

## Provincial publishing proliferated in Australia's colonial era

By Rod Kirkpatrick

Daily newspaper publication in the provincial districts of the Australian colonies in the nineteenth century was prolific, much more so than in the twentieth century, even though daily publication occurred for only half the nineteenth century.

This difference between the two centuries can be attributed to two factors: the gold rushes and the cheapness of printing technology. From 1849, when the *Geelong Advertiser* became the first provincial daily, until the close of 1900, 115 dailies were published in 48 provincial centres in the six colonies, according to my research.

Victoria was by far the most prolific of the colonies, with 43 dailies published in 13 centres, followed by NSW with 29 dailies in 15 centres, Queensland with 22 in eight, Western Australia with 13 in six, Tasmania with seven in five, and South Australia with one in one.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century 77 new dailies were published in provincial areas in the six States and 31 centres that had not published a daily in the 19<sup>th</sup> century had a daily at some stage. In all, dailies have been published in 79 provincial centres in Australia, my research indicates. Thirty of these centres are in NSW, 18 in Victoria, 18 in Queensland, six in WA, five in Tasmania and two in SA.

I have written extensively about the NSW dailies in *Country Conscience* (2000), and so this article deals briefly with the dailies in the other five states.

Some of the centres in WA and Tasmania that have achieved daily publication may surprise you. The district prosperity that led to such ventures can generally be attributed to mining for gold or one or more other precious metals. In WA, apart from the only current daily centre of Kalgoorlie, the centres that have issued dailies are Boulder, Coolgardie, Geraldton, Menzies and Kanowna. In Tasmania, apart from the two long-established daily centres, Launceston and Burnie, dailies have been published at Devonport, Queenstown and Zeehan.

Zeehan had a daily for 30 years. From March 14, 1892, until May 31, 1922, the *Zeehan and Dundas Herald*, launched on October 14, 1890, as a tri-weekly, appeared daily in this mining centre on the south-west coast of Tasmania.

At Devonport, the *North-West Post* appeared daily from October 2, 1905, until December 30, 1916. Wartime increases in the price of newsprint were the main factor that led the proprietor of the *Post* throughout that period, Henry James Richmond, to cease publication.

Today's Burnie *Advocate* was a daily at Devonport before it appeared daily in Burnie. The Harris family launched the *North Western Advocate* at Devonport on January 4, 1899, and issued it daily from May 31, 1899, while continuing to publish the *Emu Bay Times* tri-weekly at Burnie. From November 13, 1899, the family amalgamated the two titles as the *Northern Western Advocate and Emu Bay Times* and continued daily issue, covering both Burnie and Devonport.

At Queenstown, Tas., the *Mount Lyell Standard* appeared daily throughout its publication life from November 28, 1896, to December 22, 1902. Geoffrey Blainey gives the best account of the paper in his regional history, *The Peaks of Lyell* (1959).

At Menzies, WA, the *North Coolgardie Herald* appeared daily from when it was launched in September 1896 until 30 May 1904. It then appeared twice a week. The *Australian Handbook* for 1905 listed the *Southern Times*, Bunbury, WA, as a daily, but an extensive search of microfilmed files found no supporting evidence.

At Boulder (near Kalgoorlie), WA, there is solid evidence of daily publication, not once but twice: the *Evening Star* was published daily from March 21, 1898, until at least the

end of 1899; and the *Evening News* from July 25, 1921, until March 31, 1922. In 1898 the *Star's* editor proclaimed that a newspaper was “an essential adjunct to every progressive and advancing place, and the great and still growing importance of Boulder City induces the establishment of the *Evening Star* here”.

The *Kanowna Herald*, established on May 5, 1898, as a tri-weekly, was issued daily from June 14, 1898, and closed November 1, 1898

In Victoria, the notable feature is that Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong have been the home of numerous dailies – 10, nine and nine, respectively – and Castlemaine had three at one time in 1862 and has had five in all. In the mid 1880s, according to the *Australasian Newspaper Directory* (1886) directory, three dailies were being published at each of Ballarat, Bendigo/Sandhurst and Geelong; two at Castlemaine; and one each at Echuca and Warrnambool – a total of 13 dailies in provincial Victoria. At that time five were being published in provincial NSW but two of them were very short-lived,.

