarian, building cleaner and billiard marker.

Besides hosting classes, games and formal entertainment, several Schools of Arts contained a museum. The Barcardine School of Arts loaned fossils. Mourilyan School of Arts had exhibits on railway transportation, electricity and sugar cane



Figure 5 Mad Hatter's evening held at the School of Arts Hall, Caloundra, 1937. The hall is decorated with lanterns, flags and bunting and the guests sport a wide array of hats. A function like this would typically raise funds to support the School of Arts library.
Source: Picture Sunshine Coast, Sunshine Coast Libraries.

pests. It displayed cases of rare shells, New Guinea weaponry, butterflies, Fijian curios and Roman coins excavated by Australians digging trenches in Egypt during World War I. The collection also included war relics, coral, bottled snakes and other specimens.²⁹ All of these activities were designed to enhance the intellectual and cultural life of the community.

Many Queensland Schools of Arts featured a reading room, where daily newspapers and magazines were available. If a School of Arts didn't have a reading room, it sought to establish one. A reading room was the window to the larger world. If fiction collections were ideal for escape, the reading room was where a member could track news of neighbouring towns, the nation and the world. The Rockhampton School of Arts was more prosperous than many Queensland Schools of Arts. Its reading room offered 358 periodical titles and all the important weekly and daily Queensland newspapers and leading papers from other states, along with those from New Zealand. It even offered readers newspapers and magazines from Paris, New York City and San Francisco.³⁰ In Gympie, the reading room had a more modest selection of forty-seven magazines and newspapers — most of them local, including the *Gympie Times*, *Gympie Miner* and *Darling Downs Gazette*. However its magazine collection had a distinctly national and international flair, and included *Punch*, *Scientific American*, *Illustrated London News* and the *Sydney Bulletin*.³¹

Reading rooms were a source of pride for any School of Arts that had one, and an aspiration for libraries without one. Sentiments such as those expressed by the Honorary Secretary of the Windsor Library reflect this attitude. He wrote to Munn and Pitt: 'Our library is purely a lending library at present, the books being mainly fiction and travel. We are, however, anxious to have a reference section established as soon as practicable and also to have public reading rooms established, but we have to grow there.'³²

In addition to providing a reading room, fiction collections, reasonable subscription rates, flexible payment plans and a community gathering place, the rural Schools of Arts offered hours that meshed with local preferences. Openings and closings reflected the work schedules and convenience of community members. Most libraries had evening hours, and many were also open for limited hours during the day. Evening hours coincided with when the hall or game rooms were open. People could come in after the evening meal for a social activity, billiard game or card tournament, and then visit the library.

Typical evening hours were from 7.00 p.m. to 10.00 p.m. A discussion of hours figured prominently in a debate among trustees of the Gympie School of Arts who were trying to decide whether to fund an expensive new billiard table. In the end they decided it would be a good investment, as 'men would be more likely to play billiards at the library than a hotel. The members' wives would not mind that so much as they know that the School of Arts is closed at a reasonable hour and they would be sure of having their husbands home by about half past 10.'³³

Saturday hours were common; few opened on Sunday. Some Schools of Arts had no set hours and retrieved books for members when requested. The Memorial School of Arts in Cecil Plains, for example, responded to the survey: 'as we are a farming community we pay a girl who lives handy to the Hall to hand out books at any time during the week except Sundays . . . we have no set hours of lending'.³⁴ For the most part, the governing boards set library hours that met community needs. Of the 71 libraries responding to the survey, only one School of Arts, Maroochy River, recorded extremely limited hours: they were open 'only on Wednesday, on or before the full moon each month'.³⁵

If Munn had travelled to the Schools of Arts in Queensland, he most certainly would have detected a can-do spirit and sense of pride. For example, T. Prentice explained that his community had been endeavouring since 1911 to establish a School of Arts in Windsor. He stressed that, 'through patient plodding', the community had 'arrived at the point of erecting a building with sufficient accommodation to meet development for the next twenty years', although it still had a debt of £170 owed to the bank. He wrote:

The result proves that erecting this building, in spite of the pessimism of the day, was a right one. We started the year with 291 subscribers and today have 482. We are aiming to get to the 500 mark by the first July. On the opening of the library on July 1st, 1933 we reduced the subscription to one shilling per annum — one penny per month — with 3 pence per volume for books taken out. No subsidy is received from any source to assist us in our work.

