



**The University of the Third Age
in the Nambucca Valley**

OUR HISTORY

U3A Nambucca Valley Association Incorporated

Ian MacDiarmid, 2007

Author's note

In writing this history I have not attempted to create a literary masterpiece but have simply listed in chronological order events which I consider have been significant to the development of our U3A. In my research I have read all the minutes and all the newsletters, and have consulted extensively with all persons I could contact who had played active roles in the formation of the organisation. What follows is my understanding of what happened, compiled to the best of my ability. If in some detail I have got it wrong, then I apologise, but peoples' recollections of past events do vary and it is sometimes impossible to be absolutely certain.

The Beginning

In 1968 the French Government, recognising a need in the broader community, introduced legislation requiring French universities to provide ongoing learning for people who had reached the "third age" of their lives. The first age was the time of childhood and adolescence, the second was the time of earning a living and rearing children, and the third age was the time of retirement when people now had the opportunity to pursue personal interests.

The initiative bore fruit, and at a summer school in 1973 the University of Toulouse started the world's first U3A, catering specifically for the needs of older citizens. The curriculum and the courses were provided by the University but, unlike mainstream university courses, there were no prior qualifications needed to enrol, no fees, and no exams. The venture was immediately successful, and very soon U3As were established at several other universities in France, and then elsewhere in Europe. In 1981 the concept crossed the Channel and was taken up by Cambridge University.

In Cambridge they comprehensively changed the way a U3A operates. The original concept of no qualifications, no fees and no exams was retained, but now the U3A was completely divorced from the university and became an independent, autonomous and self-funding body. At Cambridge they also introduced the principle that "those who teach shall learn and those who learn shall teach, and there shall be no distinction between the two". The result was that U3As were no longer dependent upon universities, but were now on their own to source, fund and deliver whatever courses they chose.

This model harked back to the original meaning of the word "university". Today when we think of a university we usually envisage big buildings, crowded lecture theatres and vocational courses leading to a career, but it was not always like that. In its original form a university was simply a gathering together of learned people who met to exchange views and to learn from one another. And that is exactly how Universities of the Third Age function today.

Now known as the "Cambridge model", this new independent type of U3A became extremely popular, and very soon U3As were springing up all over the UK and then around the world. Because of the autonomous nature of the many U3As now in existence it is impossible to accurately count them or to know how many members they might have, but it was estimated (2007) that there are now well over 3,000 U3As world wide, with many hundreds of thousands of members between them. The one thing that is known is that their numbers are growing rapidly.

It is interesting to note that although all U3As are autonomous and therefore free to operate as they wish and to deliver whatever courses they choose, the ways in which most U3As operate around the world are remarkably similar. Even their courses are frequently similar in subject matter. Obviously a successful formula has been achieved, and has become self-perpetuating.

In some countries regional councils or networks of U3As have developed, but these exist simply to exchange information, facilitate the operations of their member U3As, and sometimes to provide

course content. They have no authority at all over their individual member U3As, all of which remain fiercely independent.

In the United Kingdom most U3As belong to a network known as the Third Age Trust, or TAT. One of the principal activities of TAT is to provide a wide variety of courses which can be taught by member U3As, and in fact many of their courses are available in Australia, via the Internet.

In Australia both Victoria and NSW have developed state councils or networks as facilitating bodies, but again they have no authority over the activities of their members, and not all U3As have chosen to belong to them. At the time of writing, Victoria and NSW are the only states with state councils or networks, although there are many individual U3As in the other states.

U3A in Australia

Australia was very quick to pick up the U3A concept and our first U3A, City of Melbourne, was established in 1984. Others quickly followed in Victoria and then across the country. Today there are more than 200 Australian U3As with an estimated total of over 63,000 members.

The movement reached New South Wales in 1987. (It reached New Zealand in 1989.)

One uniquely Australian development was the creation in 1998, at Griffith University in Queensland, of the world's first *virtual* University of the Third Age. Known simply as U3A Online, it delivers all its courses only via the Internet. Some of its courses are sourced from the Third Age Trust in the UK, but many are written in Australia. Individual U3As can become "corporate members" of U3A Online, and this entitles them for a small fee to download and teach any of U3A Online's courses. Individual members of these U3As are also able to study the U3A Online courses via the Internet, either by private study or with an online tutor.

