

The provincial press and politics: NSW, 1841-1930

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Politics and its various forms of expression spelt survival and, indeed, sustenance, for some provincial newspapers in colonial times. This paper sets out to examine how the New South Wales provincial press of the nineteenth century and early twentieth interacted with and impacted upon the political movements and processes of the day. Comparison will be drawn between the NSW provincial press and the frontier press of the United States and also the early provincial press of New Zealand. Some of the major issues on which the NSW papers sought to lead public opinion are examined. The editors and papers that were more overtly “political” than others are discussed, as are the less overtly “political” roles adopted by the papers — such as advancing the local district materially — because they, too, impacted on the political process.

For a newspaper, survival takes precedence over principles and philosophy. At different times and in different places, however, politics and its various forms of expression have spelt survival for a newspaper. This was true of England during the eighteenth century when governments subsidised “sympathetic” newspapers to the tune of £500 or £600 a year (Williams 1969, pp.7-8). It was true in America where editors were central figures in the party organisations in the first few decades of the nineteenth century. In Australia, despite their avowals of being “sworn to no master” — political or religious — many pioneering provincial newspapers were often explicitly or implicitly linked with political movements or political figures or they were owned and staffed by those motivated by enthusiasms that were “political” to some degree or another. Comparisons will be drawn with frontier papers in the United States and the pioneering provincial press of New Zealand to measure the “political” nature of the NSW

press. The principal aim of this paper is to explore the dimensions of the interaction between politics and the provincial press in the colony of New South Wales (NSW) before federation.

The American experience

In any consideration of the relationship between politics and the pioneering Australian provincial newspapers, the American experience is instructive, even though American journalism historians speak with differing voices when they discuss the political independence or partisanship of their pioneering frontier newspapers. For instance, William E. Huntzicker found “apparent contradictions” between the conclusions of Oliver Knight and William H. Lyon on whether pioneering editors were “rugged individualists or corporate and political spokesmen”. Carolyn Stewart Dyer (1989, pp.1-3) found that party politics and political patronage were the primary currencies of exchange that made the newspaper possible in new Wisconsin communities of a few hundred or thousand settlers. The press system in Wisconsin before the Civil War was a political system. All but about 10 percent of the newspapers operating between 1833 and 1860 were at one time or another identified as organs of the Democrats, Whigs, Republicans, Free-Soilers, Abolitionists, or other political parties. In both the 1850 and 1860 censuses, only about five percent of the newspapers were characterised as independent or neutral in politics. By contrast, Barbara Cloud (1980, pp.54-55, pp.72-73), in a study of Washington Territory, found that newspapers started expressly for partisan purposes were *never* the first newspapers in their particular communities. Of the 91 newspapers established in Washington Territory during 1852-1882, 20 (22 percent) owed their beginnings directly to partisan political concerns. All of these were the second or subsequent newspapers in their communities. In each of these towns this pattern developed: non-partisan first newspaper, emerging partisanship, competing partisan newspaper(s).

Lyon (1965) also found in his study of Missouri newspapers that the real pioneer editors — the first in each community — started non-partisan publications. In Ohio, the first newspaper, the *Centinel of the Northwestern Territory* (1793), announced its political impartiality by

adopting the motto, “Open to all parties, but influenced by none”. The papers that followed it, however, were drawn into the contest between the Federalists and the Democrat-Republicans over statehood and other issues (Hooper 1933, p.4). In *Arizona*, Lyon (1994, p.3) found that politics was the great generative force of frontier newspapers. Politically motivated, the pioneer editor laboured in an intensely competitive atmosphere. Parties, factions, and individual candidates for office saw editorial support as a must for success at the polls, resulting in a plethora of newspapers, more politically charged than today. Gerald Baldasty (1984, p.11) says American political parties saw the press as a vehicle to inform, propagandise, and exhort voters. The single most important link between party and electorate was the partisan newspaper. Central to the process of party organisation in the 1820s and early 1830s were the partisan editor and the partisan newspaper. Editors frequently were part of the central committee that ran the party or were closely tied to the committee. In turn, newspapers served as the major vehicle for communicating with and, ideally, mobilising voters (Baldasty 1984, p.5).