He concludes: 'The Committee of Management are endeavouring and have so far succeeded this year in placing in circulation one new book for every day of the year.'³⁶

Residents of Mourilyan were so proud of their School of Arts that they wrote a pamphlet entitled *Mourilyan's amazing citizenship: what it has done for the School of Arts Library with 10,000 books and a fine museum*. The opening lines state that it would be 'difficult to find a more outstanding example of successful civic cooperation'. Written in 1930, the pamphlet describes eighteen years of patient work and cooperation that transformed Mourilyan from a one-room library for the sugar mill employees to a School of Arts for the larger community. It emphasises that the School of Arts is debt free, receiving the maximum government subsidy and has such high participation that subscription fees cover the regular purchase of new books and many building improvements:

Today Mourilyan's School of Arts is the centre of the social life of that community, the focus point from which radiate all those activities which have for their object, the well-being and prosperity of the community in general, and the promotion of the best possible citizenship, without which any district might just as well not exist.³⁷

Not all Schools of Arts were in the same comfortable position as Mourilyan. Most were struggling — Munn was right about that. For the most part, Queensland Schools of Arts hoped that the Carnegie Corporation would provide funding for new construction, an addition or upgrade to an existing facility, or support for operations. Many libraries had borrowed money to build their facility, and did not have enough cash coming in to cover loan payments. These were Depression times, and memberships in many towns fell off when subscribers lost their jobs. For example, Honorary Secretary Joseph Hall described the hardships that arose from closing the mines in Mount Morgan:

With the exodus of our population, the number of members on our roll fell until we could only count 38. The revenue from the Hall was small, because when there was no employment, there was no money for amusement, and that will explain why your questionnaire shows us as doing little towards improvement of the minds of the population just now.³⁸

The Queensland government did not make it easy for Schools of Arts to stay afloat. It reduced and then eliminated the government subsidy to libraries in 1929. This had a negative effect on even the wealthier libraries. In a letter dated 4 May 1934, W. K. Cleeve, librarian of the Rockhampton School of Arts, wrote to Pitt about their financial pressures:

Like all Schools of Arts in Queensland, and I suppose everywhere, we are handicapped for want of funds. At one time we received a small endowment from the Queensland Government, through the Department of Education, but of late years this has been cut out . . . Consequently on account of the adverse exchange rates we have had to reduce our overseas newspapers, etc.³⁹

Smaller Schools of Arts, which lacked the reserves of larger institutions, were barely getting by. The Mulgrave School of Arts reported that all subscription fees were used to purchase new literature. They appealed to Munn and Pitt, 'No subsidy from the Government has been available for some years which is a factor severely felt by all institutions . . . Finance is at a low ebb and any help we can get from outside sources and your Corporation would be gratefully acknowledged.'⁴⁰

In tiny Cecil Plains, serving a community of 200 people, the librarian wrote: 'Owing to the difficult times we have passed through in our community we have not been able to purchase any new books as we had instructions from our bank to reduce our overdraft.'⁴¹ Secretary A. C. Morrison of the Morningside School of Arts, in the Brisbane suburbs, wrote that the library still owed £950 on a £2,250 brick building:

We have a loan from the Commonwealth Bank paying interest and redemption yearly of £140. The loan was guaranteed by five men who were residents in the district, none of them moneyed men, but ordinary employees in the City who had faith and courage in the district. The financial position does not worry us so much as the want of good books for the library. It is very difficult for us to pay interest and redemption and purchase books at the same time. If we could reduce our indebtedness to the Bank, then we would see our way to have a larger library, and a better selection for our readers. Any assistance you could give us in that way would be greatly received . . .⁴²

Honorary Secretary S. Duxbury of the Pratten School of Arts related similar concerns in his letter to Munn and Pitt dated 3 May 1934:

You will notice that we have only 25 subscribers at most, but practically everyone represents a family varying from 3 to 10 members or an average of over 100 readers. Our little room serves a very useful purpose in a small country place; we are 21 miles from Warwick. In addition to being a reading room, it is a meeting place for local bodies, charitables and sporting, etc. We do not charge any rent for charitable meetings but a small charge is made for others to cover lighting costs.⁴³

Duxbury added: 'If this survey results in assistance being given by the Carnegie Corporation we would like to be amongst the recipients. With some assistance we could enlarge our premises and perhaps afford more books and better quality ones.'⁴⁴

Would visits to Cecil Plains or Yandina or Morningside have changed Munn's opinion of libraries in Queensland? Probably not. He seems to have had his mind made up that the Queensland Schools of Arts were not worthy of investment. Perhaps his visit to the State Library of Queensland put him in a mood to write off the other libraries in the state. To be sure, Munn felt strongly that libraries should be supported by the government through taxes and not through individual subscriptions. He believed that libraries needed a professionally trained staff. Responses like the one on the Mount Morgan survey, which listed honesty and sobriety as the two most important credentials for the librarian, would not have sat well with Munn.