By 2006 Universities of the Third Age had become the fastest growing educational sector in Australia, and today are recognised by both state and federal governments as an educational institution. Most U3As however do not receive any funding from either state or Federal governments, and in fact most of them prefer it that way, fearing that with funding would come control. Many do nevertheless receive some assistance in kind from their local councils, usually in the form of provision of facilities or assistance with a newsletter.

There is no national body in Australia and, in the opinion of many members, no need for one, although the U3A Network (NSW) does accept interstate U3As as members.

U3A in the Nambucca Valley

As is sometimes the case with a good idea whose time has come, U3A in the Nambucca Valley resulted from two quite separate endeavours, each being pursued independently of the other.

In 1988 a group of local women who used to meet regularly hit upon the idea of forming a U3A in Nambucca Heads. After contacting the already established Coffs Harbour U3A and making various enquiries, they held an informal meeting at the home of local resident Barbara Flower to discuss the proposal. Encouraged by Barbara Flower and another enthusiastic local resident Barbara Box, those present decided to call a public meeting of interested citizens to see if there was sufficient community interest to make a local U3A viable.

Meanwhile, unknown to this group and at about the same time, another local resident Joie Eriksen had seen an interview on ABC Television with a spokesman from a Hunter Valley U3A, and Joie thought that the formation of a U3A would be desirable in the Nambucca Valley. So she contacted the TV station who put her in touch with the interviewee, and he in turn put her in touch with the newly formed NSW Council of U3A [now called the U3A Network (NSW)] whose then president was enthusiastically helpful. He sent her all the information needed to start a U3A locally, and also introduced her to an existing U3A in Port Macquarie to act as a mentor. Joie promptly set about gathering local support and calling a public meeting. At this point the two groups became aware of each other's existence, and decided to join forces. The result was a meeting of both interested groups held on Joie's verandah on 17th July 1998.

Those recorded as present were Joie Eriksen, Dorothy Mayes, Brett Eriksen, Pat Richardson, Dorothy Fraser, Sheila Wheeler, Agnes Cannon, Pearl Farrell, Claudia Hargreaves, Colin Hargreaves, Shirley James, Meg Hosking, Len Rose, Jessie Rose, Noreen McDonald, Peter McDonald, and Min Cameron. The two Barbaras were not present, but were kept informed of developments.

At that meeting a steering committee was formed for the purpose of starting a U3A in the Nambucca Valley, and in due course a public meeting was held in the Nambucca Entertainment Centre on 18th August 1998, attracting about 60 persons. From that public meeting Nambucca Valley U3A officially came into being, with Joie Eriksen as the first president.

Other inaugural office bearers were Barbara Flower (secretary), Leslea Miles (membership), Sheila Wheeler (treasurer) and Brett Eriksen (publicity).

The new committee immediately became active, a quarterly newsletter was commenced, and delivery of the first four courses started in late 1998. The first newsletter came out in October of that year. The first three courses to be conducted were German Language (Rick Zietlow), Philosophy (Denise Brauman) and Mah Jong (Jennifer Watson), with French Language (Chris Hamilton) following very soon afterwards.

That first Newsletter had listed a total of 17 courses proposed for 1999. Our U3A was off to a flying start!

Initially it was also intended that public forums would be held monthly, but the difficulty in securing enough guest speakers eventually made this frequency impractical.

Those first four courses continued through into 1999, when a total of 16 courses were conducted. Also in 1999 a constitution was adopted, and general arrangements for the ongoing management of the organisation were put in place.

At first courses were organised on a term basis, but experience showed that this was unnecessary and the practice developed of permitting course leaders to commence their courses at any time of year that made sense to them. This unstructured approach proved successful, and has probably resulted in the ability to deliver more courses than would otherwise have been the case.

The first annual general meeting was held in November 1999. Barbara Box now became president, with Barbara Flower vice-president, Brian Lucas secretary and Les McKinna treasurer.

Now began a year of settling in, with something of a "revolving door" of people coming and going on the committee, with the result that several committee members had at times to "wear two hats". Nevertheless classes continued successfully, and membership increased.

