



**'I wonder whether our tents will arrive in time':  
Gerhardt Laves, Ralph Piddington and Marjorie Barnes  
at La Grange, 1930.**

**Geoffrey Gray**

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*By Geoffrey Gray  
AIATSIS*

*Much more than vainly doth he loose from shore,  
Since he returns not as he set forth,  
Who fishes for the truth and wanteth skill  
(Dante, Divine Comedy, Canto XIII, 116-118)*

In early April 1930 the young anthropologist Ralph Piddington, his wife Marjorie (nee Barnes)<sup>1</sup> and the American linguist Gerhardt Laves left Sydney for their first field work in northwest Western Australia. Their destination was La Grange Bay, just south of Broome. Laves was engaged in a linguistic survey that took in much of coastal Australia and believed that he had the 'whole linguistic continent' to himself: 'I have only to choose'.<sup>2</sup> It was not so simple. The decision by AR Radcliffe-Brown, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Sydney, to send them to La Grange was influenced by AP Elkin who had done anthropological work in the Kimberley between 1927 and 1928, under the auspices of the Australian National Research Council (ANRC), and had concluded that La Grange was especially suitable for linguistic research.<sup>3</sup> Elkin spoke to them about his fieldwork experiences and they took copies of his field notes with them. Approval for Laves and Piddington to work with Aboriginal people had been obtained from AO Neville, Chief Protector of Aborigines, by Radcliffe-Brown. Neville had been consulted as to other suitable sites but his anthropological and linguistic knowledge was meagre.

Piddington and Laves had recently graduated. Piddington completed his BA degree in psychology and anthropology in 1928 and the following year worked as an assistant psychologist at the Australian Institute of Industrial Psychology.

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1 Marjorie Eileen Barnes and Ralph O'Reilly Piddington married on 23 February 1929 in Sydney. Ralph was twenty-three as was Marjorie.

2 Laves to Fay-Cooper Cole, 13 April 1931. AIATSIS Library: Laves Papers (hereafter AIATSIS) (Originals at located at the University of Chicago Library).

3 Elkin to Radcliffe-Brown, 6 February 1930. Elkin Papers, University of Sydney Archives (hereafter EP): 158/4/1/40. The ANRC as a result of a Rockefeller Foundation grant funded most social anthropological research in Australia between 1926 and 1935.

Laves, who arrived in Australia in August 1929, had an MA from Chicago University and was a student of the famed linguist Edward Sapir, was especially recruited by Radcliffe-Brown on the personal recommendation of Sapir.<sup>4</sup> Radcliffe-Brown was of the view that the only way to obtain good linguistic material was by employing top-class linguists. Gifted amateurs, he had concluded, were not able to engage in systematic collection and analysis. Marjorie Piddington had completed the first year of a degree. The University of Sydney records show that she did not complete her degree.<sup>5</sup> The research had a further purpose: Ralph Piddington was working toward an MA in Anthropology and Psychology and Laves toward his PhD.<sup>6</sup>

Ralph Piddington was part of a cohort of young anthropologists who went through the University of Sydney. The then students of Radcliffe-Brown developed a strong sense of themselves as emissaries of a new discipline. Piddington commented some years later that he enjoyed the 'solidarity ... [during] the old days of the Group', as he called them, their solidarity being increased by anthropologies and hence their opposition to other 'decaying disciplines'.<sup>7</sup> These young anthropologists, confident in themselves and their position, were on a journey to find a niche in the new discipline of social anthropology and make a career. Laves was part of an older department but it had in the year he came to Australia undergone change and moved itself from Boasian anthropology to embracing the new social anthropology promoted and developed by Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski: Radcliffe-Brown was invited to take up a Chair at Chicago and he moved there in 1931.<sup>8</sup>

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4 The department of sociology and anthropology at Chicago was considered, at the time, to be the premier department in the USA. Regna Darnell, *Edward Sapir: Linguist, Anthropologist, Humanist*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990, p. 212.

5 Student record of Marjorie Eileen Barnes, University of Sydney Archives.

6 Cole advised him that his time with 'Radcliffe-Brown will be very valuable and it should give you ample material for a Ph.D. thesis. ... [Y]our work, while largely linguistic, will give you an opportunity for ethnological work. Be sure and gather all you possibly can along these lines, and if you can do anything on the physical side, just remember that this is a field on which we need much information. You might also keep in mind our desire to secure hair specimens, together with as complete physical data as possible'. Fay-Cooper Cole to Laves, 4 October 1929. AIATSIS.