The first Victorian and Australian provincial daily was the *Geelong Advertiser*, which was established as a weekly on November 21, 1840, and became a daily on November 13, 1849, when the town had a population of about 8000. It changed from broadsheet to tabloid on its 161<sup>st</sup> birthday in November 2001.

The honour of becoming the second daily paper for the town fell to the *Geelong Times*, launched on September 2, 1857, and discontinued seven weeks later. The *Daily News*, published May 1858 to August 1859, showed how a newspaper, particularly a daily one, could pursue issues and mould public opinion – with “the watchful and intelligent supply of facts and commentaries, morning after morning, continuously during a considerable period of time”.

Mention Bendigo now and you think *Advertiser*, but the title that has been a daily since April 1856 has faced probably more competition than most existing dailies in Australia, outside of Ballarat, Geelong and some capitals. And the *Advertiser* was not the first paper published for Bendigo, nor was it even the first daily there. “Bendigo” was originally the name for this pioneering gold-field district and the town that became a city was known as Sandhurst until 1891 when it became Bendigo.

Before the end of 1853 the political and social rights of diggers had caused such vigorous debate that it is hardly surprising that the first newspaper published for the district was the *Diggers' Advocate*, established on November 3, 1853, with the backing of a prominent Bendigionian, Joseph Henry Abbott. It was printed in Melbourne.

The *Bendigo Advertiser and Sandhurst Commercial Circular*, printed in Sandhurst, began publication on December 9, 1853, as a bi-weekly. The *Diggers' Advocate* ceased publication about the end of 1854. In May 1855 the founders of the *Advertiser*, Arthur Moore Lloyd and Robert Ross Haverfield, sold to Angus Mackay, Joseph James Casey and James Henderson.

The new proprietary responded to imminent competition by converting to tri-weekly issue from October 16, 1855, four days before the first appearance of the *Courier of the Mines*, with Haverfield as editor. The *Courier* became a daily on January 1, 1856 – with the grand title of the *Courier of the Mines and Bendigo Daily Mail* – wounding the *Advertiser's* pride sorely, judging from its editorial that day. A string of other dailies – sometimes more than one at a time – competed with the *Advertiser* over the years.

The *Advertiser* itself became a daily on April 7, 1856, and the title has continued since, largely because success deferred to age. Its main competition came from the *Bendigo Independent*, established as a daily on January 1, 1862. The *Advertiser* hoped that “Bendigo will support a second paper, and that the *Independent* may enjoy a long and profitable existence”. Its hopes, regardless of how sincere they were, were realised and the *Independent* was published until November 30, 1918, when it bought the *Advertiser* but preserved the *Advertiser* title because that journal was “its senior by half a score of years”. The *Advertiser* shifted into the *Independent's* offices and used its press to print the amalgamated journal.

At Ballarat, where eight of the 10 newspapers that started there in the 1850s had short lives, the first daily was the not the *Star*, as commonly thought, but the *Ballarat Times*, established on March 4, 1854, and a daily from January 1, 1856. The *Times* ceased daily

publication on July 5, 1856, with a big libel action imminent, but resumed on July 28 and continued as a daily until it closed on October 5, 1861. The *Star* was established as a tri-weekly on September 22, 1855, and appeared daily from December 15, 1856.

Ballarat's first evening daily was the *Evening Post*, which began on May 25, 1863. The *Ballarat Courier*, still alive today, began on June 10, 1867, as a morning daily. It is said to have been in the 1880s the largest daily outside the capital cities, with copies distributed by 40 runners for miles around and to have had a circulation of 8,000.

Ballarat had a succession of other dailies in the 19th century, such as the *Evening Mail*, 1869-72 (not to be confused with the 20th century *Mail*). The *Ballarat Courier* incorporated the daily *Star* from September 15, 1924, but still faced daily competition from the *Evening Echo*, which began on February 12, 1895, and ceased publication on March 2, 1929. The *Evening Mail* began publication immediately and continued until February 2, 1966.

At Beechworth, the *Ovens and Murray Advertiser* began on January 6, 1855, and appeared daily for three separate periods: January 1, 1857, to March 31, 1860; January 11-16, 1866, during the final stages of an election campaign; and April 2, 1872, to December 31, 1873. The *Constitution and Ovens Mining Intelligencer* was established on May 17, 1856, and became a daily on August 17, 1857. It ceased daily issue on March 28, 1863.

