

Revealing chronicles of Australia's largest youth migration program now in the State Library's collection

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When English school boy Ronald Spencer threatened to 'run away to Australia' during an argument with his mother, neither of them thought it a serious prospect. But, in a bizarre twist of fate, an advert in that day's paper for an intriguing youth migration program saw the 16-year-old board a ship bound for a farm in Wagga Wagga, NSW a year later!

This is just one of the many real stories that are captured in the Big Brother Movement archive – a significant collection that documents the history of youth migration in NSW – that will be officially handed over to the State Library of NSW on **Monday 27 March**.

According to State Librarian John Vallance: "The Big Brother Movement archive offers a rare glimpse into the experiences of these young boys, aged between 16 and 20, who left their homes in England to start a new life in Australia, and the legacy left from their time here."

"The archive is an important addition to the State Library's collection, and we're excited to see more stories from these fascinating historical records come to light."

The Big Brother Movement, established in London in July 1925, was the largest youth migration program in Australia, with over 12,000 young men migrating with the support of the Australian government to help tackle the local employment shortage. The Little Brothers, as the boys were known, had guardians known as Big Brothers who mentored the new arrivals until they reached 21 years of age.

Suellen McCaffrey, BBM CEO, says "Australia was in need of farmhands, and Little Brothers like Ronald Spencer left their families, and a country gripped by an unemployment crisis, to embark on a 'boy's own adventure' to a place they had very little knowledge of."

Packing lists with suggested outfits for the boys can be found within some 67 boxes of archival material, along with correspondence, photographs and reports spanning the 1920s to 1980s.

Media Release



Young travellers are warned that ‘in your own interests, you should not take to Australia flashy or exaggerated clothes e.g. drain-pipe trousers, drape coats, etc.’

Around 500 Little Brothers from across Australia are still in contact with the organisation, including the now 90-year-old Ronald Spencer. After leaving the farm in Wagga Wagga in his early 20s, Ronald stayed in NSW where he not only found a long career in the public service but also his wife of now 65 years.

Today, BBM Ltd operates the Global Footprints Scholarships program, which so far has enabled more than 1,000 young Australians to travel the world and gain global work experience in various fields including agriculture, horticulture and trades.

“Our scholars’ stories echo the stories of many of our Little Brothers. They are stories of adventure, curiosity, courage and resilience: Qualities that our world needs just as much today as it did when our first Little Brother made his journey to Australia in 1925,” says Ms McCaffrey.

The State Library of NSW will host a special event to celebrate the archive coming to the Library on Monday 27 March. Along with patrons, Her Excellency Margaret Beazley AC KC, Governor of NSW, and Mr Wilson, more than 30 Little Brothers and their families will be in attendance.

The newly acquired Big Brother Movement archive will be made available to researchers through assisted access via the State Library’s catalogue.

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