7 Piddington to CWM Hart, 31 March 1955. Copy in authors possession courtesy Nic Peterson.

8 Darnell, op. cit., p. 212; Fred Eggan, 'Fay-Cooper Cole 1881-1961', *American Anthropologist*, No. 65, 1963, pp. 641-45.

The first part of their journey took them by train to Melbourne and Adelaide and from there on the transcontinental railway to Perth where they arrived on the day before Easter, 1930. Laves and the Piddingtons, in the words of Gerhardt, 'enjoyed the jaunt across the continent immensely especially the Transcontinental where H[is] M[ajesties] G[overnment] does himself proud'. They took some amusement at wondering what their 'fellow travellers finally decided about the youthful trio: certainly not honeymooners. Perhaps trapeze artists [in a circus]. Marjorie felt a trifle uncomfortable by my remark, intended for the galleries, at breakfast on the train, "I wonder whether our tents will arrive in time", followed shortly by, "I shouldn't like to ship elephants from Sydney to Perth by train".<sup>9</sup> It seems that Laves often played such jokes on his fellow passengers. On his way to Australia he was 'taken as a Mormon' which caused Fay-Cooper Cole, Chairman, Division of Anthropology at the University of Chicago, to comment that he was surprised that he was so mistaken by his fellow passengers. In a reference to Laves no doubt roving eye and sharing the joke he observed 'that [as] a pillar of the church [he] had to protect the young ladies on the boat' and further hoped that his 'newly acquired religious training will not effect your work in Australia'.<sup>10</sup>

## II Leaving Perth ...travelling to Broome

On arrival in Perth they met Neville, who, as he had for Elkin and Porteus, assisted the young anthropologists to ready for the field. Laves remarked that he was 'very obliging to us although he was more or less on holiday. I had the feeling that the thrill of helping anthropologists going bush is beginning to wear off for him especially when the latest variety in the form of a triune anthropologist appears'. Overall Laves felt Neville was of little help.<sup>11</sup>

They left Perth for Broome soon after Easter. Reconstructing their journey is no easy task as they left little about their eight day trip on the government boat the *SS Koolinda* to Broome. To get a feel of the journey we can refer to other trips such as those of Elkin and SD Porteus. Elkin for example wasted no time questioning Aboriginal people on the boat. He told his wife that he commenced his research work when 'half-way up, four blacks got on, two returning to the Forrest River and two to Hall's Creek, south of Wyndham. I did some useful work'.<sup>12</sup> The passengers may have looked askance but Elkin was a man in forties and had a seriousness about him. He was after all an Anglican curate and no doubt had the demeanour of one although he masked this most of the time when

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9 Laves to Radcliffe-Brown, 18 April 1930. EP: 159/4/1/53.

10 Fay-Cooper Cole to Laves, 4 October 1929. AIATSIS.

11 Laves to Radcliffe-Brown, 18 April 1930. EP: 159/4/1/53.

12 Letters to Sally Elkin (wife), and Elkin diary of Kimberley Field work. Typescript. EP: 1/1/1/1.

doing fieldwork when adopted the persona of a scientist.<sup>13</sup> It is certain however that neither Marjorie, Ralph or Gerhardt spent their time taking genealogies. The Australian born racial psychologist Stanley Porteus recalled his trip in his autobiography, some forty years later, which may assist us to better appreciate the curiosity of their fellow travellers and the scepticism with which anthropologists were considered :

Since full professors are so scarce in Australia, the title brought me deference and helpful attention in Perth, but at the gangplank ... its magic disappeared. No one without compelling business was on the ship[.] ... Everybody on board knew all about his neighbour's cattle and private business, how many half-caste children he was reputed to have fathered, how much he owed the banks, whether his wife was expecting or expected to return from the south, how much he was drinking, or how close to bankruptcy he happened to be. .... But whatever reason [SC] Childs [who accompanied Porteus] and I had for going to the Kimberley was a matter for wonder and even suspicion. It was certainly of no use explaining that I was a psychologist going out to the vast Kimberley region to study the natives. In the first place no one on board except ourselves could even spell psychology; and in the second my announced purpose merely excited unseemly mirth. Blackfellows, by common consent, had no mentality. Any old timer could tell you that. .... It took ... several days ... before the ship's company evolved a satisfactory theory as to why we were on board. ... The only professors who had visited these parts were geologists who, if not interested in oil, had secret information about vast stores of gold, silver, tin, copper, uranium, etc. .... I never shook of the idea that I was a geologist in disguise.<sup>14</sup>