The New Zealand experience

In New Zealand, partisan political advocacy in newspapers was normal in the 1840s and 1850s, which Patrick Day (1990, pp.107-108) calls the “early provincial period”. The practice had developed before self-government was granted in 1852 and had intensified in the final years before the first elections were held. Intense political agitation was coordinated through the colony’s newspapers as self-government was sought. This agitation, says Day, became “partisan political advocacy on behalf of particular politicians” and was seldom conducted according to standards of decorum or fair play. Most of the major elected officials had connections with NZ newspapers; these connections varied from actual ownership to a period of intermittent contributions to a newspaper. Day says: “Press political advocacy was not usually advocacy for a political party — these were as yet generally undeveloped — but personal advocacy for a particular politician.” Mostly the politician also happened to own the newspaper. In Great Britain, the partisan nature of newspapers in the 1870s was suggested

by a report that of all the papers published there, 498 were classed as Liberal, 276 as Conservative, 68 as Liberal-Conservative, while 912 advocated “measures, not men” — they were, politically speaking, of no party (*Sydney Mail* 1876, p.171).

The Australian experience

In Australia, political partisanship was never so clearly defined in the nineteenth century as it was in the United States. In addition, the lack of a presidential style of government provided significant electoral contrasts with America. The partisan editor and the partisan newspaper, as known in the US in the 1820s and 1830s, were not features of Australian newspapers. The editors were not vital links in a party’s organisational chain, even though some were actively involved in politics, openly or behind the scenes. Before 1855, the growing demand in the Australian colonies for self-government divided people into two clear groups, both with their peculiar approach to what was required in the constitution of each colony.

[T]wo broad political movements, conservative and liberal, existed in the colony, reflecting significant differences in approach to its government and its social and economic development, and providing therefore a potential ideological basis for party action. By 1856 “conservative” and “liberal” were not merely *ad hoc* labels applied loosely by contemporaries anxious to find a way of describing trends apparent at the elections. They were, rather, appropriate and accepted names for particular attitudes of mind — perhaps traditions — which reached back into the forties and which crystallised most sharply around the constitutional matters under debate in the fifties. (Loveday & Martin 1966, pp.9-10)

These two groups remained after the British Imperial Parliament granted self-government to the colonies in 1855. The conservatives were associated with the landed gentry who saw themselves in the role of a colonial aristocracy (Loveday & Martin 1966, pp.10-17). The liberals were mainly engaged in commercial, professional and agricultural (as opposed to pastoral) pursuits. As a rising mercantile and professional class, they strongly opposed the formation of a colonial aristocracy, and the convict system that provided the free labour that allowed the pastoralists to maintain and work their large properties.

Through their efforts transportation of convicts to Australia was brought to an end in 1840. The liberals' main platform consisted of stable government, the development of the colony and the virtues of free trade. They strenuously opposed the formation of an appointed Upper House and pledged themselves to its abolition. They argued that stable government could be achieved only by reforming the electoral act; they linked to this a demand for land legislation that would put an end to the power of the pastoralists. They called for a state educational system, increased internal and external communications, municipal institutions, an extended system of courts, and a reorganisation of the administration (Loveday & Martin 1966, pp.17-23).

In country towns, if the newspaper that was being established was the only one in the town, the paper would generally declare its neutrality, but lean towards the liberals, or it would declare its support at the outset for the liberals. The *Newcastle Chronicle* (established in 1858) claimed to be liberal in politics (*Maitland Mercury* 1859). "Its leaders reflected the major political issues of the day and read like a manifesto of liberal principles (Moody 1969)." The *Armidale Express* (1856) promoted the "liberal interest" in the first general election after the achievement of responsible government. Although the candidate whom it supported was not returned, its political influence was thought to be so considerable that two years later a prospective candidate for Parliament offered one of the proprietors £1,000 if he would publish another journal in his support. The *Yass Courier* and the *Mudgee Newspaper* (both 1857) were launched in the liberal interest. One newspaper editor commented that if NSW did not "become a liberal-minded nation, the fault certainly will not rest with the press" (*Northern Times* 1857).

