Managing Their Own Affairs:
The Australian Deaf Community During the 1920s and 1930s

Submitted by

Bridget Mary Carty, B.A., Dip. Ed., M.A.

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School of Education and Professional Studies
Faculty of Education
Griffith University

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Abstract

This thesis examines the development of and interrelationships among organisations in the Australian Deaf community during the early part of the 20th Century, particularly during the 1920s and 1930s. It focuses on those organisations which Deaf people attempted to establish themselves, or with hearing supporters, in response to their rejection of the philosophy and practices of the existing charitable organisations such as Deaf Societies and Missions. It also analyses the responses of the Societies and Missions to these moves. The thesis adopts a social history perspective, describing events as much as possible from the perspective of the Deaf people of the time. These developments within the Deaf community were influenced by wider social movements in Australian society during these decades, such as the articulation of minority groups as “citizens”, and their search for “advancement”, autonomy and equal rights.

Australia’s first schools and post-school organisations for Deaf people were closely modelled on 19th Century British institutions. The thesis describes the development of these early Australian institutions and argues that Deaf people had active or contributing roles in many of them. During the early 20th Century most of these organisations came under closer control of hearing people, and Deaf people’s roles became marginalised. During the late 1920s many Deaf adults began to resist the control of Societies and Missions, instead aspiring to “manage their own affairs”. In two states, working with hearing supporters, they successfully established alternative organisations or “breakaways”, and in another state they engaged in protracted but unsuccessful struggles with the Deaf Society. Australian Deaf people established a national organisation in the 1930s, and this led to the creation of an opposing national organisation by the Societies.

Most of these new organisations did not survive beyond the 1930s, but they significantly affected the power structures and relationships between Deaf and
hearing people in Australia for several decades afterwards. These events have been largely ignored and even strategically suppressed by later generations, possibly for reasons which parallel other episodes of amnesia and silence in Australian history.
Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Bridget M. Carty

Date
Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................... i
Statement of Originality ............................................................................... iii
Acknowledgements ...................................................................................... v
List of Abbreviations .................................................................................... vii

Chapter 1  Introduction and Literature Review .............................................. 1
Chapter 2  Historical Background .................................................................. 32
Chapter 3  Things as we Deaf see Them ....................................................... 77
Chapter 4  The Prerogative of Every Citizen ................................................ 120
Chapter 5  An Open and Official Break-Away ............................................... 153
Chapter 6  The More we are Together ............................................................ 177
Chapter 7  Managing their own Affairs: The National Scene ....................... 208
Chapter 8  All to no Purpose ........................................................................ 242
Epilogue ........................................................................................................... 273

Appendix A  The Deaf Population of Australia in the 1920s and 1930s .......... 281
Appendix B  Constitution of the Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf ............................................................... 287
Appendix C  Constitution of the National Council of the Deaf .................... 293
Appendix D  “The Deaf in their Own Association” ....................................... 299
Appendix E  Untitled Circular ....................................................................... 304

Bibliography .................................................................................................... 305
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The Deaf Societies of Australia have been another major repository of source material, and I am grateful to staff at the Victorian Deaf Society, the Deaf Society of New South Wales, the Queensland Deaf Society, the Royal South Australian Deaf Society, and the Western Australian Deaf Society for assistance with access to and photocopying of their records. I also thank Ken Donnell for his timely discovery of some long-lost records in Queensland.

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And finally, I would like to thank the Australian Deaf community and the Australian Association of the Deaf for inspiring this research and urging that the story be told.
## List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAAD</td>
<td>Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf</td>
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<td>AAD</td>
<td>Australian Association of the Deaf</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADDA</td>
<td>Australasian Deaf and Dumb Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADDSNSW</td>
<td>Adult Deaf and Dumb Society of New South Wales</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADDSV</td>
<td>Adult Deaf and Dumb Society of Victoria</td>
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<tr>
<td>BDA</td>
<td>British Deaf Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>BDDA</td>
<td>British Deaf and Dumb Association</td>
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<td>BDHS</td>
<td>British Deaf History Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>DHI</td>
<td>Deaf History International</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSWADDC</td>
<td>New South Wales Association of Deaf and Dumb Citizens</td>
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<tr>
<td>PROV</td>
<td>Public Record Office of Victoria</td>
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<tr>
<td>JWF</td>
<td>John W. Flynn [Collection]</td>
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<tr>
<td>QADDM</td>
<td>Queensland Adult Deaf and Dumb Mission</td>
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<tr>
<td>QDDCRA</td>
<td>Queensland Deaf and Dumb Citizens Reformed Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VDDI</td>
<td>Victorian Deaf and Dumb Institution</td>
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<tr>
<td>VDS</td>
<td>Victorian Deaf Society [Collection]</td>
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CHAPTER 1: Introduction and Literature Review

This thesis explores some of the organisations and activities of the Australian Deaf community during the early decades of the 20th Century. During this period Deaf people were very active, both in establishing new organisations and in resisting the controls imposed on them by some of the older organisations. In both these areas of activity, they appeared to show the influence of some of the broader social movements of the time, and demonstrated parallels with other minority groups such as Aborigines and women in their articulation of themselves as “citizens”, their search for “advancement” and equal rights, and their challenges to a charity model of service provision. Deaf communities became the sites of power struggles between some hearing administrators and a growing number of Deaf people and hearing supporters who wished to have more control over their institutions and more equality with hearing people – aspirations which they often described as “managing their own affairs”.

It is often assumed, by both Deaf and hearing people, that Deaf people’s circumstances have steadily improved throughout history, that the Deaf people of today are better educated, have more employment choices, enjoy more widespread understanding and acceptance from an increasingly enlightened community, and are taking a more active political role in policy and decision-making forums than ever before. However, historical studies are revealing that there have been times throughout history when at least some Deaf people have enjoyed a measure of equality with hearing people, have worked professionally, and have taken active roles in establishing and maintaining their institutions. The editor of a collection of papers from the First International Deaf History Conference made this point in 1993:

Deaf people’s lives have not simply improved in a straight linear fashion through the centuries, despite what early hagiographers believed. There have been advances and retreats, victories and losses.¹

This thesis documents a period in Australian history when Deaf people made some significant advances, but also found themselves in retreat. Subsequent official accounts of these years (such as those of some Deaf Societies) have omitted many of the activities of Deaf communities which directly challenged the control of hearing administrators, with the result that the advances Deaf people made have been lost even more effectively. This thesis records and analyses these events, and sets them in the context of the social and political events of the time.

In writing this thesis I adopt the accepted definition of “Deaf people” as those who communicate through a signed language, and who identify with a community of other Deaf people who share a culture. Usually, but not always, these people were born deaf or became deaf early in life. The thesis therefore does not deal with other groups of people with hearing losses, such as those who become deaf later in life, or who grow up with mild or moderate hearing losses and communicate primarily by using speech and residual hearing and lipreading. The identities and aspirations of these people are usually aligned with those of the hearing majority, and are different from those of the Deaf community. Appendix A provides a demographic analysis of the size of the Australian Deaf community during the time period being studied.

I have chosen not to focus in detail on the establishment of Australian schools and educational methodology for teaching deaf students, except where they influenced the development of adult Deaf communities. Other work has been done on the history of education for the deaf in Australia. Some recent theorists have also suggested that education has been accorded too significant a place in Deaf history, and has at times obscured “true Deaf history”, or an analysis of the social and linguistic aspects of Deaf people’s lives. I explore these contentions in more detail in the next chapter.

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2 In line with accepted practice, I capitalise the word “Deaf” when referring to those who identify as culturally Deaf; the word is left uncapitalised where it refers to the physical condition of not hearing, or to those who do not identify with the community of Deaf people (including young deaf children who may later identify with other Deaf people and become “Deaf”).

3 For example, Barbara Lee Crickmore, Education of the Deaf and Hearing Impaired. A Brief History (Mayfield, NSW: Educational Management Systems Pty Ltd, 1990)

4 For example, Bernard Truffaut, “Etienne de Fay and the History of the Deaf,” in Looking Back: A Reader on the History of Deaf Communities and their Sign Languages, ed Renate Fischer and Harlan Lane (Hamburg: Signum Press, 1993), 13-24
My analysis focuses on Deaf communities in the eastern Australian states of Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland, and comparatively little on those in other states. This is because most of the major events and organisations I examine took place or were established in the eastern states, and the personalities who seem to have most strongly influenced national attitudes and events lived in those states.

Events in Australia did not happen in isolation. They form part of an international history of Deaf communities. Chapter Two summarises this international background, and outlines the history of Deaf communities and individuals in Australia up until the early 20th Century. Many of the key institutions such as schools and Deaf Societies were in place by that time, and Deaf people had established links with each other, had meeting places in most capital cities, and were beginning the tradition of national gatherings for sporting, social and political purposes.

Chapters Three to Eight provide detailed analyses of events during the first four decades of the twentieth century in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland, with a particular focus on the 1920s and '30s. Against the backdrop of changing Australian society during the early Federation period, the First World War, the 1920s, the Depression and the beginnings of the Second World War, Deaf and hearing people worked to establish organisations which reflected the perceived needs and aspirations of Deaf people. Many of the personalities involved were charismatic and ambitious individuals, some of whom had migrated from Britain or Ireland, bringing with them well-developed beliefs about how Deaf communities should be organised, and in some cases bringing unrealised personal ambitions which impacted upon their activities in Australia. It was inevitable that some of these personalities and ideologies should clash, and that the organisations they established should be affected by these clashes.

The epilogue summarises some developments in the Australian Deaf community since the 1940s, discussing the extent to which the events of the first part of the century have influenced these later developments. The epilogue also draws some
parallels between the way in which this part of Deaf history (the 1920s and 1930s) has been treated, and the ambivalence which Australians in general have shown towards other aspects of the nation's history.

Sources consulted during the research for this thesis include newsletters, magazines, meeting minutes, correspondence and Annual Reports of many Australian Deaf organisations. The small number of books and theses which have been written about topics in Australian Deaf history were valuable sources in themselves and also suggested many additional avenues for research. Newspaper articles, Hansard and other government records have been consulted where relevant. Extensive use has been made of the self-published writings of John P. Bourke, a Deaf man writing in Victoria in the 1920s, '30s and '40s.

Interviews were conducted with a number of Deaf and hearing individuals who had participated in or had some connection with the events being described. These interviews sought primarily to establish the social background to the events and to set them in context, and to provide some depth to the descriptions of key personalities and relationships. Access was also gained to some old interviews with informants since deceased, which had been conducted by other researchers.

The rapidly expanding international literature on Deaf history, especially that of Europe and North America, has provided information about Deaf history in other times and places. This information helps set the events in Australia in an international context, and identifies some of the enduring concerns and recurring themes in Deaf history. Australian events conform to many of these patterns, but not to all – Australia's isolation, relatively small population and recent colonial past have created unique circumstances.

**Literature review**

The following literature review looks at histories of Deaf people in Europe and other western nations, then at accounts of Deaf people in Australia. Although many of these histories focus on the development of education for deaf children, they also explore the beginnings of signing Deaf communities, and thus
foreshadow the ways in which Deaf people in Australia organised their lives and constructed their institutions.

History written about Deaf people has reflected beliefs about society and the place of Deaf people in it, and also changing theories about how history should be written and used. Like histories of other subaltern groups,\(^5\) Deaf history writing has tended to progress from “great men” stories of founders and benefactors (usually hearing) of schools and Missions, to accounts which highlight the injustices of hearing people against Deaf “victims”, to contemporary work which explores Deaf people as “agents”, taking active roles in the events which affect them—although the “victim” perspective has not disappeared. As the editor of an early collection of essays on Deaf history noted:

\[...\] it is becoming apparent that deaf people have played a larger role in their own history than has been recognized ... deaf people were actively involved in trying to shape their own experience. They were often thwarted by hearing people who controlled wealth and institutions, but still they struggled.\(^6\)

As Deaf people have moved since the early 1980s towards identifying themselves as linguistic-cultural minority groups, with (at best) ambivalent links with disability movements, so their histories have reflected this need for a particular identity.

Comprehensive attempts to research and write about the history of Deaf people have been comparatively recent, and most of the works I will review date from the last 30 to 40 years. However, some writings by Deaf people in late 18\(^{th}\) and 19\(^{th}\) Century France and England are notable for their descriptions not only of the writers’ lives and immediate concerns, but of the Deaf community of the time and in some cases of the historical background to the community and the education of deaf children. Most of these works followed the establishment of the earliest schools for deaf children in England and France in 1760.

\(^5\) The term “subaltern” is used to refer to a wide variety of subordinate, “voiceless” groups whose history is often a response to the activities of dominant groups. The term was first used widely in a series of South Asian Studies edited by Ranajit Guha, beginning in 1982.

\(^6\) John Van Cleve, ed., *Deaf History Unveiled*, x.
Pierre Desloges, a Deaf bookbinder, published a small volume in 1779 called *A Deaf Person's Observations about 'An Elementary Course of Education for the Deaf'*\(^7\). This was a defence of the teaching methods of the Abbé de l'Épée, the founder of France's first school for deaf children, against an attack by a rival teacher, but it also described the Paris Deaf community in detail, and provided probably the first analytical description of a sign language used by a Deaf community. Desloges was a strong supporter of the new school for deaf children but he made it clear that, in a large city where they had had the opportunity to meet, work and learn from each other for many years, Deaf people had already formed a community and were using a common language, with or without the benefits of a formal education.

Desloges' work addressed a central conflict which has dogged Deaf history to the present day—that between signing (or "manual") and oral methods of educating deaf children.\(^8\) These approaches describe not only educational methodologies, but ways of constructing deaf people and their place in society. Chapter Two will explore in more detail the development of this conflict through Deaf history. However, Desloges became probably the first of a lengthy historical procession of Deaf people to feel publicly "obliged to defend my own language"\(^9\) against the claims of warring hearing educators.

In 1840 Ferdinand Berthier, an alumnus of the Paris school for the Deaf, wrote an account of the work of the Abbé de l'Épée which also included a detailed history

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\(^8\) These two "methods" are umbrella terms, with each incorporating much variation and historical change. "Manual" methods are generally based on the primary use of signing and fingerspelling to introduce deaf children to language and to instruct them in educational content and skills. The type of signing used may be a local natural sign language or a code which attempts to manually reproduce the vocabulary and syntax of the local spoken language. Manual methods usually include at least some instruction in speech and use of audition. "Oral" methods generally focus on instructing deaf children in the techniques of speech and in comprehending the speech of others. Originally this comprehension was through lip-reading; since the middle of the 20th Century it has relied more on technological stimulation of audition through increasingly sophisticated hearing aids and, more recently, cochlear implants. Early oral approaches included some use of fingerspelling and signing, but since the mid-late 19th Century oralists have generally eschewed all forms of manual communication.

of earlier attempts to teach deaf children in several European countries. His account described the borrowings, inventions, rivalries, subterfuges, successes and failures of early attempts to educate the deaf, and although he credited the Abbé de l'Épée with the most important and long-lasting contribution to this profession, he also criticised the Abbé's mistakes where he felt it appropriate. Berthier's writings, like those of Desioges, suggested a picture of a resourceful and sophisticated Paris Deaf community actively involved in understanding and celebrating its history.

During the remainder of the 19th Century, most writing about Deaf people continued to be about their education, often in the specialist journals that began to appear. Although some writers may have discussed the adult Deaf community and its history, and the ways in which it was constructing itself, few of these writings have so far come to light. There are exceptions, such as Alexander Atkinson's Memoirs of My Youth—an autobiography published by a Deaf Scottish man in 1865, in which he looked back over his education and young adulthood, and described some of the developments of the 19th Century British Deaf community as well as its educational institutions.

With the professionalisation and specialisation of Deaf education during the 20th Century, the training of teachers of the deaf soon began to include summaries of the history of the profession, and it was not long before textbooks were needed. The most well-known and widely used was for many years Ruth Bender's The Conquest of Deafness, first published in 1960 and still used in some teacher training programs. It was not so much a history of the Deaf as a history of those who have tried to educate deaf people. The ideological tone of the book was set by the subtitle, A History of the Long Struggle to Make Possible Normal Living to Those Handicapped by Lack of Normal Hearing. Such an approach seemed to preclude any treatment of Deaf people as agents or partners in the profession of

11 For example, The American Annals of the Deaf, which began in 1847.
12 Alexander Atkinson, Memoirs of my Youth (Newcastle on Tyne: John Wilson Swanston, 1865).
education, and Bender’s account, though detailed, differed noticeably from more recent histories in its treatment of the Deaf people who were key players in many periods of the history of their education. Deaf teachers such as Jean Massieu and Laurent Clerc were mere shadows in this book, compared to their central presence in later histories. An important assumption in Bender’s book was that “normal living” meant speaking rather than signing, so the direction of the “long struggle” in the title was towards oral education. Adult Deaf communities, which have always used sign languages, had no place in such histories, since by their very existence they contradicted the aim of oral education.

Apart from this and a few similar works, there was little interest in Deaf people’s history for most of the 20th Century. It was to take a “paradigm shift” of major proportions to change this. During the 1960s and 1970s William Stokoe and others demonstrated that the sign languages of Deaf people constituted genuine languages, with all the linguistic features and functions of spoken languages. This challenged the prevailing view that they were haphazard collections of mime, gesture and signs which attempted (unsuccessfully) to reproduce English. This recognition of sign languages began a process of change that has impacted on most aspects of Deaf people’s lives. Where Deaf people had previously been perceived and described in medical and audiological terms, they soon began to be perceived, both by themselves and others, as forming linguistic minorities, as having a culture, and therefore probably a more complex and interesting history than that which had been hitherto revealed:

The medical definition is predicated on repair and replacement; it sees the past as littered with failure and ignorance. The cultural subscribes to an ideal of equality, that all languages and cultures are equal because they are adaptations to the conditions of life. The cultural sees the past as a rich resource, making the present possible.

The 1980s saw an upsurge of interest in Deaf history. This began with the publication of two books in 1981 and 1984, both in the USA. Jack Gannon’s Deaf

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Heritage: *A Narrative History of Deaf America* (1981) was a compilation of historical information, illustrations, short biographies of significant Deaf people, timelines, lists and reproductions of Deaf people’s art and writing. It was organised around themes which reflect the central values and interests of the American Deaf community, such as the establishment of schools for the deaf, sports, arts and sign language. It has been widely read by Deaf people in the USA and elsewhere, and has been of great importance in placing historical consciousness and “heritage” on the Deaf political agenda.

This was followed in 1984 by Harlan Lane’s *When the Mind Hears: A History of the Deaf*. This book was a scholarly and provocative analysis of the beginnings of education of deaf children in France and the USA. In contrast to earlier historians such as Bender, Lane ruthlessly deconstructed much of the history of Deaf education, and portrayed many early teachers as charlatans who had failed to acknowledge their debt to their Deaf pupils and colleagues – “every great hearing teacher of the deaf is standing in front of a deaf man”. At the same time, he contributed to the construction of “heroes” such as the Abbé de l’Épée, Laurent Clerc, and Thomas Gallaudet to such an extent that the book has been called a “hagiography”. He presented Deaf people themselves as participating in and exercising some control over their education in the early 19th Century, and described how educational institutions helped to shape their community and their status in wider society. The last part of the book described the taking over of the profession by hearing people and the exclusion and marginalisation of Deaf people, which he claims continues to the present day.

Lane’s book excited (and enraged) a predominantly hearing audience – Oliver Sacks, for example, was inspired to make his own explorations of the Deaf world after reading *When the Mind Hears*. The impact of Lane’s book has been felt in

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18 Ibid., 138.
many ways: it presented Deaf history as a serious undertaking, worthy of detailed academic study; it argued that many of the issues of discrimination and oppression facing Deaf people today have historical explanations; and it introduced new disciplines and approaches to the study of Deaf people - Lane's approach in this and later books, with its exposure of Deaf education institutions as self-perpetuating power structures which create the kind of Deaf people who will continue to need hearing "experts", owes much to theorists like Foucault. Lane also demonstrated a post-modern interest in manipulating point of view - the first part of *When the Mind Hears* was written in the "voice" of Laurent Clerc, a French Deaf teacher who travelled to the USA to help establish Deaf education there. For the final two chapters of the book Lane reverted to his own persona, claiming to "cheat death and complete Laurent Clerc's history for him."

These two books can be said to have marked the beginnings of two styles of Deaf history writing - the popular and the academic - and to have created two (often overlapping) audiences - Deaf communities who are looking with increasing urgency for historical explanations for contemporary problems, who want "role models" to give to young Deaf children, and who want validation for their claims to be a linguistic-cultural minority group; and established historians (particularly social historians) who are excited at the emergence of a new "subaltern" group and intrigued by the parallels to the histories of other groups such as women and indigenous peoples.

More books followed throughout the 1980s, beginning with another volume edited by Lane. This was a collection of translations of original writings from French Deaf and hearing people of the 18th and 19th centuries - *The Deaf Experience. Classics in Language and Education* (1984). It included the writings of Desloges and Berthier described above, as well as extracts from the works of Jean Massieu, the Abbé de l'Épée and the Abbé Sicard, prominent early teachers of the deaf in France.

Lane called *When the Mind Hears: A History of the Deaf*, which I opened with indifference, soon to be changed to astonishment, and then to something approaching incredulity." (p 1)

21 Harlan Lane, ed., *The Deaf Experience*
Nora Groce's 1985 anthropological study of the population of Martha's Vineyard (an island in northeastern USA) and its adaptation to deafness was another book which attracted attention outside the Deaf community itself. Like Lane's books, this was published by a mainstream publishing house (rather than by a specialist press such as that of Gallaudet University or the National Association of the Deaf), and it carried the assumption that Deaf people were worthwhile subjects of academic study. It investigated the unusually high proportion of deaf people on Martha's Vineyard during the 17th, 18th, 19th and early 20th Centuries (at times as high as one in 25 in some areas of the island), and the ways in which the deaf and hearing inhabitants accommodated each other. Because deaf people were everywhere, they were not seen as unusual, and most people on the island, both deaf and hearing, knew and used sign language.

