

**BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY  
OF  
AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND**

**BULLETIN**

---

Volume Thirteen, Number Four

Fourth Quarter, 1989

(Issued December 1990)

---

**GOVERNMENT REGULATION OF THE NEWSPAPER PRESS  
IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY VICTORIA\***

WHILE CLIOCENTRIC, THIS PAPER IS INTENDED to serve a bibliographic end: in drawing on general history it aims to aid newspaper bibliography, with the hope that the latter activity will in turn provide a backbone for the history of Australian newspapers and journalism. It has become convention, almost ritual, to deplore the lack of such a history and to quote the words of James Bonwick, first published almost a century ago and still true today: 'The complete narrative of Australian newspapers has yet to be written'.<sup>1</sup>

In limiting myself to the pre-Federation period and to the newspaper press of only one colony (Victoria) I am nevertheless hoping to gain some insights which are helpful for the study of all six Australian — or, as I think more reasonable for the colonial era, all seven Australasian — colonies. A case study, if you like. If one were to believe what one reads in the papers, one might take it that the pinnacle of colonial newspaper development was achieved in Victoria. The Melbourne *Argus* of Saturday 13 April 1872, an issue prepared with some thought to the fact that it would be displayed along with 'presentation' issues of other Victorian newspapers at the London Exhibition later that year, claimed that, in relation to size, the newspaper literature of Victoria was unsurpassed in the world. The statement, typical late-nineteenth-century hyperbole, is a prime example of the 'blowing' which Anthony Trollope, then visiting the colonies, wrote of soon after:

They blow a good deal in Queensland — a good deal in South Australia. They blow even in Tasmania. They blow loudly in New South Wales, and very loudly in New Zealand. But the blast of the trumpet as heard in Victoria is louder than all the blasts — and the Melbourne blast beats all the other blowing of that proud colony.<sup>2</sup>

Turning from testimony, then, to tabulation, let us compare numbers of newspapers relative to population size in the respective colonies as set out in Table I. Admittedly I am drawing on data for 1892, not 1872, in part because comparative figures are not readily available for the earlier date but also because the later one is close to the end of the period I am discussing — and so you can have a fair indi-

---

\* A revised version of a paper read to members of the Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand at their annual conference, 29-30 September 1989.

cation of the degrees of development attained. Victoria, the most populous colony (something which may surprise until one recollects the great population inflow of the goldrush fifties), has also the most newspapers. Demography alone does not account for press size, however, for South Australia, in population roughly comparable with Queensland, has fewer than half the number of papers. On a paper to persons ratio, Queensland has the thickest coverage, followed by Western Australia and then New Zealand, with Victoria in the middle (and not on top as the *Argus* had claimed), after which comes New South Wales, and then way behind is Tasmania and last, with the thinnest, South Australia. Victoria appears to have the biggest suburban press — reflecting of course the growth of ‘Marvellous Melbourne’ — but the table does not show that New Zealand and Tasmania do not have the same kind of single dominant metropolis (in other words, the ‘country’ column includes papers from towns or cities not drastically smaller than Hobart or Wellington). Clearly there are, besides demography, factors such as geography (distance), spread of settlement, pattern of urban growth, rate of development of transport and communication facilities which determined the dispersion and size of the newspaper press. Though I do not propose to explore these major determinants further today, I mention them to provide a background for setting my theme in perspective.

I must also comment on my choice of focus. Looking at the making of the Victorian press from the point of view of government regulation is choosing one moderating influence over others with arguably equal claim to importance. For instance, one might examine the roles of the newspapermen (I should perhaps say ‘and women’, but the female contributors, publishers or proprietors were few and far between and the printers exclusively male) both as individuals and acting collectively — that is, through various associations of printers, reporters, country newspaper proprietors and publishers.<sup>3</sup> Or one might trace the development and study the power of the agencies and services which, through the supply of packaged advertisements and news, came increasingly to regulate content and exercise a degree of financial control.

The significance of each of these sectors can be illustrated if one looks at the surviving supplementary sources for newspaper bibliography (supplementary, that is, to the actual newspapers, a lamentably sizeable proportion of which have not survived). Appendix I, Lists of Victorian Newspapers, shows sources which have been of value to me in attempting historical reconstruction of the Victorian colonial press. Those referring to 1840, 1850 and 1871 emanated from the press and printing trade, two of the three being part of commemorative publications. For six issues in the 1860s the annual *Sands & McDougall’s Directory* contains a list which was probably supplied by the leading news and advertising agency, Gordon and Gotch. In the 1880s this firm began its own publication of the *Australasian Newspaper Directory* after stockbroker and entrepreneur H. Byron Moore had brought out the *Victorian Press Manual*. (I do wonder about the 1870s — whether there is a source I have missed. *Sands & McDougall’s* confines itself to listing metropolitan papers after 1867. Of course there are other directories which include references to some, if not all, local newspapers — notably the *Australian Handbook* of Gordon and

Gotch and the *Victorian Municipal Directory*, but I am speaking of consolidated lists, not scattered references.) The lists which survive as government documents were not compiled and published for advertisers, subscribers and the public at large, but for various political and legal purposes: Port Phillip Superintendent La Trobe's 1848 list was prepared in response to information requested by the Imperial Government; the Register of Newspapers was compiled from affidavits and recognizances made by intending newspaper publishers; and the government advertising returns tabled in Parliament in 1858 and 1878 were called for in relation to allegations of irregularities. If reliably complete and correct lists of newspapers being published at a particular date are being sought, these government documents will be found inferior to the lists drawn up and published by the private commercial enterprises producing newspapers. But if the circumstances of compilation of these government documents are understood, they will be found, nonetheless, to be invaluable primary sources for newspaper historians and bibliographers.