In a study of colonial Victorian newspapers, Elizabeth Morrison (1991, p.139) found that newspapers in small towns tended to take a consensual approach to controversial matters — including, no doubt, partisanship. The *St Arnaud Mercury* observed, on 4 February 1865, at the end of its first year, that "the fight in journalistic literature is inevitably uphill" and declared that its "only study will be, as it ever has been, the public good, and the advancement of our district to that position in the

social scale which its wealth and undeveloped resources entitle it to". The *Coleraine Albion* intended at the outset on 4 January 1868 to "give the great questions of Colonial politics a wide berth". By contrast, taking a political stand was especially noticeable in newspapers in multiple-newspapercentres such as Geelong, Ballarat and Sandhurst. New papers claimed to provide views that were alternative to and more liberal than those of the long-established dailies, which were seen as ultra-conservative. In NSW, political motivations generally arose somewhere in relation to the establishment of a provincial newspaper — if not for the town's first, as at Armidale in 1856 and Grafton in 1859, then certainly for its second (O'Keefe, pp.89-104; *Grafton Argus* 1874). H.M. Franklyn captured this in describing a typical town's growth up to 1880, with the remark that "two newspapers have been struggling into existence, and are advocating diametrically opposite views in politics" (Cannon 1973, p.239). At Grafton, William Edward Vincent launched the *Clarence and Richmond Examiner* in 1859, but holding the reins was wealthy politician, Clark Irving, whose objective was re-election at the impending NSW poll and achievement of separation for the northern districts of NSW (Vincent 1980, p.18). Vincent promised to support the liberal principles that would be evolved in the "New Parliament" (*Clarence & Richmond Examiner* 1859, p.2). In Sydney, Irving and Dr John Dunmore Lang failed to gain Parliament's support for the separation of the Northern Rivers district from the colony of NSW. Later, Vincent's failure to provide enthusiastic support for the Irving/Lang stance led Irving, as the major stakeholder, to decide to sell the *Examiner* title and plant to Richard Stevenson on 31 March 1861 (*Clarence & Richmond Examiner* 1861a & 1861b). Vincent was not the first, and would not be the last, editor expected to play the political tune required by his proprietorial master.

Papers fell into two groups

In at least one sense, Australian provincial newspapers drew from the British experience where, from about 1726 onwards, the provincial newspapers fell into two broad groups: (1) the papers which flung themselves wholeheartedly into the political fray; and (2) those which avoided the outspoken political essay and strove to steer a middle course between the two parties (Cranfield 1962, p.124). Among the

latter in NSW were such papers as the *Grafton Argus* (established 1874), the *Durham Chronicle*, Dungog (1888), and the *Uralla and Walcha Times* (1876), which declared that they were sworn to no political master. Many such declarations were soon found to be shallow, for the papers would soon be openly supporting one side of politics or the other. In October 1858 when the *Wagga Wagga Express* was about to begin, a contemporary noted that it “*promises* to be of Liberal politics; but from circumstances that have come to our knowledge we have reason to believe that it will ultimately become an organ to the squatters” (*Yass Courier* 1858). The *Uralla News*, established in 1904, was independent at first, but two years later supported Labor and won the local Labor branch’s total printing order. It rejected non-Labor advertisements (Harman 1975, pp.229-230).

In A.T. Shakespeare’s view, the establishment of country newspapers in the nineteenth century was based “as much on differences in editorial policies as on commercial competition”. G.H. Mott noted this when editorialising in his *Border Post* (1860) at Albury:

Party feeling usually runs pretty high in small communities, and if it so happens that any considerable section of such a community are disappointed with the result of an election, or are dissatisfied with the management of the local press, the first thing done is to start a newspaper to represent their particular views.

At Armidale, the squatters had become convinced they could not win the local seat without the support of a newspaper and so they invited Frank Newton to establish the *Armidale Telegraph* in their interests (O’Keefe, p.94). At Narrandera, the *Ensign* was established in November 1886 to speak for “labour and reform” — and, no doubt, protectionism — to counterbalance the *Argus* which had been preaching “commerce and conservatism” — and, no doubt, free trade — since its establishment in January 1880 (Gammage 1986, p.139; *Pastoral Times* 1880). Some papers declared that they would avoid partisanship. The *Molong Argus* (1907), when it gained a new proprietor, Frank Hartley, in 1907, declared that it was “the duty of a newspaper to faithfully and correctly report the political speeches of those who seek the suffrages of the electors, and to bind itself to principles rather

than to individuals or parties”. Hartley was going to express his opinion on political matters freely and strongly “irrespective of whether our doing so pleases or displeases individuals or parties”.

