It seemed so long to wait when John and Jan Ham stood up at The St. Louis in ‘96 and said they would be willing to chair a Convention in Australia if enough AMICAns were willing to go. A show of hands at that time did, indeed, show enough enthusiasm to send the Hams back to Australia with the task of planning our second international convention for the year 2001.

Time has flown by, and on February 18th our group “invaded” the lovely city of Melbourne, Australia. Our hotel, The Hilton on the Park, was located, as the name implied, right across the street from a Park. This made it very convenient to spend Sunday relaxing from the flight if jet lag set in.

We needed to rest up on Sunday, because Monday found us having a welcome breakfast in the Hotel at 7:30, and then off to the coaches for a trip to “Puffing Billy”, the antique narrow gauge Steam Train built in 1900.

The train pulled us on a scenic trip up the mountain, and it was a beautiful day for a train ride. Some of the AMICAns joined the local tradition of sitting on the side rail and hanging their feet over the side.

Lunch for the day was provided at the Yering Station Winery. It was a lovely ride to the Winery, and once there, we were introduced to an Australian custom...Alternative service. Now what that means is, there are two meals served, and they are put on the tables alternatively. If you prefer the meal you didn’t get, you have to hope someone at the table feels the same way and you can trade! It made for some interesting bartering...especially when the desserts arrived.

We made a short stop at the Healesville Sanctuary on the way back, and some of us saw a platypus for the first time, along with koala and kangaroo.

After that, it was back to the Hotel for dinner on your own, or an early evening for some...Jet lag yet again!

Tuesday we had Breakfast at the hotel again, and then off to the coaches for a trip to Melba Hall.

This year the workshop venue was different than usual, since Steve Rattle came up with the concept of each presenter demonstrating once only, but one after the other in the hall, so there was no need to miss any of them.

Denis Condon started off the morning with his presentation “My 53 years collecting piano rolls”, followed by Peter Phillips, “Electronic piano roll performances”, Frank Van Straten gave a talk on “Dame Nellie Melba”, Ian Dodds told us about “Vintage recordings live again on CD”, Graham Code entertained us with “Australian Pianists”. While all this was going on, Jan Ham led the “Cross Stitch” class in another room. (I have to mention that the cross stitch sampler this year was just terrific, with some of the animals unique to Australia and a map of Australia.)

After lunch in the Hall, a short walk next door led us to the Percy Grainger Museum. The Grainger Museum was a treat, and presented a real insight into the man. (AMICAns know Percy Grainger from the piano rolls he cut.) We were fortunate to hear his own Weber Duo-Art piano, and to see his collection of pianos, his own designed clothes, and just a world of interesting things.

Then it was back to the Hotel for most of us, although those who were entering the pumper contest were able to stay at the Hall and practice.

Evening brought us the Welcome Dinner, which was really lovely. It was another Alternate Service dinner, with Chicken or Beef. Both entrees were super, and dessert was a Pavlova with fresh fruit and vanilla bean scented cream...Yummy! Coffee was served with homemade chocolates.

After dinner we were treated to silent movies of old-town Melbourne through time. It was very enjoyable, and very much in keeping with the convention.

One thing I should mention is that the Ham’s had arranged the seating so that every table had an Aussie or two sitting at it...a very hospitable way for us to meet new friends or renew old friendships. We were privileged at our table to have Frank and Dora Freedman, and we enjoyed ourselves immensely.

Wednesday we traveled to see two of Melbourne’s old theaters, the 1929 “Regent” and the Victorian era “Princess”. The “Princess” even has its own ghost, and Frank Van Straten was there to tell us about Federici, an opera tenor who died in the theater during a performance, and who has been haunting the place ever since. After the theater tour, some of us went to see an opal cutting and polishing demonstration in the city.

The afternoon was free to spend as we saw fit, and the attendees scattered in all directions, all looking for that special place. Many just sat around the park for a while before going.

John and Jan had arranged a very special dinner for us that evening, and none of us knew what was in store for us until we boarded the decorative and lighted tram car across the street from the Hotel, where we were served a fabulous dinner while the tram traveled around the city. We needed their entire fleet of three trams to feed all of the AMICAns. This was a real highlight of the trip, with very formal waiters attending to our every need. Who could have expected such luxury on a
Tramcar? The food and wine was excellent, and when we got back to the hotel about 11:00 p.m. we were ready for a good night’s rest.