At the 2000 annual general meeting Barbara Box, Barbara Flower and Brian Lucas were all re-elected to their previous positions, with June Harrison taking over as treasurer. Lyn Lyneham now became course coordinator. In retrospect 2000 was seen as a good year, when real progress was made.

During 2001 both course numbers and membership continued to grow. Our first U3A web site was established, a forerunner of the present one. The desirability of becoming incorporated was recognised. A sub-committee consisting of June Harrison and John Gardner was appointed to rewrite the constitution to make it suitable for incorporation.

At the 2001 AGM, it was decided to move the date of future annual general meetings from November to March, meaning that there would be no AGM in 2002. Barbara Box was re-elected as president for her third term. Audrey Williams was now vice-president, and Barbara Flower was again secretary. June Harrison was re-elected as treasurer. Special arrangements were made for the change-over of committees during this period, with the 2001 committee members remaining in office until March 2002, when the new committee took over. Total membership had now passed the 100 mark.

The highlight of 2002 was our incorporation as a not-for-profit body under the Associations Incorporation Act 1984. This was achieved on 13th August, and necessitated the adoption of a new letterhead. Our present name became official at that time. The period from late 2001 to March 2003 was one of consolidation and steady growth, with the organisation entering 2003 stronger than ever.

June Harrison now became president, with John Gardner vice-president, Margaret Tait secretary and Tom Ward treasurer. Barbara Box and Lyn Lyneham remained on the committee, which thus had an effective mix of both new blood and experience.

The next year was again one of steady progress, with course numbers and membership continuing to increase. The organisation was now financially sound, with sufficient cash reserves for emergencies. Our first stand-alone Christmas party was held in 2003, previous parties having either followed immediately after annual general meetings or, in 2002, after a forum.

In March 2004 John Gardner became president and Dina Wallbank vice-president. June Harrison became secretary and Tom Ward was re-elected as treasurer. Lyn Lyneham stepped down as course coordinator and was replaced in that role by Patricia Quinn-Boas.

The years since then have been a time of continuous growth, with membership numbers increasing to well over 200. In 2005 we received a temporary membership boost when the numerically small Bellingen U3A ceased to operate and a number of their members transferred to us, however most of these folk did not subsequently renew their memberships.

The year 2005 also saw the introduction of our annual U3A Handbook, an attractive booklet which explains how U3A operates and lists details of courses available for that year. Largely the creation of our indefatigable secretary June Harrison, it is a mine of information for members and prospective members alike.

Our financial position has consolidated and, barring some unforeseen calamity, we are now financially secure. This is especially pleasing in view of the fact that we have never increased our membership fee since the day we first commenced operations in 1998 — surely a tribute to good financial management on the part of successive committees. It was \$25 then and it is \$25 now. The fee for a couple living at the same address is only \$40, which is actually lower than ten years ago.

During 2006 we were able to deliver nearly 40 face-to-face courses, including some which were repeated by popular demand. Our members also gained the ability to access about another 30 courses from the Internet, via our corporate membership of U3A Online. Thus a member of Nambucca Valley U3A could choose from approximately 70 courses during the year. The availability of so many courses has been by any standards an impressive achievement for a small regional U3A. A similar situation pertained during 2007.

Another significant ongoing activity conducted by our U3A is a program of public forums and educational day trips. Held in the Nambucca Entertainment Centre several times each year the forums, which are free and open to the public as well as to members, consist of lectures by invited guest speakers on a wide variety of subjects. Typically the keynote address will be followed by a question and answer session in which all may participate. Recent forum subjects have included such diverse matters as a day in the life of an ambulance officer, guide dogs for the blind, Friends of the ABC, garbage recycling, and graphology. Recent U3A day trips have included visits to Coffs Harbour Botanic Gardens, the Port Macquarie Observatory, the Macnuts macadamia processing plant and a macadamia farm, the Coffs Coast recycling Depot, and an educational river cruise.

One particularly pleasing feature of Nambucca Valley U3A is the number of inaugural members who have remained active in the organisation to this day. This is surely a compliment to the organisation that they helped bring into being.

Of course no U3A can survive without the willing and dedicated input of many volunteer course leaders. These people freely give of their time and effort to benefit their fellow members, and we would be lost without them. Nobody is paid to do anything in our U3A, everything is voluntary.