Major issues

From their earliest days, provincial newspapers sought to influence public opinion on specific issues. After the gold discoveries of the mid-nineteenth century, rival newspapers were established in many towns to represent the contending interests of squatters and selectors in the land controversy. Examples have been provided in Armidale, Mudgee and Deniliquin. In addition, the *Free Selector*, with editorials written in the first person singular by Hanley Bennett, was established in Tamworth at the end of 1874 and in southern NSW the *Yass Free Holders' and Free Selectors' Advocate* was issued monthly from November 1875 from the office of the *Yass Courier*. (Tamworth Historical Society; *Australian Almanac* 1876, p.89; *Singleton Argus* 1875). The *Albury Banner and Wodonga Express*, a weekly bordertown newspaper for ninety years from 1860, became known as “The Cocky’s Bible” because George Adams, who bought it in 1862, advocated the cause of the free selectors so forcefully (Walker 1976, p.170). At Wagga Wagga, the squatter-initiated *Express* (1858) did little to disguise its elitism at the outset, even though it was the first newspaper in the town.

Demagogues may preach doctrines which they know to be heterodoxical — political charlatans may pander to the weak vanity of the multitude by telling them that the man without a shoe to his foot or a sixpence in his pocket is as valuable and important a member of the social community as the one who by his skill, care and perseverance has amassed wealth or even independence for his family and himself — but truth and the experience of everyday life teach us the contrary. The larger the stake which any one has risked on the welfare or otherwise of a country, the more faithful and more strenuous will be his exertions on its behalf.

In the final two decades of the nineteenth century, when free trade versus protection became an acute political issue, there was a new editorial basis for newspaper rivalry although the opponents seem to have been much the same as in the squatter-versus-selector debates. The *National Advocate* was established as a daily in Bathurst in 1889

expressly to fight the protectionist cause in a town where free-trade supporters received a generous hearing in the daily *Times* and the tri-weekly *Free Press*. By March 1890, the *Advocate* was claiming a circulation more than double that of either of its two principal competitors, both dailies by then (Kirkpatrick 1996, pp.60-61; *National Advocate* 1889a, 1889b & 1890). At Taree, where the long-established *Manning Times* espoused free trade, an alderman, George Saxby, initiated the bi-weekly *Manning River Independent and Advocate of Native Industries* in 1888 to support protection (*Sydney Mail* 1889, p.672; *Wingham Chronicle* 1888, p.2). At Molong the *Argus* — whose editorial motto was “Australia for the Australians” — was set up on 6 September, 1895, to pursue the protectionist cause against the free-trade *Express*. At the end of its first year the *Argus* (1895 & 1896) had gained “a foothold that will defy the united efforts of the foreign trade adherents and local boycotters to dislodge”. Each week it was gaining new subscribers. At the close of its second year, the *Argus* remarked that it had encountered until then “a senseless opposition from a few” who sought its downfall. Protectionists were surely as entitled as free-traders to have their opinions respected, and to have press representation (*Molong Argus* 1897). At Tamworth, the fiercely free-trade *Observer* was outraged in 1887 when a local MLA, R.H. (Harry) Leven, proclaimed himself determinedly protectionist. Its attacks opened up old sores of rivalry with the *Tamworth News*, which was vehemently protectionist (Milliss 1980, pp.143-144).

Influence on election results

Newspapers attempted to influence election results, mainly by giving clear advice to electors on how to cast their votes. It was generally believed that the press significantly influenced voting, and in a number of polls the influence of the press was thought to have been decisive. For example, the defeat of Charles Wilson for the Armidale seat in 1901 was believed to have been largely the result of attacks made on him by the *Armidale Argus*. For six months before polling day the *Argus* (1901) attacked Wilson repeatedly, accusing him, amongst other things, of retaining office as an alderman on the municipal council to make his parliamentary position more secure. The victory of the Labor

candidate in the contest for New England in the 1906 general election was attributed by many newspapers of differing political opinions to the strong support he received from the many newspapers which had for many years consistently supported a policy of tariff protection. Grant Harman showed that the majority of voters in the Armidale electorate followed the line advocated by the *Express* in 1901, 1919, 1922, 1925 and 1929, but not in 1903 and 1910. At Tamworth, the electors followed the line of the *Observer/Leader* in 1903, 1914, 1919, 1922, 1925 and 1929, but not in 1901 and 1906. At Glen Innes, the electorate followed the *Glen Innes Examiner's* line in 1901, 1906, 1913, 1919, 1922, 1925 and 1929 (Harman 1975, p.234). Newspapers naturally were proud of their political influence. Two years after its establishment the *Uralla News* (1906) boasted of its political accomplishments, which included securing government action to conserve a local lagoon, helping establish a butter factory, initiating a move to put the local cemetery in order, and helping to secure the election of councillors to the shire council and the return in 1906 of Foster as member for New England.