Rather than channel Carnegie money into propping up the existing library system in Australia, Munn advocated rate supported libraries administered through local government, with additional funding from the state. He urged the Carnegie Corporation to put its money into grants to train promising young Australians as librarians at American library schools. He argued for stipends for Australian library leaders to participate in study tours, in order to observe the workings of prominent American libraries. In a memo to John Russell dated 5 December 1934, Munn outlined conditions that the corporation should consider when giving grants to

individuals and institutions in Australia. He also specifically advised the corporation to avoid giving ‘financial help to any school of arts, literary institute, mechanics’ institute or other semi-private subscription library, except to aid their personnel in receiving training’.⁴⁵ Munn’s vision for public libraries left no place for Schools of Arts. His goal was to eliminate them and build professionally staffed libraries — that is, libraries supported by local taxes.

It is perhaps worth noting that Munn did not include School of Arts librarians in this offer for training. In another letter to Russell, dated 8 February 1935, Munn makes it clear that, in recommending individuals for grants for study in the United States or Great Britain, he would *not* consider ‘the School of Arts librarians’. He had a low opinion generally of the quality of the librarians in Australia. For example, Munn noted that he could not offer a positive recommendation for a Carnegie study grant for anyone from the states of Queensland or Tasmania.⁴⁶

Munn may have formed his judgements about the Queensland Schools of Arts based partially on his observations of the Mechanics Institutes of Victoria and Tasmania, the Literary Institutes of South Australia and the Schools of Arts in New South Wales. They undoubtedly shared many similarities with Queensland’s Schools of Arts. There is evidence that Munn was more thorough in his investigation in the other states. He most certainly did not form his views by any in-depth analysis of the Schools of Arts in Queensland. Because Munn prejudged the Queensland Schools of Arts, he failed to recognise their importance to the communities in which they were located. To call subscription libraries ‘wretched institutes’, as he did, seems both mean and condescending.

That said, Munn was not entirely off the mark in his analysis of the Schools of Arts. He was right to highlight the gross under-funding of Queensland libraries and the huge imbalance of fiction over non-fiction. He rightly targeted the lack of professionalism in the Queensland library system. He may have ruffled feathers locally in Queensland and elsewhere, but he felt he needed to do this for the cause of better and more accessible libraries. In the end, Munn missed a lot while touring Queensland, but he was able to accomplish his objectives. His pithy report, later augmented by locally initiated free-library movements in the states and an infusion of Carnegie Corporation money, helped to transform the Australian public library system.

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Endnotes

- 1 R. Munn and E. Pitt, *Australian libraries: a survey of conditions and suggestions for their improvement* (Melbourne: Australian Council for Educational Research, 1935), p. 9: ‘This survey of Australian libraries has been made possible by the generous action of the Trustees of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, in furtherance of their objective of promoting the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding. The whole of the cost

of conducting the inquiry, including the publication of this report, has been met by the Corporation.’

