



Laurie Copping Background

Laurie Copping joined the Children's Book Council of Australia ACT Branch in 1962 and he remained an active member until his death in September 2003.

From the onset, Laurie was heavily involved with the Children's Book Council of Australia. Some of his roles within the organisation included being the president of the ACT Branch numerous times as well as National president, ACT judge for the CBCA Awards (1973-74), National archivist from 1988, regular reviewer for the CBCA journal *Reading Time* and a member of its editorial board. He was also instrumental in the setting up of the Lu Rees Archives at the University of Canberra in 1980, where he gave many volunteer hours for various projects. One activity of which he was especially proud was overseeing a donation of 3000 books which had been used by Walter McVitty during his teaching years in Melbourne. This involved many hours of checking the Lu Rees Archives holdings to determine which of the McVitty books were needed for the Archives.

One of Laurie's strongest interests was the establishment and growth of the national archives of the Children's Book Council of Australia. After the formation of the National Council in 1959, there was discussion from time to time regarding the records of the organisation. When a government grant of \$500 to each Branch of the Children's Book Council became available in 1974, the ACT Branch decided to make a start by establishing an Archives and Records section and gathering the records of the Council and of Australian authors and illustrators of book for children. Lu Rees, who was then president of the ACT Branch, proposed this idea to all the Branches, who agreed. The following year an Archives Committee was set up including Lu Rees, Laurie Copping, Millicent Jones and Jill Gamble. It was Laurie who persisted year after year to fill gaps in the Children's Book Council's records. In 1988, the Annual General Meeting of the Children's Book Council of Australia formally appointed Laurie 'National Archivist', a voluntary position he held for the remainder of his life.

Laurie, as Principal of Hall Primary School, offered his school for annual writing and illustrating for children's seminars, for which Canberra became very well known. They were held there from 1974-1982. People came from all over Australia to attend these informative sessions and audiences topped over 225. When these seminars were organised there were no national CBCA conferences, so they were ahead of their time. The talks and photographs from these seminars are now being digitised with a Community Heritage Grant. These form an early record of Australian children's literature from 1975 when Australian children's literature was entering the world stage. As part of his dedication to the school and village of Hall, Laurie served as Honorary Curator of the Hall Village Schoolhouse having retired in 1981 after twenty years as Principal. The Official Opening, by His Excellency the Governor-General, Sir Ninian Stephen, took place on 19th April 1986, and is marked by a brass plaque on the building. In 2004 Governor-General Michael Jeffery dedicated the Museum to Laurie Copping and it is now known as the 'Laurie Copping Heritage Centre'.

Together with John Tyrrel, Laurie also organised the very early children's seminars and encouraged children to express their views on the award winners. Another contribution to Children's Literature in the ACT was Laurie's role as a long time reviewer of children's literature for *The Canberra Times* and articles he wrote for Children's Book Week segments. He was admired for his wise counsel, mentoring of those new to children's literature, and his vast memory of all that had happened in the Children's Book Council over 40 years. Whenever there was a question that could not be answered, someone would always say, 'Let's ask Laurie'.

Recognition for Laurie's work came in many forms, most notably a Life Membership of CBCA ACT, the Inaugural Recipient of the Lu Rees Archives Award for outstanding service to children's literature in 1988, an OAM for services to Children's Literature in 1990, the Inaugural Citation for Outstanding Service to the Children's Book Council of Australia in 1991 and the Nan Chauncy Award 1993.

Laurie's contribution to children's literature in Canberra and nationally has been enormously significant and the CBCA ACT Branch is proud to name this Award after him.