John Van Cleve and Barry Crouch wrote *A Place of Their Own. Creating the Deaf Community in America* in 1989 to fill a need for a university textbook on American Deaf history, and it is probably the first Deaf History text aimed at such an audience. It focused on the development of the nineteenth century Deaf community in the USA, looking at the influences of wider social changes and tracing the patterns behind developments such as the rise of oralism in the late nineteenth century. It presented Deaf people as actively involved in the creation of their own community, and profiled many little-known Deaf people and their work. It was a wide-ranging and thorough overview, and would have provided many possible research topics for students. The fact that a university text was needed indicates that Deaf history had survived a measure of scepticism and was beginning to be accepted as a discipline.

Deaf people also began to emerge as players in different historical arenas, not only in the development of their own schools and political organisations. John Schuchman's *Hollywood Speaks: Deafness and the Film Entertainment Industry* (1988) described Deaf participation in the early years of the American film

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industry. This account suggested new and intriguing directions for Deaf history, describing how Deaf people's sign language and highly developed visual communication skills were appreciated and used during the silent film era, and the reciprocal impact this had on entertainment traditions within the Deaf community.

If the 1980s were almost entirely dominated by the USA, the 1990s saw Deaf History works emerge around the world. In 1990, the British Deaf Association (BDA) celebrated its centenary, and two books were published for the occasion by Deaf writers. The first was Peter Jackson’s Britain’s Deaf Heritage. Inspired by Gannon’s 1981 book, with a similar title and chapter headings, this covered the history of Deaf people in Britain from the 16th century until the late 20th century. It included many stories which show Deaf people as active and competent in a variety of professions, but offered little analysis of events. The second book published in 1990 was a history of the BDA itself, The Deaf Advance, by Brian Grant. It was a comparatively more detailed and analytical study, and useful for examining the extent of British influence on the formation of early Australian Deaf organisations.

In 1991, worldwide interest in Deaf history was sufficient for the First International Conference on Deaf History to be convened at Gallaudet University in the United States. Presenters (mostly hearing) were from North America and several European countries, and many of the papers were later combined into a book, Deaf History Unveiled, edited by John Van Cleve. It included papers about Deaf history in Spain, France, Russia, Italy and Hungary as well as a majority about the USA and Canada.

The same year, another extensive collection was published by Signum Press in Germany, as part of their “International Studies on Sign Language and

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27 John Van Cleve, ed., Deaf History Unveiled
Communication of the Deaf" series.\textsuperscript{28} Edited by Renate Fischer and Harlan Lane, \textit{Looking Back: A Reader on the History of Deaf Communities and their Sign Languages} included a considerable amount of visual material, or "optical allusions" - illustrations, photographs, artworks by Deaf people, reproductions of old texts and cartoons - in addition to academic papers. This was an acknowledgement that Deaf history comes from a tradition of visual communication among Deaf people, and as far as possible such history should be presented in a way that retains some of that visual nature. Focussing almost entirely on European countries, this collection provided detailed biographies of Deaf individuals and descriptions of the linguistic, cultural and political structures in their lives. These last two volumes provide some confirmation of the claim that "contemporary historians have retreated to smaller questions,"\textsuperscript{28} with increasingly finely detailed studies of particular events or personalities in Deaf history - an order of Deaf nuns in Montreal,\textsuperscript{30} Deaf people's experiences in wartime Britain,\textsuperscript{31} the uses of particular sources such as Jewish scriptures\textsuperscript{32} or the records of an individual school.\textsuperscript{33}

Another British Deaf writer, Arthur Dimmock, published \textit{Cruel Legacy} in 1993 - a sweeping catalogue of the injustices done to Deaf people in various countries throughout history.\textsuperscript{34} Much of the information was anecdotal (such as a stereotyped picture of Deaf Aborigines in Australia living on "their tribal ground in the Northern Territories [sic] ...in shanty encampments", spending their unemployment benefits on drink and making "little or no effort to keep themselves clean").\textsuperscript{35} Despite the questionable research this book was bitterly

\textsuperscript{28} Renate Fischer and Harlan Lane, eds., \textit{Looking Back: A Reader on the History of Deaf Communities and their Sign Languages} (Hamburg: Signum Press, 1993).
\textsuperscript{31} G Pullen and R. Sutton-Spence, "The British Deaf Community During the 1939-1945 War," in \textit{Looking Back}, ed. Renate Fischer and Harlan Lane, 171-176
\textsuperscript{34} A F. Dimmock, \textit{Cruel Legacy: An Introduction to the Record of Deaf People in History} (Edinburgh: Scottish Workshop Publications, 1993).
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 65.
eloquent at times—the chapter outlining the rise of oralism is subtitled, “We have ways of making you talk”.

Since the early 1990s, most of the historical research and publication in Britain has taken place under the auspices of the British Deaf History Society (BDHS), which began in 1993. In that year, Raymond Lee and John Hay published *Bermountsey 1792*, an account of the beginnings of the first public school for deaf children in Britain (a private school had been established in the 1760s in Edinburgh, but this was the first one open to deaf children of the poor)\(^{36}\) In 1994 the Society set up a publishing company to publish the work of its own researchers. Their first publication was a history of the British manual alphabet, also by Lee and Hay.\(^ {37}\)

Since 1997, the British Deaf History Society has also edited and published the *Deaf History Journal* — for some years this was the only journal dedicated solely to Deaf history.\(^ {38}\) While it focusses primarily on British topics, the journal also includes occasional articles with a more international scope, including Australian Deaf history.\(^ {39}\) The journal has regular supplements for more local articles. The BDHS runs workshops around Great Britain, encouraging the development of local history and offering training in research and history writing skills to members. Among their ongoing projects are a series of booklets on “Notable Deaf Persons”,\(^ {40}\) and the re-printing of facsimile copies of old and out-of-print books and pamphlets related to deaf people and sign language.\(^ {41}\) The BDHS is one of a number of European Deaf organisations devoted to the history of their respective

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\(^{38}\) The newsletter of Deaf History International, *The DHI Newsletter*, has since become another forum for publishing research and reviews about Deaf history


\(^{41}\) For example, *Digit Lingua* (1698; reprint, Feltham, Middlesex: BDHS, 1999); *The Invited Alphabet, or Address of A to B, containing his Friendly Proposal for the Amusement and Instruction of Good Children* (1809; reprint, Feltham, Middlesex: BDHS, 2000).
Deaf communities, and reflects the value Deaf people are according to their history since they have begun identifying as linguistic-cultural minority groups.

The greater interest in and respect for sign languages since the 1970s has drawn more attention to earlier versions of manual communication, such as medieval finger alphabets. Lois Bragg, a Deaf American with a background in medieval literature, has described some of these early systems and reviewed other people's studies of them. She urged researchers to be cautious in assuming that they were used by deaf people (either at the time or in later adapted versions), claiming that most of these systems were more likely to be used by hearing people and late-deafened people. Not all agree with her, however. British researchers George Montgomery and Arthur Dimmock published a study (1998) of the Venerable Bede's work with manual alphabets and counting systems, claiming that these early systems were prototypes for modern fingerspelling alphabets and counting systems used in Deaf communities, and that Bede himself may have had a speech impairment for a time as a child.

Another collection of papers was published after the second International Conference on Deaf History in Hamburg in 1994. This was *Collage: Works on International Deaf History* (1996). It included papers on Deaf history in a wider variety of countries, such as Iran, Finland, Nigeria and Australia. This collection also included a number of papers on specialised libraries and archives, and

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42 There are now similar organisations in France, Sweden, Norway, Russia and several other European countries, and moves to establish one in the USA.
46 Three Australian papers were included: Jan Branson and Don Miller, "Frederick John Rose: An Australian Pioneer," (69-82); Jan Branson and Don Miller, "Writing Subaltern History: Is it Myth? Is it History? Is it Genealogy? Is it All? Or is it None?" (185-194); and Brian Bernal and Jennifer Toms, "I Live as a Pupil at the Victorian School for Deaf Children in the 1940s and 1950s," (51-62), in *Collage*, ed. Renate Fischer and Tomas Vollhaber
visual records such as films and photographs. The editors insisted that contributors include visual material with their papers, and chose the title *Collage* to reflect the "different themes and materials, cut out, scrambled up, and pasted back together". They also pointed out in their Preface that much of the material was at odds with the often serious tone of Deaf history:

It pushes the sorrowful story of deaf people into the background and shows something of the initiative, the power and the fantasy of deaf individuals and communities and lets a story of sensitivity and tenderness shine through—a story no longer of helpless victims, but rather of cycling scholars, of celebrating crowds on the occasion of the famous Abbé de L’Epée’s 200th birthday, of clashing fronts in the riots of Sydney.

This offers some confirmation of the earlier observation that Deaf history has moved from portraying Deaf people as victims towards presenting them as agents.

The mid to late 1990s saw the publication of a number of works on Deaf history which broadened the parameters of the field. Some of these historians were “visiting” from other disciplines or other areas of history. The effect has been to encourage greater attention to the historical context of events in Deaf history, to explore parallels between Deaf people and other marginalised groups in society, and to develop the uses of other discourses, such as those of cultural studies, in writing about Deaf people.

Lennard J. Davis used his background in cultural studies and disability studies, but also his status as a child of Deaf parents, to explore the historical and political concepts surrounding modern understandings of “disability” and “Deafness” in *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness and the Body* (1995). Nicholas Mirzoeff, a professor of art history, provided a detailed study of Deaf artists during 19th Century France in *Silent Poetry: Deafness, Sign, and Visual Culture in Modern France* (1995).

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49 Ibid., 9
50 Renate Fischer and Tomas Vollhaber, eds., *Collage*, 9
Douglas Baynton’s 1996 book *Forbidden Signs: American Culture and the Campaign Against Sign Language* examined the process by which Deaf people and their language have always been culturally constructed, and the ways in which they are inexorably influenced by events and ideologies in wider society. Baynton focussed on the campaign during the late 19th Century against the use of sign language in deaf education, and efforts to replace it with the exclusive use of oral methods. Although his book examined this process only as it occurred in the USA, it has parallels in many other western countries. Baynton skilfully set this ideological and pedagogical change in the context of other social and cultural changes during the 19th Century, such as the emergence of Darwin’s theory of evolution, the entry of women into the teaching profession, and the move towards more practical, utilitarian kinds of education.

Susan Plann, who has a background in Spanish language and linguistics, has written a detailed account of the beginnings of Spanish deaf education, *A Silent Minority: Deaf Education in Spain, 1550-1835* (1997). Her account explores the Spanish influence on the beginnings of Deaf education in other European countries as well, particularly France, and some of the disputes and rivalries which ensued. She has also provided intriguing portraits of some little-known personalities in early Spanish deaf education, such as the ex-Jesuit Lorenzo Hervás y Panduro (1735-1809) who, while living in exile in Italy, wrote some of the earliest linguistic descriptions of deaf people’s signed languages, and the Deaf man Roberto Francisco Prádez (1772-1836), whose heroic career as one of the world’s first Deaf teachers was unknown until Plann’s work.

Philosopher Jonathan Réé used the “voice” as his central image in *I See a Voice: Language, Deafness and the Senses—a Philosophical History* (1999). This book offers a wide-ranging history of philosophical beliefs about language and the

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55 Ibid, 84-96
senses. Since many of these beliefs have, throughout history, been most clearly revealed in attitudes to those who appeared to be without language or voice, he has also woven into his main story a well-researched history of Deaf people and especially of attitudes to their language and education.\(^57\)

Michael Miles, with a background in Asian disability history, has provided new information about Deaf people and sign languages in Asian countries (an area long ignored in Deaf history),\(^58\) and particularly in Ottoman Turkey.\(^59\) His work draws on a very wide range of sources, such as the writings of diplomats and traders who visited Turkey at the height of its power. His evidence about the role of Deaf people in the Sultan’s seraglio, and the widespread use and acceptance of their sign language, have made it necessary to revise the widely held belief that Deaf people as a group were generally ignored, isolated, and without a sophisticated language until the late 18\(^{th}\) Century.

These “visiting” historians have contributed a great deal to the field of Deaf history, and their professional skills (including their abilities to read sources in many different languages and set Deaf history in a very broad context) have highlighted some of the weaknesses of what can be an insular field. In some cases they have inadvertently given us new windows into our history. Although there remains some ambivalence about outsiders publishing in the area of Deaf history, it seems to be generally agreed that “you can be known by others in different ways than you know yourself, and ... valuable insights might be generated accordingly.”\(^60\) There is sometimes more acceptance of hearing researchers who come from completely different disciplines, as they are seen as having no ideological prejudices about Deaf people (unlike, for example, hearing teachers of the deaf, whose motives can be regarded as suspect by Deaf people).


\(^{59}\) http://www.sign-lang.uni-hamburg.de/bibweb/miles/miles.html


However, much of the new work being done still comes from those with a long and close involvement in the Deaf community, though not necessarily an academic background in historiography. Horst Biesold, a teacher of the deaf in Germany, spent several years researching the treatment of Deaf people under the Nazi government, after finding out in the early 1980s that an older Deaf friend and his peers had been forcibly sterilized. The resulting book, *Crying Hands: Eugenics and Deaf People in Nazi Germany*,\(^{61}\) is a good example of a Deaf history text which reads official records “against the grain” for the story of a marginalised people. Despite encountering much official resistance and refusal, Biesold made use of the records (medical, educational, and administrative) of the Nazi government, and combined these with the records held by Deaf organisations and individuals, as well as extensive surveys and interviews with Deaf people, to present a chilling account of the attempts to eliminate Deaf people and other “hereditarily diseased” people from a race.

Other work has been done on the experiences of people who were both Deaf and Jewish during the Nazi reign,\(^{62}\) and Deaf historians in Germany are beginning to examine the role of Deaf organisations and individuals in either supporting or resisting the official strategies against Deaf people during the Nazi regime.\(^{63}\) A number of historians are also showing interest in Deaf people’s wartime experiences in other countries.\(^{64}\) Not only are these accounts valuable in themselves, they also throw light on the ways in which Deaf people adapt to extraordinary circumstances, and the new (if temporary) alliances which are sometimes formed between Deaf and hearing people in such situations.

With the rise in interest in Deaf history, and the desire of those in related disciplines such as education and linguistics to draw on historical sources,

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\(^{63}\) For example, Jochen Muhs, “Followers and Outcasts: Berlin’s Deaf Community under National Socialism (1933-1945),” in *Collage*, ed. Renate Fischer and Tomas Vollhaber, 195-204.

\(^{64}\) For example, Barbara Kannapell, “The Forgotten People: Deaf Americans’ Contributions During World War II” (paper presented at the 4th International Conference on Deaf History, Washington, DC, 1999).
compilations of original and influential source material are appearing. As well as the BDHS's series of facsimile editions of historical works (see above), some American collections have been published in recent years. Christopher Krentz edited a collection of 19th Century writings by Deaf Americans, *A Mighty Change* (2000); and Lois Bragg edited a collection of 19th and 20th Century writings by Deaf people arranged around themes such as education, the Deaf community, sign language and the "Deaf ethic" – *Deaf World: A Historical Reader and Primary Sourcebook* (2001). Increasing awareness of the transnational nature of Deaf communities and the historical value of their accounts of interactions with each other is recognised in another recent collection of the writings of a Deaf Frenchman, Henri Gaillard, about a visit to the USA in 1917 – *Gaillard in Deaf America. A Portrait of the Deaf Community, 1917*, edited by Bob Buchanan and translated by William Sayers (2002).

Jan Branson and Don Miller have mined Deaf history and assembled a persuasive narrative in support of their claim that the labelling of Deaf people as "disabled" (or similar, depending on the time and place) has always been a cultural construction. They have examined the ways in which this has happened at various stages of history, and have presented some new historical information (particularly from Britain) in the process. Their findings are presented in *Damned for their Difference. The Cultural Construction of Deaf People as Disabled* (2002).

Susan Burch has studied the American Deaf community's struggles to defend their language and community, their right to education through sign language, and (in some states) their right to marry and bear children during the early decades of the 20th Century – a time when oralist philosophies of education and eugenic ideas

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DC, June 2000); M. Evseeva, "Deaf People During the Great Patriotic War" (paper presented at the 4th International Conference on Deaf History, Washington, DC, June 2000).


were particularly powerful. Her book *Signs of Resistance: American Deaf Cultural History, 1900 to 1942* (2002) describes these campaigns in detail and uncovers layers of complexity in a period that has often been described too simplistically in Deaf history as one of retreat and defeat.\(^6\)

Paddy Ladd has written a detailed and enlightening analysis of modern Deaf culture and its roots in *Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood* (2003).\(^7\) Although not primarily a historical study, it describes the historical background with some new insights. It also includes an ethnographic study of the modern British Deaf community which reaches back to early 20\(^{th}\) Century experience and memory, providing a valuable resource for comparing with the experiences of the early 20\(^{th}\) Century Australian Deaf community, the subject of this thesis.

**Australian studies**

The first attempts to record historical information about Deaf people in Australia are probably the several centenary histories of schools for the deaf which have appeared regularly over the last 30 years. J.H. Burchett’s history of the Victorian School for Deaf Children was the first.\(^7\) It details the foundation and development of the school and gives background information to some policy decisions which affected it (e.g., the visit in 1950 of the Ewings, prominent British educators, who encouraged greater emphasis on oral education). The book has a lengthy Appendix listing the names of every pupil enrolled in the school from 1860, the year of foundation, until 1963. This Appendix has a value to Deaf people which may have been unforeseen by the author — it is a social record, a reference point for members of the community, and many Deaf people own the book solely for the pleasure of consulting this Appendix.

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Other centenary histories have followed for other schools. Most of these books are tributes rather than analytical works, but they provide useful records of the beginnings and developments of schools for the deaf, and incidentally, of some of the people who later played key parts in Deaf community events and organisations. Not all schools have waited for a centenary – others have written histories of schools which change or close after a shorter lifespan. A more comprehensive history of Catholic Deaf education was presented in *Open Minds Open Hearts* (1999), a collaborative work narrated by Sarah Fitzgerald, which explored more fully the connections between education, identity and the development of community.

A general history of education of the deaf in Australia was published by Barbara Lee Crickmore in 1990, which goes some way towards providing an overview of the Australian system. However, this book was disappointingly sketchy and incomplete and contained a number of errors, including the misspelling of people’s names and incorrect titles for some institutions. It did not analyse patterns and changes in the system – for example, it mentioned the Deaf founders of some early Australian schools without comment on why this was possible in the nineteenth century when there have been few Deaf teachers of the deaf in Australia since then.

The state Deaf Societies are particularly relevant sources of information for the topic of this thesis, as many of the Deaf community events and organisations I will examine developed under the auspices of, or in rivalry with, the Deaf

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Societies. Their newsletters, minute books and other records are some of the most important primary sources for anyone researching the history of the Australian Deaf community. The first published work to make use of these sources was John Flynn’s *No Longer by Gaslight* (1984), a centenary history of the Adult Deaf Society of Victoria. The book provided an account of the beginnings and development of the Society and the individuals involved, many of whom were Deaf. It made extensive use of the Society’s records, including photographs and reproductions of old letters and documents, some of which documented other related organisations. This was the first Australian publication to focus on the adult lives and social and political activities of Deaf people, rather than on their education. Other State Deaf Societies have also published histories recently, using the same kinds of resources and providing similar insights into the evolution of the Australian Deaf community.

The accidental discovery in 1991 of a tombstone under the Sydney Town Hall led to the (re)discovery that there had been a deaf woman convict on the Second Fleet in 1790, and this became the subject of a book by Jan Branson and Don Miller in 1995. They set the story of Betty Steel in the tradition of social history, presenting her story as part of the history of a cultural minority – but also, by locating Steel at the beginnings of colonial settlement, establishing the continuity of Deaf people in Australian history. They also experimented with perspective, first giving a conventional third person account of Steel’s life, then presenting an “imagined” version from Steel’s point of view – though less effectively than Lane did in his adoption of Laurent Clerc’s “voice” in *When the Mind Hears*.

A number of Masters theses have been written on aspects of Deaf history in Australia. Joan Sheen investigated the beginnings of the Victorian School for Deaf Children, in particular the role of its Deaf founder and first principal, F.J.

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76 John W. Flynn, *No Longer by Gaslight: The First 100 Years of the Adult Deaf Society of Victoria* (East Melbourne: Adult Deaf Society of Victoria, 1984)


Rose. Rhonda Loades examined the formation of the Deaf community in South Australia during the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. Jenny Koschutzke studied the events surrounding the establishment of the NSW Association for Deaf and Dumb Citizens in the late 1920s and 30s. Anne Bremner has documented the development of Deaf sports organisations and events in Australia, and Melissa Anderson has written about the life of Daisy Muir, a Deaf woman who was active in the early years of the Victorian Deaf community. John Flynn, who published *No Longer by Gaslight* in 1984, followed this up in 1999 with a thesis about post-school organisations of and for Deaf people.

I have made a preliminary study of Australian national organisations of Deaf people, analysed the development of artistic expression in the Australian Deaf community, and described an early Deaf immigrant to Sydney, John Carmichael, exploring his background as a signing Deaf person from Scotland, and his career as an engraver in colonial Sydney.

