

[Professional Historians Association NSW Inc](#)

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What is the PHA?

The Professional Historians Association NSW Inc (PHA NSW) is the organisation representing qualified historians who are professionally employed or commissioned to undertake historical work. Similar organisations exist in most Australian states (though their objectives and membership criteria may vary) and liaison and information exchange occurs through a National Council.

The PHA NSW generally draws its membership from New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory. Membership, however, is not restricted by place of business or residence. The PHA NSW has strict professional criteria for membership and is thus an association for practising professional historians. It is akin to associations for other professionals such as architects, doctors, surveyors and planners.

What are the PHA's objectives?

The Association's objectives are:

- i) To set and maintain standards of professional practice;
- ii) To promote the concept of professional history and the status of professional historians in the community;
- iii) To represent professional historians in contractual and employment matters;
- iv) To inform professional historians and prospective employers of acceptable standards of employment;
- v) To encourage professional development by means such as seminars, workshops, publications;
- vi) To collect and disseminate information of interest to professional historians;
- vii) To maintain links with similar organisations;
- viii) To maintain a Register of its Members and Associate Members.

THE PHA NSW CODE OF PRACTICE

PREAMBLE

The objects of the Professional Historians Association are contained in its Constitution. Included is the duty to 'set and maintain standards of professional practice' (s2[i]). The Association has also drawn up a Code of Practice which deals with basic issues such as the use of evidence, relations with colleagues and informants as well as negotiation with clients. The Code recognises that the vitality of historical enquiry depends upon contributions from historians holding diverse points of view, but its integrity also presupposes the acceptance of certain professional 'ground rules'. Adherence to this Code is a condition of membership of the Association. Clients and prospective clients are also invited to consult the Code as it clarifies the obligations and rights of the professional historian.

The Code has been formulated to embrace the practice of all Association members. However, given the variety of tasks carried out by those members, it cannot cover every ethical dilemma. The changing demands made upon member historians are raising issues still to be negotiated. When working in Aboriginal history and oral history, or when producing material for broadcast media such as radio, television and CD-ROM, questions of cultural sensitivity and the balance between the historian's public and private obligations take on a particular importance. Sometimes the nature of the project or the client means that a historian will negotiate rights which she or he would normally take for granted, such as the right to decide what will or will not be published and who owns the final work. The Association is prepared to advise members on reconciling the needs of clients, the conditions imposed by informants and the professional standards of the historian within the framework of the Code. The Association reminds members that their work is affected by current statutes, notably privacy and copyright legislation, and can direct members to the appropriate statutory bodies for advice on their legal obligations. Members needing such advice should contact the Secretary, Professional Historians Association, GPO Box 2437, Sydney NSW 2001. Members may also find it useful to consult other professional Codes of Practice, such as that of the Oral History Association of Australia.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

1. Members will not make false claims when presenting their credentials (curriculum vitae, biographical notices, references etc).

2. Members will apply strict professional criteria to all matters of appointment, promotion and payment of colleagues and assistants, having regard to the requirements of equal opportunity and related legislation.
3. Members will take care that those working under their direction are given reasonable opportunities to advance their professional expertise. It follows they will not abuse their authority to hinder the career advancement of assistance or colleagues and will ensure that they receive credit for their contribution to any project.
4. Members will not claim as their own, work to which they contributed a small part.
5. Members will not, without due permission, use any confidential information acquired in the course of their work, except where such disclosure may be justified at law.
6. Members will disclose to their client and to any other party to the work any conflict of interest which arises. If a conflict exists which compromises the integrity of the work the historian should withdraw her/his services.

HISTORICAL STANDARDS

7. Members have a duty to their discipline to ensure that public and clients are made aware that what the historian offers is an interpretation, however authoritative. They must, therefore, be prepared to cite the evidence on which their interpretation is based. They will not deliberately falsify or suppress evidence which runs contrary to their interpretation.
8. When dealing with communities or individuals, members will inform themselves as to the cultural and political situation of that community or individual, such as the historical exploitation of indigenous peoples. Members should be prepared to consult over projects and negotiate any special cultural and other requirements which that community or individual wishes to be observed.
9. Members will respect the wishes of informants when engaged in oral history and honour any promises made regarding editing, confidentiality and other entitlements. Before any interview members will discuss with their informants the mutual rights and responsibilities involved in participating in this form of history.
10. Members will respect the integrity of research materials. They will not engage in vandalism or misappropriation of such materials whether in public or private ownership. They will make reasonable efforts to ensure the preservation of materials which appear at risk through neglect, threat of destruction or any other cause.
11. Members will clearly acknowledge the use of existing sources, published and unpublished, to avoid plagiarism.

THE PROFESSIONAL HISTORIANS ASSOCIATION

12. Members will not claim to act on behalf of the PHA NSW or its Management Committee without the express authority of that Committee.

NON-COMPLIANCE WITH THE CODE

If any person considers a member of the Professional Historians Association NSW to be guilty of unethical or unfair practice, they should present the relevant information to the Secretary of the Association. The Secretary will present the matter to the next scheduled meeting of the Management Committee. The Management Committee will seek information and/or submissions from the member in question and any other persons involved. Where the Management Committee is of the opinion that a member has breached any provision of this Code it may:

- a) expel such member subject to s3(1) of the Constitution; or
- b) not expel on the condition that the member
 - i) undertakes to resign from membership of the Professional Historians Association NSW forthwith, or on a date set by the Management Committee;
 - ii) makes forthwith, or on a date set by the Management Committee, a written or verbal, public or non-public, confidential or non-confidential (all as determined by the Management Committee) statement to the Association, an employer, a client or other persons (as determined by the Management Committee) which is satisfactory to the Management Committee; or
 - iii) complies with any combination of the above conditions as determined by the Management Committee.

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