He also commented on the 'floods of drunken or half-sober conversations', a situation which no doubt suited at least one of our young anthropologists. Ralph was not averse to a drink. It is likely that Laves had a good time making up stories as he had on the train on their way to Perth. At Broome they presumably stayed at the Governor Broome Hotel which consisted of about six iron cottages.<sup>15</sup>

### III At La Grange

La Grange is about ninety miles south of Broome. It is unlikely they had much difficulty in obtaining transport armed as they were with a letter from Neville supporting their enterprise. Two years earlier Elkin when casting round for a way

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13 Geoffrey Gray, 'Dislocating the self: anthropological field work in the Kimberley, Western Australia, 1934–1936', *Aboriginal History* (vol. 26), 2002, pp. 34-7.

14 Stanley D Porteus, *A Psychologist of Sorts. The Autobiography and Publications of the Inventor of the Porteus Maze Tests*, Palo Alto: Pacific Books, 1969 , pp. 93-95. There is no description in his *The Psychology of a Primitive People*, New York, Longmans, Green & Co, 1931.

15 Quoted in Tigger Wise, *The Self Made Anthropologist*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1985, p. 54.

to get to La Grange thought he 'might get the police buggy and mules to go to La Grange... as a car would cost about £10'.<sup>16</sup> He did not make the trip to La Grange until the mid September 1928 and he travelled by car.<sup>17</sup> It is unknown how Laves and the Piddington's travelled to La Grange but it most likely was by car.<sup>18</sup>

La Grange was a small settlement consisting of 'four households'. He told Cole that 'on the principle that it takes twenty acres to feed a head of cattle these people are scattered miles apart, the natives providing the necessary communication and help each "suburb" to remain abreast of the latest gossip'.<sup>19</sup> When they arrived they were put up in 'the provision shed, used also by the cattle dippers at other times'. Soon after the Piddingtons were provided with a room at the Post Office to sleep in, though they spent their days at the camp about a quarter of a mile away.<sup>20</sup>

They settled into the rhythm of field work and soon got used to paying for informants time with 'sticks of tobacco and other trifles'. Their life was pretty simple and they were enjoying it 'hugely'.<sup>21</sup> Sometimes they shared informants. Piddington commented that they were 'troubled by an alternation of feast and famine in the matter of informants; last week Gerhardt and I had only one man between us for a period of about three days; whereas for the past three days we have had about a dozen'. Laves was particularly pleased with the way his work was panning out and told Radcliffe-Brown that 'The past ... weeks ...[have] been most rewarding, for all the material comes from a background of culture about as real as any to be found in Australia. The texts roll into my notebooks ... I feel from their form and their vividness of expression how much they form a part of the natives' life. Especially with the material "sacred" to the initiated men only, the close relation to the initiation rites, which are still held, is most obvious'.<sup>22</sup>

The choosing of informants is clouded in mystery: what made a person volunteer to be an informant? On what criterion did anthropologists choose an informant(s) and what made them elevate one against the other? I suspect it had to do with the personableness of the informant, an ease in dealing with the work of the anthropologist/linguist, an appreciation of the anthropological enterprise as well

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16 Elkin to Radcliffe-Brown, 16 January 1928. EP: 158/4/1/39.

17 Elkin to Radcliffe-Brown, 10 September 1928. EP: 158/4/1/39.

18 Laves to Fay-Cooper Cole, 1 July 1930. AIATSIS.

19 Laves to Fay-Cooper Cole, 1 July 1930. AIATSIS.

20 Piddington to Radcliffe-Brown, 22 May 1930. EP: 159/4/1/61; Spurling to Neville, 22 September 1930. State Records Office Western Australia (hereafter SROWA): ACC993, 133/30.