Research into Australian Deaf history is still in its infancy, and most of the published accounts have related to educational establishments or practices. Source material is widely dispersed, sometimes poorly maintained, and occasionally jealously guarded. The history of the Deaf community's own efforts to organise and control their affairs is still comparatively recent and contentious, but interest has been growing among the Deaf community since the late 1980s. As in other

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79 Joan B. Sheen, "A Study of the Victorian Deaf and Dumb Institution (Now the Victorian School for Deaf Children) and Areas of Education Associated with the Deaf 1860-1913" (MA thesis, Monash University, 1982).
81 Jenny Koschutzke, "The History of the Sydney Deaf Community's Boycott of the Adult Deaf and Dumb Society from 1929 to 1937 and the Establishment of their own Rival Association of Deaf and Dumb Citizens" (MA thesis, University of Sydney, 1995).
82 Anne Bremner, "Deaf Sports in Australia" (Master of Sign Language thesis, La Trobe University, 1996).
83 Melissa Anderson, "Daisy Muir: A Remarkable Influence in the Deaf Community" (Master of Education Research Essay, La Trobe University, 2001)
84 John W. Flynn, "Some Aspects of the Development of Post-School Organisations of and for Deaf People in Australia" (MA thesis, La Trobe University, 1999).
countries, there is a search for "heroes", a desire for historical justification for present beliefs and aspirations, an emerging academic discipline, and a growing appreciation of the complexities involved in recovering Deaf history for such a mixed audience.

**International perspectives**

There is now an organisation called Deaf History International, which hosts triennial international conferences and encourages an expanding network of researchers, teachers and writers in the field. There is a steady stream of publications from more and more countries. However the field is not without its conflicts. There is sometimes tension between Deaf historians whose primary aim is to feed historical information into the community and celebrate Deaf people's survival and achievements, and more academic historians (mostly hearing) who are keen to create a new academic discipline and establish rigorous professional standards for Deaf history writing, which can marginalise the work of Deaf historians. The 1994 general meeting of Deaf History International was marked by a heated debate about whether hearing people should be allowed to hold positions on the organisation's Bureau (it was not disallowed, but no hearing person has been on the Bureau since then). One British Deaf writer described to me how a particular book had been researched, written, laid out and printed by Deaf individuals or businesses - "no hearing hand touched it". Academic historians cannot afford to be complacent about these tensions, since their history writing must be accepted and used by Deaf communities if it is to have value and integrity.

There are other occasional causes of tension, such as the discovery that the largest extant collection of historical records on British Deaf education, the Baker Collection, has been in the Gallaudet University library since 1874, unknown to most British Deaf people and inaccessible unless they travel to the USA. This collection was purchased by Edward Miner Gallaudet for £250 (a trifling sum even then for more than 600 volumes) as soon as Charles Baker, the owner, died, although other British institutions expressed keen interest in it at the time. The

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British Deaf History Society has declared emphatically that “the transfer of the Baker collection to the U.S.A. must represent a very sad episode in British Deaf history”. [Emphasis in original]^{89}

These tensions are not unlike those in Australian Aboriginal history, where a debate about “who owns the past?” has been running since at least the early 1980s. The 1983 Annual Symposium of the Australian Academy of the Humanities was devoted entirely to this question, and a collection of papers from the symposium was later published.^{90} That symposium and its resultant publication have served as reference points in much subsequent discussion of the issue, so that the question, “Who owns the past?” is readily recognised by those within the field. Related disciplines such as archaeology have also been affected by this debate, facing demands that the human remains which they have excavated to use as “data” be returned to Aboriginal communities for reburial.^{91}

Henrietta Fournil summarised some of the main concerns of Aboriginal people, such as the placement of resources about Aboriginal history in archives and libraries far from their place of origin; difficulties for Aboriginal people in accessing these materials, both because of their placement in distant academic environments and because almost all of them are in English, which is not always their first language; and problems with legal ownership.^{92} She illustrated these concerns by describing how she found, quite by accident, detailed clan designs and entire family histories for her own people, and a tape recording of her grandfather speaking their tribal language, held in archives in another part of the country. These had been prepared by white anthropologists, but her people had never been informed of their existence. Even when physical access was possible, she pointed out that language differences could effectively preclude Aboriginal

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88 John Hay, personal communication, 17 October 1994
people from having full access to historical resources in English. She concluded by paraphrasing an American anthropologist:

To be an Aborigine is having non-Aborigines control the documents from which other non-Aborigines write their version of our history. 93

The parallels with Deaf people’s concerns are obvious—records about Deaf people, where they exist at all, are usually held in libraries and archives with sometimes restricted access, and they are almost all in the written languages of their host countries. Despite over 200 years of educational efforts, most Deaf people (except those who acquired deafness after learning a first language) have generally low levels of literacy. 94 Once a discipline is colonised by “others”, it can become difficult for the subjects to re-assert control over it.

Although the importance of Deaf history is rarely disputed now, it has not been immune to criticism from theorists both within and outside the field. Miles (2000) has suggested that some contemporary writers of Deaf history use it as part of a “modern campaign agenda” and “re-project their beliefs to past ages” without sufficient attention to evidence and context. 95 Owen Wrigley, in The Politics of Deafness (1996), attacked the uncritical accounts of early Deaf history, especially the work of Harlan Lane. He accused Lane of hagiography, of creating a “pious morality play” and of developing Laurent Clerc’s story as “the saga of a typical American frontier hero”. 96 He suggested instead that the stories of early hearing educators such as de L’Épée might be better presented as “contact narratives”, and offered as an example Columbus’ discovery of the “Indians” and his inability to accept that they had a language or even that they could speak. 97 Wrigley dismissed the oral-manual debate as “an argument primarily between two camps of the Hearing that seek the same goal: the creation of a Deaf identity acceptable and convenient to Hearing social and administrative concerns”, 98 and asked rhetorically:

93 Ibid , 7
94 For a summary of literacy levels of deaf people, see Peter V. Paul, Literacy and Deafness: The Development of Reading, Writing and Language Thought (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1998); Des Power and Greg Leigh, “Principles and Practices of Literacy for Deaf Learners: A Historical Overview,” Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education 5, no 1 (Winter, 2000): 3-8
95 M Miles, “Signing in the Scraglio”, 118.
96 Owen Wrigley, The Politics of Deafness, 44.
97 Ibid , 47
98 Ibid , 51
Isn't Deaf history really about the small land wars at the margins of society and self-identity, exactly where the Hearing administrations of the Deaf through these institutions don't quite succeed in controlling or suppressing Deafness? Isn't Deaf history more about the resistances to subjugation and oppression than about the success of the institutions into which Hearing people put Deaf people?99

These critical voices can be seen as an indication of the maturing of Deaf history as a discipline. As Miles has said, "Anything on which historians are unanimous is automatically suspect since it is their business to doubt one another".100

**Theoretical perspective**

I have chosen to write this thesis from a social history perspective. There are several issues which have both influenced my choice of this approach, and also raise some questions for me about its relevance. Social history is usually understood to be "history from below", or the history of groups which have traditionally been considered marginal to the "main story". Since the beginnings of the *Annales* school in France in 1929, such groups have included peasants, slaves, the family, women, children, indigenous peoples, the history of particular activities and occupations, and the history of social attitudes to things such as childhood, the body, sexuality, death.101 The development of social history approaches in other countries and other traditions has seen works such as E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, in which he famously claims to:

...rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the 'obsolete' hand-loom weaver, the 'utopian' artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott, from the enormous condescension of posterity.102

The temptation to "rescue" is attractive to many people, especially those who have a personal stake in the history to be recovered. Appleby, Hunt and Jacob commented on the huge volume of social history writing produced in the USA by the children of working class and migrant families, who sometimes seemed to have "a personal incentive for turning the writing of their dissertations into a

99 Ibid., 50.
100 M. Miles, "Signing in the Seraglio", 119.
movement of memory recovery." Other features of social history are the use of unorthodox sources and techniques, such as quantitative analyses of demographic and economic records ("cliometrics"); and a willingness to draw on the methods and theories of other disciplines, particularly sociology and anthropology. All these aspects of the social history approach have done much to revitalise the discipline of history and increase its relevance to a broader range of people, but when applied indiscriminately they can prompt accusations of triviality and antiquarianism. As one disappointed critic claimed,

In these circumstances the study of the past becomes a playpit for the unattended urchins of other disciplines: computer scientists, parsonian sociologists and structural anthropologists wallow around under a benevolent editorial eye.

Some social history has also tended to ignore the political context of the group and time period being studied, and to discount any criteria for determining the "value" of the subject of study (the critic just quoted deplored studies of the history of footwear and cooking, for example).

While being aware of the perceived pitfalls of social history, and of the personal stake I have in the history I recover, I feel it is the most appropriate approach for this thesis. Since I will be describing the "resistances to subjugation and oppression" in more detail than the "success of the institutions into which Hearing people put Deaf people", the viewpoint of Deaf people themselves is the one I wish to explore. Although Deaf history has made significant progress towards presenting Deaf people as agents in their own histories rather than obscure shadows behind the stories of "great men", this progress is still uncertain in many countries, including Australia. It therefore seems important to focus on the resources which can show us Deaf people's involvement in or resistance to the major institutions of their community. A history which seeks to uncover the actual lives of Deaf people and the structures they created to give meaning to their lives can hardly help but be social history.

102 E. P Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), 12
103 J. Appleby, J. Hunt and M. Jacob, Telling the Truth about History, 146-147
However, there are some issues which will raise questions about the value of the social history approach for this thesis. In seeking to record Deaf people’s involvement in organisations and institutions, do we merely create another minor history of “great men”? There are indications that it may have been an minority of Deaf people, not all of them born deaf, who did much of this work in Australia, and that the majority of Deaf people had comparatively little interest in the political aspects of their communities and their relationships with hearing people. So in presenting this history, are we simply providing another scenario which will have to be mined again for the true “history from below”?

How do we decide who are the real subjects of study, the people whose viewpoints we wish to explore? Deaf communities have always had criteria for being authentically Deaf, but these criteria can be ambiguous. Not only were some of the Deaf people I describe late-deafened or “oral” (attributes which can cast some doubt on their status as Deaf people), but some of the hearing people were CODAs (children of Deaf adults), who are often claimed to be “culturally Deaf” though physically hearing. They occupy a liminal position, sometimes appearing to be part of the community of Deaf people, and at other times appearing separate, able to use their intimate knowledge of Deaf people to either support or manipulate them more effectively. These shifting categories of deafness may make it difficult to identify the perspective needed for social history.

Many of the records we need to use were still, inevitably, written by hearing people. Because of the low levels of literacy attained by most Deaf people throughout history, the only true records of their thoughts and activities would be visual records of their signing. While the interviews I conducted provide this to some extent, there is still heavy reliance on written records, and thus perpetual uncertainty about the authenticity of the view from below. The historian’s task becomes one of interpreting the evidence left by hearing people writing about Deaf people, reading these records “against the grain” and with the assistance of the few records left by Deaf people themselves. While this may be challenging, it is a common problem in social history.

CHAPTER 1. Introduction and Literature Review

The field of Deaf history has grown significantly since the early 1980s, and there now exists an international audience, both academic and popular, with an interest in seeing individual stories and theoretical works presented. There are increasing opportunities for debate and analysis about Deaf history and what it reveals of the events, personalities and relationships within and between Deaf communities and their hearing neighbours.

In summary, this thesis presents an account of the Australian Deaf community, and some of the personalities and organisations associated with it, during one of its most formative and tumultuous periods – the early decades of the 20th Century. During these years, the early work of establishing Deaf schools and social welfare organisations had largely been completed. Deaf people began to challenge these organisations, the controls they imposed and the images they promoted about Deaf people. The history that emerges adds to the Australian contribution to the international historiography of Deaf people, and provides new material for the search for the Deaf perspective or “speaking position” in this history. The thesis contributes to the growing body of work which places Deaf people within the mainstream of history and acknowledges their agency in creating and maintaining their communities, languages and cultures.
CHAPTER 2: Historical Background

Nature has not been as cruel to us as is commonly assumed.

Pierre Desloges, 1779.1

This chapter provides an overview of the history of Deaf people up to the beginning of the 20th Century, and a discussion of some issues of interpretation which have been debated by recent historians. The first part of the chapter focuses on western history in general, and the second part on Australian history. This historical overview is brief, and concentrates on the development of signing Deaf communities in western countries. Later chapters provide a detailed description of developments in the Australian Deaf community after the early establishment of schools and community organisations, at a time when relationships between Deaf and hearing people were still being negotiated. The background information in this chapter provides some context for understanding these developments in Australian Deaf history.

Despite the increase in Deaf history research and writing since the 1980s, our information about Deaf people throughout history remains sketchy. In most societies, Deaf people have been an overlooked minority, not considered important in the written record of their country's history. Deaf history can therefore be likened to that of many other marginal groups such as women and the disabled, whose histories are being pieced together from diverse sources, often using social history methods. There are many gaps in Deaf history, many nameless people who are mentioned only in passing. The narrative is continually being revised as new information comes to light and unsuspected inter-relationships are revealed.

This outline of the history of Deaf people seeks to focus on the evidence of Deaf people forming communities, demonstrating use of a sign language, and showing signs of self-awareness and political and cultural activity. It will not attempt a

comprehensive survey of education for deaf children, except where (as was often the case) educational theories, institutions or personalities impacted significantly on the lives of Deaf communities. Much Deaf history writing and teaching has focused on the development of education for Deaf people, as it is often assumed that it was only education which brought Deaf people together and provided an environment for the development of a full language. While educational provisions certainly did have these effects to a large extent, it is also becoming obvious that Deaf people have formed communities and used sign languages even in the absence of educational services, and often in spite of them. This is particularly important, given that many attempts at education have been haphazard, ineffective and repressive, and that Deaf political activity has often centred around attempts to influence or control educational practices for deaf children. The relationship between Deaf people and educators has always been a troubled one, marked by passionate support or equally passionate opposition.

A French Deaf historian, Bernard Truffaut, has articulated the modern discomfort with Deaf history’s focus on education:

... for nearly two centuries, it was especially the history of Deaf people’s education upon which attention and research was focused ... education was the field reserved for hearing people, where they played the major role ... So the history of Deaf education written by hearing people stood in for true Deaf history.2

Harlan Lane (using the persona of Laurent Clerc) also rejected much Deaf history as "an account not of my people but of our hearing benefactors ... a false history."3 So what is the “true Deaf history” that Truffaut urged us towards? He explained:

... this marginalised history had a sociological aspect: the deaf community and its identity, its culture, its initiatives for the recognition of its rights, its artists and militants; and a linguistic aspect: the sign language and the vagaries of its acceptance, its analysis, its writing and its application. Here was a great and rich field of study, which remained practically unexplored because of a lack of pioneers.4

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Truffaut’s criteria for validity reflect the concerns of the late 20th and early 21st Centuries, when Deaf scholars and their hearing colleagues have focussed on the recognition of signed languages and the exploration of the cultures of Deaf communities around the world, areas of study which have not always sat comfortably with the field of education of the deaf. Another critic who has attempted to define “true Deaf history” is Owen Wrigley (see Chapter 1) who urged more attention to “the small land wars at the margins of society and self-identity”, and “the resistances to subjugation and oppression [rather] than . . . the success of the institutions into which Hearing people put Deaf people”.5

These efforts to redefine “true Deaf history” are important. However, there seems to be a central issue which they do not satisfactorily address. Deaf communities in many countries have developed accounts of their origins, stories which are told and retold and which embody their values and aspirations. Whether or not they fit with modern theorists’ views, these stories are almost invariably stories of the beginnings of education and the first teachers (usually hearing). Two prominent examples are the importance accorded to the Abbé de l’Épée by the French Deaf community, and to Thomas Gallaudet in the USA. Australia is beginning to follow this trend with its homage to the early educators F. J Rose and Thomas Pattison (though they were Deaf). If we wish to address the way in which Deaf communities themselves see their histories, we cannot ignore the importance they place on these stories of educators, even if we sometimes feel the emphasis is misplaced.

So in attempting to summarise the broad sweep of Deaf history and to highlight the issues which provide background to this thesis, there are some difficult choices to be made: How to avoid giving too much attention to education, when these are the stories that Deaf communities still look for and see as important? How to highlight the “small land wars”, the “resistances to subjugation”, the “sociological aspects” which contemporary historians deem relevant, when these are poorly documented and have probably often been suppressed? The approach taken here focuses on the development of Deaf communities while being conscious of these contextual theoretical questions.

5 Owen Wrigley, The Politics of Deafness, 50
Early records

Early Jewish law included references to deaf people – the most well-known is the edict in Leviticus, “Thou shalt not curse the deaf”\(^6\) Deaf people have also found significance in the assurance to Moses that he was fit to be a prophet, even though he was “slow of tongue”\(^7\) Scattered references exist in other early texts, but the most explicit and influential appear in classical Greek texts. In one of his Dialogues, Plato described Socrates asking a student:

> Suppose that we had no voice or tongue, and wanted to indicate objects to one another, should we not, like the deaf and dumb, make signs with the hands, head and the rest of the body?\(^8\)

This suggests that the deaf people of the time communicated with signs, and also (since Socrates was able to assume that his students knew what he was referring to) that deaf people were regularly seen to sign with each other in public places.

Aristotle made a lasting, though probably unintended, contribution to the history of Deaf people in his pronouncement that “Men that are deaf are also speechless; that is, they can make vocal sounds but they cannot speak.”\(^9\) Because the Greeks believed that thought or reason could only be demonstrated through speech, Aristotle’s words were used to rationalise the lack of educational provisions for deaf children for centuries to follow. If deaf children could not think, it was argued, what was the point in educating them? When deaf children finally began to receive formal education almost two thousand years later, one of the first teachers declared grandly: “[My pupils] manifested, by using them, the intellectual faculties that Aristotle denied they could possess.”\(^10\) This suggests how far-reaching Aristotle’s influence had been.

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\(^6\) “Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shalt fear thy God: I am the Lord.” Leviticus, 19:14.

\(^7\) “Who hath made man's mouth? Or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I the Lord?” Exodus, 4:11

\(^8\) Quoted in D F Moores, *Educating the Deaf* Psychology, Principles and Practices 5\(^{th}\) ed (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), 33

\(^9\) Ibid., 32.

\(^10\) Pedro Ponce de Leon, quoted in Harlan Lane, *When the Mind Hears*, 91
Quintus Pedius was a deaf artist in ancient Rome, described by Pliny as one of the city's most important painters.\(^{11}\) He seems to be the earliest deaf individual whose name has survived—probably due to the fact that he was from a wealthy and notable family (Augustus Caesar was his uncle), was male, and had the opportunity to develop his talent for art. Although there are no details of how he communicated, the only surviving illustration of him shows him with a loose gag around his lower face—presumably indicating that he did not speak.

Roman law addressed the issue of deaf people, and had a pervasive influence on other countries subsumed under the Roman Empire. The Code of Justinian (c. 600 AD) divided deaf people into a number of categories, each with a different legal status. People born deaf and mute “with both diseases at once” had no legal rights, and had to have a guardian to look after their affairs. Those who became deaf later in life “by calamity”, and could write, were allowed to marry and handle their own business whether or not they could speak. Any deaf person who could speak had full legal rights, as did hearing people who were mute.\(^{12}\) It would seem that competence in speech or writing was required to demonstrate the ability to reason and be independent.

During the 5\(^{\text{th}}\) Century, there were brief references to deaf people in the writings of St Augustine. Although his best-known comment was that deafness “hindered faith”, he also referred to a family with several deaf members, and speculated that signing was similar to speech in that both “pertain to the soul”.\(^{13}\) The Venerable Bede described the treatment of a deaf person in the 8\(^{\text{th}}\) Century, and wrote about the use of early finger alphabets and counting systems.\(^{14}\) Others have described the portrayal of gestures and (occasionally) fingerspelling in medieval artwork.\(^{15}\) Not all modern

\(^{11}\) D F Moores, *Educating the Deaf*, 35

\(^{12}\) Ibid., 34-35

\(^{13}\) John Van Cleve and Barry Crouch, *A Place of Their Own*, 4ff


commentators agree that such systems would have been used by deaf people, however. 16

One place where deaf people were highly visible and often remarked on was at the Ottoman court in Turkey, from the 15th Century through to at least the 17th Century. Travellers, foreign diplomats and visitors regularly described the many “mutes” in attendance on Sultans 17 They were part of a large contingent which included dwarfs, jesters and other entertainers. While these people usually accompanied the Sultan in order to entertain him, the mutes also had roles such as messengers, doorkeepers and (according to one observer) executioners. Although information is less clear, it seems deaf women also served in the harem. Visitors often remarked on the sign language used by these mutes, and more interestingly, the fact that most of the Sultans and other persons in the Court also knew and used this sign language.

But this language of the Mutes is so much in fashion in the Ottoman Court, that none almost but can deliver his sense in it, and is of much use to those who attend the Presence of the Grand Signior, before whom it is not reverent or seemingly so much as to whisper. 18

In contrast to many Western European countries which were strongly influenced by the old Roman laws, Turkish laws were comparatively enlightened as to the status and function of sign language. According to the Hedaya, a 12th Century commentary on Muslim law, “the intelligible signs of a dumb person suffice to verify his bequests, and render them valid”, and such persons were also allowed to “execute marriage, divorce, purchase or sale” 19

Several Deaf people gained prominence during the 16th Century in Spain. The tradition of sending young boys to monasteries as “oblates” for their formative years facilitated some of the first formal teaching of deaf children, particularly when the monasteries used a system of monastic signs. The first to come to attention was the

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17 M. Miles, “Signing in the Seraglio: Mutes, Dwarfs, and Jesters at the Ottoman Court 1500-1700,” Disability & Society 15, no. 1, (2000): 115-134
19 Quoted in M. Miles, “Signing in the Seraglio,” 130, n. 3
painter Juan Fernández Navarrete (1526-1579), who was known as El Mudo ("the mute"). Fernández Navarrete was taught by the monk Fray Vicente de Santo Domingo at a monastery in Logroño, and later studied art in Italy. He returned to Spain to become the court painter of King Philip II, and his work can still be found in the Prado in Madrid, in the monastery of El Escorial, and in other galleries around the world. Fernández Navarrete was known to communicate through sign language and to use interpreters. His paintings were noted for their heightened use of gesture, sometimes called tenebrism—his subjects’ hands were often unusually detailed and expressive. Modern Deaf observers have sometimes commented that his subjects appear to be signing.