I must mention, however, that many of us spent a lot of time in the evenings at the park, where the possums held court and entertained us. These possums are not at all like what we have back home, where they tend to be rather funny-looking creatures with a long rat-like tail. The possums in Australia and New Zealand are furry, cute, and have furry tails. They look cute, but are apparently a real nuisance since they have no natural enemies in either country, and so they do what animals do, and their population is booming. This is extremely hard on the natural habitat, and in New Zealand they are decimating the forests. Even in the park they have become a problem to the trees and shrubs. (New Zealand’s only natural mammal is a small bat...everything else has been brought in one way or another, and when you have a country with four flightless birds it isn’t a good idea to have animals brought in which feed on bird’s eggs and small animals.)

Anyway, I digress, but I should mention the huge bats which also live in the park, and which flew out every night. It was a very live area at night.

On Thursday we were again treated to breakfast and then on to the coaches for a trip to see the collections of Frank and Dora Freedman and Harold and Beverly Ball. I should mention that we were told again and again that “We don’t have the big collections over here” prior to arrival, but for my part, I saw some of the finest music boxes I had seen anywhere, and some really great orchestrions and pianos, too. I think we all need to realize that “big” isn’t (or shouldn’t be) the criteria for a collection.

Frank and Dora have amassed a lovely collection over the years, and we all enjoyed it immensely. From monkey organs and pianos to music boxes, their instruments played well, and were a pleasure to behold. Frank told us many stories of how he obtained some of the instruments, and what had gone into restoration.

They have a lovely home, and a beautiful yard, too. While we were outside a plane began skywriting above us, and when it got as far as “Marry me An” our own Anita Johnson got quite excited, feeling she must have picked up an admirer somewhere along the way, but unfortunately when it was finished, it was Ana, not Anita. (Unless the pilot couldn’t spell, of course, in which case it is a case of lost love forever)

Harold and Beverly have wonderful reproducing pianos, and lots of great music. They also have a player grand, which has great sound, and Julian Dyer kept many of us entertained with this instrument. Harold and Beverly also have a lovely home and beautiful garden. Of course, the men congregated in the workshop out back. The hospitality shown by both of these families was fantastic, and certainly much appreciated. We all owe them a vote of thanks.

Friday was a big day for most of us, with a trip to the Jirrahlinga Koala and Wildlife Park, to be met by staff members in front, each with an animal in their arms. This was started by Tehree Gordon as a sort of half-way house for injured animals, and has been kept going mainly by donations and the pet boarding facility on the premises. It is a fabulous place to visit, and the work they do there is just amazing. On arrival we were greeted with an Aussie morning tea of Billy Tea and Damper.

Then Tehree gave us all the photo ops we could ever want for pictures of ourselves with koalas, kangaroos, dingoes, birds, wombats, and other native animals. A couple of us even got to hold a baby kangaroo, all wrapped in a substitute pouch. He was the cutest little thing. I would have loved to bring him home, but I think U.S. Customs would have frowned upon that.

Another real treat was the Aboriginal man who played his didgeridoo. That is something to see and hear, and he was super at it. He could make so many sounds, and boy, were the video cameras going full blast.

Lunch was furnished at the Wildlife Park. We had a great barbecue, and then it was back to the coaches and on to the hotel. The coaches took us at 7 p.m. back to Melba Hall for the Pumper contest. Wine and cheese were served, and we were treated to the usual variety of music for the contest, with some really good rolls.

Contestants were Julian Dyer (who was not eligible to win, but did a demonstration), Valerie Saari, Selmer Nielsen, John Phillips, Mike Walter, and Ray Palmer.

The Piano used was a 1928 Beale Player Piano...an Australian Player Piano. It was a lovely, strong piano. It was lent for the contest by the parents of Steve Rattle, which was a very kind gesture. This year the winner was Mike Walter. “Footsie”, however, was missing and will be delivered to Mike later. (The trip from England was just too long for Julian to bring it along.) After the pumper contest there was a tribute to Len Luscombe. This was a super program, both entertaining and educational.