We have also been fortunate in having Nambucca Shire Council photo-copy our newsletters for us free of charge. This started in 1998 under then General Manager Tom Port and continues to this day. Many U3As find that one of their biggest expenses is the production of their newsletter, and we have been extremely fortunate in never having had to meet any printing costs.

The following table is interesting from a historical point of view:

Year	President	V-President	Secretary	Treasurer	Course Co-ordinator
1998-1999	Joie Eriksen	Dorothy Mayes	Barbara Flower/ Brian Lucas	Sheila Wheeler	Barbara Box
2000	Barbara Box	Barbara Flower	Brian Lucas	Les McKinna	Barbara Box
2001	Barbara Box	Barbara Flower	Brian Lucas	June Harrison	Lyn Lyneham
2002	Barbara Box	Audrey Williams	Barbara Flower	June Harrison	Lyn Lyneham
2003	June Harrison	John Gardner	Margaret Tait	Tom Ward	Lyn Lyneham
2004	John Gardner	Dina Wallbank	June Harrison	Tom Ward	Patricia Quinn-Boas
2005	John Gardner	Anne Holgate	June Harrison	Tom Ward	Patricia Quinn-Boas
2006	John Gardner	Anne Holgate	June Harrison	Mike Bucchorn	Barbara Visser/ Alison Savage
2007	John Gardner	Anne Holgate	June Harrison	Mike Buchhorn	Alison Savage

U3A World Wide

Although as already stated all U3As of the Cambridge model are autonomous, independent and self-governing, there is nevertheless a world body which acts as a unifying force and effectively glues all U3As together as part of the same world wide movement. Fittingly located in France, it is the Association Internationale des Universités du Troisième Âge (AIUTA). A brief history of the early days of the movement appears below, downloaded from their website, followed by a free translation:

Une jeune initiative de trente ans...

La première Université Permanente a vu le jour à Toulouse en 1973, à l'Université des Sciences Sociales où le Professeur Pierre Vellas, de la faculté de Droit et de Sciences économique, conçut le projet d'offrir aux personnes du troisième âge un programme d'activités qui respecterait les conditions, les besoins et les aspirations propres à cet âge de la vie.

Après des débuts modestes et les premières conférences et activités physiques les salles de cours devinrent vite bondées. Les personnes âgées étaient prêtes à recevoir, en même temps que les bienfaits de la culture intellectuelle et physique, l'épanouissement social et affectif que procure la rencontre avec d'autres dans le partage d'aspirations communes.

Ce premier exemple ne fut pas long à être suivi et plusieurs universités mirent sur pied à leur tour des programmes destinés aux personnes âgées.

C'est en France que le mouvement s'est développé le plus rapidement, le nombre des Universités du Troisième Age ne cessant ensuite d'augmenter au fil des années.

Après la Belgique ce furent l'Espagne, la Suisse, la Pologne, le Canada, la Suède, l'Italie, les États Unis, l'Angleterre, l'Allemagne... puis l'Amérique Latine, l'Afrique, l'Asie.

Le Professeur Pierre Vellas fonde alors l'Association Internationale des Universités du Troisième Age, lieu idéal d'échanges et de rencontres pour tous les responsables et usagers d'institutions universitaires grâce à la mise en commun des expériences et des travaux de recherche.

— *d'après Roger Bernier(Sociologie et Sociétés, vol XVI)*

(This text downloaded from the AIUTA web site, April 2007)

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Free translation:

A forward looking initiative from 30 years ago

The first “continuing university” (U3A) came into being at Toulouse in 1973, at the University of Social Sciences, when Professor Pierre Vellas from the faculty of Law and Economic Sciences conceived the idea of offering, to persons of the “third age”, a program of activities which would be appropriate to the needs and aspirations of their time of life.

After modest beginnings the classrooms quickly filled. Older persons were found to be very ready to receive not only the benefits of intellectual and physical training but also the social and emotional growth which resulted from the sharing of common interests.

This first experiment was quickly copied, with several other universities in turn setting up their own programs designed for older persons.

In France the movement initially developed rapidly, and the number of Universities of the Third Age increased continuously with the passing years.