21 Laves to Radcliffe-Brown, 13 May 1930. EP: 159/4/1/53.

22 Laves to Fay-Cooper Cole, 1 July 1930. AIATSIS.

as an ability on the part of the person (informant) to grasp the needs of the anthropologist/linguist. Were people attracted to the material goods provided as a reward for providing information? Did this encourage participation? Laves for example on occasion paid sixpence for each story.<sup>23</sup> Once an anthropologist/linguist had worked in an area there was developed an understanding of the anthropological enterprise and those who had worked as informants offered their services again.<sup>24</sup>

Piddington, for example, used Elkin's 'main informant', the headman Yuari, who he (Piddington) considered 'an excellent man on ceremonies and myths [but] quite unsatisfactory on social organization; he himself having married "no proper right" by taking a woman of the wrong section (it is not an inter-tribal marriage) is eager to justify his actions by minimising the importance of the marriage regulations'. Anthropologists of the time collected, as we have seen, genealogies as a matter of course and were able to judge the quality of the informant by the way he presented his genealogy. Piddington had collected a fair number of genealogies 'but few really satisfactory ones'.<sup>25</sup> The other feature of anthropological field work was the way in which anthropologists were presented with and subsequently accumulated artefacts. This raises further questions: what did indigenous people think anthropologists were doing? Were artefacts a reward for the anthropologist? Was it part of a wider exchange?<sup>26</sup> Piddington noted that 'the people were eager to bring us objects [artefacts] for the collection, which is growing rapidly owing to the fact that Yuari uses his official position to pillage the sacred storehouse. We have now several specimens of everything except spear throwers and circumcision knives, and Yuari has promised to secure these for us in due course'.<sup>27</sup> A not dissimilar situation occurred with Elkin when he was at La Grange. He noted that on the second day 'the men took me to their sacred ground to show me their sacred objects and to sing me sacred songs. ... They also brought me various curios. I encouraged them to continue their sacred ceremonies and to abide their own laws and incidentally to keep their women folk from white, Malay and Japanese men'. He added in a self-knowing way that 't he half-caste problem is a very serious one for them'.<sup>28</sup>

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23 Laves to Fay-Cooper Coles, 13 April 1931. AIATSIS.

24 See for example, Gray, op. cit., [2002], p. 38; Roger Sanjek, 'A Vocabulary for Fieldnotes', in Roger Sanjek, (ed), *Fieldnotes: the makings of Anthropology*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990, pp. 107-08.

25 Piddington to Radcliffe-Brown, 22 May 1930. EP: 159/4/1/61.

26 More work is needed on such problems and unfortunately this presentation is not the time.

27 Piddington to Radcliffe-Brown, 22 May 1930. EP: 159/4/1/61.

28 Elkin to Sally Elkin, 13 October 1928. EP: 1/1/1/1. See also Porteus, *A Psychologist of Sorts*, Palo Alto: Pacific Books, 1969, pp. 98-101.

In their fieldwork report, published in the journal *Oceania*, Marjorie and Ralph observed that 'the effect of white influence upon the culture has been a general weakening of tribal tradition. The aspect of the culture which has suffered most is the local organization; many of the natives are content to live away from their own country ... but there exists a very powerful bond between a man and the district in which he has been reared. The kinship organization has also suffered disintegration, though the more binding usages and prohibitions associated with it are still maintained. ... [Nevertheless] many of the [initiation ceremonies] have now fallen into disuse'.<sup>29</sup>

Marjorie, who it was anticipated would work with women,<sup>30</sup> 'was not having much success finding women informants' as 'white influence appears to have affected the women more than the men'. This may have resulted from her inexperience but this did not deter her, however. Ralph remarked that Marjorie's help in the field was 'invaluable, especially in the collection of genealogies and myths; of the latter there are an extraordinary number, many of which should be of considerable value'. Ralph had brought with him 'several books dealing with Australian animals, birds et cetera' which, he expected, would be of use ... in dealing with Karadyeri (sic) mythology'.<sup>31</sup>