News columns used as means of influence, too

Provincial papers gave space and prominence to electoral lists, announcements and advertisements, and to election reports and editorial comment on them: information “essential to the operation of the machinery of representative and responsible government” (Morrison 1991, p.137). The editorial column was not the only means by which newspapers attempted to influence public opinion. Obviously, the selection and reporting of news items provided an effective means by which the press could espouse certain ideas and causes. The blatant use of news columns for propaganda purposes was common. For instance, in 1901, to help the sitting member’s prospects for re-election, the *Armidale Express* reported that “a prominent Minister of the Crown” (a vague identity) who visited Armidale for the Federation celebrations had told the paper’s editor in a private conversation:

You are fortunate in getting a stamp of a man like Wilson to represent you; he is, I can assure you, the best-liked man in the Assembly; there is not a member in the House with more personal influence.

In the style of a number of papers, the *Express* regularly used an odd jottings column entitled “Events and Rumours” and later “Facts and Rumours” for propaganda purposes. In 1899 during the Federal referendum campaign, for example, in this column it reported: “It is said that the merchants of Sydney are doing their utmost to defeat federation (Harman 1975, p.230).”

Newspaper support for Labor

In the colonial period, it was not unusual for some provincial newspapers to support the emerging Labor party. In 1898, W.A. Holman, who became the Labor premier of NSW from 1913-20, bought the *Grenfell Vedette*. From August 1902 until August 1904, when Holman sold it, the *Vedette* was edited by Harry Holland, a militant socialist at other times but most discreet and restrained in his conduct of the paper. Holland found the paper at a low point but more than doubled its circulation and trebled its turnover in his two years there (Walker 1976, p.186). J.L. Treflé, proprietor of the *Temora Independent* for 20 years from 1895 (in partnership, from 1907, with J.A. Bradley), was a State Labor member for nine years and a from 1910 until his death in 1915 (Ritchie 1990, pp.254-255; Bradley 1990, p.9). T.M. Shakespeare (whose cousin Tom Brown was the Labor member for Canobolas) revealed Labor sympathies. Shakespeare, founder of *The Lachlander*, Condobolin, and owner until 1902, and proprietor of the *Grafton Argus*, 1902-1904, left the party over the conscription issue (Walker 1976, p.184). He established the *Canberra Times* in 1926. At Wellington in 1889, Michael Conlan O’Halloran established the *Wellington Times and Australian Industrial Liberator* on 23 May to espouse the Labor cause (Register of Newspaper Recognizances and Affidavits). The *Newcastle Morning Herald* (1876) set out to be “the only fearless advocate of the legitimate rights of labour in the Hunter River District, or in the colony”. The *Barrier Miner*, an evening daily at Broken Hill, supported the miners’ strike so warmly in 1892 that the Special Magistrate Whittingdale Johnson complained that the paper criminally libelled him almost every day. The *Miner* was not prosecuted and flourished up to the time of the next great strike in 1909 (Walker 1976, p.166).

By then, the union-owned *Barrier Truth*, established in 1898, had become a daily. From July 1899 the *Truth* appeared as the official organ of the Barrier District Council of the Australian Labour Federation. It concentrated on local and on general Labor news and had very little other news. When it began to provide a women's section in 1902, and more sporting news and racing results, its circulation almost doubled to just over 3000 in nine months. On 2 November, 1908, it became the first Labour daily in Australasia (Walker 1976, p.177). Almost alone among Labour papers in Australia, Bathurst's *National Advocate*, which survived 73 years, was profitable and regularly returned to shareholders a 10 percent dividend. Hilton Radcliffe "Bull" West edited the paper from 1914 until 1956, a few months before his death on 29 April, 1957, aged 79. West expressed moderate Labor views. During the Lang schism the *Advocate* picked a delicate path, attacking Langism, but advising a vote for C.A. Kelly, the local member who was in the State Labor Party (Kirkpatrick 1996, p.61; Walker 1980, p.170). At Grafton, *The Grip* was seen to have Labor sympathies. In 1899 creditors forced "Fighting Tom" Penrose out of the editorial chair; his sister Susan took charge. The poet and freelance journalist, Edwin Brady, became co-proprietor of the bi-weekly *Grip* in July, 1901. Brady was a Laborite, and the local member, John See, held office as Premier from 1901 to 1904 with the aid of Labor votes. *The Grip* had opposed the election of See, whom it accused of not promoting the North Coast railway as vigorously as he should, but there was much in the government's policy of which Labor, and Brady, approved (Walker 1976, pp.186-187).