Saturday we rose early, had breakfast, and were off to the organ rally in Geelong. Lunch was supplied at “Smoresy’s” Restaurant right on the end of the pier with great harbor views, an all-you-can-eat affair, and boy, can AMICAns eat!!!!!

After lunch we wandered the shores of Geelong listening to the organs and admiring the scenery. It is a beautiful beach area. There were some really super organs, including a Dutch Street Organ that was hand-cranked, and it was fun to see a lot of our people up there cranking away. (Not to say anyone in our group was cranked, of course!) John and Jan had their Calliope there, complete with American and Australian flags!!! Some of the music, too, had a distinct American flavor. I think we need to make them honorary Yanks! They sure earned it!!!!

Most of us managed to squeeze in a ride on the Carousel, which is an Armitage-Herschell portable steam-driven carousel c.1892. This was purchased only in 1996 and completely restored to its former glory. Add to that a replica 1898 Gavioli Band organ, and what more can you want?????

Strolling along the park, we admired the Bollards, which are painted wooden structures all along the path...104 of them in all. They are carved and painted to represent everything from fishermen, the tin man, policemen, Scotsman, bathing beauties, and many other representations of the area population of yore. They are really fascinating, and each one I saw had a rabbit on it somewhere. If the organs weren’t there to distract us we could have just spent the day inspecting the art of the Bollards. Time flew by and we had to leave.

Back on the coaches again and off to Ballarat where John
Semmens, the fourth member of the small Convention Committee, was waiting to greet us at Peter Warburton's lovely old home, built in the late 1800's, and enjoyed his Orchestrelles and organs. The Orchestrelles sounded great, and the home was really fun to see. More good Aussie hospitality, and much thanks to Peter!

We set off to the center of Ballarat to see the oldest carillon in Australia, dating from 1869. We gathered around and held our breaths waiting, and waiting, and waiting, and...Seems the carillon was not going to work today! All was not lost, since we walked a couple of blocks back to Her Majesty’s Theater, which is Australia's oldest gold rush era theater. It is a lovely theater, and after a brief tour and some music on the impressive Compton theater organ, it was off across the street for dinner at the lovely Craig's Royal Hotel.

Then it was on board the coaches again for a trip to “Blood on the Southern Cross”. This is a hard show to explain if you didn’t see it for yourself. It is a light and sound show unfolding across a large area of an outdoor Museum, and surrounds the audience with this historical chapter in Australian history.

The story is about a battle on December 3 in 1854 when soldiers and police charged the stockade and the sleeping gold miners. It was a brief and bloody battle, the first time on Australian soil that men had fought and died together under their own flag - the flag of the Southern Cross. Clever use of sound and lighting effects puts you right on the scene, and it was a fascinating evening.

The Farewell breakfast was held Sunday in the Ballroom of the hotel, and it was a fitting end to the convention. Jan had been given a large teddy bear to give away, and they had decided that the first one to register would get “Ben” (yes, he came pre-named!). Well, since the first to register was Shirley Nix...I had the fun of carrying this teddy bear with me all over New Zealand...in and out of planes, buses, hotels. I sure got tired of hearing that I was going to have to buy an extra plane ticket for him...even the airline people gave me that line, but all is well...he’s home and resting on my bed.

It’s hard to find words to thank John and Jan and the Committee for all the work and time they put in on this Convention to make it the huge success that it was. They used the whole five years I’m sure, and it just couldn’t have been better! Thanks, too, to Steve Rattle who was the “right-hand man” during all the events, acting as announcer, emcee, and taking care of the Technical Talk music. We can’t forget to thank Ian Savins, who was tour guide, bus captain, and who, I believe, handled a lot of the Sydney arrangements.

From there, we were on to Sydney by plane and to The Boulevard Hotel. Sydney is the home of the Craig Robson collection, and what a fantastic collection that is! As we entered the museum the first thing most of us saw was the Dutch Street Organ, “The Clock”. It is a marvelous organ, hand-cranked, and again our people had a chance to show their cranking skill, or lack of same as the case might be.