Although neither Ralph Piddington, Marjorie Piddington or Laves left much by way of correspondence or field diaries we can gain some insight into the way Laves worked and the way Aboriginal people worked with him and the social interaction in a small settlement like La Grange in 1930. Marjorie and Ralph had left to do some fieldwork south of La Grange. Laves anticipated that this would enable him to have some time to himself and 'find time for a bit of reading'. He told Cole that [n]ot a day had passed without visitors white and black (in addition to the regular informants, who come during the day). One afternoon I had just sat down to

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29 Marjorie Piddington & Ralph Piddington, 'Report of Fieldwork in North-Western Australia', *Oceania*, vol. 2 (3), 1932, pp. 346; 350; 352. It is of some interest that Marjorie is a co-author and suggests that Ralph was keen to involve her in the anthropological enterprise and recognise her contribution as well raising the possibility that Marjorie may have harboured intentions of returning to University and completing her degree.

30 There is some work on the 'woman question/problem', that is, the use of women and often the wives of male anthropologists in the field, to specifically investigate the life of women, in the literature but it is still an undeveloped area of research. See in particular Christine Cheater, *Argonauts of the Primitive World. A Social History of Anglo-Australian Anthropology (1850-1950)*, PhD, University of New South Wales, 1993, pp. 262-286.

31 Piddington to Radcliffe-Brown, 16 July 1930. EP: 159/4/1/61.

alphabetize some 600 slips when a little old man of seventy appeared. No introductions or excuses for dropping in. He simply sat down and talked oblivious that I went right ahead with my work. He was one of the many odd individuals up in this country whose profession consists of carrying their "swags" about, having a look at the country. ... The next morning for breakfast another old chap dropped in. ... Another version of the yarns I had heard last evening. ... And then my informants came so he quietly disappeared.

Another evening I had my table covered with slips when I heard voices - laughter and arguing in the near distance. A little later a bit of whispered palaver at the fence so I took my lantern and welcomed in four young blackfellas. They had heard of my making records of marungu<sup>32</sup> songs and wanted to hear the "gämapin". They were all young fellows only one having been through the first stage of the initiation, and roared with laughter at hearing songs and passages (dialogues) from stories which they knew so well. Finally I played a record of myself giving one of the dialogues ... Unfortunately (sic) I could not play all of them as certain ones were räi (sacred)<sup>33</sup> nor did I play a record of my chief informant's funeral "oration" on the death of his elder wife. Since they have a fair command of English I explained "Ol' Man River" to them, it being a "proper blackfellow song alonga my country".

Imagine the four kids sitting in a row staring fixedly at the kerosene lantern while the music was going on. The little fellow at the far end would occasionally peep out furtively from behind his older neighbour to have a quick look at the big fella doctor, all thirty-two [teeth] gleaming out of the black darkness of his round face. By and by I fixed a plate of biscuit with butter and jam including three gingersnaps. Naturally somebody got left, the little Stöpke. So I buttered an extra biscuit with plenty of jam. Hardly a peep out of the lot of them. I have a habit of perching myself Turk-fashion atop a petrol case. No sooner than I had seated than I heard a scuffle of feet and the others followed suit; the eldest, who had the distinction of being employed by the local sandalwood cutter, maintained his dignity (he had shoes) by tucking only one leg under. Finally some one whispered galaya:gardaga (enough: asleep). We played "Ol' Man River" again and they walked off into the darkness.<sup>34</sup>

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32. 'marungu' (modern orthography 'marrungu') means people; it is a variant of 'marrngu' which means person, initiated man. Pers. comm., David Nash and Janet Sharp, 9 November 2004.

33. 'rai' (modern orthography 'rayi' ) is widely used to refer to 'spirit'. 'It is used more commonly in religious expressions these days'. Pers. comm., David Nash, 9 November 2004, quoting Janet Sharp.

34. Laves to Fay-Cooper Cole, 1 July 1930. AIATSIS.

But this comfortable easy life was not to last. While at La Grange Elkin had stayed with John Spurling, 'an elderly man', who was in charge of the Government Aboriginal Feeding Station. The cooking, he informed Sally, his wife, was done 'for the most part, by a nice black gin, helped at times by a Malay-black half caste [Lucy]'.<sup>35</sup> Spurling notified Neville toward the end of September that the Piddingtons and Laves had left La Grange.<sup>36</sup> Spurling described Laves as a gentleman who bid him farewell and thanked Lucy 'for having made bread for him and for washing his clothes'.<sup>37</sup> Piddington did not have the 'decency to come and thank the woman for her services'; he also accused Piddington of engaging in local politics by supporting the local postmaster and his wife who were 'trying to do me personal injury' and causing 'trouble amongst the natives'.<sup>38</sup> This is the first hint of trouble between Piddington and Spurling.<sup>39</sup>

