The purpose of today’s conference is to provide an opportunity for members of local historical societies to meet with one another and to hear papers on a range of topics in Queensland history. I commend the organisers on the many fascinating titles and on the quality of the speakers. I must also compliment them on the theme they have chosen — “Discovering Queensland History”.

In a chapter on Australian historiography written by Stuart MacIntyre in the volume, *Australians: a guide to Sources*, the author speculates about the reactions of the members of the Queensland Historical Society to the then young university lecturer, A.C.V. Melbourne, who read a paper on “Methods of Historical Research” at the inaugural meeting of the Society on 18th August 1913. That gathering of members of well-known pioneering families and of other leaders of community and university life was a mixed collection of people if measured by their likely interest in the rigour of “scientific” history.

In retrospect, it is interesting to see that, as expressed in the inaugural meeting of the Queensland society, one of the dominant themes was to separate those who joined historical societies into those who favoured the “scientific”, “professional” or “academic” approach to history, and those who thought the role of the historical societies should be more antiquarian in orientation. That tension, in one form or another, appears to have surfaced in the affairs of the society from its very beginning.
Peter Biskup, in his article, “The Politics of Preserving the Past: the early years of the Historical Society of Queensland” published in the November 1988 issue of the Journal comments on the initial association of the society with the new University of Queensland. The Queensland Society differed in this and several other respects from the approach of the Australian Historical Society which had been formed in New South Wales in 1901, and from that of the Historical Society of Victoria which was founded in 1909. Those two southern bodies were born into environments which were, by comparison, much more richly endowed with the structures and institutions of educated, cultured and literate societies. For example, for more than thirty years after it was established in 1850, the University of Sydney remained an arts university — a single faculty devoted to the education of the colony’s young gentlemen. Further, the State Library of New South Wales, which could trace its origins back to 1826, and the State Library of Victoria, which was founded in 1856, were, by the turn of the century, substantial institutions.

By contrast, the State Library of Queensland did not come into being until 1896, was not opened to the public until 1902, and it suffered from the start from meagre funding and resources. Furthermore, universities had been established for about sixty years in Sydney and Melbourne before Queensland opened the doors of its first university in 1910. For many years in the first half of this century, numbers of Queensland students continued to journey south in order to attend schools such as the Kings’ school and Geelong Grammar and to pursue studies, especially in medicine, at the older universities. For a long time, Queensland was thought of as a place of temporary exile, and there was an attitude that life in its more substantial forms was lived in the south or on the other side of the world.

So it was in this relatively culturally deprived and struggling society the R.H.S.Q. first took root. Despite this fact, Biskup points out that its initial membership of one hundred compares more than favourably with the foundation membership of the two earlier southern societies. However, while they had grown, by 1928 the Queensland Society had dwindled to a mere half dozen financial members. The intervention of World War I, the death of about thirty members, financial difficulties, the personal idiosyncracies, perhaps, of the president from 1917 to 1930 — Dr Cumbrae-Stewart — in conjunction with differing expectations about the role of the society, all played their parts in causing a decline in membership.

While the early years of the Historical Society of Queensland were unpromising, it was reinvigorated in later years, and several of its members made useful contributions to the writing of Queensland
history. One such member was the late Mr Alan Morrison. In 1943 he had succeeded Melbourne as lecturer in history at the University of Queensland. He published papers on Queensland history which included topics such as the abolition of the Legislative Council, the Brisbane General Strike of 1912, and another on militant labour in Queensland from 1912 to 1927. In an article in the February 1988 issue of the Journal, Dr Lyndall Ryan wrote that, upon becoming president of the society in 1948, Alan Morrison “placed the Society very firmly on a post-war footing and began a crusade to collect archival material about Queensland’s past”.

He resigned from that office in 1954 in order to study overseas, and on his return in 1955 presented a Ph.D. thesis on Liberalism in Queensland, and wrote an important paper about Colonial Society in Queensland from 1860 to 1890. At about this time he also commenced research on the period of Labor Government. There is some opinion that Morrison had hoped to win the commission to write a history of Queensland to be published to coincide with the centenary of separation in 1959. However, the commission was awarded by the Centenary Celebrations Council of Queensland, to Sir Raphael Cilento and Mr Clem Lack, who together wrote Triumph in the Tropics.

I think it fair to say that Sir Raphael’s more important contribution to the Society was in rebuilding its strength and membership, first as a Vice President and then as President from 1953 to 1968. It is regrettable that, by the time of the centenary, a scholarly, balanced and broad general history of Queensland had not been written — a need which has not yet been fully met. Of course publications such as Ross Johnston’s one volume summary, The Call of the Land and Geoffrey Bolton’s A Thousand Miles Away — A History of North Queensland to 1920, both make important contributions to the history of the State.