There remain two matters of definition before I get down to business. First, what do I mean by government regulation? Henry Mayer, in the historical overview which forms part of his uniquely valuable study of Australian newspapers in the twentieth century, refers to methods used by governors and government in attempts to overcome press opposition — namely censorship, demands for securities, actions for libel and contempt of court or of Parliament. He notes also a number of indirect controls — manipulation of printing contracts, insertion and withdrawal of government advertising, provision of newspaper trains.<sup>4</sup> I too intend to cover both direct regulation and indirect economic control. In addition to Mayer's specifics, I shall look at measures to facilitate access to political information.

If regulation takes many forms, governance takes place at several levels. The three to be distinguished for my purposes are:

1. The regulatory activities of the British Imperial Government until the mid-fifties, evidence of which is to be found in the instructions and advice conveyed in despatches from the Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Governor of New South Wales before Separation and the Governor of Victoria thereafter, but receding in importance with the granting of 'responsible government'. Thus I have taken notice of the advice from Earl Bathurst to Governor Darling which led to the press legislation of 1827, of that from Lord Stanley to Governor Gipps and then Earl Grey to Governor Fitzroy during the 1840s resisting petitions from residents of Melbourne to have overseas mail landed there directly instead of being taken on to Sydney and brought back, and of that also from Earl Grey to Fitzroy calling for information about the character, readership and circulation of New South Wales newspapers which caused Superintendent La Trobe to draw up the list already referred to. I have also considered the parliamentary moves and Victorian gubernatorial representations to the British Government for a regular steamship monthly mail service.

2. The regulatory activities of the colonial governments: that is, the New South Wales Governor and part-elected Legislative Council to 1850, the Victorian Governor and part-elected Legislative Council from 1851 to 1856, and the bicameral Parliament from November 1856. I take into account both collective law-

making and the actions of individuals, and here I include, acting in their public capacity, not only governors and members of the Legislature but also officers of the Crown.

3. The regulatory activities of local government bodies set up, from 1854, under the Municipal Institutions Act and amending legislation. These I do not intend to explore here, for every country and suburban newspaper would have a story to tell about maintaining a *modus vivendi* with local powers.

Throughout my period of study both prospectuses for new papers and editorials in first issues (these leaders customarily captioned ‘Ourselves’) contain statements about press freedom. To take an example at random, the Camperdown *Western Press* in country Victoria, in its inaugural number of 30 June 1866, announces that ‘the Press has been the oracle of the people except where despots have overstridden its liberty’. The extent of freedom which any would-be newspaper owner had, in Victoria or anywhere, to start a paper, obtain news, decide what to print and to distribute the publication was always at issue, within a framework of controlling interests. I propose to examine government regulation of the ‘freedom’ of the nineteenth-century Victorian press under four separate headings (hoping, in organizing interrelated matters under these different rubrics, not to distort or fracture the whole picture):

- Licensing provisions
- Content control
- News gathering and distribution
- Financial viability

### Licensing Provision

The territory which became known as the Southern Province of New South Wales, better known as the Port Phillip District or, to many of its settlers, Australia Felix, was occupied by the British for ‘free’ settlement and not as a ‘receptacle of felons’.<sup>5</sup> This occurred from the mid-1830s, at a time of emergent libertarianism in the mother country — seen there in campaigns for increasing democratic participation in the political process and for easing of controls on the newspaper press. To drive home the point, the first Port Phillip newspaper began publication in 1838, four years after the passing in Great Britain of the landmark Reform Act which there extended the franchise to sections of the middle class. Newspapers of Victoria were never the direct mouthpieces of government, as had been the case in New South Wales early in the century. Nonetheless they were, until 1864, subject to the legislative controls introduced by New South Wales Governor Darling in 1827, intended to curb what authority saw as an ‘extremely dangerous’ press in Sydney,<sup>6</sup> controls such as campaigners for press freedom in Britain were fighting to abolish which were based on what Francis Williams has described as the ruling class fear of what might happen if newspaper reading were allowed to become general.<sup>7</sup> Similar legislation was introduced in Tasmania (or Van Diemen’s Land as it was then) for, as Morris Miller explains, ‘a controlled press was a necessary instrument of policy’.<sup>8</sup> The Darling press legislation of 1827 was tri-partite:

1. An Act to impose a 4d stamp duty on each copy of a newspaper sold (as was then in force in Britain, there to be reduced to 1d in 1836 but not abolished until 1855), which occasioned such an outcry in Sydney that it was suspended (thereby denying New South Wales of expected revenue to subsidise government printing — but that is another story).<sup>9</sup>

2. An Act requiring the owners of printing presses or type to register the fact with the Colonial Secretary (a press being seen as a dangerous weapon in the wrong hands). This Act was put into effect.<sup>10</sup>

3. The Blasphemous and Seditious Libels Act, which required newspaper editors, proprietors, publishers and printers to make affidavits and enter into recognizances with two or three sureties each of £300, to be delivered to the Colonial Secretary before publication could begin.<sup>11</sup> With over twenty clauses imposing various conditions and obligations (including full imprint on paper and the delivery of signed copies to the Colonial Secretary) the Act also laid down severe penalties for non-compliance and a sentence of banishment following a second conviction on a charge of blasphemous or seditious libel.