Soon after this, another Spanish monk, Fray Pedro Ponce de León (1520-1584), taught several other deaf boys in the Benedictine monastery of Oña, beginning with the brothers Juan and Francisco de Velasco, from a noble family with four deaf children. Ponce successfully taught these brothers to read, write and speak. Plann has pointed out that Ponce’s teaching was probably greatly facilitated by the fact that the brothers would have had early access to a home sign system, since all of their siblings were deaf. The Velasco brothers were widely commented on, both in Spain and abroad—Spain was an important economic and cultural centre in the Europe of the time, and anything which happened there was likely to be noticed and discussed widely. Pedro Ponce de León has traditionally been regarded as the first teacher of the deaf, although Vicente de Santo Domingo had taught Juan Fernández Navarrete only a few decades before. As Plann suggests, Ponce was probably considered to have performed the greater miracle because his pupils spoke and Fernández Navarrete did not—despite Fernández Navarrete’s more successful career.

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21 Ibid
23 Susan Plann, "Pedro Ponce de León: Myth and Reality," 8
24 Susan Plann, "Pedro Ponce de León: Myth and Reality," 9-10
In France, Etienne de Fay was born deaf in 1669, and was educated in the Abbey of Saint-Jean d'Amiens. Though no records of the method used to educate him survive, he was usually referred to as “deaf and dumb” and described as skilled at communicating in signs.\textsuperscript{25} His education impressed observers, and he was described as a
deaf-and-dumb scholar from Saint-Jean d'Amiens who, besides reading and writing, knew arithmetic, Euclidean geometry, mechanics, drawing, architecture, holy and profane history, especially of France.\textsuperscript{26}

He stayed on at the Abbey for the rest of his life (though he did not become a monk). He filled several roles, including those of procurator, sculptor, librarian, architect, and teacher of deaf children. He taught these children using sign. De Fay is usually overlooked in histories of deaf education, which tend to claim that Jacob Pereire and the Abbé de l'Épée were the first formal teachers of the deaf in France.\textsuperscript{27} This is an example of a tendency among historians (both Deaf and hearing) to give credit to hearing benefactors rather than to deaf people.

The intellectual climate of 18\textsuperscript{th} Century France aroused interest in deaf people and their sign languages from philosophers such as Diderot, Condillac and Rousseau.\textsuperscript{28} There was a willingness to consider radical shifts in thinking, such as the idea that deaf people could be educated, and that language could be in a different modality. There was a bourgeois interest in displays and “tests” of new ideas, and this climate helped to foster the development of more formal and public attempts to educate deaf children.

Jacob Pereire made a name for himself in France between 1745 and 1780 as a private tutor for a small number of wealthy deaf children. He focused on teaching them to speak, although he also used a one-handed manual alphabet and some signs. He gave


\textsuperscript{26} Quoted in Bernard Truffaut, “Etienne de Fay and the History of the Deaf,” 15.

\textsuperscript{27} For example, Ruth Bender, The Conquest of Deafness, 65-77.

\textsuperscript{28} See Jean-Rene Presneau, “The Scholars, the Deaf, and the Language of Signs in France in the 18\textsuperscript{th} Century,” in Looking Back, ed. R. Fischer and H. Lane, 413-421.
public displays of his more successful pupils, and his work was recognised by the French Academy of Science and the Royal Society of England.  

Another man who entered this milieu was to become one of the icons of Deaf history. The Abbé Charles Michel de l’Épée was a priest whose first encounter with Deaf people was with a family in a poor area of Paris—a mother and her deaf twin daughters. The mother was concerned that her daughters would not be able to receive the sacraments and go to heaven when they died, because she could not find a way for them to be given religious instruction effectively. De l’Épée was intrigued by this problem, and even more interested when he saw that the girls (who were about 14 at the time) had developed a home sign system, which they used to communicate with each other. De l’Épée set about learning the sisters’ sign system, and attempting to use it for their religious instruction. Of course he found it was inadequate for this purpose, since it would have evolved to discuss only the sisters’ immediate needs and interests. Instead of abandoning it, he began to develop and expand it, seeing in it the possibilities of a way to educate the deaf—“bringing in through the window what cannot come in through the door.” From this introduction to deaf people and their language, de l’Épée went on to establish a school for deaf boys at his home in Paris in 1760. This is usually claimed to be the first school for the deaf in the world, though another school was set up by Thomas Braidwood in Edinburgh in the same year.

Contrary to popular opinion, the Abbé de l’Épée did not “create” a sign language for the deaf, nor was his school the first gathering of Deaf people in Paris. An intriguing picture of the comparatively well-developed Parisian Deaf community of the time was presented by a deaf writer, Pierre Desloges. Desloges had become deaf in early childhood, and learned sign language as an adult from the Paris Deaf community. In 1779, he published a short book defending the Abbé de l’Épée from one of his detractors, the Abbé Deschamps, who favoured an oral approach to teaching deaf

29 Ruth Bender, *The Conquest of Deafness*, 65-69
children.\textsuperscript{31} The appearance of the book showed the extent to which the question of "method" (oralism versus signing) was already dividing educators of the deaf, and drawing people from the Deaf community into the debate. With this book, Desloges became the first in a long tradition of Deaf people who have felt "obliged to defend [our] own language".\textsuperscript{32} His book focused on refuting the claims of the Abbé Deschamps; however Desloges was also careful to emphasise that de l’Épée was not the inventor of sign language, but that he learned it from Deaf people who already used it. He stressed that most of these users of sign language had no formal education.

There are congenitally deaf people, Parisian laborers, who are illiterate and who have never attended the abbé de L’Épée’s lessons, who have been found so well instructed about their religion, simply by means of signs, that they have been judged worthy of admittance to the holy sacraments, even those of the eucharist and marriage. No event—in Paris, in France, or in the four corners of the world—lies outside the scope of our discussion. We express ourselves on all subjects with as much order, precision and rapidity as if we enjoyed the faculty of speech and hearing.\textsuperscript{33}

Desloges went on to give some descriptions of the different kinds of signs in use, such as those designating close or distant acquaintances, upper and lower nobility, tradesmen and manufacturers.\textsuperscript{34} He created a picture of an observant, active and lively community, fully involved in the daily life of Paris, and insisted, “Nature has not been as cruel to us as is commonly assumed”.\textsuperscript{35}

This last assertion was an early and succinct statement of one of the central values of Deaf communities—Deaf people have consistently rejected pity on account of their deafness, although they will claim it for those Deaf people who are isolated, victimised and languageless. This lack of self-pity has not always sat comfortably with the attitudes of their benefactors, who have frequently been motivated by pity for their charges, and who have regularly relied on evoking the sympathy of supporters.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 30
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 36
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 42-45
CHAPTER 2  Historical Background

The French Revolution, which began in 1789, is often seen as the birth of modern history, and the origin of many of the ideas which have informed history, government, and philosophy since then. It was, interestingly, also a time of great upheaval and “birth” in Deaf history, with many of the early advances in the establishment of Deaf education occurring between the years 1760 and 1820, and finding their source in France. French Deaf history intersected with the Revolution in a number of ways too. Pierre Desloges was greatly influenced by the ideals of the Revolution, and published letters praising the rebels, which he signed “a deaf mute French citizen”. The Abbé de l’Épée’s successor, Abbé Sicard, was arrested by the Revolutionary Commune in 1792 and narrowly escaped execution. His case was probably helped by a petition from his deaf pupils, pleading for the return of “their father, their friend and their teacher”. This petition was prepared and presented to the Legislative Assembly by a Deaf teacher, Jean Massieu.37

Jean Massieu (1772-1846) was another early icon in French Deaf history. In a short autobiographical essay, he described his childhood and family (he was one of six deaf siblings, though his parents were both hearing), his yearnings after education, and the great change wrought in his life when he was “discovered” and sent to a regional deaf school in Bordeaux. He offered an eloquent comparison of how he viewed the world as an “uneducated” mute and later as an “educated” person. Massieu became the prize pupil of an aspiring teacher of the deaf, the Abbé Sicard, who was to succeed the Abbé de l’Épée on his death in 1789. Sicard took Massieu to the Paris school with him, and Massieu later became a teacher there himself, teaching many of the young Deaf men who were to play significant roles in the development of the French Deaf community during the 19th Century.

37 Harlan Lane, When the Mind Hears, 24-27.
Itard's experiments

France during these times was remarkable for scenes of great brutality co-existing with great liberation, progress and reform. Things for Deaf people were not very different. At the same time that the Paris school was transforming the Deaf world and building a platform for an illustrious tradition of Deaf intellectuals, artists and activists, in an apartment in the school building a very different kind of “benefactor” was experimenting on deaf boys in the name of medical science. Dr Jean-Marc Itard was, like many of his contemporaries, fascinated by the philosophical questions of the origins of language and the differences between humans and animals.  39 He had already come to some attention through his work with a “wild boy” found at Aveyron in 1800, though his efforts to teach that boy to speak were not successful.  40

He was appointed resident physician to the Deaf school for his work with Victor, the “wild boy”, and his attention was then drawn to the many deaf boys in the school. He determined to find a cure for deafness, and proceeded to experiment on many of the pupils in his search for this elusive cure. Over the next few years, he administered electric shocks to the boys' ears, forced liquid up their nasal passages in an effort to “unblock” their Eustachian tubes, bled them with leeches, pierced their eardrums, bandaged their ears with acid-soaked cloths which made the skin blister and peel off, broke their mastoid bones with a hammer, and tried various other increasingly desperate measures. At least one boy died as a direct result of his experiments, and countless others suffered excruciating pain and fear. He finally abandoned his search for a cure, and wrote, “Medicine does not work on the deaf...and as far as I am concerned the ear is dead in the deaf-mute. There is nothing for science to do about it”.  41 His efforts nevertheless won him recognition, and he is still sometimes referred to as the “founder of otology”.  42

Itard embodies a “hearing” value which is woven through Deaf history—the desire to make the deaf like the hearing. This has been the basis not only of physical interventions like those of Itard, but also of much oralist teaching. If deaf people

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39 See Hulan Lane, When the Mind Hears, 121-144
40 Ibid
41 Ibid, 134.
cannot actually be made to hear, then ideally education can make them appear as though they do, by making them speak and seem to understand speech (by lipreading). The fact that this has often been at odds with what Deaf people themselves want, has rarely troubled idealistic educators or physicians. Itard’s successor at the Paris school, Prosper Ménière, summed this up when he wrote in 1855:

The deaf believe that they are our equals in all respects. We should be generous and not destroy that illusion. But whatever they believe, deafness is an infirmity and we should repair it whether the person who has it is disturbed by it or not. 43

Massieu was the first of several influential Deaf teachers in France during the 19th Century. Laurent Clerc, Ferdinand Berthier, Claudius Forestier and Alphonse Lenoir all taught at the Paris Deaf school and all found themselves working at the intersection of education and politics. Their belief in the importance of education for Deaf people was demonstrated in many ways. Clerc moved to the USA and played a key role in the beginnings of education and community organisations there (see below). Berthier, Lenoir and Forestier all participated in a long protest at the Paris school after the administrators sacked a sympathetic and outspoken hearing colleague (Roch-Ambroise Bébian) and tried to move the school towards oralism and lower the status of Deaf teachers. Berthier, Lenoir and Forestier organised a petition to King Louis Philippe, signed by Deaf staff and other Deaf people from the community. The students in the school revolted in 1830, and a group of sixty of them wrote to the Minister of the Interior to complain about their treatment at the school. Berthier and Lenoir were actually invited to a dinner with the King (who enquired after Clerc and Massieu). 44 Berthier in particular was an activist, writer, and community leader as well a teacher for the whole of his long life, and was awarded the French Legion of Honour. He and other Deaf people formed probably the first official Deaf organisation in the world – the Société Centrale (1838), which changed its name to the Société Universelle des Sourd-Muets in 1867. 45

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43 Ibid., 121.
43 Quoted in Harlan Lane, When the Mind Hears, 134.
One of Berthier’s most significant achievements was initiating an Annual Banquet in honour of the Abbé de l’Epée’s birthday. This event was held each year in Paris, from 1834 onwards. The banquets were remarkable not only for organising the Deaf community and bringing them together (at first only men—women were admitted in 1883), but also for their recognition and exploitation of the political and public relations opportunities they provided. Mottez has written of these banquets as being “the birth of the Deaf movement.” Each year at least one Parisian celebrity was invited, as well as journalists and writers. These people wrote admiringly of the event, and were invariably impressed by the company of educated and lively Deaf men and their homage to the memory of the man they considered their first teacher. The writer Victor Hugo was pressed to attend several times without success. In one of his notes of apology, he wrote to Berthier, “What matters deafness of the ear, when the mind hears? The one true deafness, the incurable deafness, is that of the intellect.”

International relationships between Deaf communities began to develop during the 19th Century. Deaf people from England, Italy, Germany and the USA travelled to France at times to attend the annual banquets, and these may have been the first examples of international gatherings of Deaf people. American Deaf artists such as John Carlin and Douglas Tilden participated in the banquets while visiting Paris. Such meetings would have provided opportunities for Deaf people to observe and discuss how those in other environments dealt with their common experiences, how different kinds of education systems worked, and how Deaf communities fostered the growth of signed languages and enabled Deaf people to debate and respond to the issues which affected their lives.

**Great Britain**

The history of Deaf people in Britain is particularly important for this thesis because of its influence on Australian Deaf history. Since the majority of early Deaf

49 Bernard Mottez, “The Deaf Mute Banquets and the Birth of the Deaf Movement,” 147
immigrants to Australia were British, its sign language and educational and welfare institutions were imported virtually intact during the 19th Century.

Some documents in early British history contain short but intriguing references to deaf people, and like Desloges' book, suggest the existence of local communities of deaf people with relatively developed sign languages. Richard Carew's *Survey of Cornwall* (1602) describes a young deaf man in Truro, Edward Bone, who was a servant of the local Member of Parliament. Bone could evidently lip-read but not speak, and would watch the Town Crier give announcements, then go and relay the information to his master in an elaborate system of gestures. However, on his off-duty days Bone would walk to a nearby village and meet a deaf friend, John Kempe:

[The] two, when they chanced to meet, would use such kind embraces, such strange, often, and earnest tokenings and such hearty laughers and other passionate gestures, that their want of tongue seemed rather a hindrance to others conceiving them than to their conceiving each other.

The descriptions of these two kinds of signing – one relatively transparent system for use with hearing people, and another system of "strange tokenings" for use with deaf people, suggest that Bone and Kempe used a sign language which was not understood by hearing people, but that they could adapt this to a more pantomimic system when needed for communication with others. This is a traditional response by Deaf people to their unique communication situation – it is often called "code-switching" by modern linguists.

The diarist Samuel Pepys recorded an encounter with a deaf boy on 9th November 1666. This boy knew one of Pepys' colleagues, Sir George Downing, and could communicate with him in sign language (not a pantomime such as the one Bone used with his master). This may be explained by the fact that Downing came from the Kentish Weald, where it seems genetic deafness was common and sign language was

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50 Dorothy Miles, *British Sign Language*, 14
51 Quoted in Dorothy Miles, *British Sign Language*, 14
used widely. During a fire in Whitehall, soon after the Great Fire of London, Pepys described being at a dinner with Downing and others:

But above all, there comes in that Dumb boy that I knew in Oliver’s time, who is mightily acquainted here and with Downing, and he made strange signs of the fire and how the King was abroad, and many things they understood but I could not — which I am wondering at, and discoursing with Downing about it, “Why” says he, “it is only a little use, and you will understand him and make him understand you with as much ease as may be.”

These fleeting references indicate that deaf people in Britain were out and about and signing. If they had the use of sign languages, it would follow that they had opportunities to meet each other and to allow these languages to become established, even if they were regional and limited in what they may have been able to express.

There were sporadic and isolated attempts to educate deaf children throughout the 16th, 17th and 18th Centuries in Britain, but the first teacher considered to have established a school was Thomas Braidwood (1715-1806), who began educating deaf boys in Edinburgh in 1760. Although de l’Epée has usually been thought to have established the world’s first school for deaf children in that year, British historians now claim that Braidwood began his school a few months before de l’Epée, and that the Edinburgh school was thus the first Deaf school in the world. Braidwood’s first pupil was Charles Shirreff, who proved so talented at writing and painting that he inspired Braidwood to abandon his previous career as a mathematics teacher. The school was visited and remarked on by Sir Walter Scott (who referred to it in his novel The Heart of Midlothian) and Dr Samuel Johnson, who later wrote:

It was pleasing to see one of the most desperate of human calamities capable of so much help; whatever enlarges hope will exalt courage After having seen the deaf taught arithmetic, who would be afraid to cultivate the Hebrides?

There has been much debate over the method Braidwood and other early British teachers used to teach their pupils. Although Braidwood highlighted his work teaching

53 Quoted in Peter Jackson, A Pictorial History of Deaf Britain, 12.
54 For example, Peter Jackson, A Pictorial History of Deaf Britain, 320.
speech, it is now claimed that this was for publicity purposes, and that in actuality he made use of signs and fingerspelling as well, so that his method was a forerunner of what was later called the "combined system". Many of his better-known pupils (Shirreff, McKenzie, Goodricke, and others) were observed to communicate later through signs rather than speech.

Braidwood moved his school to London in 1783, and members of his extended family continued the tradition, establishing and teaching in a number of other schools for deaf children for the next few decades. Braidwood's early schools were all private establishments for the sons of the wealthy. The first public school for the deaf began in 1792 in Bermondsey, London, after a charitable foundation had been set up to raise funds. The school later moved to Old Kent Road, Southwark and eventually to Margate. It was led by Joseph Watson, a nephew of Thomas Braidwood. Watson soon employed a deaf man, John Creasy, to teach his small group of private pupils and to train other deaf students as teachers. Creasy had been educated at the Braidwood schools in Edinburgh and Hackney. He seems to have had a similar role to Massieu, in that he inspired and trained other deaf teachers in England, such as William Hunter and George Banton, who each taught for 50 years or more at the Old Kent Road school.

As in France, the spread of education for deaf children and the activities and aspirations of educated deaf adults led to moves to organise the Deaf community more formally. Deaf adults began to gather for religious worship and social activities from the 1820s onwards, usually led by evangelical or charitable hearing people. These gatherings evolved into organisations variously called Missions, Institutes, Benevolent Societies or Associations. They usually had a leader who was known as a Missioner or Superintendent. Most of these leaders were hearing, but many were Deaf. The Missions provided assistance and support to deaf adults, held regular religious

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55 Quoted in Peter Jackson, *A Pictorial History of Deaf Britain*, 52
56 Jan Branson and Don Miller, "From Myth to History: Maginn, Gallaudet and the Destruction of BSL—Based Manualism in Deaf Education in Britain," *Deaf History Journal* 4, no. 1 (Aug 2000): 7-17
57 Peter Jackson, *A Pictorial History of Deaf Britain*, Ch V
59 Ibid., also Peter Brown, *Banton* (Feltham, Middlesex: National Union of the Deaf, 1994)
services, and became centres for the social lives and leisure activities of Deaf people around the country. It was the Deaf leaders of these Missions, such as Francis Maginn, who worked to establish Britain’s first national Deaf organisation, the British Deaf and Dumb Association, in 1890.  

The United States of America

Histories of Deaf people in the USA generally start with the community on the island of Martha’s Vineyard. Many of the white settlers on the island had originally come from the Kentish Weald in England in the 17th Century. That community’s genetic transmission of deafness meant that an unusually high proportion of the population on Martha’s Vineyard was deaf. This created a particular type of community which has often been thought to be unique. Most of the hearing people on the island learned sign language as they were growing up, simply from being regularly exposed to it; and deaf people seem to have been fully integrated into the social and economic life of the community. Modern researchers have been intrigued by the various ways in which sign language could sometimes be the preferred language for hearing people, such as when they were communicating over distances, or in situations where spoken language was not considered appropriate, such as in church or when doctors forbade a patient to “talk.” This compares with the use of sign language in the Turkish Seraglio, and indeed, the two situations were partially contemporaneous.

However, there was at least one other early American community where deafness was highly prevalent, which demonstrated a different kind of adaptation. In the Henniker community in New Hampshire, almost entire families tended to be deaf—the genetic transmission there was evidently a dominant type. This contrasted with the seemingly random distribution of deafness that occurred on Martha’s Vineyard, where the genetic transmission was clearly recessive. In the Henniker community, deaf people kept to themselves and the surrounding hearing people did not learn their sign

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60 Brian Grant, *The Deaf Advance*, Ch 2
61 Nora Ellen Groce, *Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language*
62 In fact, these kinds of accommodations have also been observed in other closed communities where deaf people have a lot of contact with their hearing neighbours. See, for example, Jan Branson, Don Miller and I. Gede Masaia, "Everyone Here Speaks Sign Language Too: A Deaf Village in Bali, Indonesia," in *Multicultural Aspects of Sociolinguistics in Deaf Communities*, ed Celio Lucas, 39-57 (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press)
language as they did on Martha’s Vineyard. It is now being theorised that the type of genetic patterning therefore influences the sort of community that will develop, and even the relationships that ensue between Deaf people and their hearing neighbours.  

Ironically, it was the establishment of the first major deaf school in nearby Connecticut that began the decline of the Martha’s Vineyard genetic transmission of deafness. Deaf children from the island were sent to the school, and over time they either stayed on the mainland or introduced “off-island” partners to Martha’s Vineyard, thus diluting the traditional genetic transmission. For a short time on the island, deaf people were seen as better educated, and Groce recounts stories about hearing islanders bringing their official letters and papers to Deaf neighbours to ask for their help in reading them. This was a rare moment in Deaf history.