Indeed, the resurgence of interest in historical matters, as expressed through the expansion of activity in social history, local and family history, and the focus upon the role of women, of minorities and so on, has meant that Queensland history is now being documented and recorded more comprehensively than at any time before.

We are now at a crucial juncture regarding the collection of oral history, when the recollections of Queenslanders whose knowledge of daily life before the advance of the technological age, is being dimmed by age or lost with their passing. It seems to me that there is an important role for members of local historical societies in capturing the recollections of elderly people about the many details of daily life before the widespread use of motor transport which transformed communications and access to supplies, and before other innovations which altered the pattern and quality of life.
Other events, such as the creation of a chair in Australian History at the University of Queensland in 1989, suggest that the study of Australian and Queensland history is gaining further momentum. Furthermore, the attainment of centenaries by local authorities, by schools, by large institutions such as hospitals, has stimulated and continues to trigger a wave of historical publications, albeit of variable quality. However, it is reassuring to see the number of organisations which have commissioned professional historians to take on the task of researching and writing their histories.

So while there is optimism for the future, how might the existing historical writing about Queensland be described? Among the earliest general writing about Queensland was the work of John Dunmore Lang, entitled *Cooksland* and published in 1847. It, and the revised version renamed *Queensland* which was published in 1861, was aimed at winning support in London for Lang’s view of how the colony should be developed. He sought to persuade the Colonial Office that the cultivation of cotton and the immigration of free, white settlers were keys to the success of this part of Northern Australia. His principal intention of persuading British readers makes his works less interesting than those which relied more on documentation and personal recollection.

A more interesting and prolific writer was the journalist, pamphleteer and engineer, William Coote who wrote on many aspects of Queensland affairs including immigration, the railways, and electoral distribution - a matter which appears to be of almost perennial interest in this State. His *History*, which was published as a book in 1882, covers the period 1770 to Separation in 1859 and is the work for which Coote is most often remembered.

Another early history was published in 1895 by John James Knight. He, too, was a journalist, and he used a variety of documentary and oral sources in order to write *In the Early Days*. He also edited the notes and diaries of Nehemiah Bartley who drew pen portraits of the prominent participants in the social, political and sporting life of Queensland. Another similar set of personal recollections — *Opals and Agates*, written by Bartley — was published in 1892.

The centenary year of 1888 brought forth a number of historical publications, including *The Genesis of Queensland*, the rather rambling and turgid recollections of the explorer Henry Stuart Russell, and *The Jubilee History of Queensland* published by the Aldine Publishing Company. This latter work is in a genre which MacIntyre describes as “history in progress”. The works of this sort (and I quote) “remained wedded to the notion of continuous progress. They were concerned with recording what MacAulay had described as the history of physical, of moral and of intellectual improvement, which in this case was measured in flocks and crops, bricks and mortar and then in the civilisation these made possible.”
Several other volumes were published in this style — *Our First half Century*, put out by the Government printer to celebrate the golden anniversary of separation, and the huge three volume *History of Queensland* published progressively over the years 1919 to 1923. It was subtitled 'An Epitome of Progress' and placed particular emphasis upon the biographies of people on the land and in business. Its one thousand pages are liberally sprinkled with solemn photographs of men of all ages. There are, as well, photographs of houses, shops, buildings, horses and other livestock.

While the numerous photographs of horses have captions which list the sires, the dams and important trophies won, the occasional women or children, who happened to appear in the foreground of some photographs of domestic establishments, have their anonymity preserved in the captions which read, for example, "Residence of Mr E.J. Easton, Bundamba" or "Ruwenzori — residence of Mr C.M. Curr, Warwick". Despite these shortcomings these volumes provide a valuable pictorial and biographical record of many of the men, buildings and stock in Queensland during the early quarter of this century.

The works of contemporary historians supplement the varied output of earlier historians and writers. Collections of papers such as those which are published by the R.H.S.Q., the John Oxley Library, the Brisbane History Group and those in the series of Lectures on North Queensland History address a great number of important questions in the history of the State. It is pleasing to see that special interest publications — such as those of the National Trust and of the Amphion Press for example — address such matters as the history of medicine and our man-made heritage.

I am optimistic that participation in this conference will be a further stimulus to more high quality work on the history of Queensland. I commend the Federation of Australian Historical Societies on having chosen to meet this year in Queensland. I have pleasure in declaring this conference and the annual meeting of the Federation of Australian Historical Societies to be officially opened.