- 2 Munn and Pitt, *Australian libraries*, p. 61.
- 3 Munn and Pitt, *Australian libraries*, p. 62.
- 4 Columbia University, Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY). Series III-A. Box 50. Letter, Ralph Munn to John Russell, 4 June 1934. Russell served as consultant to Frederick Keppel, President of the Carnegie Corporation.
- 5 State Library of Victoria. Papers Relating to the Munn-Pitt Report, 1934. MS 9596. Box 1. Survey Q49 Esk.
- 6 Papers Relating to the Munn–Pitt Report. Survey Q3 Boonah.
- 7 Papers Relating to the Munn–Pitt Report. Survey Q5 Bundaberg.
- 8 A. Blyth, *Yandina School of Arts 1916–2006* (Yandina: Yandina School of Arts, 2006), p. 13.
- 9 Munn and Pitt, *Australian libraries*, 65. The calculations in this section of the report are incorrect. The authors state that the total expenditures for thirty-one rural Queensland libraries are £5834 with an average expenditure of £118 per library. The average is actually £188, a difference of £70. The report also claims a survey return rate of thirty-six, but seventy-one Schools of Arts in Queensland returned a questionnaire. Even if one discounts the questionnaires of the larger libraries (Public Library of Queensland, Rockhampton, Townsville and Brisbane Schools of Arts), and specialised libraries (Workers Educational Association of Queensland, Department of Workers Tutorial Classes, University of Queensland, Historical Society, Royal Society and Parliamentary Library of Queensland), that still leaves sixty-one Schools of Arts surveys returned from small towns and rural areas, not thirty-six.
- 10 Correspondence typically expanded on the survey questions or requested financial assistance from the Carnegie Corporation.
- 11 Papers relating to the Munn–Pitt Report. Survey Q29: Mount Morgan. Letter, 10 May 1934, Joseph T. Hall to Ernest Pitt.
- 12 Papers relating to the Munn–Pitt Report. Survey Q2: Babinda. Letter, 28 April 1934, J. G. Eastwood to Ernest Pitt.
- 13 Papers relating to the Munn–Pitt Report. Survey Q43: South Johnstone. Letter, 16 May 1934, Thomas Joseph Farrell to Ernest Pitt.
- 14 Papers relating to the Munn–Pitt Report. Survey Q28: Cardwell. Letter, 9 May 1934, Gladys Stephens to Ernest Pitt.
- 15 R. Wagner, ‘A blood-stained corpse in the butler’s pantry: the Queensland Bush Book Club’, *Queensland Review* 18(1) (2011), 1–25.
- 16 John Oxley Library (JOL), State Library of Queensland, Brisbane, OM-78-47, Queensland Bush Book Club Records, *Annual Report (AR)* 1928.
- 17 A. Bremer and M. Lyons, ‘Mechanics’ Institute Libraries: the readers demand fiction’ in M. Lyons and J. Arnold, *A history of the book in Australia 1891–1945* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2001), pp. 209–25; R. Webb, *The Gympie School of Arts and Library* (Brisbane: Aebis, 1995), p. 11. Mudies, a large circulating library in London, despatched as many as 1,000 boxes weekly, each carrying between ten and 100 books to British country and colonial subscribers. Many boxes went directly to the Schools of Arts and Mechanics’ Institutes in Australia. Webb writes: ‘Placing a regular standing order with Mudies was in many ways a sensible course of action for the School of Arts to take. It meant that boxes of a hundred or more reasonably cheap, popular, current and attractively presented books arrived regularly. Libraries set up standing orders to obtain large numbers of books and multiple copies.’