Laves and the Piddingtons, it appears, found living and working together difficult. By mid July Piddington expressed some irritation telling Radcliffe-Brown that 'Gerhardt, who appears to be staying here indefinitely, is the only feature of our field work which can definitely be described as a hardship, since the flies and mosquitoes have not bothered us as we expected they would and the climate is, at present, perfect'.<sup>40</sup> It is unclear what led to this rupture between Laves and the Piddingtons. Spurling had commented, in a letter to Neville, that Laves had formed the 'opinion that Piddington was mad'.<sup>41</sup> It may have been political rather than personal.<sup>42</sup> Ralph Piddington drank heavily and this may have caused a problems for their friendship but I suspect that if it was a factor it was minor.<sup>43</sup> Reading through Laves extant correspondence it is clear that he was anti-communist, anti-worker and pro-American capitalism as well as possessing a

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35. Elkin to Sally Elkin, 13 October 1928. EP: 1/1/1/1; Elkin to Radcliffe-Brown, 28 September 1928. EP: 158/4/1/39.

36 Spurling to Neville, 22 September 1930. SROWA: ACC993, 133/30.

37 Spurling was accused of abducting 'the Aboriginal woman Lucy'. See various in SROWA: ACC993, 27/36.

38 Spurling to Neville, 22 September 1930. SROWA: ACC993, 133/30.

39 Geoffrey Gray, "Piddington's indiscretion": Ralph Piddington, the Australian National Research Council and Academic freedom'. *Oceania* vol. 64 (3), March, 1994. pp. 217-245.

40. Piddington to Radcliffe-Brown, 16 July 1930. EP: 159/4/1/61.

41 Spurling to Neville, 16 December 1932. SROWA: ACC993, 133/30.

42 For further evidence see Laves to Fay-Cooper Cole, 2 March 1930; 13 April 1931. AIATSIS.

43 Raymond Firth described Piddington as 'rather "wild" at times'. Firth to Gray, 20 February 1993 (authors possession). In his extant correspondence Laves makes no mention of any difficulties between them.

certain ethnocentricity about America vis-à-vis Australia. These were all things that Ralph Piddington was not and I suspect Marjorie was largely in sympathy.

Marjorie and Ralph returned to Sydney. Gerhardt remained in the field, moving first to Cape Leveque Light House then Lombadina Mission. From there he travelled north where he made a grammar of the *Bard* language and short survey of the languages to the north as far as Port George IV. In January 1931 he went to Albany in south west Western Australia and spent two months studying the *Kurin* language.<sup>44</sup> He then proceeded to the Northern Territory and conducted intensive linguistic investigations among the natives on the Daly River and in Darwin, returning overland and sampling by survey work a number of languages of North Queensland from informants at Cairns, Townsville and Palm Island. Raymond Firth, acting Professor of Anthropology, declared that in the two years that Laves been in Australia, he had added significantly to the study of linguistics in Australia.<sup>45</sup> Many contemporary linguists would wholeheartedly agree. Laves left Australia for Chicago in late August 1931 expecting to return sometime in 1934.<sup>46</sup>

Radcliffe-Brown, by then at Chicago University, was confident that Laves' work would provide the 'first scientific study of Australian languages' and he looked

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44 Laves informed Cole: 'I have made a study of a language in the region of Albany, Western Australia, ie the extreme south of Western Australia. Although the natives there had been under white influence for over a century, I was able to make good progress with the language and even obtain a fair number of texts of ethnological value. By offering a sixpence per "story" I managed to speed up the work and finished the language in eight weeks.' Laves to Fay-Cooper Coles, 13 April 1931. AIATSIS.