The beginnings of Deaf education in the United States have been developed into an “origin story” in much the same way that the story of the Abbé de l’Epée has in France. The similarly iconic American character is Thomas Gallaudet, although he was not in fact the first person to attempt to set up a Deaf school. The first school was set up in Virginia in 1815 by John Braidwood, grandson of the original Thomas Braidwood from Scotland. This school was short-lived, as Braidwood was an alcoholic and could not maintain it. The same year, Thomas Gallaudet, a young man recently ordained as a Congregational minister, became interested in the deaf daughter of his neighbour Mason Fitch Cogswell in Hartford, Connecticut. Cogswell had observed Gallaudet attempting to communicate with his daughter, and decided that Gallaudet was the person he and other parents of deaf children were seeking—someone who would travel to Europe to study methods of teaching deaf children, and return to set up a school. Gallaudet duly went to England, where he asked the Braidwoods for a short period of tuition. The Braidwoods refused this request, instead

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64 More recent revisions qualify Gallaudet’s pre-eminence, according equal or greater status to Laurent Clerc, a Deaf man who worked alongside Gallaudet, who was hearing. E.g., Harlan Lane, When the Mind Hears.
CHAPTER 2: Historical Background

offering Gallaudet a three-year residential course of training. This exchange has been open to a variety of historical interpretations. Americans have usually cast the Braidwoods as villains, heartlessly turning down their hero on his search for enlightenment. In Deaf culture, villains are always oralists, so the Braidwoods have been painted as oralist educators although in fact they made use of signs and fingerspelling. Modern British historians have disputed these American claims, pointing out that the Braidwoods were not strict oralists and were treating Gallaudet the same way as any other candidate for the teaching profession, insisting that he undertake an appropriate course of study and training.

But this interesting episode of historical revisionism is unlikely to alter Gallaudet’s status in American Deaf history. After declining the Braidwoods’ offer, he fortuitously met the Abbé Sicard, Jean Massieu and Laurent Clerc, who were in England for a display of their method of teaching. Gallaudet arranged with Sicard to visit the Paris school to observe and learn what he could there. He stayed in Paris for several months, but found himself quite unprepared to take on the responsibility of teaching deaf children after such a short period of preparation (suggesting that the Braidwoods may have had a point after all). But Gallaudet, like the Abbé de l’Épée, made an historic gesture. Instead of trying to do something for which he was not fitted, he turned to Deaf people and asked their help. He persuaded Laurent Clerc to accompany him back to the United States and work with him to establish the school, bringing his fluency in sign language and his experience as a teacher and a Deaf person. On the sea voyage back to New York, Gallaudet tutored Clerc in English, and Clerc tutored Gallaudet in French Sign Language—a partnership which many would consider the ideal linguistic and pedagogical relationship between Deaf and hearing people.

Gallaudet’s voyage has assumed a “Pilgrim’s Progress” stature in American Deaf history, as the hero battled a series of symbolic villains (including “Fair-Speech”), struggled through the Slough of Despond and emerged with Greadheart to find the

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65 Described in D. F. Moores, Educating the Deaf, 59.
66 E.g., Harlan Lane, When the Mind Heats, 160-162.
67 E.g., John Van Cleve and Barry Crouch, A Place of Their Own, 27.
68 E.g., Jan Branson and Don Miller, Damned for their Difference, 133-136.
69 Harlan Lane, When the Mind Heats, 206.
Celestial City The story embodies many of the values which have imbued Deaf history for the last couple of hundred years—equal partnership between Deaf and hearing people, resisting the lures of oralism with its temptations of fame and fortune, establishing and maintaining institutions which represent “home” for Deaf people.

During the decades which followed, schools for the deaf opened in most American states in quick succession. The majority of these were modelled on the original school in Hartford, using the form of signing which was developed there. Many of the teachers were trained by Clerc, and Deaf teachers were widely employed. Clerc (though he had originally intended to stay in the USA only three years) had a long and illustrious career at the school, training many other teachers, writing for journals and taking a leading role in Deaf community organisations. Gallaudet’s career was shorter and he was often ill, but he was greatly venerated, and two of his sons continued to work with Deaf people. One was a minister, the other, Edward Miner Gallaudet, was a teacher and in 1864 became the founder and President of the Deaf Mutes College (later Gallaudet College and University) in Washington DC.

A Deaf Commonwealth?

In the 1850s, a Deaf man called John Flourney called for other Deaf people to petition the US government to establish their own separate state. This was not as far-fetched then as it seems today, as other communities such as the Mormons were successfully doing the same thing. Flourney’s quest did not succeed, but it raised issues central to Deaf history and identity. Do Deaf people congregate mainly from linguistic and cultural ties, or from a sense of oppression and alienation from the wider community? Flourney based his call on the latter, but this did not gain full support from the Deaf people of the time. And, given Deaf people’s strong tendencies towards community, who exactly is included and excluded by this community? Flourney’s compatriots argued over the status of their hearing children in the proposed new state, and these arguments proved too difficult to resolve.

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70 M. Winzer, “Deaf-Mutia: Responses to Alienation by the Deaf in the Mid-Nineteenth Century,” *American Annals of the Deaf* 131 (March 1986): 29-32; see also John Van Cleve and Barry Crouch,
Another person who loomed large in the Deaf history of this time was Alexander Graham Bell, best known for his invention of the telephone. Bell was also a teacher of the deaf; he had a deaf mother and married a deaf wife. He believed strongly in oral education for deaf children, and his invention of the telephone gave him the means to support the introduction of oral programs and small day schools for deaf children all over the United States. His outspoken advocacy of oralism did not earn him many supporters in the Deaf community, and his later support for the new science of eugenics would pit him even more strongly against them.

A Golden Age?

The first three-quarters of the 19th Century are often considered a “golden age” for Deaf people. This view is supported by the rapid spread of education to large numbers of deaf children, the acceptance of sign languages and the respect many educators and observers had for these languages, the high proportion of Deaf teachers in schools for the deaf and the comparatively wide range of employment some Deaf people enjoyed – Jackson described a Deaf lawyer, a colonial governor and an astronomer, as well as many Deaf teachers and artists in Britain; Mirzoeff described professional Deaf artists in France; and Van Cleve and Crouch mentioned Deaf architects as well as many Deaf teachers in the USA. It was during these decades that Deaf people began forming their own organisations, distributing magazines and newspapers, establishing sporting networks, and articulating their social and political identification as a group.

While these were important developments, they co-existed with less than ideal conditions. Deaf teachers were paid considerably less than hearing teachers and were rarely given the same opportunities, there were still many deaf children (especially girls) with little or no education, and it is likely that the majority of deaf people had no work or only unskilled work. The attitudes of hearing people, though accommodating,

eds., *A Place of Their Own*, 60-70. Many of the letters are reprinted in Christopher Krentz, *A Mighty Change*, 161-211

11 Peter Jackson, *A Pictorial History of Deaf Britain*
13 John Van Cleve and Barry Crouch, *A Place of their Own*
14 Douglas Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*, 60-61
were overwhelmingly paternalistic, and many Deaf organisations were controlled by hearing people. The fact that this era is still perceived and described as a “golden age” may reveal more about attitudes to the changed conditions that followed.

The last few decades of the 19th Century saw significant social and scientific changes in the western world—Darwin’s *The Origin of the Species* was published in 1859, the industrial revolution spread, women began to campaign for greater social and economic participation, the science of eugenics developed. All of these impacted on the social and educational status of Deaf people, not always in positive ways. Darwin’s ideas were used to help overturn early 19th Century romantic beliefs about the universality and “nobility” of sign languages. Rather than being connected with a purer past, with the oratorical gestures of classical Rome, sign languages began to be seen as embarrassing remnants of a more primitive era. Oral education was promoted as making deaf children more “fit” to participate in the modern world. Women’s eagerness to join the professions meant that they were readily available as teachers, at much lower salaries, for the more labour-intensive oral classes. Deaf teachers, a fixture in schools for the deaf during the early 19th Century, began to decline in numbers, as they were thought to undermine oral programs. They did, of course—both ideologically and by their very presence, since they usually embodied the value Deaf people placed on sign languages.

The new science of eugenics also impacted on Deaf people, from its beginnings in 19th Century England and the USA, up to its climax in Nazi Germany. Early eugenicists (particularly A. G. Bell in the USA) advised against Deaf people marrying each other. Even though the genetic transmission of deafness was not yet understood, it was obvious that Deaf people were somewhat more likely than hearing people to have deaf children. Bell delivered a paper to the American Academy of Science in 1883 called *On the Formation of a Deaf Variety of the Human Race*, in which he argued against practices which he saw as encouraging the continuation of the “deaf race”—not only Deaf intermarriage, but the things which he considered led to it: residential schools,

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56 For an excellent analysis of the impact of these changes, see Douglas Baynton, *Forbidden Signs*
the employment of Deaf teachers, the use of sign language in education, the dissemination of Deaf community newspapers, and reunions of former pupils of Deaf schools. He astutely identified the things which brought Deaf people together, encouraged their continuing association, and bound them together as a community. Although Bell was a “positive eugenicist”, and did not advocate sterilisation or actual banning of Deaf intermarriage, his association with these threatening ideas made him even more of an ogre in Deaf communities.

These changes came to a head and are symbolised in “the Milan Congress”, usually seen as the great watershed in Deaf history, when the gains made by teachers and Deaf community leaders of the first half of the 19th Century were swept away. Although the social and ideological developments described above were largely responsible for most of these changes, Milan has become a potent symbol of oralism, disempowerment, loss and hearing control. Ever since Milan, it is implied, Deaf people have been perpetually on the defensive, “at war”.

The Milan Congress

In 1880, the Second International Congress of Educators of the Deaf was convened in Milan. It was attended by 164 people from Europe and the USA, but the vast majority—143—were from France and Italy, which were both strongly oralist at that time. Only one delegate was Deaf, James Denison, a school principal from the USA. Almost the entire congress was devoted to the “methods” issue—whether deaf children should be educated using sign languages or oral methods. The Congress president, the Abba Tarra, gave a two-day long presidential address, concluding with “viva la parola!” (Long live speech!) The Congress Resolution, which was passed 158 to 6, read:

The Congress, considering the incontestable superiority of speech over signs in restoring the deaf-mute to society and in giving him a more perfect knowledge of language, declare that the oral method ought to be

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77 Described in John Van Cleve and Barry Crouch, A Place of Their Own, 145-146
preferred to that of signs in the education and instruction of the deaf and
dumb.  

The Congress had far-reaching results. In some countries, such as France, delegates
returned home and instigated changes immediately, on the strength of the Congress
resolution. All of the Deaf teachers in the original Paris school were dismissed—
though not without an elaborate farewell. All schools for the deaf in France officially
became oral. Other countries, such as the USA, felt the impact more slowly, over the
course of several decades. However, the outcome was eventually similar—the
majority of schools adopted a policy of oralism, and the ranks of Deaf teachers were
decimated. Other European and North American countries reacted the same way.

The role of the Milan Congress was more symbolic than actual, as the move to oralism
and the changes to education and the teaching profession were more the result of the
social and economic changes sweeping Western society than of this particular
gathering. Deaf people's resistance to these changes was also more widespread and
creative than has previously been acknowledged. But the Milan Congress has
provided a satisfactory scapegoat for the rise of oralism and the disempowerment of
Deaf people ever since, partly because the Congress Proceedings provided a rich
source of material to illustrate the heightened prejudice against signing Deaf people.
The use of signing in schools was blamed for everything from chilblains to flat-
chestedness; it was alleged that signing in the confessional caused sinners to relive
their sins; and most tellingly, signing children were described as having an "indocile
and wild spirit" in contrast to orally taught deaf children, who were more "obedient,
respectful, affectionate, sincere and good."  

The long-term effects of the loss of Deaf teachers have probably never been
calculated. They were not merely members of teaching staffs, they were visible
symbols to deaf children of what they might become, they confounded the persistent

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79 Harlan Lane, *When the Mind Hears*, 394. The wording is slightly different in Van Cleve and Crouch,
*A Place of Their Own*, 110.
80 Harlan Lane, *When the Mind Hears*, 397-398.
81 See Susan Bux, *Signs of Resistance*, for a valuable analysis of this resistance in the United States.
82 Quoted in Harlan Lane, *When the Mind Hears*, 393-394, 401.
belief that Deaf people were incapable and needed hearing people to look after them, they tacitly assured deaf children that they had a valid role in society. In many cases they provided direct links and accessible communication between schools and adult Deaf communities. Their marginalisation or removal had profound effects on generations of deaf children. As one commentator has remarked, “Teachers like Clerc, cultured deaf people who communicated in sign, disappeared from both the classrooms and the imaginations of young deaf students.”

The efforts to remove signing from classrooms and denigrate its use by adults angered and appalled Deaf people worldwide. “What heinous crime have the deaf been guilty of that their language should be proscribed?” demanded Robert P. McGregor, first President of the National Association of the Deaf in the USA. For decades after the Milan Congress, national and local Deaf associations and individuals worked to influence decision makers and overturn oralist policies, though with limited success. The widening opposition between Deaf communities and hearing educators was evident at another conference of educators in Paris in 1900. Deaf attendees outnumbered the hearing, but the conference organisers refused to allow Deaf people to participate in the main conference. Deaf people held a parallel conference of their own. Both groups considered a proposal to re-introduce the combined method into schools. The Deaf section passed it unanimously, the hearing section defeated it overwhelmingly. The Deaf section presented a list of resolutions to the hearing conference chairs, but they were not considered. After almost a hundred years of uneven collaboration, it seemed that by the turn of the century Deaf and hearing people were implacably at odds, at least in the sphere of education.

However, the last few decades of the 19th Century also saw the establishment and consolidation of national organisations for Deaf people. In the USA, the National Association of the Deaf was formed in 1880 (the same year as the Milan Congress), with one of the reasons for its formation being the desire of Deaf people to “attain the

83 Beryl Lief Benderly, *Dancing Without Music*, 127
84 Robert P. McGregor, quoted in Harlan Lane, *When the Mind Hears*, 338
85 Harlan Lane, *When the Mind Hears*, 407-413
ability to intelligently administer [their] affairs". The British Deaf and Dumb Association began in 1890 for similar reasons. These associations reflected the growth of Deaf communities which made it possible for them to meet and debate issues on a national level. International gatherings, such as the International Congress of the Deaf and Dumb in Paris in 1889, commemorating the centenary of the death of the Abbe de l’Epee, drew enthusiastic crowds.

Many Deaf organisations began producing their own newspapers, which were distributed widely. These newspapers helped to bring together national Deaf communities, and some were also sent to Deaf communities in other countries, increasing Deaf people’s awareness each other and making it more possible for them to influence each other. Deaf people were also articulating their need and desire for such close association, not only for political progress but to satisfy their human desire for companionship and unfettered communication. An American Deaf man, Henry Rider, described this need compellingly in 1877, saying that Deaf people’s experience "engenders in our hearts the longing desire and almost irresistible impulse to meet with each other; and even though it be brief, to enjoy for a short season the society of our boon companions."

Histories of Deaf communities in other (mostly Western) countries are continuing to appear. While it is impossible to discuss all of them in this overview, similar patterns are evident in many of them—a few isolated accounts of deaf people’s lives before education was available, the establishment of schools (often with involvement from Deaf people during the 19th Century), the emergence of local and national Deaf communities and the formation of organisations representing them. One of the countries which fits this pattern is Australia.

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86 I. A. Froehlich, quoted in John Van Cleve and Barry Crouch, A Place of Their Own, 94
87 E.g., British Deaf newspapers of the late 19th and 20th Centuries were usually available in Australian Deaf Missions and Societies, and often printed news from Australia.
88 Quoted in John Van Cleve and Barry Crouch, A Place of Their Own, 93
89 For example, Clifton F. Carbin, Deaf Heritage in Canada. A Distinctive, Diverse, and Enduring Culture (Whitby, Ontario: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd, 1996)
The Australian Background

Australia was colonised by the British in 1788, and was first used primarily as a penal colony. Little is known about the position of deaf people in Aboriginal societies prior to European arrival, although some tribes are known to have used signed communication for several purposes.\textsuperscript{90} Knowledge about Deaf migrants in the decades before the 1850s is still patchy, and there is not yet evidence of any groups or communities of Deaf people during that time. The few individual stories that have emerged illustrate the likely range of early Deaf British migrants to Australia.

The first European deaf person who came (unwillingly) to Australia seems to have been Elizabeth Steel, a convict on the Second Fleet. She had been sentenced in the Old Bailey in October 1787 to transportation for seven years for stealing a watch, while engaged in prostitution. Her trial had proceeded, however, only after a special session “to enquire whether she stood mute wilfully and of malice, or by the visitation of God”\textsuperscript{91} Once the jury was satisfied that she was actually deaf, she was tried and convicted, and arrived at Sydney Cove on the Lady Juliana in June 1790. From there she was taken to Norfolk Island, where she served out her sentence. She returned to Sydney at the expiration of her sentence in 1794, but died soon afterwards.\textsuperscript{92}

Another early arrival was John Carmichael, who came to Sydney as a free settler in October 1825. He was 21 years old, and had reached journeyman status while apprenticed to an Edinburgh engraver.\textsuperscript{93} He was “deaf and dumb” a fact which was remarked on in newspaper references to his work,\textsuperscript{94} and by government officials who

\textsuperscript{90} Adam Kendon, Sign Languages of Aboriginal Australia: Cultural, Semiotic and Communicative Perspectives (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) Kendon observed that deaf Aboriginal people usually communicate through “home sign” systems limited to some family members, rather than by appropriating existing tribal sign languages (406-407).
\textsuperscript{91} Michael Flynn, The Second Fleet: Britain’s Grim Convict Armada of 1790 (Sydney: Library of Australian History, 1993), 547-549.
\textsuperscript{92} Jan Branson and Don Miller, The Story of Betty Steel: Deaf Convict and Pioneer (Petersham, NSW: Deafness Resources Australia, 1995)
\textsuperscript{94} For example, a review of Carmichael’s Select Views of Sydney (1829) in the Australian newspaper praised his taste and skill and added that the fact that “this young artist is not only deaf, but also dumb, should also interest the Public in his favour” Quoted in Richard Neville, “Printmakers in Colonial Sydney 1800-1850,” (MA thesis, University of Sydney, 1988), 106.
commissioned work from him.\textsuperscript{95} His use of English in some of his surviving correspondence with the Colonial Secretary also exhibits mistakes typical of a moderately educated Deaf person.\textsuperscript{96} Carmichael completed a wide range of engraving work during his career in New South Wales, including maps, charts, stamps and illustrations for tourist guides. He self-published a collection of six engravings (from his own drawings) in 1829, \textit{Select Views of Sydney, New South Wales}. He was considered by the Postmaster General to be "the most competent engraver in Sydney."\textsuperscript{97}

Carmichael had attended the Edinburgh Institute for the Deaf and Dumb as a child, and was a fluent signer. Fellow students have left accounts of him entertaining his school mates with signed stories about cock-fighting and horse-racing, and described him as "proud of being ... great in our eyes" when he came to school with new stories to sign.\textsuperscript{98} Although it is likely he was the only signing Deaf adult in Sydney for most of his time there, Carmichael displayed considerable independence and assertiveness in maintaining his career as an artist and engraver. He may have had an advantage in the fact that he was one of the few (perhaps at first the only) free emigrant engraver in the colony. He died in 1857.

Henry Hallett was a small child when he arrived in Adelaide on the \textit{Africaine} in 1836.\textsuperscript{99} He would have been similar to many other deaf children who came to Australia with their families who were seeking a new life. Hallett's story is known to Deaf people today largely because he was the first of many generations of Deaf

\textsuperscript{95} Andrew Houison, \textit{History of the Post Office, Together with an Historical Account of the Issue of Postage Stamps in New South Wales Compiled Directly from the Records} (Sydney: Government Printer, 1890), 61

\textsuperscript{96} Quoted in M. Cannon and I MacFarlane, eds., \textit{Historical Records of Victoria}, vol. 4 (Melbourne: Victorian Government Printing Office, 1985), 14-15 Some examples include: "I get another poor copper smith. Thin copper cheap. No use map.", "I am now etching mountains, it will soon be finished I will bring some proofs. I say hills is very much trouble etching &c.", "I know all printers in England never print size original I was measure some maps at Surveyor printed in London, not size original."

\textsuperscript{97} Kerr, Joan, ed., \textit{The Dictionary of Australian Artists}, 134-135

\textsuperscript{98} A. Atkinson, \textit{Memoirs of My Youth}, 192

\textsuperscript{99} Travers Borrow, \textit{The Hallett Family} (Adelaide: Pioneers' Association of South Australia, 1946); and personal communication, John Hallett, 1993
Halletts, some of whom still live in Adelaide. Henry’s father John was part owner of the *Africaine*, and became a successful pastoralist in South Australia.100

Thomas Pattison was born in Scotland around 1805, and attended the Edinburgh Institute for the Deaf and Dumb at the same time as Carmichael. Pattison was employed at his former school for some years as an assistant teacher. He emigrated to Sydney in 1858 to join his brother there.101 He may also have been influenced by Carmichael’s career in Sydney, though Carmichael had died the previous year and no evidence of any correspondence survives.