The publisher of the first newspaper for Melbourne and the Port Phillip District, John Pascoe Fawcner, fell foul of the law for issuing the first number of his handwritten *Melbourne Advertiser* in January before the documents he had lodged with Superintendent Lonsdale had reached Sydney. Amending legislation later that year removed this obstacle in allowing publication outside Sydney after affidavits had been made before a *local* Police Magistrate.<sup>12</sup>

Further concessions were obtained in January 1842 at least partly as a result of Melbourne press protests during Governor Gipps's visit in October 1841, when he received a deputation from the three Port Phillip papers. The chief objections were to the banishment clause and the requirement to name the editor in the imprint.<sup>13</sup> A.G.L. Shaw's edition of the Gipps-LaTrobe correspondence includes a conciliatory and clarifying letter from Gipps, sent in November. Two months later the banishment clause was repealed and the principle of editorial anonymity became enshrined in law.<sup>14</sup>

A further amendment, which provided for Port Phillip District papers to be registered in Melbourne, was introduced in 1849, anticipating Separation.<sup>15</sup> Thus entries in the Register of Newspapers (now in the Victorian Registrar-General's Office) are dated from 1850. Also under the amendment, delivery of signed copies to the Colonial Secretary was no longer required. If liberalising, this latter provision is to be regretted by posterity, reflected as it is in the total absence or drastic incompleteness today of files of many Victorian newspapers published over the next twenty to thirty years.

While the New South Wales Act as amended remained in force, unsuccessful efforts were made in 1862 and 1863 to introduce new legislation. Each was instigated by a member of the Legislative Assembly personally affronted by press reports and seeking punitive action: William Frazer because of the *Argus* and, the following year, Richard Ireland because of the *Age*.<sup>16</sup> Measures proposed in the Bill introduced by the latter, especially a requirement to furnish sureties of £1500,

elicited a concerted campaign by city and country newspapers, and the proposed legislation was withdrawn.<sup>17</sup> The failure of the attempt to introduce it demonstrated the practical limits to parliamentary control of the press.

In 1864, as part of a general consolidation of the laws, the Printers and Newspapers Registration Statute came into force and remained unchanged throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>18</sup> While the new legislation imposed virtually the same obligations on newspaper publishers, penalties were more flexible and the definition of 'newspaper' more restricted — being limited to a frequency not exceeding twenty-six days and a price of sixpence or less.

Invoking of the law for non-compliance with the registration obligations was the exception even though many short-lived papers do not appear in the Register at all and others, at least until the 1870s, were registered late (even years after they began). It is possible that errors of omission occurred in compiling the register from the affidavits and recognizances — and it would be a mammoth if not impossible task to check this — but if such were found to be the case, even more laxity would be evident.<sup>19</sup> The sanctions seem to have constituted a reserve power, one which may have been used against opponents. There is quite strong circumstantial evidence, it seems to me, that an action against Mitchell Armstrong of the *Kyneton Guardian* for inadvertent omission of imprint on a supplement in the early 1860s was connected to a campaign by rival Kyneton newspaper proprietor George Sands, who was also a Member of Parliament, to drive the former out of business.<sup>20</sup> The real function of registration was that it provided evidence of legal liability for the purpose of litigation — particularly the libel actions which were a regular fact of life.

The Copyright Act of 1869, the first of its kind for the colonies, imposed further conditions on publishers of newspapers in requiring the deposit of copies in the Public Library of Victoria — a measure more honoured in the breach than the observance during the Henry Sheffield and Marcus Clarke years until 1881, when Thomas Bride took over as Chief Librarian.<sup>21</sup> The many improvements from that year on included attention to newspaper acquisitions by legal deposit and donation or bequest (Fawcner's collection of eighty-eight volumes of newspapers was received in 1882) and the preservation and use of the newspaper collection. From 1882, as any user of Victorian colonial newspapers in the State Library will know, there is a vast increase in the holdings.<sup>22</sup> The issuing that same year by H. Byron Moore of the *Victorian Press Manual* is probably not entirely coincidental, though I have not yet pursued a connection. Another feature of the Copyright Act was the protection it afforded against unauthorised use of published material — of *prima facie* significance to newspaper publishers in restricting the traditional practice of freely extracting and republishing from other newspapers but in fact becoming less relevant as the practice was giving way to direct reporting and to use of news from agencies. In 1871, with experience of intra- and inter-colonial use of the telegraph to transmit news and in anticipation of the impending overseas cable link, the Telegraph Messages Copyright Act was passed. Prohibiting unauthorised use of cables for twenty-four hours, it was intended to ensure that pirated cable news would be stale news.<sup>23</sup>

The last item in what I have grouped together as licensing provisions is the Sunday (Newspapers) Act of 1889,<sup>24</sup> brought in to clarify existing prohibitions under the Police Offences Statute of 1865 on the sale or publication of papers on the (Christian) Sabbath, except in emergencies (mentioned below in relation to the transmission of State War Telegraphs). The issue of Sunday observance was critical and controversial in the 1880s, and this particular legislation was sparked by the announcement of publication of a *Sunday Times* (which it of course inhibited). Sydney, on the other hand, had Sunday papers for a short time in 1849 and regularly from 1885. I don't want to digress here into a Melbourne-Sydney cultural difference study, but clearly there is a point to be taken up.

### Content Control

By another name, censorship.