45. Firth, Annual Report, Committee on Anthropological Research and Fellowships in Anthropology and Human Biology, July 1930- June 1931. EP: 161/4/1/81. In addition to extensive survey work, Laves made an intensive study of six languages in widely separated parts of the continent. After some training in under Radcliffe-Brown 'he began with (1) Kumbaingeri [Gumbaynggir] (northern NSW coast), and some study of other NSW languages (including the poorly documented Anewan [Nganyaywana] language). In April 1930 he moved on to (2) Karadjeri [Karajarri] (La Grange, near Broome). In October 1930 Radcliffe-Brown advised the addition of (3) Barda [Bardi] (Cape L'Eveque Peninsula, north of Broome) (4) Kurin [Goreng] (near Albany, southern WA) (5) Hermit Hill [Matngela] (Daly River) and (6) Ngengumeri [Ngan'gimmerri] (Daly River)'. David Nash, Obituary, *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, 1993.

46 Laves to Firth, 21 August 1931. EP: 161/4/1/85.

forward to the completion and publication of this work.<sup>47</sup> By 1936 his optimism was replaced by disappointment; he told Elkin that Laves has been a great disappointment to me. It seems that he is not really good enough as a linguist to carry out the task I set him - which I admit is a very difficult one. He left Chicago more than a year ago to go to Yale. ... I will get in touch with him and see what I can do to get some of his material published. The Australian languages need to be worked by an absolutely first class linguist so that the work may be done in a thoroughly scientific fashion. I do not know [TGH] Strehlow personally but it is quite clear that he has not had the proper training for the linguistic work that is needed in Australia, I suspect that, like the other Adelaide people, he may not recognise the fact.<sup>48</sup>

When Elkin, now professor of Anthropology at Sydney, was seeking contributions for a volume on Australian Aboriginal languages he sought one from Laves. '[I]t[']s a great shame', he told Piddington, 'for he possesses material which would be of great value in our present studies'. Piddington too was unable to provide a suitable contribution as he had no deep knowledge of the Karadjeri language.<sup>49</sup> Laves published only two articles on his Australian work,<sup>50</sup> and, prepared a paper for the American Association for the Advancement Science (Atlantic City, 1931).<sup>51</sup>

By 1936 Laves had most likely given up linguistics and the following year he was teaching at Navaho schools in New Mexico.<sup>52</sup> It is likely that he did some linguistic work there as Navaho (and American Indian languages) was a project of Sapir.<sup>53</sup> It seems likely that Sapir did not promote Laves, when he was at Yale, somehow finding him inadequate for his needs. It is significant to note that Laves is not included as part of that Yale group of linguists and anthropologist, trained by Sapir, who went onto develop careers in the USA and remained a recognisable group throughout their careers.<sup>54</sup> It is likely that insufficient funds and the corresponding reduction in Rockefeller Funding internationally contributed to

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47 Radcliffe-Brown to Chapman, 24 December 1931. Australian National Library: MS 482, 850 (c).

48 Radcliffe-Brown to Elkin, 26 January 1936. EP: 248/645.

49 Elkin to Piddington, 7 July 1937; Piddington to Elkin, 7 May 1937. EP: 161/4/1/84.

50 'Words among Australian Aborigines', *Science*, n.s. 70, no. 1823: Supplement, 1928, p. xiv; 'Collecting native words', *El Palacio*, vol. 27 (8/9), 1929, pp. 290-291. The former was a note stating that Laves, a student of anthropology in the University of Chicago, was collecting Aboriginal words in the cane-farming district of northern N.S.W.

51 Bowen, op. cit., p. 138, suggests that he was working up his Bardi research in 1932.

52 David Nash, Obituary, Gerhardt Laves, *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, 1/1993, pp. 101-102.

53 Darnell, op. cit., pp. 238-52.

54 Darnell, op. cit., p. 367. Darnell makes no mention of Laves in her biography of Sapir.

Laves leaving the academy and opting for reliable employment elsewhere. Subsequently he took up a position with the International Harvester Company in Chicago where he remained until his retirement. One his children told David Nash that their grandfather was keen for Laves to get a 'proper job'.<sup>55</sup> Laves never returned to the academy.

As far as I can ascertain, after the Piddingtons left La Grange, Laves did not meet them or have any contact with them again. Laves story is complete. Ralph and Marjorie Piddington were just embarking on another journey which would dramatically effect their future personal and professional lives.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Pers. comm. David Nash, 5 November 2004.

<sup>56</sup> For part of this story see Gray, op. cit., [1994].