The birth of the *Australian Worker*

The newspaper that eventually became the *Australian Worker* owes its birth and its resurrection to the provinces of NSW. On 19 October, 1891, Arthur Rae and W.W. Head published the first issue of *The Hummer* on behalf of the Wagga Wagga branch of the ASU and the GLU (the ASU was the forerunner of the AWU, or Australian Workers' Union). *The Hummer* (1891) set out to "advocate Unionism; not only Unionism in Labour, but Unionism in politics likewise". It had taken the advice offered by the metropolitan papers during the "Big Strike" to act "constitutionally by redressing our wrongs at the ballot box".

We want to form a big, solid, compact Labour Party right through Australia; a Party that can watch the interests of the Workers both inside and outside of Parliament, and counteract the moves continually being made by Organised Capitalism to crush Unionism, or to rob it of its usefulness, which comes to the same thing.

The paper's title was inspired by the militantly "humming" tone of the union circulars that were issued at the time of the shearers' strike. Rae and Head told their readers that so long as the people continued to read, "*The Hummer* will continue to hum". There were about 5000 members of the two unions in Wagga Wagga, and if every member took a copy — priced at one penny — "we can keep *The Hummer* going on a circulation of five thousand and two". It appeared until 24 September, 1892, as *The Hummer*, and then became the *Worker*. It was published at Wagga Wagga until April, 1893, when it shifted to Sydney. During the 1894 elections, it was published daily for several weeks to help Labor in 1894 elections, but lost £1000 and took a long time to recover. When it suspended publication from February 1897, the Bourke branch of the AWU revived it six months. The branch, which had 3500 members, bought the paper for £537 and paid its debts. Bourke branch secretary Donald Macdonnell canvassed for subscriptions, donations and advertisements and appointed local agents to distribute the paper. No subsidies were needed in 1898. From October 1897 the *Worker* incorporated the *Australian Workman*, which had begun on 22 September 1890; it became the *Australian Worker* in November 1913 (Walker 1976, pp.134-137).

Launching pads for political careers

Provincial newspapers in the Australian colonies were often the vehicles for political causes to be pursued overtly, sometimes on behalf of factions, sometimes on behalf of individuals. Some proprietors either set out to achieve parliamentary status, or adopted that goal along the way. The biographical registers of state and federal parliaments are sprinkled with the names of those who jumped the fence, sometimes back and forth, between newspaper ownership and/or editorship and politics. Newspapers were often used as, or became, the launching pads for political careers.¹ In the NSW Legislative

Assembly up to 1880 at any one time no more than two practising journalists had held seats, but their numbers soon increased with the prolific expansion of the press in the eighties, the emergence of party politics instead of factionalism, and the payment of members. In 1887 there were eight journalists and newspapers proprietors in the House; in 1891, and again in 1898, 15; at these dates they formed, respectively, 6.4, 10.5 and 12.0 percent of total membership (Martin 1956, pp.46-67). Grant Harman found that between 1898 and 1932 at least four journalists and newspaper proprietors from New England and one from the adjoining Dorrigo plateau actually secured Parliamentary seats — three at a State level: two in the Legislative Assembly and one in the Legislative Council; and two at the federal level: one in the House of Representatives and one in the Senate. “Newspaper proprietors had a decided advantage over other candidates in running for public office,” he commented. “Their position gave them contact with party officials and the opportunity to become well known in their communities, and they were spared the expenses of newspaper advertising.” (Harman 1975, p.222) The first country journalist to become Premier was William Arthur Holman, a cabinetmaker by trade, who bought the *Grenfell Vedette*, with his father’s assistance, shortly before the 1898 elections. Holman, who contributed articles to the *Vedette* from 1895-98, was elected to Parliament from 1898 to 1920. At Grenfell, the protectionist *Vedette* and the free-trade *Record* engaged in mortal combat with voluminous attacks on one another (Connolly 1983, p.151; Walker 1976, pp.186, 188).