From the 1860s, relations between press and politicians were characterised by a continuing oppositional dialogue — published in the papers, pronounced in Parliament, pursued in court. Ironically, many of the players in the game combined careers in the law, politics and journalism, and jousting was often carried over from one arena to another.<sup>25</sup> Politicians' weapons included summoning a publisher to the Bar of the House to face disciplinary action — only possible if a majority of Members agreed. It was a course of action pretty well abandoned after the 1860s, perhaps because of the insistence by newspapermen that statements published were, in David Syme's words, 'fair comment upon the public conduct of public men';<sup>26</sup> possibly also because of embarrassments such as occurred in 1867, when Syme was brought to book for an offending editorial in the *Leader* and MLA George Paton Smith felt morally impelled to emerge from beneath the veil of editorial anonymity and admit to the House that he had written it.<sup>27</sup> Certainly libel actions, criminal or civil, but more often the latter, became the norm.<sup>28</sup> While Melbourne newspaper publishers were the usual targets, a case in 1867 brought by MLA George Sands against his Kyneton newspaper rival Mitchell Armstrong (mentioned above) shows that the country press was not exempt and also points up what I have found in my researching of press history: that the Victorian country press was quite powerful in the 1860s.

By contrast, in the 1880s a large amount of litigation between country newspaper publishers and *local* personalities (sometimes holding office in local government) bespeaks a more circumscribed role for the country press.<sup>29</sup> Lawyer, parliamentarian and one-time journalist John (later Sir John) Quick made strenuous but unsuccessful attempts to amend the law of libel so as to provide protection for the reporting of local Council proceedings and save the time of the courts.<sup>30</sup>

The law of libel was radically different in the Port Phillip years. Then it rested on what Henry Hallam, in 1827, refers to as the ancient 'received doctrine in Westminster-Hall . . . that no man might publish a writing reflecting on the government, nor upon the character, or even capacity and fitness of any one employed in it'.<sup>31</sup> As Hallam points out, in libel actions it was the juries' province solely to determine the *fact* of publication. Perhaps ahead of his time, he was

actually calling the doctrine into question. At any rate, a Select Committee of the House of Lords recommended in 1843 that truth could be a defence in civil and criminal proceedings if publication were for the public benefit. The full recommendations were incorporated into amendments to the New South Wales Slander and Libel Act in 1847, thus putting newspaper publishers of that colony on a stronger footing.<sup>32</sup>

Of the several conflicts between press and authority in Port Phillip before this occurred, the sharpest was that between the young, talented George Arden of the *Port Phillip Gazette* and the irascible resident judge John Willis, who, unwanted elsewhere, had been inflicted on Melbourne.<sup>33</sup> Though Arden was instrumental in bringing about the recall of Willis, the libel actions incurred probably contributed to the breakup of the young newspaperman's career and his premature demise. Thomas Wilkinson, publisher of the *Portland Guardian*, was more fortunate. Arraigned in 1845 on a criminal libel charge for editorial attacks on the Catholic Police Magistrate James Blair (the leaders were actually written by the Anglican minister James Yelverton Wilson and were clearly motivated by sectarian animosity, but Wilson as editor was of course not liable) he was taken into custody and conveyed to Melbourne, where he was held for a month pending trial.<sup>34</sup> The case was dismissed and Wilkinson returned to his paper. Attacks on Blair — albeit milder in tone — continued, and Wilkinson lived to a ripe old age. That official attitudes were changing is illustrated in the language used by La Trobe in his January 1848 report on the newspapers of his jurisdiction: expressing, almost ritualistically, extreme disdain for the papers, he seems to accept them, however, as a necessary part of commercial and political life and to recognize their integrative role in a scattered community.<sup>35</sup>

In the general disruption which the goldfinds of late 1851 brought in their train, the press of Victoria, drastically short of labour, was set back for two or three years. In 1854, when it was beginning to grow again, with papers starting on the goldfields, landmark court actions took place which had the effect of quelling any latent or overt radicalism and setting clear limits to press criticism of the powers that be. These happenings were part of the authoritarian reaction to the political and civil chaos epitomised in the Eureka rebellion. In October James Harrison of the *Geelong Advertiser* was convicted on a libel charge for editorially describing the drunkenness on the Bench of Crown Prosecutor Dr George MacKay.<sup>36</sup> Although the insobriety appears to have been corroborated, the jury, following judicial direction, found (as it seems now) against the 'truth', the 'public benefit' being identified with a certain unquestioning respect for the personifications of law and order. Harrison was fined £800 and had to pay costs. The other case was the arrest, in the wake of the Eureka uprising, of a young Henry Seekamp, publisher of the *Ballarat Times*, on a charge of sedition. He was convicted in January 1855 and sentenced to six months' imprisonment.<sup>37</sup> Ironically, the offending editorials were almost certainly written by John Manning, one of the Eureka rebels tried and acquitted, who would ten years or so later himself stand trial in New Zealand on a sedition charge.<sup>38</sup> Sadly, Seekamp, like Arden, would go downhill thereafter and also die in his early thirties.<sup>39</sup> The general effect of the Harrison and Seekamp cases was



that examples were set and warnings sounded to newspaper publishers in Victoria not to exceed certain limits. Even so, the law was further liberalised in 1856, new legislation allowing the faithful and accurate reporting of proceedings in court and providing for the defendant in a libel action to publish an apology and plead no malice, in mitigation.<sup>40</sup>