As you passed the organ and went in further, around the corner was the breathtaking sight of the Taj Mahal...I can’t find words to describe this wonderful Mortier organ. It literally stopped most of us in our tracks, and when it played everyone just sat down and admired the music and the light show. What a gorgeous, fantastic instrument.

Other things in the museum were a double Violano, a robot band, an Arburo orchestration, a couple of other Dutch Street Organs, several really nice orchestrations, a lovely reproducing piano, a carousel, and so much more. Everywhere you looked you found a treasure.

Craig had a barbecue lunch for us, with lots of food, very delicious, and then a dessert bar. It was just a wonderful way to spend a day, and we felt we really didn’t want to leave, but time has a way of flying by.

Our spare time in Sydney was spent cruising the harbor, visiting the Opera House, walking around the lovely town and parks, shopping, shopping, and doing the things that tourists do in a town like Sydney, which is simply made for tourists.

Thanks also to Denis Condon, who held an unofficial open house for those who wanted to go. His collection of piano rolls is mind-boggling. He played any kind of music you wanted to hear, on whatever system you wanted to hear it on. It was a great evening...so much so that Frank and I went twice!

From Sydney, we flew to Wellington, New Zealand, where we boarded the coaches and on to the Hotel.

In the early evening we rode to the hilltop home of Michael and Gillian Woold. The bus ride up the mountain road was the thrill ride we needed to keep the adrenaline flowing. We did make it, and were greeted by Michael and Gillian and treated to a wonderful barbecue dinner. Michael started collecting about forty years ago, and has a home that overlooks Wellington Harbour, which is a spectacular view. We watched the sun go down, the moon rise and the lights come up...what a way to enjoy dinner.

The collection includes cylinder and disc music boxes, phonographs, records, pianos, organs...you get the idea...the emphases is on fun! The home is lovely, and the hospitality just never ended. It was a perfect way to end the day.

The next morning we were on our way again, this time to Rotorua. The trip took us north along the Kapiti Coast, then inland to travel through rolling hill country.

We stopped for lunch and then we continued across the central Plateau. Further north we followed the shores of beautiful Lake Taupo before passing the Wairakei Geothermal Area. We did stop en route at the Huka Falls, which was lovely. Some of the group checked in at the hotel, and the second bus went directly to the Maori Arts and Crafts Institute and Thermal Reserve for an evening cultural experience. We took the tour of the model village site and then on to the Thermal Reserve to see the boiling mud pools and geysers.

After that, we had to choose a chief from each group to answer a traditional Maori challenge and welcome. Mel Septon, Jay Albert and Maury Willyard acted as our chiefs, and we all held our breaths as they decided whether to pick up the offered stick (good thing), or kick it aside (not a good thing). Luckily, they decided to act like good AMICAn's and accept the welcome rather than act on the challenge.

Then we were ushered into the Maori meeting place and were treated to a Maori show depicting the mythical beginning.
of time. This was really an interesting and entertaining show, and when it was over the Maoris (in full costume, of course,) were available for us to visit with, take pictures of, and to join in for pictures. They were really quite fierce looking, even compared to AMICAns, and the pictures we took will be treasured.

An authentic Maori hangi (dinner) followed. Food is cooked in an underground steam pit, lifted from the pit and served. It was delicious, with wild pork, lamb, seafood, vegetables, and all the extras. By the time we finished eating, most of us were dragging from a long day, and were glad to go back to the Hotel to rest up for the trip tomorrow.

Our next visit was at the home of Jonathan White in Whakatane. This was a real treat, even in the rain. Jonathan has a large property, and a garden that is amazing. He put it all in himself, including a stand of native trees.

His collection, housed in his studio among his wonderful art work, is all in peak condition, and includes some great music boxes, both cylinder and disc, a Violano, a Coinola X, a Link, Seeburg G, a wonderful reproducing piano, and various assorted other things. What a joy to visit! Jonathan is a wonderful host, and we all enjoyed our visit, which was too short, of course. We could, again, have spent days just listening to the piano and other instruments. Everything sounded so great!