At Chiltern, the *Federal Standard*, established on August 24, 1859, as the *Chiltern Standard*, appeared daily from January 19, 1863 to March 28, 1863, in conjunction with the *Border Post*, Albury, and the Beechworth *Constitution*. The three papers were owned by George Henry Mott whose descendants have been involved in newspapers in Victoria almost without interruption since. The Mott family launched what is now the *Border Mail* at Albury on October 23, 1903, and still owns it.

At Castlemaine, at least five newspapers have been issued daily at some stage of their careers. The most significant has been the *Castlemaine Mail*, still published today but not as a daily. It began as the weekly *Mount Alexander Mail* on May 6, 1854, became a bi-weekly in January, 1856, and a tri-weekly on August 18, 1856. It first appeared as a daily from October 1, 1862, and changed its name to the *Castlemaine Mail* on October 1, 1917, because the significance of "Mount Alexander" as a goldfield was by then meaningless, "even to the bulk of Victorians". The *Mail* appeared daily until November 17, 1942, when it reverted to tri-weekly issue.

The *Castlemaine Advertiser*, which began life as the *Miner's Right and Castlemaine Advertiser* on February 1856, became a daily for two months from September 16, 1862. But the first Castlemaine daily was *Our Daily News*, launched on March 31, 1862. It claims to have begun with 1,000 subscribers and appeared daily for seven years. The *Castlemaine Representative* (1870-1883), succeeded by the *Castlemaine Leader* (1883-1915), was also published daily.

At Stawell, the *Pleasant Creek News*, established on July 21, 1868, appeared daily from July 23, 1873, until September 2, 1882.

In Victoria's western district, the solidly established tri-weekly *Hamilton Spectator* appeared daily, briefly, during a railway strike in 1903 (May 12-16), but tried it much more seriously, from January 1, 1908, until September 29, 1917, when wartime newsprint rationing forced it to revert to tri-weekly issue.

At Bairnsdale, the *Gippsland Daily News* appeared from March 31, 1890, until August 1, 1891. It claimed to have its roots in the *Bairnsdale Courier*, which began publication on June 18, 1870, and then the *Bairnsdale Liberal News* (May 10, 1879), the *Bruthen Chronicle* (1882) and the merging of these two titles to form the *Bairnsdale and Bruthen News*.

At Echuca, the *Riverine Herald*, launched on July 1, 1863, became a daily on July 1, 1878, and continued until March 31, 1956, before reverting to tri-weekly issue. At Daylesford, the *Mercury*, established on February 2, 1864, became a daily in February 21, 1866, amalgamated with the *Express* on March 6, 1868, and ceased daily issue on September 30, 1869. The *Daylesford Mercury & Express (Incorporated)*, as it termed itself in its masthead, was itself swallowed by the second *Daylesford Advocate* on May 18, 1880.

At the gold-mining town of Clunes, the *Clunes Guardian and Mining and Agricultural Reporter* appeared daily from its establishment on April 30, 1869, until October 14 that year. At Maryborough, another mining town, the *Maryborough Advertiser* appeared daily from July 18, 1921, shortly after it had absorbed its rival of nearly 50 years, the *Maryborough Standard*. The two had been tri-weeklies, appearing on alternate days and so they had given the town, in effect, a daily. The *Advertiser* appeared daily until May 18, 1929.

Gold was also the reason for the *Inglewood Advertiser's* brief flirtation with daily issue from May 1860.

Dailies have also served the following cities as indicated: Mildura, *Sunraysia Daily*, from October 16, 1920; Shepparton, the *Shepparton Advertiser*, May 1, 1934, to October 31, 1936, and *The News*, from July 3, 1972, as an afternoon daily and from August 6, 1990, as a morning daily; Wangaratta, the *Chronicle-Despatch* from April 1, 1958, until September 1963; and Warrnambool, *The Standard*, from January 1, 1884.

The two SA centres listed are Kapunda, where the *Kapunda Evening News* was published for six weeks in mid-1873, and Port Pirie, where the *Recorder* was published daily from April 6, 1914, until January 22, 1941.

In Queensland, dailies were published in the nineteenth century successively at Rockhampton, Toowoomba, Ipswich, Maryborough, Townsville, Charters Towers and Cairns. In the twentieth the new daily centres were Mackay, Bundaberg, Warwick, Thursday Island, Innisfail, Atherton (the Australian Army daily, *Table Tops*), Mount Isa, Gladstone, Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast and Gympie.