Local MPs and the press

All country newspapers promoted vigorously the material and social advancement of their town and district. In the absence of local government, competition for roads, bridges, schools, public buildings, railways and other amenities depended much on the local member supported by a public marshalled by the press (Walker 1976, p.176). In pursuing these goals, the press sought to influence a number of separate centres of power, both directly and indirectly. The New England papers, for instance, attempted to influence the direction and intensity of public opinion; they also tried to focus public opinion on

specific issues and on these to develop particular points of view; and they attempted to influence the local members of parliament. Because members of parliament believed the press was extremely powerful, they were easily influenced by it. Newspapers gave local members clear indications of what policies they expected them to support. If a member followed a newspaper's directives he was accorded generous publicity; when he did otherwise, his actions and even his personal qualities were criticised and ridiculed. Even politicians who received regular support from a particular newspaper were reprimanded when they failed to live up to expectations on a particular matter. For instance, in 1905 the *Armidale Express* censured S.J. Kearney severely for his failure to arrive from Armidale at the Legislative Assembly in time to record his vote against the north coast railway bill. Until at least the 1920s the press occupied an important place in New England political life (Harman 1975, pp.230-231). Rare were the issues on which provincial newspapers sought to remain apolitical, but in Bourke the *Western Herald* and the *Central Australian* attempted this, possibly in collusion, during the shearers' strike in 1891. A careful scrutiny of the Bourke papers' files during this period "reveals little mention of the shearers' strikes, and it was left to the city papers to report the unrest". Burrows and Barton (1996, pp.49-50) suggest the local censorship of the issue was to avoid alienating readers through taking sides.

Sustenance, not just survival

As America expanded westward, the "first task of the printer in the upstart city was to bring into existence a community where the newspaper could survive", according to Daniel Boorstin (1966, p.126). In fact, publishers wanted more than survival, says Barbara Cloud (1992, pp.14-15). They expected a community to provide them with immediate sustenance, but they also looked for promise of growth and prosperity. "A newspaper has to look to things eventual as well as matters immediate," the publisher of the *Miner*, explained upon beginning publication in Butte, Montana, a town that had been somewhat depressed but was reviving. Throughout the West, three kinds of activity sent particularly strong growth signals: political development, mineral finds and railway construction. Anticipation of

the formation of a state, territory or local government generally accounted for the establishment of one or more newspapers in a given community. In Washington Territory, for example, as confidence grew that statehood was imminent, newspapers multiplied rapidly. In 1887 the territory had about 70 newspapers; in the next two years leading to statehood the number more than doubled.

Official status, at whatever level, conferred political legitimacy on a locale and almost certainly induced a boost in population by assuring hesitant immigrants that the United States government gave its full blessing and protection. For the publisher this not only meant readers and advertisers, but also heightened prospects for power and profit, the power via the influence a publisher could exercise through his paper, the profit via the public printing which would come as a reward for his lending that influence to the winning side.

Publishers supported efforts to form separate territories, win statehood, and create new counties, recognising that new political entities could be economically beneficial to them because of the forms and laws to be printed. The *Columbian* argued for separation from Oregon Territory, the *Mesilla Times* in New Mexico agitated for formation of Arizona Territory, the *Golden Age* in Lewiston campaigned for Idaho Territory, and the first papers in Los Angeles and San Diego called for the splitting of California into two states. Countless papers pushed their towns' advantages as county seats.

In Australia, generally the first political status that the provincial papers sought for their towns was municipal or borough status. Some towns, such as Bombala, Cooma, Tumut, Orange, Armidale and Albury, vied early in the twentieth century to become the site of the federal capital (Clark 198, p.330). As Table 1 shows, Bathurst had its first newspaper 14 years before it became a municipality; Goulburn 11 years; Maitland 22 years; Tamworth 17 years; and Wollongong and Newcastle, four years. Until the arrival of local government within a community, a heavy onus fell on the press to advocate social and material progress. In its first issue the *Armidale Express* (1856a) suggested improvements to the postal system in the district, urged the necessity of a bank in the town, advocated the rapid formation of railroads from good

seaports to the inland. Within a month the *Express* (1856b & 1856c) was advocating the building of many more houses in Armidale and, a few weeks later, entering the debate on the need for a shorter road to the coast.

The papers were naturally the prime movers in the fight for incorporation of their town or district. In the fictitious town of Wattle gum, a *Bulletin* writer, John Farrell, described how the local paper, the *Stiffener*, soon ran a full-column leader on “Incorporation” wherein it showed that nothing else was needed to make Wattle gum “second to no town in the colony”. The *Stiffener* had no doubt that the people would “recognise in it a sturdy champion who was to be found in the van of every movement for the public good” (*Bulletin* 1885, p.20). At the very real Richmond River town of Coraki, Louis Ferdinand Branxton Benaud established the *Richmond River Herald* on 9 July, 1886, and waited only until its third issue before advocating that the town be incorporated into a municipality, thus beginning his long career of advocating Coraki’s interests. Coraki was a “government village”, as opposed to a town built on private land, and, by 1890, this status was seen to be holding it back. The Municipal District of Coraki was eventually gazetted on 10 September, 1890 (Curby 1992, pp.10-11). The *Queanbeyan Age* (1960, p.1) from its earliest days, “sought to bring before the citizens the advantages to be derived by the establishment in the town of organisations for the advancement of social amenities . . . foremost among these was that of incorporation of the township”. Bega’s *Gazette* (1873) strongly supported the incorporation of the town as a municipality.