### News Gathering and Distribution

Some years ago Sir Zelman Cowen, as Chairman of the Press Council in Great Britain, drew attention to the right to gather news as a necessary part of the freedom to publish and to the related question of the protection of sources of information.<sup>41</sup>

Above all, colonial newspapers were concerned with politics, so I shall turn to the issue of obtaining political news. This was, to say the least, difficult in eighteenth-century Britain, until reporters were permitted to take notes in the House of Commons (from 1783) and given free access to the press gallery (which happened much later).<sup>42</sup> Macaulay, in 1828, comments on the changing perceptions — with reporting of parliamentary proceedings becoming not only a press right but a duty:

The gallery in which the reporters sit has become a fourth estate of the realm. The publication of the debates, a practice which seemed to the most liberal statesmen of the old school full of danger to the great safeguards of public liberty, is now regarded by many persons as a safeguard tantamount, and more than tantamount, to all the rest together.<sup>43</sup>

In the 1840s, the chief source of information for Port Phillipians about New South Wales politics was the Sydney press, in particular the *Sydney Morning Herald*. From 1851, Victorian newspapers attempted to report directly on proceedings in the Victorian Legislature. The *Argus* carried the most complete reports, while country papers — in Geelong, Portland, Belfast (now Port Fairy) — had great difficulty in securing prompt and reliable information. By 1856, however, a press gallery had been established, with a committee of management which included one country representative.<sup>44</sup>

From 1856 the record of proceedings in the two Houses of Parliament, Hansard, was based on accounts in the *Argus*, with members having the opportunity to make corrections. In 1860 the *Argus* was given the contract to produce it.<sup>45</sup> From 1866, after much dissatisfaction with the product (MLA and newspaperman James Casey, who had lived in the United States in the 1840s, argued that Parliament should finance its own reporting, as did the American Congress) the House engaged its own staff and issued Hansard in weekly parts.<sup>46</sup> In my opinion, one may date from that time the beginning of the decline of the *Argus* from press supremacy — with the *Age* on an equal footing, as it were. From the late 1870s the press gallery was not greatly used by country reporters, which is understandable given not only the distance factor but also the development of the telegraph and agencies to transmit urgent news, the increasing distribution to country districts of Melbourne dailies containing political reports and comment, and the growing role of the country press

to *interpret* political events in relation to their own locality rather than to repeat news already conveyed in the daily press. That, in the 1880s, the matter of enlarging the press gallery so as to accommodate more country reporters was raised by deputations from the *Victorian Farmers' Gazette* and the Chaffey Brothers' *Mildura Cultivator* and the request was met (though the extra provisions were, some years later, hardly ever used) was the result of a press-supported country party political movement which gathered momentum in the late 1880s but slackened thereafter.<sup>47</sup> To what extent Hansard itself was obtained by country newspaper publishers I do not know, though the importance of making it available was periodically voiced in debates.<sup>48</sup>

I shall briefly mention postal charges. Newspapers could be sent free through the mail in New South Wales until 1850, when a 1d charge came in. La Trobe removed this from 1852, but it was re-imposed in 1854 and remained, though lowered in 1873 to ½d. It is hard to gauge the effect of the postal charge on the newspapers (as compared, say, with other colonies where no charge was more often the case). I would hazard the suggestion that this source of revenue contributed to the efficiency of the postal service, while the development of an extensive railway system (albeit after a slow start) through the relatively small and densely populated colony allowed for newspaper distribution schemes to operate outside the postal system. Whatever the truth of this, the debates on postal charges are revealing: in the Upper House, the conservative Legislative Council, there were spokesmen for the old authoritarian view of restricting the spread of information; in the Lower House, the Assembly, the case for removing 'taxes on knowledge' was countered by *economic* arguments, and there seems to have been a growing consensus on the importance of spreading information, whether political, commercial or general, to the remotest parts of the colony and of course through the medium of the newspaper.<sup>49</sup>

I shall also just touch on the telegraph. In Britain it was first used in the 1840s. In Victoria a service was operating from 1854 — and in this respect the colony was a frontrunner, fortunate to have the services of Canadian expert Sam McGowan.<sup>50</sup> By the 1860s the network was spreading virtually in parallel with urban settlement. By 1869 Victoria was linked with all Australian colonies except Western Australia. In November 1872 the overseas cable to Europe was operating. New Zealand was joined in 1876, and the east-west link was completed the following year, bringing Western Australia into the network. The telegraph service was under the control of the government. Initially, high distance-based tariffs brought in a great deal of revenue to finance further development. With growing recognition by the government of the benefits not only to itself but also to commerce and industry and public enlightenment, a tariff independent of distance was introduced, charges were progressively reduced and press rates applied. Governmental participation generally in the supply of cable news was debated in Parliament during 1873, when there was concern with the cost of overseas telegraphs and discussion of either a subsidy or a government news service. The notion was generally rejected. As Charles Gavan Duffy put it, such measures would 'interfere with the free circulation of free opinion in a free country'.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, the government did give itself

special powers: provision was made in 1877 (during the Russo-Turkish War) for 'State War Telegrams' to take priority in transmission and to be made available on Sunday at ordinary press rates to country papers.<sup>52</sup>