Pattison soon met the Lentz family, which had three adult deaf daughters, and through them became aware of other deaf children in Sydney. With support from the Lentz family, he decided to establish a school. He began classes for deaf children in Sydney in October 1860, the first in Australia. These classes soon evolved into a small school, with deaf children slowly trickling in from around the colony. Pattison was Principal of the school, and did most of the teaching himself. This would not have been unusual in the British education system which was Pattison’s model. As we have seen, there were many Deaf teachers in Britain, including some who established and led new schools for the deaf, such as Matthew Burns.102 However, Pattison’s career in the school he began was not to be a long one—he was dismissed by the Board of Management of the School (a group composed entirely of hearing men) in 1866. The reasons for his dismissal are unclear.103

Pattison’s school began education for deaf children in Australia, and it was a significant beginning in other ways too. He used manual methods in this school, communicating with his pupils through signs and fingerspelling, probably modelled on the “combined method” used in Britain at the time. Together with the school begun soon afterwards in Melbourne, this established British signing dialects as the prototype of the sign language which was to develop in Australia. These schools also

100 Penelope Hope, comp., *The Voyage of the Africaine: A Collection of Journals, Letters and Extracts from Contemporary Publications* (South Yarra: Heinemann Educational Australia Pty Ltd., 1968), 34


established manual communication as the method of instruction in Australian schools for the deaf. Even though it was not long before oralist influences made themselves felt, the strength of these beginnings meant that Australian schools for deaf children had a long signing tradition which proved difficult to break.

The school that Pattison established, like most large schools for the deaf, also served to bring together the widely scattered deaf children of New South Wales. It provided opportunities for them to learn a sign language and develop the strong social and cultural links that helped to consolidate the beginnings of the Deaf community there.

Pattison's school was Australia's first by only three weeks. Another Deaf man, Frederick John Rose, opened a similar school in Melbourne in November 1860. Rose's career lasted longer, and his life is better documented. He was born in Oxford in 1831, and attended the Old Kent Road Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb in London. He emigrated to Melbourne in 1852 with his brother, part of the huge influx of migrants who came in search of gold in the 1850s.

In February 1859, some correspondence in the Melbourne newspaper The Argus led to Rose discovering a new calling. Two letters signed by "G" and "Widow" claimed that there were more than 50 deaf and dumb children in Victoria, and no educational provision for them. The writer appealed for the establishment of some form of schooling for her deaf daughter, otherwise she would be "put to the peril and danger of a sea voyage to get her educated in Old England, but should such an institution arise here, I would enrol myself a life subscriber." This letter-writer was Mrs Sarah Lewis, and she was referring to her eight-year-old stepdaughter Lucy Lewis. Rose replied to these letters a few days later:

I would beg to state that I am deaf and dumb, and have received a good education in the asylum in the Old Kent-road, London, where I was for five and a half years; and, knowing the great necessity that exists for the instruction of the deaf and dumb, who, unless some little knowledge be imparted to them, cannot tell good from evil, I should feel most happy to

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103 Jean Walter, The History of New South Wales Schools for Deaf Children and Blind Children, 8-16
105 Letters to the Editor, The Argus, 14 Feb 1859, 5; and 16 Feb 1859, 5
further the views of your correspondents in establishing an asylum for the
instruction of those who may be unfortunately deaf and dumb: or, if one
were established, I should have no objection to render any assistance in
my power in the way of instruction for a fair remuneration.\footnote{106}

Following this, Rose made contact with Mrs Lewis, advertised for other interested
parents of deaf children, and made plans for the establishment of a school. He and his
new wife, Elizabeth Manning Telfer (also deaf), opened the school in their rented
home in Prahran, Melbourne, on 12 November 1860, just three weeks after Thomas
Pattison had opened his in Sydney.

Although Rose also worked under a Committee of hearing men, he seems to have
fared much better than Pattison, and had a long and well-regarded career at the school,
as both principal teacher and superintendent. His teaching was favourably mentioned
in a number of government inspections of the school. He not only taught the pupils,
but also trained many of the teaching staff, including several Deaf teachers. Some of
these Deaf teachers were recruited from overseas, such as Miss Frances Lorigan, who
had been educated at the Claremont Deaf and Dumb Institution in Dublin before being
appointed in 1864.\footnote{107} Other Deaf teachers were recruited from among the pupils and
became pupil teachers, in accordance with common practice in all schools at that time.
David Piper was an example of such a pupil-teacher.\footnote{108}

After Rose retired from the school in 1892, he lost his savings during the Depression
of the early 1890s. He applied to the school for a pension, but the Board refused, and
instead offered him a position as Collector. So F. J. Rose found himself at the end of
his career travelling around the suburbs of Melbourne soliciting public subscriptions
for the school he had headed for so many years. It was another twenty years before the
Victorian Parliament succumbed to repeated requests from the Deaf community, and
granted Rose a pension, supplemented by both the school and the Adult Deaf Society.
Rose died in 1920, at the age of 89.

\footnote{106}{Supplement to The Argus, 24 Feb 1859, 1.}
\footnote{107}{J H. Buchett, Ulmost for the Highest, 108-109}
\footnote{108}{John W. Flynn, No Longer by Gaslight, 3}
Although F. J. Rose was commemorated for many years in the Victorian Deaf community by an annual "Rose Day", after the 1930s he shared the fate of Pattison in joining the largely forgotten generations of Deaf teachers, whose contributions were lost and are only recently being rediscovered. Like Massieu, Clerc, Creasy, Banton and countless others, their work was overshadowed and marginalised by the professionalisation of teaching and the ascendancy of oralism. In this respect, Australian Deaf history falls neatly into line with that of other countries in the western world.

Several other schools for the deaf were established around Australia during the late 19th Century. The schools interacted with each other and the Deaf communities in a variety of ways. When the New South Wales and Victorian schools became well-established, deaf children from further afield were sent to them, including some children from other states that did not yet have schools for the deaf. For example, a number of Tasmanian and South Australian deaf children went to school in Melbourne, and some Queensland deaf children were sent to the Sydney school. When the South Australian school opened in 1874, some of their teaching staff were recruited from the Victorian school, most notably Samuel Johnson, who became principal of the South Australian school in 1885. The Victorian school also provided the first staff for the Western Australian school when it opened in 1896. Prior to this, many deaf children from Perth had been sent to the South Australian school.

The school in Queensland opened in 1893. Its first teachers, Miss Sharp and Mr T. R. Semmens, were also recruited from the Melbourne school. Most of the Queensland deaf children who had been travelling to Sydney for their education subsequently transferred to the Brisbane school, as had happened with Western Australian children returning to Perth from the Adelaide school. The Tasmanian school opened in 1903.

These schools precipitated much movement among deaf children and those who worked with them, and the results of that may be evident in modern dialects of

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109 J. H. Butchett, Utmost for the Highest, 73.
Australian Sign Language (Auslan). It can be assumed that Thomas Pattison, like John Carmichael, would have brought a northern (or Scottish) dialect of British Sign Language with him and used it in his work with deaf school children and other deaf associates in Sydney. F. J. Rose would have used a southern, or English, dialect and would not only have introduced it to his pupils, but also passed it on to the many teachers he trained. Care needs to be taken not to oversimplify the effects of these influences (other Deaf adults from varying parts of Britain and Ireland also migrated to different Australian cities and brought with them their dialects or sign systems). However, there are today two dominant dialects of Auslan—northern and southern—and it is likely that the deaf students who moved around brought the signs they had learned with them. For example, the Queensland children who had lived for some years in the Sydney Institution and learned the dialect there would have brought it with them and disseminated it to the other students when they moved to the new Queensland school, despite their having a Melbourne trained teacher.

The Catholic Church also established schools for deaf children, beginning in Newcastle in 1875. Two other Catholic schools were established in the 20th Century. These schools were begun by Dominican nuns and Christian Brothers from “parent” schools in Ireland. One of the first teachers at the Newcastle school was an Irish Deaf nun, Sister Gabriel Hogan. Irish Sign Language was used as the medium of instruction and socialisation in these schools until the 1950s, creating a language minority within the Australian Deaf community—graduates of these schools continued to use Irish Sign Language among themselves and with their families, although they also learned the British-influenced Australian Sign Language and used that for their interactions with the broader Deaf community.

Despite the efforts put into the establishment and development of these schools, education for deaf children did not become compulsory until the early decades of the 20th Century, after lengthy advocacy by the schools, Missions and Deaf

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111 Sarah Fitzgerald, *Open Minds, Open Hearis*, 53-58
communities. All of the schools described above (apart from the Catholic schools) later came under the control of their respective state governments, and were the major educational centres for deaf children in those states until the middle of the 20th Century.

The schools played several important roles in the Deaf community during the late 19th Century, in addition to their primary function of educating young deaf people and preparing them for work and citizenship in the wider community. They all brought together scattered populations of deaf children, were the primary centres for enculturating these children and transmitting Australian Sign Language, and they played key roles in building the social networks which formed the basis of Deaf communities around Australia. Each school had additional unique influences on their local Deaf communities. In Melbourne, Deaf school staff such as F. J. Rose took leadership roles in the establishment of the Victorian Deaf Mission, in South Australia and Queensland hearing teachers played key roles in organising Deaf people and beginning the Missions, and in Sydney the school provided a meeting place for the local Deaf community for many years.

The influence of the schools was facilitated by late 19th Century social and education systems, which allowed Deaf people to take important roles in schools and Missions without some of the obstacles which were to arise in the 20th Century—for example, the widely-used pupil-teacher system of the 19th Century was an accessible and culturally appropriate way for Deaf people to become teachers.

Once the schools were established and the Deaf communities in each state began to coalesce, the demand for organisations and services for adult Deaf people emerged. The British Missions provided ready models for Australian Deaf people, and their expectations and needs were shaped by those of their British counterparts—a meeting place, a centre for religious worship, regular social and sporting activities, and some activities for the “uplift” and continuing education of the community. An implicit

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112 For example, it was made compulsory in Victoria in 1910 (Burchett, *Utmost for the Highest*, 153); in Queensland in 1924, but in New South Wales not until the 1950s.
function of the Missions was also to keep Deaf people off the streets and out of undesirable places.\textsuperscript{113}

The histories of the Australian Missions or Societies are relatively well-documented, with many of them publishing centenary histories during the past 20 years. The Victorian Mission was the first to be established in 1884. Flynn has written in detail of its beginnings and development, and has described the many Deaf and hearing people who were active in its establishment and early history.\textsuperscript{114} The Deaf people included F. J. Rose, three Deaf brothers—John, Adam and William Muir, Matthew Miller, and David Piper. The British influence on these men was obvious, as Rose and two of the Muir brothers had been educated in England and Scotland. The next State to establish a Mission was South Australia, in 1891. The Superintendent of the South Australian school for the Deaf was Samuel Johnson, a hearing Irishman, and he also took a key role in the beginnings of the Mission in that State, as he had in Victoria previously. For many years he was Superintendent of both the School and the Mission, but relied on several Deaf and hearing men to do most of the work in building up the Mission. One of these Deaf men was Eugene Salas, who worked under Johnson as Missioner from 1892 until his death in 1915.\textsuperscript{115}

New South Wales did not establish a formal Deaf Society until 1913, but there were church services and regular meetings for adult Deaf people for many years before that, usually associated with the NSW Institute for the Blind, Deaf and Dumb (the school that Pattison had started). Once again, Deaf men were very active in these developments. The most prominent was Fletcher Samuel Booth who, from 1891, was given a stipend from the School Board to work “for the uplift of the Adult Deaf”.\textsuperscript{116} The community was supported by Samuel Watson, the Superintendent of the Institute.

\textsuperscript{113} For example, in the First Annual Report of the Adult Deaf Young Men’s Mutual Improvement Society in Adelaide in 1891, the rationale for its formation was given as: “...to prevent Deaf young men from wandering about the streets at night where they may meet with accidents, or fall in with bad company and be led astray. As Deaf young men cannot, by reason of their peculiar affliction avail themselves of the usual means of mental and moral improvement, this society was established, in order that they may have the same means of developing their mental powers and characters, as hearing young men do.” Quoted in Rhonda Loades, The Deaf Community in South Australia, 32

\textsuperscript{114} John Flynn, No Longer by Gaslight, and Post-School Organisations

\textsuperscript{115} Rhonda Loades, The Deaf Community in South Australia, 36-47.
and several other hearing men, some of whom had Deaf relatives. Watson helped to
secure some additional land adjoining the school site, and a building was constructed
there in 1902 for the express use of the adult Deaf community.\textsuperscript{117} Although they did
not have a Mission, the NSW Deaf community was organised and active by the early
20\textsuperscript{th} Century.

The Queensland Deaf Mission began in 1903, after a few years of meetings and
religious study groups convened by a hearing teacher of the deaf, Thomas Semmens,
and an Irish Deaf woman, Martha Overend Wilson. Wilson continued to organise the
groups on her own after Semmens withdrew due to illness. She was one of the leaders
of the group of Deaf and hearing people who later met to organise the new Mission,\textsuperscript{118}
and she continued to play a major role in the development of the Mission and in the
later events described in this thesis. Although there were some other active Deaf
women during these years, none had such a prominent or visible role as Martha
Overend Wilson. The Queensland Mission, like the one in South Australia, employed
a Deaf Missioner (later Superintendent), Samuel Showell.\textsuperscript{119} The Deaf Societies of
Western Australia and Tasmania were not formed until the late 1920s, and do not
feature in this thesis.

Most of the early Deaf Societies used the services of local ministers who were
sympathetic to the Deaf or had Deaf relatives (Doran in New South Wales, Frewin in
Victoria), who were former or serving teachers of the Deaf (Johnson in South
Australia), or Deaf people (Salas in South Australia, Showell in Queensland, and later,
Blackmore in Western Australia) Victoria was the first state to recruit a hearing
Missioner from Britain—Ernest Abraham, whose far-reaching influence on
Australia’s Deaf community will be described in later chapters.

\textsuperscript{116} Fletcher S. Booth, “History of the NSW Adult Deaf Society Organisation Work,” undated MS, c
1938 (File No. 0268, JWF Collection), 1
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 1
7-9
\textsuperscript{119} Sue Wilson, \textit{The History of the Queensland Deaf Society. From Mission to Profession 1903 – 2003}
(Brisbane: The Queensland Deaf Society, 2003).
CHAPTER 2: Historical Background

Although some Deaf people had explicit leadership roles in the new Missions and Societies, many more worked for them in other capacities, such as caretakers, domestic staff and Collectors. In an era when such organisations depended almost completely on public donations or "subscriptions", the role of Collector was critical to the Deaf Schools and Deaf Societies, as well as to almost all other charity organisations. Collectors canvassed specific areas of the state served by their organisation, visiting homes and businesses and collecting subscriptions from the public. They were paid a percentage of the amount they collected. It was the money raised by Collectors that made possible the payment of teachers’ and Missioners’ salaries and the purchase of land and construction of schools and Mission buildings in most Australian states. The majority of Collectors for the schools and Missions were Deaf, and it was usually a sought-after occupation. Because Collectors were in regular contact with the area they canvassed, they were the most likely to know the whereabouts of isolated deaf persons and families with deaf children. They were often relied on to help recruit pupils for the schools and new members for the Societies and Missions. Collectors also became the public face of their organisations, and they were expected to be well-dressed and of "good character". Their access to the public sometimes gave them the opportunity to pursue agendas which competed with those of the Missions, and this will be described in later chapters.

While the Missions were becoming established, Deaf people were also building the infrastructure for other networks, particularly sport. The Victorian Deaf Cricket Club was established in 1881, and other states followed suit. An interstate (or "intercolonial" as it was before 1901) cricket match was first held in Adelaide in 1894 between Victoria and South Australia, another one between New South Wales and Victoria was held in Melbourne the following year, and interstate competitions continued regularly, expanding to include other sports. These interstate excursions drew other Deaf people as well, not just the cricketers, and from the outset they provided the opportunity for meetings, conferences and social gatherings.

120 Anne Bremner, *Deaf Sports in Australia*
A conference held during the 1895 gathering in Melbourne was reported on in several issues of *The British Deaf Mute*, and revealed some of the emerging issues for Australian Deaf people. The conference Chairman was Mr F. J. Rose, who stressed the need for regular national gatherings, in order to "enhance the social sphere, elevation of culture, higher polish and asserted independence" of Australian Deaf communities. Other Deaf people addressed the conference on education for the Deaf (Mr D. Piper of Melbourne), the superiority of Deaf Collectors over hearing Collectors (Mr G. Gibson of Adelaide), the advantages of Mutual Improvement Societies (Mr W. H. Bostock of Adelaide) and "self-development" (Mr F. S. Booth of Sydney), and the perceived risks of intermarriage among the Deaf (Mr E. Salas of Adelaide). This last paper reflected the British and American preoccupations with Deaf intermarriage at that time, and the spread of eugenic ideas in Australia. Deaf people seem to have been predominant in the organising and presentation of this conference, indicating their growing independence and visibility within their organisations.

This chapter brings us to the beginning of the 20th Century, and the events which are the focus of this thesis. The historical development of Deaf communities and their sign languages, though incompletely understood, is emerging in more detail around the world. By the close of the 19th Century, education for deaf children was well-established in Europe, North America, Australia and many other regions. Deaf communities using signed languages were also well-established and active in many countries. During the last few decades of the 19th Century, Deaf people were playing significant roles in forming community groups and national organisations, establishing, running and teaching in schools for deaf children, and initiating and working in service organisations such as Missions and Deaf Societies. These successes were being countered in many countries by a swing towards oral methods of educating deaf children and a sharp reduction in the numbers of Deaf teachers, and also by the spread of eugenic beliefs, which sometimes mitigated against Deaf communities and Deaf intermarriage. In Australia, however, the impact of oralism and

eugenics was less drastic than in Europe and North America. The Australian Deaf community at the beginning of the 20th Century appeared to be optimistic and energetic—poised to "manage their own affairs".
CHAPTER 3: Things as we Deaf See Them

Mr Ernest J. D. Abraham ... appears to have spent a good share of his time in instituting, organising, establishing, founding, manufacturing, and managing.

This chapter provides an overview of the Australian Deaf community during the first quarter of the twentieth Century. It describes the consolidation and growth of Deaf Societies and other organisations, and introduces key people who contributed to or participated in later events. Although the political conflicts which are the focus of the thesis are described in Chapters Four to Seven, this chapter examines some of the opening skirmishes and individual antagonisms which developed into full-scale conflict in the late 1920s and '30s.

The century began with the arrival from England of a very important person, in several senses of the term. The Adult Deaf and Dumb Society of Victoria's new hearing Missioner, Ernest Josiah Douglas Abraham, was critically important to its development and that of many other Deaf Missions, Societies and organisations which began during the next four decades. He was a very important person to many Deaf people, who found an energetic and inspiring champion for their desire to consolidate their communities and have well-established “homes” or clubs, and also to those Deaf people who were to find in him an opponent to their hopes for independence. He was a very important interface between Deaf people and the many hearing people who took an increasing interest in their affairs. He was a pivotal person in the conflicts which are described in later chapters of this thesis. And last but not least, he was a very important person in his own estimation.

Abraham is a legendary figure in Australian Deaf history, and to a lesser extent in British Deaf history. His name has never really disappeared from the shared culture and experience of Deaf people, not least because he bequeathed a Cricket Shield

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1 Joseph Hepworth, “Christmas at the Home of the B D M.,” The British Deaf-Mute V, no. 51 (Jan 1896): 89
which has been contested by Australian state Deaf teams since 1917? His name is intertwined with the origins of so many Australian Deaf institutions that it is still almost always recognisable. He goes by more than one epithet—from the cautiously respectful “Mr A.” still used by older Deaf people who remember him, to the “Abe” (tinged with grudging admiration) preferred by hearing workers in Deaf Societies who came under his direct or indirect influence. The names Abraham promoted for himself among the Deaf community were more along the lines of “Our Principal” (though he was not a teacher) and perhaps the most succinct—“Our Chief”.

Abraham was already well-known in the British Deaf community by the time he came to Australia. He had been adopted at the age of 14 by a Deaf Missioner, John Jennings, and he began working in Jennings’ South London Gospel Mission to the Deaf and Dumb a few years later. While in London, he also organised several other clubs and activities for Deaf people, including a YMCA, a Dramatics Club, and a “Golden Society of Love”.3 Since 1887 he had been in charge of the Bolton, Bury, Rochdale and District Adult Deaf and Dumb Society in Lancashire (at first a subsidiary of the Manchester Society, but independent since 1892), and had also begun editing a national paper, The British Deaf-Mute. He had demonstrated a talent for “instituting, organising, establishing, founding, manufacturing, and managing”,4 as well as a gift for self-promotion. It was clear that he did not wish to confine his career to provincial English towns. He attended the International Conference on Education of the Deaf in Chicago in 1893, as the “Reverend” E. J. D. Abraham, and presented a paper called "A plan for the permanent employment of the deaf in the higher trades and professions".5 The British Deaf-Mute, which he edited, found its way around the world and helped to establish his profile, since it always ran complimentary articles about his work in Bolton, Bury and Rochdale:

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2 Anne Brommer, “Deaf Sports in Australia”, 27.
5 Proceedings of the International Conference of Educators of the Deaf, Supplement to American Annals of the Deaf, 1893. Abraham’s paper was not printed, as it was "withdrawn for revision, and, much to the editor’s regret, [has] not been received for publication"
Mr. Abraham had been instrumental in making the little town of Bolton famous in all parts of the world. Should any of the Bolton deaf find themselves in America or Australia, he felt confident they would only need to mention that they came from Bolton, when they would receive a hearty welcome from all sections of the deaf community.6

Abraham had made more than one application for positions in Australia before his successful appointment as Missioner to the Victorian Society in 1901. He had applied for the same position in 1892,7 and also for the position of Superintendent at the Victorian Deaf and Dumb Institute around the same time,8 but was not successful until his 1901 application.

A number of commentators have agreed that Abraham “ghosted” most of the laudatory articles which appeared about him in various print sources over the years9. The following article, from a magazine he edited in Australia, is a good example of both his style and of the image he strove to create for himself:

The name of E. J. D. Abraham was at that time (1901) a household word in all communities of the deaf and dumb throughout the world. Some of us (the deaf of Victoria) had known him through his writings, for years.