Lunch was at the museum of Leslie Watchorn’s. Leslie has never seen an old car or truck he didn’t like, and it became his area of collecting until he finally had to open a museum. What a treat to wander among the old vehicles to our heart’s content, and then to be served lunch at picnic-type tables set up for us. Each table was served so it was totally self-sufficient, and the food was just super. It made the service fast and efficient, too. (I do have to mention how strange it seemed to see old American cars, like a ‘57 Chevy, with the steering wheel on the right side...well, actually the wrong side to us.) We wandered, as we are apt to do, into the house and admired the reproducing piano and another good collection of rolls.

Next morning we again boarded the coaches and went to the ferry across Waitemata Harbour to Waiheke Island (arranged for us by Rod Cornelius), where we were transferred by coach to Lloyd and Joan Whittaker’s place. The Whittaker’s have a museum of old musical instruments, some automatic, art work, is all in peak condition, and includes some great music boxes, both cylinder and disc, a Violano, a Coinola X, a Link, Seeburg G, a wonderful reproducing piano, and various assorted other things. What a joy to visit! Jonathan is a wonderful host, and we all enjoyed our visit, which was too short, of course. We could, again, have spent days just listening to the piano and other instruments. Everything sounded so great!

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Then we set off for lunch and a tour of the island, all again arranged by Rod Cornelius. After that, it was back to the ferry, the coaches, and on to the hotel. In Auckland the Hotel was the Sky City, and it was complete with a casino. I don’t know if any of our group found time to visit said casino or not. Most of us were too busy trying to cram as much sightseeing in as we had time for.

The next day we traveled on to Rod Cornelius’ home in Devonport. Again, the house is wonderful, and the view, particularly from the upstairs balcony, is just magnificent. I don’t know how these people get anything done...I’d be sitting outside all the time looking at the scenery at nearly every home we visited.

Rod has a huge collection of 78 rpm recordings of Opera...I mean a huge collection! He could play anything you wanted to hear. Along with that, he has a marvelous collection of music boxes, phonographs, a Violano, and various miscellany as any good collector would!

Rod’s wife, Helen, sings in a Sweet Adeline group, the female equivalent of a barber shop quartet, and she and three of her friends sang and entertained us while we ate lunch. What a lovely, full sound four voices can make when they are all matched properly. Again, there was a lot of talent there, and we were sorry when they decided they were done. The hospitality shown by all these people was just overwhelming. We really can’t thank any of them enough.

With that, the planned part of the trip ended, and the next day most of the attendees boarded the coaches for the airport and the trip home.

This was a wonderful convention, with so many memories that can’t have been made any other way. I just have to thank John and Jan and their hard-working committee again for volunteering their expertise. They gave us a convention that no one will ever forget who attended...So many things we wouldn’t (or couldn’t) have done on our own!

Now, I have to mention that I didn’t realize I was going to do the write-up until well into the Convention, and my notes are on tiny slips of paper, on the back of information papers, and on whatever I managed to find to write on. If I forgot anyone, or got something wrong, please overlook it. The main thing I tried to impart was the great fun and companionship we experienced, and the great planning which went into this trip, making it so fantastic.

The timing was perfect, too, since the dollar was so strong and the trip turned out to be quite inexpensive. When the trip was first planned, there were not going to be many meals furnished, but it turned out that we got breakfast nearly every day, lunch and dinner more days than not, all thanks again to John and Jan Ham and the super committee members.

We were given a carved koala as the table favor, but the Hams had scavenged around and managed to come up with more “goodies” for the group...a koala screen saver, koala calendar, little clip on koalas...all this on top of the piano roll. The piano roll this year was made by The Mastertouch Piano Roll Company, where we visited for a fascinating tour. It is a very good roll, with “Happy Days Are Here Again”, “Shepherd’s Hey”, “Waltzing Matilda”, “Let’s Take a Trip to Melbourne”, and “I Still Call Australia Home”. This roll will bring back memories for a long time.

There were seventeen first-time convention attendees this year...what a great first convention!!!! Of course, thanks are due also to Liz Barnhart for all her work making it all happen. Liz is stepping down from her job as Convention Co-coordinator, and will be missed. We owe her a lot for the great job she has done the last 16 years.
Top Left - Mike Walter the VP wins the pumper competition!

The host with the most.