### Financial Viability

From the beginning advertising was the chief source of revenue for newspapers in Port Phillip and Victoria. The first issue of the *Portland Mercury* in 1842 probably brought in about £15 from advertising and £3 from subscriptions.<sup>53</sup> I would suggest that money from subscriptions (which were the method of purchase in the early years) and sales of single copies (which became the norm later) of any Victorian newspaper never amounted to more than a quarter of the total revenue. Advertising included commercial, private and government notices. In the early years (and before there was a large electorate to inform if not sway) obtaining government advertising seems to have been largely a matter of press initiative. In October 1839 Arden and Strode of the *Port Phillip Gazette* were offering their services to La Trobe; in 1845 and again in 1846 Thomas Osborne of the *Portland Gazette* was doing likewise and boasting in his paper of being awarded the government contract — a favour that did not continue, for in October 1847 he complained to La Trobe that he was receiving only a fraction of the government advertising.<sup>54</sup>

From 1856 regulations which required electoral lists to be published at least twice in country newspapers brought in more business at intervals — probably of most benefit to the itinerant compositors who would be taken on for this extra work.<sup>55</sup> By the 1860s irregularities in the disbursement of government printing were apparent. In 1862 advertisements were withheld from the *Age*, an unsuccessful attempt to stifle the expression of its proprietor's reformist views.<sup>56</sup> In 1863 the notorious politician George Sands was receiving the lion's share of advertising for his *Kyneton Observer*, while Mitchell Armstrong was trying to keep his *Kyneton Guardian* afloat.<sup>57</sup> Investigations into this form of 'patronage' were called for, and procedures established to channel all advertising through the Government Printer — though these were not always followed, and figures published from time to time reveal inequities.<sup>58</sup> (For the newspaper bibliographer, these returns are a useful source for verifying the existence of a paper in a particular year. It is noteworthy that an 1878 list of amounts paid includes several papers which were not then registered, which further supports my contention that the law was not routinely enforced.<sup>59</sup>) In summing up the significance of this advertising, I would have to say that the government could not, either by the granting or withholding of it, actually make or break a newspaper.

Trade protection was arguably the hottest political potato for many years in colonial Victoria. A Royal Commission reported on tariffs in 1883.<sup>60</sup> The evidence taken shows that the importation from Britain of literary supplements for newspapers (in the form of stereoplates ready for printing) was objected to by representatives from the printing trade. The Commission recommended nonetheless that the existing duty of 20% which applied on other printing stationery be retained. Two points may be made: first, that a division of interests between

labour and capital is displayed — newspaper publishers were happy to buy ready-made entertainment packages if that would save costs and be acceptable to the readers; second, that general and literary reading matter had become a standard ingredient of newspapers, often being purchased as a package, and the government was not giving any preferential treatment to such materials locally produced.

To conclude, the common thread in the bits and pieces I have presented is, as I see it, the changing relations of press and government as the District of Port Phillip became independent of New South Wales and as, with the coming of representative parliamentary democracy and the passage of time, British influences waned. I have tried to convey some sense of the climate of increasing libertarianism within which the new political machinery evolved, with the newspaper press a part of it. James Curran sees the press as an agency of social control and interprets the nineteenth-century campaign for press freedom in terms of the conscription of the press to a new social order.<sup>61</sup> It is his approach, I think, which informs my interpretation of newspaper development in colonial Victoria — perhaps a model which could also be applied to other Australasian colonies. In any case, my line of investigation may help put the bare data of newspaper bibliography — titles, places, dates, frequencies, etc. — into a meaningful context.

Elizabeth Morrison,  
Monash University.

#### NOTES

1. James Bonwick, *Early Struggles of the Australian Press* (London: Gordon & Gotch, 1890); quoted by J.P. Henningham, 'Two Hundred Years of Australian Journalism: a History Waiting to be Written', *Australian Cultural History* 7 (1988): 49-64 (p.49), who adds that it is 'surely surprising that 200 years of Australian history have not produced a comprehensive study of Australian journalism'.
2. Anthony Trollope, *Australia and New Zealand* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1873), v.1, p.387.
3. For example: Port Phillip Benefit Printers' Society, Melbourne Typographical Society and similar bodies in Geelong and Ballarat, Victorian Master Printers' Association, Victorian Reporters' Association, Provincial Press Union.
4. Henry Mayer, *The Press in Australia* (Melbourne: Lansdowne, 1964), p.17.
5. *Port Phillip Herald* 1 November 1841, 'Extraordinary' issued on the occasion of Governor Gipps's visit to Melbourne and Port Phillip.
6. *Historical Records of Australia* ser. 1, v.13, p.96.
7. Francis Williams, *Dangerous Estate* (London: Longmans, Green, 1957), p.29.
8. E. Morris Miller, *Pressmen and Governors* (1952; reprint ed. Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1973), p.66.
9. 8 Geo.IV, No.3 (1827). 'An Act for Imposing a Duty upon all Newspapers and Papers of a Like Nature Printed to be Dispersed and Made Public'. On planned use of the expected revenue see: 'Despatch, Governor Darling to Earl Bathurst, 8 September 1826', *Historical Records of Australia* ser. 1, v.12, p.548.
10. 8 Geo.IV, No.5 (1827). 'An Act for Preventing the Printing and Publishing of Books and Papers by Persons Not Known'. The Letter-book of T.H. Osborne, now in the possession of the Port Fairy Historical Society, contains a copy of such a declaration, dated 26 April 1846 (when Osborne was proprietor and publisher of the *Portland Gazette*).
11. 8 Geo.IV, No.2 (1827). 'An Act for Preventing the Mischiefs Arising from the Printing and Publishing Newspapers and Papers of a Like Nature by Persons Not Known and for Regulating the Printing and

