

## **SA & NT Morsecodians—Overland Telegraph Celebration Adelaide and Historic Telegraph Station Alice Springs**

*By Laurie Wallace, President, SA & NT Morsecodians Fraternity*

The SA & NT Morsecodians Fraternity was formed in 1988. And since then, the Fraternity has annually celebrated the historic Overland Telegraph Line (OTL) using temporary telegraph stations in Adelaide, Alice Springs and Darwin. Over the years, visitors to the temporary telegraph stations have had the opportunity to send telegrams to friends or loved ones in Australia and overseas. This celebration of the OTL for over 30 years achieved a high point this year with celebrations of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the completion of the historic OTL in 1872.

From 15 August to 28 August the SA & NT Morsecodians Fraternity took part in keynote functions and events in both Adelaide and Alice Springs. The Morsecodians Fraternity members involved were Laurie Wallace, President, 96 years, Graham Borlace, 84 years, Denis Hughes, 89 years and Barrie Barnes, 85 years. Working closely with them were Public Relations Officers Patricia Watkins and Dianne Borlace.

On 15 August 2022, the Pioneer Association of South Australia function was convened by Robin Mulholland. Laurie Wallace and Denis Hughes attended the function providing members and guests with a step back into history using demonstrations of the speedy sending and receiving of Morse code messages. A lot faster than sending a text message using a mobile phone!



*Laurie Wallace (L) and Denis Hughes*



### *Morse code demonstration*

Later, on 22 August, the Institution of Engineering Technology and Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers Retired Engineers Group (IET/IEEE REG) had a presentation and demonstration to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of The Overland Telegraph Line at the State Library of South Australia.

This event was convened by Don Grigg from IET/IEEE REG, to commemorate the day in 1872 when the OTL was completed with a demonstration of Morse code by SA & NT Morsecodians Fraternity members Denis Hughes, 89 years and Barrie Barnes, 85 years.

Denis Hughes sent a Morse code message to Barrie Barnes which was a re-enactment of the message sent by Charles Todd from Central Mount Stuart on 22 August 1872 to the Chief Minister, Parliament House Adelaide.

The participation of the SA & NT Morsecodians Fraternity at key-note functions in Adelaide celebrating the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the OTL culminated in a nine-day celebration at the Historic 1872 Telegraph Station Alice Springs. Record numbers of visitors from across Australia and overseas were attracted to the Historic Station throughout the celebrations. There were 200–300 daily, and more than 2500 over 9 days.



***Laurie Wallace 96 years and Graham Borlace 84 years, Telegraphists with Patricia Watkins and Dianne Borlace, Public Relations Officers and NT Parks & Wildlife rangers***

Daily Bus Tour groups of 30–60 along with some 200+ Ghan train guests attended a 5-star Banquet Dinner under the stars outside the Telegraph Office on two nights.

The highlight was a visit by the great-great grandsons, James and Julian Todd and Todd family members as well as 80+ friends for a Barbecue Banquet Dinner under the Stars and a demonstration of the Morse signalling and presentation of a Souvenir Telegram Message.

Daily, more than 100 visitors listened and watched their names being signalled over the Historic Morse Keys and received in dits and dahs, resonating from the Sounder and translated by the receiving Telegraphist, who presented the Souvenir Message to the recipient. It is a keepsake of their visit to the 150th Anniversary of the OTL at the centre of Australia's first speedy communications link from the Gateway Adelaide—Alice Springs—Pt Darwin and onward to London, Europe and America by undersea Telegraph cable.

In 1872, contact through letters taking months by sailing ship or steamer was reduced to just hours by the Electric Telegraph! Remember—there were no telephones and no radios—they had not been invented!

The Chief Ranger e-mailed a copy of an usually high number of comments (several hundred) which visitors queued up to sign. Some of the comments are shown below.

## Visitors comments

- Excellent display of Morse code by two treasures!
- Very interesting: great, knowledgeable man, well educated
- Thoroughly enjoyed it—great to have our history preserved.
- What a legend! So fast—better than SMS
- What talented and fluent messaging
- Great experience; ‘ol’ boys still doing the business.
- Great tapping and thank you. Great to celebrate 150 years
- Graham and Laurie were wonderful to watch. Amazing to see this all happen in front of our eyes
- Long live the Morsecodians! Well done all.
- Great to be here on the week they have a ‘live’ display.
- Thank you. Blood is worth bottling!
- Great to see the operators using their skills gained many years ago.

The sponsors for this historic and memorable celebration of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the OTL were the Premier’s Department of South Australia, NT Tourism and NT Parks and Wildlife. The SA & NT Morsecodians Fraternity sincerely acknowledge and thank the Premier’s Department of South Australia for the financial grant to celebrate this milestone in connecting Australia with the rest of the world.