The Bega folks will, we hope, rouse themselves from their present state of torpor, and energetically frustrate the selfish and short-sighted views of the leaders and *the led* who are now baulking every scheme for the progress of the town, except perhaps, those one or two particular schemes which promise an immediate inflow to their own pockets. This town is ready for incorporation, and those people are stupidly blind and no friends to Bega who oppose it.

Table 1: Dates 20 selected districts attained municipal status and obtained their first newspaper²

Name of Municipality of borough or Municipal district	Date of incorporation	Year of establishment of first newspaper	Name of first newspaper for district
Albury	1859	1856	<i>Border Post</i>
Armidale	1863	1856	<i>Armidale Express</i>
Bathurst	1862	1848	<i>Bathurst Advocate</i>
Bega	1883	1864	<i>Bega Gazette</i>
Bourke	1878	1872	<i>Central Australian</i>
Cooma	1879	1861	<i>Monaro Mercury</i>
Cootamundra	1884	1877	<i>Cootamundra Herald</i>
Dubbo	1872	1866	<i>Dubbo Dispatch</i>
Goulburn	1859	1848	<i>Goulburn Herald</i>
Grafton	1859	1859	<i>Clarence & Richmond Examiner</i>
Hay	1872	1871	<i>Hay Standard</i>
Lismore	1879	1876	<i>Northern Star</i>
Maitland West	1863	1841	<i>Hunter River Gazette</i>
Murrurundi	1890	1871	<i>Murrurundi Times</i>
Newcastle	1859	1855	<i>Newcastle Telegraph</i>
Tamworth	1876	1859	<i>Tamworth Examiner</i>
Tenterfield	1871	1861	<i>Tenterfield Chronicle</i>
Wagga Wagga	1870	1858	<i>Wagga Wagga Express</i>
Wollongong	1859	1855	<i>Illawarra Mercury</i>
Yass	1873	1857	<i>Yass Courier</i>

Through the columns of the *Port Macquarie News* (1922 & 1982), established in 1882, the founder, Alfred Edward Pountney, advocated incorporation for the district. He was the secretary of the Hastings River Progress Committee and the poll clerk, scrutineer and returning officer for the first Municipal Council elections held in 1887. At Quirindi, William Hawker established the town's first paper, the *Quirindi Gazette*, in January 1885, and advocated incorporation of the town — something opposed by the second paper, the *Argus*. The municipality was gazetted on 29 December, 1890 and Hawker was elected the first mayor on 5 March 1891. He was an alderman for 20 years (Durrant 1994, pp.103-104; *Quirindi Advocate* 1985, p.6).

Conclusion

The pioneering NSW provincial newspapers generally began by declaring their independence from political influences, or by declaring they were being established in the liberal interest. Their proprietors were much less likely to be political animals than proprietors of American newspapers in the early to mid-nineteenth century. Editors were prepared to take a stand on major issues, such as the Land Acts and the free-trade debate. They were also prepared to influence election results by giving clear advice on how to vote. Even the news columns were used as a means of persuasion by different papers. The emerging Labor political forces won the sympathy of a number of provincial papers, and two provincial towns played a key role in the birth and resurrection of what became the *Australian Worker*. Some proprietors used their papers to launch political careers, and others were drawn into politics after publishing successful papers. All provincial papers tried to influence the political process favourably in terms of expenditure on their towns and districts. Many promoted their towns as suitable for incorporation as boroughs or municipalities. In all, the provincial press of NSW played an important role as a forum for political debate in the colonial era and in the early years of the newly established federal compact.

Notes

1. Compositor James Christian Watson, NSW, and journalist Andrew Fisher, Qld, both became Prime Minister.
2. This table was inspired by a larger one prepared by Major Kenneth Sanz, of Sydney. The local government source was: F.A. Larcombe, *History of Local Government in New South Wales*. The newspaper establishment dates are drawn from the author's research.

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