The winning performance, the judges hard at work.

Taking a bow.
Maori man with digiri doo

Mike and Liz Barnhart

Shirley Nix at Jirrahlinga

Koala at Jirrahlinga

Mike and Liz Barnhart

John Washburn at Healesville

Percy Grainger Museum

Sharyn Cunningham and Liz Barnhart

Galen and Linda Bird, Judy and Rollie Chisnell, Selmer Nielsen
Harold and Beverly Ball

Liz Barnhart with John and Jan Ham

Five Past Presidents - Bob Taylor, Ron Connor, Mel Septon, Maury Willyard, Linda Bird

Peter and Janet Tallent

Wellington, New Zealand - Michael Woolf with Carol Veome

John Mercy, Liz and Mike Barnhart, Lyn Mercy

Elsa and Joe Pekarek

Road hazard

Michael Woolf’s backyard in Wellington
Denis Condon at Peter Warburton’s

Paderewski’s piano at Whitakers Museum, Waiheke Island

Howard Sanford at Rod Cornelius, Auckland

Lloyd Whitaker entertaining, Waiheke Island

Don Ellison with Dora and Frank Freedman

AMICA member, Alan Brehaut at home in Timaru, New Zealand, South Island

Denis Condon and Peter Warburton

Joan Whitaker presenting program on Waiheke Island Museum

Jonathan White, Whakatane
Master Touch Piano
Roll Factory, Sydney

AMICA members Alan and Lorna Brehaut,
Timaru, New Zealand, South Island

Craig Robson’s organ, Sydney

John Mercy, Paddy Austin,
Tony Austin, Lyn Mercy

Mel Septon

Alan Brehaut’s musical collection

Rod Cornelius’ Edisons, Auckland
Peach Melba - our dessert served in Ballarat and named for Dame Nellie Melba, as was Melba Hall. Yummy!

And the winner is - Mike Walter

Australian road signs.

Tehree Gordon, founder of Jirrahzinga Park, with Herb and Rochelle Mercer.

John Ham has an encounter with an echidna.

Shirley and Frank Nix at the Maori show - who looks the fiercest?

Beverly and Jeff Brabb

One set of Bollards in Geelong. These are the life saving team.

Jan and John Ham with “Ben”, the bear presented to the first to register for the Convention - Shirley Nix.
Helen Cornelius (left) and her singing group entertain as we eat lunch.

Rod Cornelius - it’s music to his ears.

Selmer Nielsen petting a wombat.

Earl Scheelar shows he can digiri-doo!

Shirley Nix holds an orphan baby kangaroo.

Jonathan White in front of his piano and wonderful artwork.

Craig Robson telling us about the Taj Mahal.

Terry Haughawout, Joan Haughawout, Mary Pollock and Leroy Schumacher at Yering Station Winery.
This bus had no bathroom, so it makes lots of stops!

Brian Meeder and Jay Albert admire the koala’s hat.

One of the lovely, uncrowded beaches.

One of many New Zealand volcanos (dormant!)

The Majesty’s Theatre - a wonderful old theatre.

Train station in Melbourne.
This koala has a “proper” Ausie hat.

Tree lined path in park next to Melbourne Hotel.

The view from the balcony of Rod and Helen Cronelius.

Sydney skyline with ferry in foreground.

The bridge in Sydney Harbor. If you look closely you can spot people on the top - you can take a hike up there - with safety lines.
First-time convention attendees: front row (l-r) Leroy Schumacher, Betty Schumacher, Dennis Eiland, Cindy Eiland, Marilyn Udell, Kay Overfield, Jerry Golmanavich, Carol Veome, Raymond Palmer; back row (r-l) Norm Overfield, Mike Boyd, Ern Fisk, Betty Golmanavich, John Phillips, Jackie Dupon, Dave Reichert.

The Ham's calliope, complete with Australian and American flags.

George Cunningham, Sharyn Cunningham, Jan Ham, Frank Nix, Shirley Nix, John Ham “Under the AMICA Banner”.

The small village in the park at Melbourne.

One of the ponds in the Gardens in Melbourne.

The organ at the carousel in Ballarat.

John and Barbara Washburn at the tram car dinner.