But what of the man as we actually know him? Well, when we saw the slim, quiet, smiling little man that stepped from the S S. Austral we were for the moment puzzled. Can this be the man we had in our mind? We had known him for years, for always it had seemed, as an exceptionally strong man, who had fiercely and fearlessly battled in the cause of the deaf, often standing almost alone against great opposition, and yet coming out victorious. We had seen, too, many portraits of him, each of which gave him the appearance of a tall and physically powerful man with set iron features, yet there he stood, a lithe, nervous, almost bashful little man, undoubtedly E. J. D. Abraham, but

7 J W Flynn, No Longer by Gaslight, 24.
8 Notes of the Victorian Deaf and Dumb Institution, Melbourne. From the Year 1898 to 1930. PROV, VA 02707 Charities Board of Victoria, VPRS 4523/P1, “Closed” Agency and General Correspondence Files, Unit 38, File No. 354. These notes state, in part: “… the fact that he was an applicant of the Superintendent’s position some years previously is considered the reason for [Abraham’s] prejudice against the school.”
9 For example, J P Bourke, The Story of a Deaf Drudge, 18; J W Flynn, “Post-School Organisations,” 37 and 58.
not the one we had expected Napoleon Bonaparte naturally flashed across our mind, and we have since had more than one opportunity of recognising the irresistible power behind the slim figure and laughing eyes. He works, attends to the most minute details, and in his company you have to work too. A perfect slave driver and sweater when anything has to be done, but he always takes the giant’s share of the work, and will begin hours before anyone and leave off hours after, and that perhaps is the secret of his success. Though shattered, somewhat, in health he did not pause to think of it; love of work in the cause of the deaf clung to him.\(^{10}\)

His adroit combination of self-deprecation and self-promotion, and his ability to weave Victorian melodrama through his appeals for support, usually made good copy. He was also a talented public speaker and organisat of “entertainments”. These skills made him an excellent publicist and fund-raiser, which in turn fed his preoccupation with “instituting, organising, establishing, founding, manufacturing, and managing”. However, he always chafed under restrictive management, preferring that “his committee [give] him a free hand”\(^{11}\) His move to Australia was probably a search for more freedom and space to pursue his ambitious plans, though he usually claimed that he had moved for health reasons. He became more comfortable with admitting the truth the longer he stayed:

There came to Victoria in 1901, a man, broken in health, but with a paradise for deaf mutes conceived, planned out and erected in his mind, and brick by brick, that ‘palace in the air’ has been brought down to mother Earth, until now, after the space of eleven years, it needs only the coping stone to complete the greatest provision that has ever been attempted for the welfare of the deaf.\(^{12}\)

Abraham dazzled the Deaf community in Melbourne, and soon the rest of Australia, with his energy and ideas, and with his fluent signing and ease of interaction with Deaf people. He quickly became the national expert on the affairs of the Deaf.

\(^{10}\) The Gesture, June 1907 Quoted by J. P. Bourke, The Story of a Deaf Drudge, 16-17.


A national gathering

Abraham’s organisational hand was evident early. One of the first major events he planned was a large national gathering of Deaf people two years after his arrival. Although there had been interstate sporting meetings and conferences since 1894 (see Chapter Two), the Congress that Abraham planned for Melbourne during the Christmas and New Year period of 1903–1904 was grander and more complex in its scope, and attracted the patronage of luminaries such as the Premier and an Archbishop, as well as extensive and detailed media coverage. Abraham and his Deaf organisers included cricket competitions, church services, “conversaziones”, grand banquets, garden parties, an exhibition of handicrafts, and a programme of presentations by Deaf and hearing people.

The Melbourne papers The Age and The Argus ran daily articles on the Congress, and newspapers in other states also carried reports. Most of these commentators were struck not only by the unusual experience of relying on sign language interpreters to understand the proceedings, but also by the cheerfulness and desire for independence exhibited by the Deaf participants. More than one reporter commented with surprise on the fact that they did not seem to feel sorry for themselves. An Adelaide reporter marvelled at the “complete absence of maudlin sentimentalism”; and a Melbourne reporter commended the “really wonderful spirit of cheerfulness”, remarking that “The double affliction of the deaf mutes is borne with a cheerful resignation, which impels admiration”.

There were presentations on “School Life of the Deaf”, “The Law and the Deaf”, “Social Status of the Deaf”, “The Family Life of the Deaf”, “The Capabilities of the Deaf”, “The Past, Present and Future of the Deaf”, as well as general debate and a presidential address by Abraham. The Congress also drew newspaper correspondence about the education of Deaf children, with a lively exchange of letters arguing the relative benefits of oral and manual methods of teaching. Samuel Showell, the Deaf

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13 “A Pathetic Congress,” The Register, 4 Jan 1904, 4
14 “Deaf and Dumb Congress,” The Argus, 30 Dec 1903, 6.
Missioner of the recently-formed Queensland Mission, made an eloquent defence of the use of sign language in education:

As regards the rival systems of oral and manual, let the deaf and dumb themselves decide.... Signs to a large extent are natural to the untaught deaf mute, and can only be eradicated by a severity perilously bordering on cruelty. That the oral system is held in utter detestation by the majority of deaf mutes, and that if compelled to learn it they make little or no use of it, must be patent to all fair-minded people who have seen much of the deaf and dumb.\textsuperscript{15}

But this educational debate was not as contentious an issue in Australia as it was in other Western countries at the time, and the Congress is more interesting as a portrait of the adult Deaf community at the beginning of a period of rapid development.

Abraham was mentioned often by the reporters, both for his interpreting and his addresses on behalf of Deaf people's ideals and aspirations. The \textit{Adelaide Register} reported him saying, "They did not ask for favours or privileges; all they asked for was justice. They asked for the opportunities and advantages which were already enjoyed by their speaking and hearing fellow-countrymen."\textsuperscript{16} Although this stance was commended, it was also considered idealistic and unworldly. The editor of that paper wrote a prescient piece which could serve as an indicator of some of the conflicts which were to surface over the following decades:

One may admire the splendid spirit of self-reliance exhibited by the mutes, and the fine courage of the Congress in requesting fairplay for the afflicted; but it is doubtful whether Mr. Abraham is over-endowed with worldly prudence. In this age, which glories in humanitarianism, it is much easier to extract a charity dole than to obtain justice. Mankind prefers to act so as to be considered generous, rather than to make reparation which brings no credit but such as is associated with a stigma. What a satire upon a society in which so many other normal members are leaning against Government posts nursing "tired feelings," fostered by enervating politics, is the fact that the deaf and dumb should be heard eloquently preaching the gospel of self-help and manly independence!!\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15} Samuel Showell, Letter to the Editor, \textit{The Age}, 4 Jan 1904, 5.
\textsuperscript{16} "A Pathetic Congress," \textit{The Register}, 4 Jan 1904, 4.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 4.
Although this editorial underestimated Abraham, who was to demonstrate plenty of “worldly prudence”, it identified an ongoing source of conflict in the administration of Deaf Societies and schools, and indeed those of many other disadvantaged groups in Australian society—whether they should appeal to public sympathy in order to raise funds for their services and risk the “stigma” of charity; or aim to be self-sufficient and independent and risk being penniless. For at least the next few decades, most steered a middle path, using the rhetoric of independence but the organisational and fund-raising practices of charity.

The events of the Congress, and the fortuitous variety of media commentaries it elicited (thanks to Abraham’s skill as a publicist) provide a fascinating snapshot of the evolving Deaf community in Australia, its key personalities, its aspirations and beliefs, and the way it was regarded by wider society. We know that Deaf people then, as always, were willing to travel long distances and endure considerable discomfort in order to meet and fraternise with each other; that social and sporting events were well-established in their communities; that Deaf people and their sympathisers were then, as always, dismissive of oral philosophies in education and alarmed by their spread. Indeed, one of the resolutions of the Congress was that Australian Deaf people join Deaf people in “Great Britain, America, Germany and France, in protesting against the use of the pure oral system in the instruction of the deaf.”18 We know that Australian Sign Language was established as the preferred language of the community, although it was not yet defined as a language and was almost certainly different in significant ways to Auslan today. Many Deaf people, such as F. J. Rose and Samuel Showell, were already respected figures in their communities; and Abraham’s far-reaching control and confrontational manner were already in evidence. It is also interesting to see that, with astute management, prominent political and religious figures were willing to patronise the Deaf community, and media interest seemed to be genuine and well-informed.

18 “Resolutions,” The Age, 30 Dec 1903, 4.
The Australasian Deaf and Dumb Association
One of the most significant outcomes of the Congress was a resolution: “That an
Australian Association of the Deaf and Dumb be formed on the lines of the British
Deaf and Dumb Association, and the American National Association of Deaf
Mutes”\textsuperscript{19} The organisation which grew from this resolution was called the
Australasian Deaf and Dumb Association (ADDA). It eventually had branches in
Victoria, Queensland, New South Wales and South Australia, with almost all
members being Deaf. Despite the name “Australasia” in the title, there is no evidence
of any branch in New Zealand\textsuperscript{20} Abraham was President of the Victorian branch,
which was always the most active, and also President of the General Board of the
Association.

The Objects of the Association, adopted in 1911, were:

(a) To unite the deaf and dumb and all interested in their welfare.
(b) To organise congresses from time to time in different parts of
Australasia, for the discussion of matters in relation to the deaf.
(c) To advance and protect the interests, to elevate the social status, and
as far as possible to secure higher education, better employment, etc.,
for the deaf.
(d) To afford to the education departments, members of Parliament,
school authorities, the press, etc., information as to the condition,
education and opinions of the deaf.
(e) To gather and preserve all facts, statistics and opinions relating to the
deaf, and to promote by every legitimate means the diffusion of the
same by means of public meetings, the press, or other publications,
etc., as shall be thought advisable by the Boards of Management.
(f) To promote the establishment of organisations for the welfare of the
adult deaf in States at present neglected\textsuperscript{21}

Little information survives about the activities of the ADDA, except in Victoria,
where it was regularly reported on in the Deaf Society’s newsletters. It concentrated
most of its efforts on advocating for education of deaf children to be made
compulsory (which was achieved in 1910), and on persuading the Victorian
Government and the Victorian Deaf and Dumb Institute to contribute to a pension for

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid
\textsuperscript{20} The term “Australasia” has usually referred to Australia and New Zealand combined.
F. J. Rose (which they also achieved). They contributed to Object (f) by sending Abraham to Sydney to assist with the formation of the Deaf Society in that State (see below), and they did hold one more Congress in 1911, again in Melbourne.

The 1911 Congress was similar to the one in 1903-04. The ADDA adopted its rules, logo (an eye superimposed on a hand), and the motto “Ad Educandum et Elevandum” (For Education and Advancement). Among the topics discussed were the desirability of adopting a uniform system of signs and fingerspelling throughout Australia, rather than the regional variations which were evidently becoming entrenched (presented by J. E. Muir), the importance of higher education and access to trades and professions (M. O. Wilson), the desirability of giving positions in Deaf Schools, Missions and Societies to Deaf people where possible, the problem of Deaf beggars and hearing people pretending to be Deaf in order to beg (M. L. Miller), and the pure oral system as used in New Zealand (T. Williamson of New Zealand). The Congress resolved to approach the New Zealand government asking it to be more flexible in its method of educating deaf children. 22

The subjects addressed by these presenters (all of them Deaf) reflect similar concerns in Deaf communities in Great Britain and the United States in the early 20th Century. 23 As the Australian Deaf community became established and organised, it faced the same kinds of aspirations and obstacles as its older cousins.

The South Australian Deaf community
The ADDA seems to have had a harmonious relationship with the Deaf Missions and Societies. The only evidence that it was seen as a potential forum for change by Deaf people who were dissatisfied with their Mission was in South Australia, where there were a number of clashes between the Mission and the community during the early

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21 Australasian Deaf and Dumb Association, Rules, n.d., 1-2. File No. 0431, JWF Collection
22 Our Monthly Letter 8, no. 5 (Jan 1912): 4-5.
23 See Susan Burch, Signs of Resistance, for a discussion of these issues in American Deaf communities between 1900 and 1940.
years of the 20th Century. In 1902 the Deaf community had challenged the Mission’s refusal to support a Deaf immigrant’s stay in the sanatorium. The community raised the money for the Deaf man’s expenses amongst themselves, attracting attention from the Advertiser for their “true nobility of character” and embarrassing the Mission.

In 1905 the Mission Committee established a separate Finance Committee, consisting only of hearing members, and this Committee took over most of the administrative matters of the Society, effectively disenfranchising the Deaf members of the Mission Committee. The most significant clash occurred when Eugene Salas, the Deaf Missioner, fell ill with consumption and was taken to the sanatorium in 1910. The Finance Committee immediately replaced him with a new Missioner and gave his wife and children notice to leave their house. The Deaf community was incensed, and organised a boycott of the Mission until Salas was promised his job back after his recovery.

In this environment, the ADDA was seen for a time as a way for Deaf people to be more autonomous. They pointedly rejected the application of the hearing Superintendent of the Mission, Samuel Johnson, to join the ADDA, identifying it as an area where Deaf people were in control.

Abraham’s national role
Abraham’s status and influence were not confined to Melbourne. Other states were eager to enlist his support, and he was usually more than willing to respond. An early example was his visit to Brisbane in November and December 1904. The organisers of the recently-formed Queensland Mission invited him to help launch their new

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24 See R. G. Loades, “The Establishment and Maintenance of the Deaf Community in South Australia”, Chapter 4, for a discussion of these clashes.
27 Ibid., 45.
Mission and raise public interest. Abraham obligingly made the journey (still a sea voyage during the early decades of the twentieth Century) and conducted a number of public lectures and “entertainments” which attracted thousands of attendees and raised enough funds to give the new Mission a healthy opening balance in its Building Fund.  

Several years later the Deaf community in New South Wales also sought his help. They were becoming frustrated with their lack of an organised Deaf Society, when even the smaller states of Queensland and South Australia were boasting established Societies like that in Victoria. They were continuing to meet in the building adjoining the school for the deaf and blind (described in Chapter Two). However, this building was now too small for them, was owned by the school rather than the adult Deaf community; and the school would not allow them to have separate Collectors, fearing that their own revenue would be reduced. Their close relationship with Samuel Watson, the school Superintendent, probably kept them from acting sooner than they did, but when Watson died in 1911, there was little to stop them from moving to break away from the school and establish a Deaf Society. After an initial unsuccessful attempt to set up on their own in 1912, the next year they invited Ernest Abraham to come to Sydney and help them begin a formal Deaf Society. They remembered Abraham’s assistance to the fledgling Queensland Mission, and were aware of his impressive achievements in Melbourne.

Abraham jumped at the chance to demonstrate his talents for “instituting, organising, establishing, founding, manufacturing, and managing” once again. He visited Sydney in his role as President of the ADDA, not in his capacity as Superintendent of the Victorian Society. This allowed him to promote the ADDA, but it also meant that he did not seek permission from the Committee of the Victorian Society for his trip, as

28 QADDM, Second Annual Report, Year Ending 28 Feb 1905
they would probably have put restrictions on what he was able to do in Sydney.29 As President of the ADDA, he had the “free hand” he relished.

Abraham spent at least two weeks in Sydney, doing the rounds of influential people and raising support and funds. He managed to gain the sympathy of the Lord Mayor, who agreed to preside at a public meeting in the Town Hall. The Committee of the school fought against the move, met with the Mayor themselves and wrote to the newspapers. But Abraham and the Sydney supporters managed to counter their moves, reply to their letters, and sway the public. The Town Hall meeting on 20 October 1913 resolved to form a Deaf Society, a Committee was appointed and permission secured to begin appeals for public funding. Abraham had reason to be very pleased with himself, and the Sydney Deaf community was full of praise and gratitude.30

A new arrival
In the closing years of the First World War, a recently-deafened man appeared in the Melbourne Deaf community—John Patrick Bourke. He was to become not only an important participant in the troubled times ahead, but also one of the chief chroniclers of these events. In the 1930s he self-published several short books and pamphlets about his experiences with the Deaf Society and Deaf community in Victoria,31 and also self-published a magazine briefly in the early 1940s.32 He was a prolific letter-writer, and made use of his voluminous correspondence files in his books. Bourke’s material is an invaluable resource, and he seems almost to have anticipated the role of the future social historian. He wrote in the Preface to one of his books:

29 J. W. Flynn, “Post-School Organisations,” 67. The Society’s Committee was not happy with Abraham’s action, and resolved that “in future, [he] obtain the permission of the Committee before going away”.
31 J. P. Bourke, The After-School Problems of the Deaf and Dumb, No. I The Problem of a Central Meeting Place for Them (1933); The After-School Problems of the Deaf and Dumb, No. II The Problem of Ministering to their Religious and Spiritual Needs (1933); The After-School Problems of the Deaf and Dumb, No. III The Problem of the Impotent Deaf (March 1935); Benevolence and the Banned Baby (May 1937); “Fiction and Fact”—A Pamphlet (December 1937); The Story of a Deaf Drudge (1939), all published in Victoria by J. P. Bourke.
32 The Australian Deaf Citizen, six issues published between March 1940 and June 1941.
The Reader, if he has heard anything about the adult deaf and their society, has done so per medium of the Superintendent’s voice and seen it through his eyes. I have found it necessary therefore, to take the public behind the scene and show it things as we deaf see them.\textsuperscript{33}

Bourke was not writing as an idle hobby—his writing was fired by anger and urgency. He was bitterly dissatisfied with his treatment by the Society, and his work is permeated with a desire to expose what he saw as injustice and corruption. He developed a particular hatred of Abraham, and it would be easy at times to dismiss his writings as a stream of vituperation and his observations as unreliable. But this would be to dismiss much of value. He took great care to substantiate most of his allegations, and details can often be confirmed from other sources such as Society minute books and letters in newspapers. He considered the work he was doing a moral responsibility. Writing in a radical magazine for Deaf people in the 1930s, he described what he saw as his and other Deaf people’s responsibility:

We deaf are writing the history of our Societies, and it is our duty to get at the truth of what happened and to give a moral judgment on events and persons and pass it on for the good of posterity.\textsuperscript{34}

This thesis makes frequent use of Bourke’s material, not only as a source of information, but also as a commentary on events of the time and his own involvement in them. Bourke similarly made extensive use of Abraham’s writings (carefully reproducing Abraham’s occasional spelling mistakes and marking them with a “sic”).\textsuperscript{35} He defended this once by quoting from an Emil Ludwig biography of Napoleon. The quote he chose could just as easily be used by the modern researcher to defend the use of extensive quotes from Bourke himself:

For in truth a man always explains himself better than anyone else can do it for him; even when he is mistaken, or when he is lying, he reveals himself to those who come afterwards, to those who know the truth.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{33} J P Bourke, \textit{The Story of a Deaf Drudge}, preface
\textsuperscript{34} J P Bourke, “Brotherly Love” \textit{The Deaf Advocate 3}, no 1 (Jan. 1933)
\textsuperscript{35} For example, J P Bourke, \textit{The Story of a Deaf Drudge}, 30 (“substantial”) and 32 (“rudimentals”).
\textsuperscript{36} Quoted in J P Bourke, \textit{The Story of a Deaf Drudge}, 15.
Bourke’s story

Bourke’s own description of his background and his introduction to the world of the Deaf is presented in the first chapter of The Story of a Deaf Drudge

I lost my hearing when I was about twenty years of age. I was a Junior teacher at the time. My deafness making teaching impossible, and not wishing to be a burden on a married sister, I set out to fight the battle of life for myself, untrained, without a home, with one or two friends to help, and with about £5 in my pocket. It did not take me long to find out that the world did not want the untrained deaf. I became a drudge and the prey of those who wanted cheap labour. In the process I drifted from one dead-end job to the other trying to find someone with humanity enough to give me a chance to make a home for myself and settle down. It has been a hopeless quest. In 1918 my eyes became very bad. I lost my employment (I was working on a dairy farm on 30/- a week), and on account of my eyes I could not seek other work. When I had no more money to pay my board, I sought help from the Charity Organisation Society. It promised to bring my case under the notice of the Society for Helping Persons of Education. Instead of doing so, it turned my case over to Abraham. As a result, I had a letter from him inviting me to come to the farm for a rest and a holiday. On the principle that beggars cannot be choosers I had to go.37

Deaf Society files indicated that Bourke had been born in Adelaide in 1882 or 1888, and was living in India when illness (allegedly malaria) caused him to become deaf.38 As someone who had grown to adulthood as a hearing person and been educated in hearing schools, Bourke would have been different from most of the other Deaf people he later came to associate with. He would have been able to speak like a hearing person (though as he grew older his speech may have become less distinct); his understanding and use of sign language would probably never have reached native fluency (though he has been described as being able to sign and fingerspell and communicate effectively with Deaf people).39 and his education would have been more extensive than that of most other Deaf people. His work as a “Junior teacher”, his writing skill and the many quotes and literary references in his work show that he was comparatively well-educated and widely-read. This seems to be confirmed by the

37 J P. Bourke, The Story of a Deaf Drudge, 1.
38 “Records of Members”, Box No. 31, VDS Collection.
fact that the Charity Organisation Society almost referred him to the “Society for Helping Persons of Education” for assistance, rather than to the Adult Deaf and Dumb Society.

Another effect of his education as a hearing person may have been that he escaped the set of beliefs that Deaf people can acquire through growing up in the deaf education and welfare systems—a belief that hearing people are all-powerful, all-knowing, that their legal, religious and government systems are mysterious and sacrosanct, and that Deaf people are inferior and dependent, without a proper language. Bourke referred obliquely to this set of beliefs:

Societies need hearing Superintendents who are experts in the language of the deaf and dumb, in order to bridge the gulf that stands between the hearing and the deaf worlds and to act as interpreters between the hearing and the deaf and dumb. It is a noted feature of the character of the deaf and dumb that they become very dependent on these Superintendents who can interpret their signs to the bystanders. They look to such men in all their difficulties, lean upon them in their troubles, rally round, love, and follow them blindly right or wrong.  