- Publication of such Papers in other Respects and also for Restraining the Abuses Arising from the Publication of Blasphemous and Seditious Libels'.
12. 'The First Newspapers and Printers', in *Historical Records of Victoria* v.4, pp.489-526; 2 Vic., No.20 (1838), amending 8 Geo.IV, No.2 (1827).
  13. 5 Vic., No.19 (1842); *Port Phillip Herald* 1 November 1841.
  14. *Gipps-La Trobe Correspondence, 1839-1846* ed. A.G.L. Shaw (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1989), pp.106-107.
  15. 13 Vic., No.47 (1849). 'An Act to Transfer Certain Duties with Respect to the Printing and Publishing of Books and Newspapers ...'
  16. *Victorian Parliamentary Debates* (hereafter, VPD), v.8, 1862, pp.923 ff.; VPD, v.9, 1863, pp.712 ff.
  17. VPD, v.9, 1863, p.1027; C.E. Sayers, *David Syme: A Life* (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1965), pp.56-57; *Kyneton Guardian* 14 May 1863; *Melvor News* 28 May 1863.
  18. Attempts in the early 1880s – on behalf of the *Daily Telegraph* – to allow a company to be considered a proprietor and its manager to make the statutory declaration came to nothing, and a further consolidation in 1890 merely altered its title to the Printers and Newspapers Act.
  19. Entry No.54 in the Register 'Woodspoint Leader 5.2.56' cannot possibly be correct, for Woods' Point was not settled and named until the 1860s: very likely the figures have been transposed and should be '5.2.65'.
  20. 'Report from the Select Committee upon Mr Sands' Case', *Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly of Victoria and Papers Presented* (hereafter, VPP), 1867, (First Session), v.2, pp.493-747.
  21. Improvements may be traced through the annual reports of the Trustees of the Public Libraries, Museums, and National Gallery of Victoria, published in VPP.
  22. 6,273 copies were deposited in 1880, 12,747 in 1881 and 19,234 in 1882.
  23. 35 Vic., No.414 (1871).
  24. 53 Vic., No.1033 (1889).
  25. For example, George Higinbotham and George Paton Smith.
  26. VPP, 1867, (First Session), v.1, p.95.
  27. VPD, v.4, 1867, p.703.
  28. Law Reform Commission, *Unfair Publication: Defamation and Privacy*, Report no.11 (Canberra: AGPS, 1979), in recording that one third of the defendants in libel actions in the Australian colonies in the last quarter of the nineteenth century were media proprietors, would indicate that the phenomenon was not limited to Victoria (p.18).
  29. Frequently reported in issues of the *Australasian Typographical Journal*.
  30. See, for example, debates in September 1886 on the Libel and Slander Amendment Bill, VPD, v.52, 1886, pp.1394-1402, 1564-1571.
  31. Henry Hallam, *The Constitutional History of England from the Accession of Henry VII to the Death of George II* (London: Ward Lock, 1859[?]), p.719 (first published 1827).
  32. Law Reform Commission, *Unfair Publication*, pp.43, 64.
  33. Summarised in the entries for Arden and Willis, respectively, in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press), v.1, 1966, pp.26-27 and v.2, 1967, pp.602-604.
  34. The events may be gleaned from issues of the *Portland Guardian* and the *Portland Gazette* from August to November 1845.
  35. *Historical Records of Australia* ser. 1, v.26, pp.170-172.
  36. Timothy T. Bracher, 'The Geelong Advertiser, 1840-1865: "The Harrison Years"' (typescript dated 1983 in Geelong Historical Records Centre), ch.14; Reports in the *Age*, *Argus*, *Melbourne Morning Herald* and *Geelong Advertiser* on and after 14 November 1854.
  37. Numerous references in Melbourne newspapers for the period January to March 1855, for example *Age* 24 January, 6, 22 February, 26 March.
  38. D.R. Harvey, 'Joseph Ivess, "Celebrated Country Newspaper Proprietor"', *Turnbull Library Record* 21 (May 1988): 5-28 (p.8).
  39. *Ballarat Times* 23 October 1856; Barbara Cooper, 'The Ballarat Times', *Ballarat Historian* 3 (December 1987): 18-30 (p.21).
  40. 19 Vic., No.4 (1856).
  41. Zelman Cowen, 'Protecting Press and Public', in *One Hundred Years of Journalism* ed. Cyril Bainbridge (London: Macmillan, 1984), pp.8-11 (p.8).
  42. A. Aspinall, 'The Reporting and Publishing of the House of Commons' Debates, 1771-1834', in *Essays Presented to Sir Lewis Namier* eds. Richard Pares and Alan J.P. Taylor (Freeport, Conn: Books for Libraries, 1971), pp.227-257 (first published 1965).
  43. 'Lord Macaulay on Hallam's *Constitutional History of England* (*Edinburgh Review*, Sept., 1828)' reprinted in Hallam, *Constitutional History*, pp. 874-933 (p.930).