- 18 Webb, *The Gympie School of Arts and Library*, p. 41
- 19 Blyth, *Yandina School of Arts 1916–2006*, p. 11.
- 20 Papers relating to the Munn–Pitt Report. In Queensland, most Schools of Arts relied on volunteers or an honorary secretary rather than paid staff.
- 21 Papers relating to the Munn–Pitt Report. Survey Q29: Mount Morgan. Letter, 10 May 1934, Joseph T. Hall to Ernest Pitt. The Mount Morgan School of Arts permitted senior scholars in the primary schools to borrow books for 1 shilling per year if paid through the head teachers of their respective schools. When the scheme was adopted, there were seven primary schools in the district, and the head teachers agreed to an allocation of from ten to fifty scholars from their schools, based on enrolment, so that 200 students had library access. The Minister of Education was so impressed with the results that he sent a special grant of £10 to the Mount Morgan School of Arts to purchase more literature for the juvenile section.
- 22 Webb, *The Gympie School of Arts and Library*, p. 5. Other motivations behind the School of Arts movement included a better trained workforce, a desire of the fortunate to share their blessing with others and the belief that the education of the lower classes might make them more respectful of authority. There was also the desire of the workers themselves to improve their skills.
- 23 Papers relating to the Munn–Pitt Report. Survey Q12: Maroochy River.
- 24 Blyth, *Yandina School of Arts 1916–2006*, p. 5.
- 25 Papers relating to the Munn–Pitt Report. Survey Q17: Stanthorpe; Webb, *The Gympie School of Arts and Library*, pp. 13–14.
- 26 Webb, *The Gympie School of Arts and Library*, p. 15.
- 27 Papers relating to the Munn–Pitt Report. Survey Q12: Maroochy River; Survey Q26 Mourilyan.
- 28 Papers relating to the Munn–Pitt Report. Survey Q11: Kangaroo Point.
- 29 Papers relating to the Munn–Pitt Report. Survey Q26: Mourilyan.
- 30 Papers relating to the Munn–Pitt Report. Survey Q16: Rockhampton. Letter, 4 May 1934, W. K. Cleeve to Ernest Pitt. Cleve provides a list of the magazines and papers that the Rockhampton School of Arts sold at the end of the year to raise money for the library. This list shows the variety of publications including *Australian Traveler*, *Australian Cat & Dog Gazette*, *Queensland Herald*, *Sydney Mail*, *British Weekly*, *London Observer*, *Glasgow Daily Record*, *Illustrated London News*, *Le Temps* (French daily), *Manchester Guardian*, *New Republic*, *New Statesman and Nation*, *New York Life*, *New York Herald*, *San Francisco Examiner*, *Scientific American*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Sunday Times of Johannesburg*, *Tattler*, *London Times*, *Weekly Independent of Dublin*, *Harper’s Bazaar* and *Ladies Home Journal*.
- 31 Webb, *The Gympie School of Arts and Library*, pp. 8, 11.
- 32 Papers relating to the Munn–Pitt Report. Survey Q62: Windsor.
- 33 Webb, *The Gympie School of Arts and Library*, p. 22.
- 34 Papers relating to the Munn–Pitt Report. Survey Q47: Cecil Plains. Letter 20 May 1934 M. S. Eggar to Ernest Pitt.
- 35 Papers relating to the Munn–Pitt Report. Survey Q12: Maroochy River.
- 36 Papers relating to the Munn–Pitt Report. Survey Q62: Windsor. Letter, 28 May 1934, T. Prentice to Ernest Pitt.
- 37 Papers relating to the Munn–Pitt Report. Survey Q26: Mourilyan. Pamphlet, *Mourilyan’s amazing citizenship: what it has done for the School of Arts library with 10,000 books and a fine museum*, 1930. The pamphlet was written prior to the subsidy cut.

- 38 Papers relating to the Munn–Pitt Report. Survey 29: Mount Morgan. Letter, 10 May 1934, Joseph Hall to Ernest Pitt. Hall recounts the history of Mount Morgan School of Arts from prosperous times, with 326 on their rolls in 1925, to a downward spiral, brought on by a railway strike and mine closings. Unemployment rose and revenues fell. ‘The committee had borrowed £2,250 from the Government, to complete the erection of a Hall, from the letting of which, they expected to receive sufficient revenue to repay the loan, and provide literature for the Library & Reading Room. The closing of the Mine, with its consequent exodus of our population, was a very severe blow . . . The Committee struggled to meet their financial obligations to the Government, up to June 1928, when they had exhausted their resources, and from then they were compelled to allow their installments to fall into arrears. In 1929 the Government reduced the endowment from 10/ in the £ to altogether, and there has been no subsidy since then.’
- 39 Papers relating to the Munn–Pitt Report. Survey Q16: Rockhampton. Letter, 4 May 1934, W. K. Cleeve to Ernest Pitt.
- 40 Papers relating to the Munn–Pitt Report. Survey Q41: Mulgrave. Letter, 15 May 1934, Alfred Nighell to Ernest Pitt.
- 41 Papers relating to the Munn–Pitt Report. Survey Q47: Cecil Plains. Letter, 20 May 1934, M. S. Eggar to Ernest Pitt.
- 42 Papers relating to the Munn–Pitt Report. Survey Q36: Morningside. Letter, 15 May 1934, A. C. Morrison to Ernest Pitt.
- 43 Papers relating to the Munn–Pitt Report. Survey Q15: Pratten. Letter, 3 May 1934, S. Duxbury to Ernest Pitt.
- 44 Papers relating to the Munn–Pitt Report. Survey Q15: Pratten. Letter, 3 May 1934, S. Duxbury to Ernest Pitt.
- 45 CCNY. Series III-A, Box 231. Letter, 5 December 1934, Ralph Munn to John Russell.
- 46 CCNY. Series III-A, Box 231. Letter 8 February 1935 Ralph Munn to John Russell.