Then came Belgium, then Spain, Switzerland, Poland, Canada, Sweden, Italy, the United States, England, Germany ... then Latin America, Africa, Asia....

Professor Pierre Vellas then founded the International Association of Universities of the Third Age (AIUTA) which he saw as providing an ideal medium for exchanges between the leaders and the users of the academic institutions which were all being brought together by this common interest.

Appendix:

U3A NAMBUCCA VALLEY - 1998-2008

List of Executive/Committee Members since inception

**17.7.98 - INAUGURAL MEETING TO DISCUSS FORMATION OF A U3A
IN THE NAMBUCCA VALLEY**

President	Joie Eriksen
Secretary	Barbara Flower
Membership Secretary	Leslea Miles
Treasurer:	Sheila Wheeler
Publicity Officer	Brett Eriksen

Additional people present: Dorothy Mayes, Pat Richardson, Dorothy Fraser, Agnes Cannon, Pearl Farrell, Claudia Hargreaves, Colin Hargreaves, Shirley Jones, Meg Hosking, Len Rose, Jessie Rose, Noreen McDonald, Peter McDonald, Min Cameron.

18.8.98 - PUBLIC MEETING TO FORM U3A NAMBUCCA VALLEY

President	Joie Eriksen
Secretary	Barbara Flower
Membership Secretary	Leslea Miles
Treasurer	Sheila Wheeler
Publicity Officer	Brett Eriksen

15.10. 98 Resignation of Treasurer - Sheila Wheeler due to moving from area
Resignation of President - rejected by meeting - motion of confidence passed.
Dorothy Mayes assisted by Denise Brauman to hold temporary role of Secretary

4.11.98 Brian Lucas elected Secretary. Committee expanded by 3 - Heather Heywood,
Chris Hamilton and Barbara Box.

29.11.99 - 1ST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

President	Barbara Box
Vice President	Barbara Flower
Secretary	Brian Lucas
Treasurer	Les McKenna
Members	Denise Brauman, Joie Eriksen, Trevor Francis, June Harrison, Coralie Lett, Jo Smyth

21.11.2000 - 2ND AGM

President	Barbara Box
Vice President	Barbara Flower
Secretary	Brian Lucas
Treasurer	June Harrison
Members	Sandra Ellis, Dianne James, Lyn Lyneham, Jo Smyth, Audrey Williams

13.11.01 - 3rd AGM

President	Barbara Box
Vice President	Audrey Williams
Secretary	Barbara Flower

Treasurer June Harrison
Committee Members Brian Lucas, Lyn Lyneham, John Pyle, Margaret Tait,
Joan Kocken, John Gardner, Jo Smyth

Brian Lucas left committee to move to Central Coast area in January.

Because of changes to the Constitution to allow smoother changeover of office bearers and to the change in the financial year from July-June to January-December, there was no AGM in 2002.

25.03.03 - AGM

President June Harrison
Vice President John Gardner
Secretary Margaret Tait
Treasurer Tom Ward
Committee Members Jo Smyth, Lyn Lyneham, Dina Wallbank, Barbara Box,
Anne Holgate, Pearl Farrell.

16.03.04 - AGM

President John Gardner
Vice President Dina Wallbank
Secretary June Harrison
Treasurer Tom Ward
Committee Members Jeff Hall, Patty Boyd, Anne Holgate, Marguerite Hamilton,
Patricia Quinn-Boas

16.03.05 - AGM

President John Gardner
Vice President Anne Holgate
Secretary June Harrison
Treasurer Tom Ward
Committee Members Moya Connors, Mike Buchhorn, Narelle Degraa,
Marguerite Hamilton, Ian MacDiarmid, Patricia Quinn-Boas

14.03.06 - AGM

President John Gardner
Vice President Anne Holgate
Secretary June Harrison
Treasurer Mike Buchhorn
Committee Members Moya Connors, Marguerite Hamilton, Ian MacDiarmid,
Llynne Salom, Alison Savage, Barbara Visser

21.03.07 - AGM

President John Gardner
Vice President Anne Holgate
Secretary June Harrison
Treasurer Mike Buchhorn
Committee Members Chris Birch, Moya Connors, Marguerite Hamilton,
Ian MacDiarmid, Llynne Salom, Alison Savage