44. C.T.Lloyd, *Parliament and the Press: The Federal Parliamentary Press Gallery, 1901-1988* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988), p.22 dates this from 1854; Henry Wrixon, VPP, 1886, p.2206, indicates 1856.
45. VPP, v.7, 1860, p.430.
46. VPD, v.11, 1865, pp.1026-1027.
47. See especially: record of Legislative Assembly debates on 11, 16 October and 14, 20 November 1888 in VPD, v.58, 1888; VPD, v.64, 1890, p.1815.
48. For example, VPD, v.14, 1872, p.366; v.29, 1878, pp.2189 ff.
49. VPD, v.1, 1857, pp.310-311; VPD, v.13, 1871, pp.1091-1092.
50. Developments may be traced in Reports of the Electric Telegraph Department to 1868 and Post Office and Telegraph Department from 1869, in VPP.
51. VPD, v.16, 1873, p.1003.
52. Post Office and Telegraph Department Order-in-Council, VPP 1877-78, v.3, p.211.
53. Based on hypothetical 100 subscriptions and on advertising revenue calculated by T.P. Newton, 'The Portland Mercury and Normanby Advertiser' (unpublished booklet held at History House, Portland), p.6.
54. 'George Arden & Thomas Strode to C.J. La Trobe, 1 October 1839', in *Historical Records of Victoria*, v.4, pp.501-504; Osborne, Letter-book entries 29 September 1845, 12 October 1846, 16 October 1847; *Portland Gazette* 29 January 1845.
55. 19 Vic., No.12 (1856). *Australian Typographical Circular*, May 1859 notes that the provision has been an 'impetus to trade in provincial cities'.
56. Sayers, *David Syme*, p.56.
57. 'Report from the Select Committee upon Mr Sands' Case' (1867).
58. For example, 'Government Advertising, Return (partial) to an Order of the Legislative Assembly', VPP, 1869, v.2, p.83.
59. For example, *Bairnsdale Courier* and *Gippsland Standard* (the 1878 document is cited in Appendix I).
60. 'Tariff: Report of the Royal Commission, together with Appendices and Minutes of Evidence', VPP, 1883 (2nd Session), v.4.
61. 'The Press as an Agency of Social Control: An Historical Perspective', in *Newspaper History from the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day* eds. George Boyce, James Curran and Pauline Wingate (London: Constable, 1978), pp.51-75.

TABLE I

## NEWSPAPERS PUBLISHED IN THE AUSTRALASIAN COLONIES IN 1892

Colony (1st paper*) Population	Md	Mw	S	C	TOTAL	Paper: Population
Vic. (1838) (1,140,405)	4	13	48	181	246	1:4635
N.S.W. (1803) (1,123,954)	5	10	11	192	218	1:5155
N.Z. (1840) (668,353)	3	3		144	150	1:4455
S.A. (1837) (324,946)	4	9		21	34	1:9557
Qld. (1846) (303,718)	3	10		66	79	1:3844
Tas. (1810) (146,667)	2	4		10	16	1:9166
W.A. (1830?) (49,835)	2	5		5	12	1:4152

\* from various sources

Md = Metropolitan daily  
Mw = Metropolitan weekly  
S = Suburban (of metropolis)  
C = Country

(Figures based on lists in *Australasian Newspaper Directory, Advertisers' & Subscribers' Guide*, 3rd ed. (Melbourne: Gordon & Gotch, 1892))

## APPENDIX I

## LISTS OF VICTORIAN NEWSPAPERS

Ref.date	Source	Issued by
1840 (Oct)	Arden, G. <i>Latest Information with Regard to Australia Felix</i> (Melbourne: Arden & Strode, 1840), p.86.	PRESS
1848 (Jan)	Mr C.J. La Trobe to Colonial Secretary Thompson, 20th January, 1848 [Report on newspapers published in Port Phillip district]. In <i>Historical Records of Australia</i> , Series 1, v.26, pp.170-2.	GOVT
1838-50(Nov)	'Commemoration of the Boon of the Separation of the Province of Victoria', <i>Melbourne Morning Herald</i> 19 Nov 1850. (Also pr. as separate leaflet, 15 Nov)	PRESS
1850+	Register of Newspapers in Victorian Registrar-General's Office.	GOVT
1851-57	'Total of all Amounts paid . . . for Advertising . . . and for Printing . . . to 31st December, 1857', Victoria. <i>Votes &amp; Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly</i> . . . Session 1858-9, v.1, p.654.	GOVT
1862-67	<i>Sands &amp; McDougall's Commercial and General Melbourne Directory</i> [Issued annually. Title varies].	AGENCY
1871	'The Press in Victoria', in Ferres, J. (comp.) William Caxton: A Contribution in <i>Commemoration of the . . . Fourth Centenary of the First Printing in the English Language</i> (Melbourne: Ferres, 1871), pp.15-16.	PRESS
1877-78(Feb)	'Government Advertisements', Victoria. <i>Votes &amp; Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly</i> . . . Session 1877-8, v.1, pp.829-30.	GOVT
1882	<i>Victorian Press Manual and Advertisers' Handbook</i> (Melbourne: H.Byron Moore & MacLeod, 1882).	AGENCY
1886	<i>Australasian Newspaper Directory 1886</i> (Gordon & Gotch, 1886).	AGENCY
1888	<i>Australasian Newspaper Directory</i> , 2nd ed. (Gordon & Gotch, 1888).	AGENCY
1892	<i>Australasian Newspaper Directory, Advertisers' and Subscribers' Guide</i> , 3rd ed. (Melbourne: Gordon & Gotch, 1892).	AGENCY

Note: These lists vary in degree of completeness, detail and accuracy. None is 100% complete and correct.



**Copyright of Full Text rests with the original copyright owner and, except as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, copying this copyright material is prohibited without the permission of the owner or its exclusive licensee or agent or by way of a license from Copyright Agency Limited. For information about such licences contact Copyright Agency Limited on (02) 93947600 (ph) or (02) 93947601 (fax)**