His late arrival to the Deaf community may have given Bourke clearer eyes to see the Deaf Societies with all their strengths and weaknesses, and to point out and protest about things that other Deaf people may have been more likely to take for granted or not to question. As well as being widely read and highly literate, he obviously maintained an interest in current affairs and the political events of the day, as he often referred to these in his writings. He was able to compare the systems and methods used in the Deaf Society to those used by other institutions, large and small, and thus bring a broad perspective to his experiences within the Deaf world.

On the other hand, his status as a former hearing person would have stigmatised him somewhat within the Deaf community. He would always have been seen as something of an outsider, and there would have been areas of the Deaf experience and world view which he would not have fully understood. The particular circumstances

40 J. P. Bourke, The Story of a Deaf Drudge, 3.
of Bourke’s becoming deaf, and the additional disadvantage posed by his eye problem (which seems to have fluctuated), combined with his education to place him outside of the “elite” of the Deaf community. This elite has traditionally been composed of those who have excelled in the Deaf school system, who have a skilled trade, and (preferably) blood or marriage connections to a Deaf family which extends over several generations. The popular belief that “in the kingdom of the blind, the one-eyed man is king” has never held true in the Deaf community. People like Bourke can be assimilated and accepted, and sometimes become very astute observers and advocates within the Deaf community, but they often remain slightly awkward outsiders, pitied rather than envied for their involuntary “hearing” taint.

Influences on Bourke

Bourke’s sources of inspiration are important, and seem to make his work comparable to that of many other aspiring social reformers. He often referred to Dickens, and compared Abraham to Dickensian figures such as Squeers, the abusive schoolmaster in Nicholas Nickleby, Christopher Casby, the patriarch in Little Dorrit, and Bumble, the workhouse master in Oliver Twist. As well as Dickens, Bourke also cited Elizabeth Fry and John Howard’s writings about prisoners, Lord Shaftesbury’s work on behalf of factory children and the insane, and William Lloyd Garrison’s writings about slavery in the United States.

Another influence on Bourke’s writing was A. H. Payne’s King Silence, a polemical book—half novel, half treatise—published in England circa 1920, which described the ways in which unscrupulous hearing people abused Deaf people. Its author was a hearing son of Deaf parents (his parents had been associates of Abraham’s in

41 J. P. Bourke, "Fiction and Fact", 1.
42 Ibid., 10.
43 Ibid., 11.
44 J. P. Bourke, "Fiction and Fact", 1.
45 For example, a quote from Garrison’s “The Liberator” (1831) is inside the front cover of every issue of The Australian Deaf Citizen, Nos. 1-6.
England in the late 19th Century). Bourke often quoted from *King Silence*, although its portrayal of Deaf people as uncomplaining victims was not always compatible with his calls for activism:

The deaf set out with a cheery smile and no word of complaint along an uphill road of life strewn with hard boulders of isolation, misunderstanding, unfairness, and often tyranny. The hustling hurrying sons of Sound elbow them aside, shameless by taking many a mean advantage of them, and noisily squabbling over the good things of life as they go. The deaf glance wistfully at them as, at best, the hearing pass them by on the other side, or, worse, give them a kick or a cuff to hasten them out of the way.

While Bourke may not have entirely identified with the passive deaf people described here, he certainly endorsed the depiction of many hearing people as “hustling, hurrying sons of Sound”! He used a quote from *King Silence* on the title page of his book *The Story of a Deaf Drudge*, which helped to set the tone for that book’s bitter account of his experience of “drudgery” under Abraham: “…Added to which was the fact that John was deaf, and therefore was obviously intended to be a hewer of wood and a drawer of water for his inferiors.”

Bourke’s writings are comparable to those of Albert Ballin, another Deaf man who was active in the United States at about the same time, although there is no evidence of any direct influence. Ballin published a book in 1931 called *The Deaf Mute Howls*, protesting against things such as the dominance of hearing directors of Deaf-related institutions and the injustices and inadequacies of deaf education. Although Ballin’s writing is leavened with more humour, his underlying premise was similar to Bourke’s: “All [the deaf-mute] asks for, nay, demands, as his birthright, is to be

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47 They were members of the Guild of St John of Beverly which Abraham had helped to establish.


respected and treated as an equal and be given an equal chance in this life. And Ballin’s justification for his writing could also have applied to Bourke over the years:

Long, loud and cantankerous is the howl raised by the deaf-mute! It has to be if he wishes to be heard and listened to. He ought to keep it up incessantly until the wrongs inflicted on him will have been righted and done away with forever.

Bourke’s work for the Deaf Society

Bourke’s employment history with the Deaf Society can be pieced together from his own accounts and from Society records, though each gives a rather different picture of the man. According to Society records, Bourke was a “lonely fellow” and an incorrigible complainer, frequently ill and with a tendency to weep over “trivial affairs.” He had three periods of employment with the Society: the first was from June 1918 until November 1920, when he lived at the Society’s Farm and Home at Blackburn and worked there as a poultry farmer and general farm hand. He resigned from this position. The second period (which Bourke does not mention) was when he was given a position as a Collector. He “only lasted three weeks, his failure to succeed reducing him to tears.” The third and final period was from April 1924 to April 1925, when he worked as a gardener and caretaker at the Society’s new headquarters at Jolimont. He was dismissed from this position, allegedly because he continually purchased supplies without permission. As well as these official positions, there were some additional periods when he was given unemployment relief and temporary accommodation in the Home.

Bourke’s version is given in his book The Story of a Deaf Drudge and also touched on in his other writings. His information confirms the details in the Society’s records, apart from omitting his ill-fated attempt at collecting. But, as any autobiography does, his writing also gives us much more insight into Bourke as a man. For example, it makes it very clear how strongly he aspired to “a living wage and a chance to make a

51 Ibid., 35 Emphasis in original.
52 Ibid., 1
53 Farm & Home Committee Notes on John P. Bourke File No. 668, JWF Collection.
home and settle down” 54 The fact that he had grown up with the education and expectations of a hearing person evidently made him unwilling to accept that he should be denied this basic opportunity because he was deaf. For most of these years (1918 to 1925), his feelings towards Abraham vacillated between gratefulness that Abraham seemed to be giving him a “chance”, and outrage when Abraham continually overworked and underpaid him, keeping him dangling with promises of future pay rises.

From a wider perspective, Bourke’s writings provide a valuable insight into the way Abraham worked. This needs to be balanced by the fact that Bourke’s account is unique, there are no books or letters by other Deaf people corroborating his claims. However, by the late 1920s a number of other sources provide some confirmation of the interpretations we can make from Bourke’s story.

Bourke regularly described how Abraham was able to manipulate him by making use of his (Bourke’s) aspirations and desires. Abraham did not merely dispense relief and give or take away jobs. He made a point of finding out what kind of people his charges were, of understanding their hopes and fears. This made it easier for him to manage them and keep them emotionally dependent on him. For example, early in Bourke’s first period of employment at the Farm:

He noticed my nervousness and asked if I was a nervous man. I said “No, but that I had worked hard all my life and yet could find no one who could see any good in me and give me a chance in life.” He told me not to worry, but to stick to him, that he was my friend and he would see that I got my chance 55

Such assurances served (successfully) to make Bourke feel overwhelming gratitude to his “benefactor” and tolerate a level of abuse that he may not otherwise have accepted. Abraham would remember and re-use such information—for example, when Bourke began his later position as a gardener at Jolimont Square, Abraham wrote him a note saying, “You now have the opportunity for which you have craved

54 J. P. Bourke, The Story of a Deaf Drudge, 28
55 Ibid., 21
for years. The future is with yourself."\textsuperscript{56} He then proceeded to demand long hours of work from Bourke at a low rate of pay.

Bourke recognised this strategy in retrospect, and described how effective it was: "I was to come completely under his spell. He set out to be very nice to me."\textsuperscript{57} It worked even when he was warned about Abraham by other Deaf people:

\begin{quote}
The deaf overseer, who had worked under Abraham for fifteen years at the farm, warned me not to work for him. He told me that Abraham would make me all sorts of promises which he would never keep, but at this time (1918) I was completely under Abraham's spell and no one could make me believe a word against him.\textsuperscript{58}
\end{quote}

Bourke described his work at the Farm in painstaking detail. He was given responsibility for poultry-farming (work that he loved) but also expected to do the work of a general farm-hand. He was paid a meagre salary in addition to his board and lodging (the Farm & Home notes record that it commenced at 10/- per week and rose to 20/- by the end of his term there),\textsuperscript{59} but Abraham continually assured him that if he could show that "poultry paid", the Board would be convinced of the value of the scheme and his wages would increase—£200 a year was promised.\textsuperscript{60} Bourke poured his energy and resources into the job, frequently paying for materials he needed out of his own pocket—because, he claimed, "I had a devil of a time trying to get anything out of Abraham. He would exasperate me by ignoring my requests for stock, materials, etc."\textsuperscript{61} Whenever Bourke protested about his low wages, Abraham would promise to bring up his case again before the Board, and later tell him that he had not been successful. Bourke claimed he was later informed by a Deaf member of the Board that Abraham had never actually presented his case to the Board at all.\textsuperscript{62}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 26.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 19.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 20.
\textsuperscript{59} Farm & Home Committee Notes on John P Bourke File No. 668, IWF Collection.
\textsuperscript{60} J P. Bourke, The Story of a Deaf Drudge, 21.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 21.
\end{flushright}
Abraham was able to use Bourke’s passion for poultry-farming as another way of manipulating him. He would threaten that the poultry scheme might be disbanded:

He could see by this time that I was in love with my job and he played on my emotions accordingly. He said that his Board did not believe that poultry paid; that if he asked them for an increase in wages for me they would close down the poultry scheme and dismiss me.63

Alternatively he would flatter Bourke by offering him public praise. Two years after Bourke had commenced, Abraham wrote an enthusiastic little report about “Our Poultry Experiment” in the Society’s newsletter,64 congratulating Bourke and referring to him as “our poultry expert”:

When he wrote that he was giving me 1½ a week. An expert on 1½ a week! He showed me that paragraph himself, and I admit I was pleased and flattered. I thanked and shook hands with him.65

Eventually, however, Bourke could no longer accept the conditions and low pay, and resigned when he found another job at “double the wages” he was receiving on the Farm. It was not easy for him to leave the regular company of other Deaf people and the poultry work he was so attached to:

…it was good to work with, amongst and for those handicapped like oneself... I felt mean and as if I were deserting my post, and apologised to Abraham for leaving him.66

Despite the disappointments of his job at the Farm, Bourke had not yet lost faith in the Society, and specified that he left bearing no grudges against Abraham or his Board.67

Bourke’s “micro-history” will be returned to later. Meanwhile, there were further developments in the wider Australian scene, in which Abraham was still a central figure.

62 Ibid., 22.
63 Ibid., 21
64 Quoted in Ibid., 21
65 Ibid., 22
66 Ibid., 22-23.
67
The decline of the Australasian Deaf and Dumb Association

The Australasian Deaf and Dumb Association survived during the 1920s only in Victoria and (to a lesser extent) Queensland. Its meetings were occasionally reported in the *Monthly Letter* of the Victorian Deaf Society, though it seems not to have been very active. One of the few traditions that the Victorian branch maintained during the 1920s was the celebration of "Rose Day", which commemorated F. J. Rose's establishment of the school for deaf children. In 1925 it was reported:

This year [Rose Day] was held at the Adult Deaf Centre, Jolimont Square, on the 12th of November, and the chief feature was an exhibition of photographs bearing upon the Education of the Deaf and occurrences pertaining to the Deaf generally. Mr. Abraham presided and there was a good attendance.  

However, the remaining members of the ADDA were not happy with its gradual decline, and tried on one or two occasions to revive it. One such occasion was a meeting of representatives of the Deaf Societies (from Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia and Queensland) in Sydney in October 1922. A lengthy discussion was held at this meeting about whether the ADDA should be revived or abandoned in favour of a new organisation which represented Deaf Societies, rather than the Deaf community. The record of the meeting reveals not only the issues under discussion, but also much about the personalities of the people involved, and the underlying tensions between some of them. It is worth noting the comments of some people who became key players in later developments. Some comments at this early meeting show attitudes that did not change over many years, others said some very surprising things in the light of their later activities.

Mr Robert Luff (the Deaf President of the Victorian Branch) described the ADDA as having "the flower of the Deaf Community on its Committees". Luff's terminology looked forward to some of the more radical organisations formed in the late 1920s and

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67 Ibid., 23.
1930s (in which he was to be a participant). He talked often about “rights” and claimed that the ADDA was working to “try to secure [Deaf people’s] just claims to citizenship”. He described the members as having “pledged themselves to keep their eyes open for any injustice or oppression that may be placed upon the Deaf at large, and make every effort to alleviate such.” He stressed that “its operations will not clash with the operation of the Adult Deaf & Dumb Societies, because these Societies work for the Deaf, but this Association will assert their rights.” However, Luff and his supporters encountered doubt and scepticism about this issue from Lonsdale and some others, as will be shown below.

Luff also repudiated the notion of charity, especially in relation to education. One of the Victorian branch’s proudest achievements was helping to fight for compulsory education for deaf children (which was won in 1912): “...we opened our eyes to see the injustice the Government were doing in placing us Deaf and Dumb under charity, when with the normal people free education was a right”

Samuel Showell, the Deaf Missioner from Queensland, supported Luff’s comments and urged New South Wales and South Australia to revive their membership and support the ADDA. Abraham did most of the talking, as he so often did. He was a passionate supporter of the continuation of the ADDA, and could not conceal his impatience with the sceptics from South Australia and New South Wales, who questioned its value and “benefits from subscriptions”. He remarked that:

...the Victorian Branch set to work and did achieve success as I have just pointed out... South Australia simply formed themselves into a Branch and did nothing. Did they expect the Victorian Deaf to go over there and work for them?

Perhaps the most surprising contribution was from Fletcher Booth, who had been a prominent leader in the New South Wales Deaf community for over 30 years. He spoke against the ADDA, objecting in part to the extent of the Victorians’ control of the organisation. “The rules were made by Victorians alone” he noted, and New South Wales members “never advised their adoption”. However, he also warned that having a

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69 Conference Notes: Australian [sic] Deaf & Dumb Association 5 Oct 1922. File No. 253, IWF
branch of the ADDA in each state would mean “two Societies in each State and would cause friction, and it is possible if any deaf and dumb have a grievance against the Society, they might make a breakaway”. He compared this with the breakaways happening in the Labour movement, which he said caused “trouble, trouble, trouble.” But most intriguingly of all, this long-serving and outspoken Deaf man, who would later be one of the biggest defenders of breakaways and of the Deaf “managing their own affairs”, said:

I am sorry to say that the Deaf and Dumb have very little business faculty, and we can trust the hearing Board to look after the interests of the Deaf and Dumb. They have greater influence with the Public than the deaf and dumb. The best way is to leave our troubles and disputes and grievances to the hearing Board of Management, they will look after us very well.

Booth’s contribution was welcomed by Mr A. L. Lonsdale, a hearing member of the Board of the New South Wales Society, who was to become another key player in the events that followed. Lonsdale had joined the Board only two years previously. He was active as a lay preacher in the Methodist Church, but had no prior connection with Deaf people. Lonsdale rephrased Booth’s words in his own way—a textbook example of paternalism and of the “charity” attitude:

I agree with Mr. Booth. I am a hearing man, and I think that if you will get a few hearing people into the control of your Society, you will get very much better results. We sympathise with these deaf chaps here, because we love them, but we think that they have not got just that ability to control the Association as it should be controlled.

This claim that Deaf people were not capable of controlling their organisations was very important. After almost fifty years of Deaf activism and involvement, Lonsdale declared in a national forum that they were not capable of controlling their organisations and needed hearing people to do it for them. It is significant that Lonsdale was not challenged on this point by anyone present, and even appeared to have support from Booth. In a way, he had casually redrawn the balance of power between Deaf and hearing people, and set the scene for the conflicts that were to follow.

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70 J W Flynn, “Post-School Organisations”, 80.
One of Lonsdale’s objections to the constitution of the ADDA was that it admitted only “Hearing persons who have spent three years of actual work among the Deaf”, and this rule excluded him, and some other hearing people he respected, from membership. However his main objection seems to have been that such an independent organisation could be a potential thorn in the side of the Societies. He favoured instead:

...an Association or a Federal Body of the Societies. Every Deaf mute has the right and privilege of becoming a member of the Society. There is nothing to debar or stop him and they have the right of electing their officers. Why should we create another Society? Everything will be done by us for the advancement of the Deaf and Dumb. I believe that is the right way.

Lonsdale pointed to the example of Australian Federation, which was just over 20 years old at that time. He considered that it gave the Federal Government too much control over the states, and warned, “The Australasian Deaf and Dumb Association might become very powerful and be able to overthrow the Societies’ management.” Despite Lonsdale’s low opinion of the abilities of Deaf people, this warning suggests that he feared the idea of Deaf people gathering en masse without the explicit control of hearing people.

Abraham obviously found this meeting very difficult. He desperately wanted the support of New South Wales and South Australia in order to revive the ADDA, but he could not help bristling at their criticisms. He found himself in the role of defender of the Deaf people who originally framed the rules of the ADDA, and he did this quite eloquently. In reply to Lonsdale’s complaint that he and others were debarred from becoming members of the ADDA and that hearing people were needed to “control the Association as it should be controlled”, he expostulated:

Well, that is pretty rough on me. It was the New South Wales Society that invited the Australian Deaf and Dumb Association to send its President over there and found the Society, and ... now New South Wales turns them down. It is beautiful. However, I can see the point Mr Lonsdale is driving at. That article [admitting only hearing people who had worked with the Deaf for at least three years] was at the time strongly opposed by me, but I was convinced in the end that it was self-defence. That is, had they not put that clause in, the Board of Management of the Australasian Deaf and Dumb Association in its infancy might have been swamped with hearing and speaking gentlemen, in full sympathy perhaps with the Deaf and
Dumb, but not with the knowledge to enable them to do that which was best as the Deaf, and the deaf themselves, thought for themselves. They had the feeling that their opinions would be swamped by outsiders, and it was a very natural feeling too.

By the end of the meeting, Abraham seems to have bowed to the arguments of Lonsdale and Cox (Superintendent of the South Australian Mission). Although he still held out for retaining the ADDA, he assured the meeting that he supported the inclusion of hearing people as members:

...supposing a Branch [of the ADDA] is formed in South Australia...composed mainly of Deaf and Dumb people, but Mr. Cox would be eligible for any post, President, anything. It is a great factor if we can have men like Mr Cox as a member of that organisation as a leader and guide to them. Whereas, if they form the Association themselves and leave us out, difficulties may arise and there would be no one to take a sympathetic interest in their organisation and prevent it possibly from interfering with the work of other Deaf and Dumb Societies.

The meeting concluded by carrying a resolution (proposed by Mr. Lonsdale and seconded by Mr. Martin of South Australia) which effectively postponed any decision:

“That the State Societies of the Deaf and Dumb recommend to consider and obtain data with a view to: (a) Re-forming the Australasian Deaf and Dumb Association or (b) The creation of a Federal Body of State Societies, and to report on this and any other matters relating to the Deaf, to a Conference to be held in 1923."

No Conference seems to have been held in 1923, but the issues of national associations and the power relationships between Deaf and hearing people certainly did not go away. The views expressed by various individuals at this meeting were in some cases almost prophetic of their later actions (especially Lonsdale’s), and in others (e.g., Booth’s) either very puzzling, or indicative of some strongly influential person who was later able to change their views. Abraham demonstrated here his chameleon-like ability to be both an eloquent champion of Deaf people’s views, and a firm supporter of the hearing people whom he perceived as holding power. Lonsdale also demonstrated his uncanny ability to get his own way—towards the end of the meeting almost everyone expressed their agreement with his views about including hearing people in a national body and safeguarding the role of the Deaf Societies.
In contrast with the activity of its earlier years, the ADDA during the 1920s stagnated and declined. Its membership was aging, and its successful projects, such as making education for deaf children free and compulsory in some states and securing a pension for F. J. Rose, were receding into the past. It hosted no more national gatherings after the 1911 event. The dominance of Victoria in national affairs was no longer as readily accepted by the other states. As with other such organisations that come to an end, it had obviously ceased to meet the needs of its community. The Australian Deaf community and its institutions were changing. The time was ripe for new leaders and new organisations to emerge.

New leaders and organisations did begin to appear during the late 1920s. Some of these leaders were Deaf, either younger more radical people such as Crush and Bourke in Victoria, or re-politicised older people such as Booth in NSW and Wilson in Queensland. Two hearing men also emerged as significant leaders, both professionally, as Welfare Workers committed to a higher level of independence among Deaf people, and more indirectly, exerting strong and radical influences on the Deaf people they knew and worked with.

**The “Banned Baby” incident**

The Victorian Deaf Society received a burst of bad publicity in February 1923, when the *Herald* ran a series of articles highly critical of their treatment of some former employees. The employees in question were a young married couple who had interviewed for the position of joint caretakers at the Society’s headquarters in Flinders Street. They were appointed to the position, but before they could commence work (though after the man had resigned from his previous position) Abraham withdrew the offer because he found out that the woman was pregnant. He advised them that they would not be able to accommodate a child at the Centre “from a health point of view”. Although he claimed to have made this clear in the interview, the couple said he had not. Having lost their former work, and unable to find another position, they were experiencing great difficulties and their newborn baby was in poor

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health. The Herald’s expose attracted an avalanche of public condemnation of the Society and offers of support for the young couple. Abraham refused to comment to the Herald on the incident, saying that it was a matter for his management committee.

Bourke wrote a short booklet about the incident in 1937. Its relevance to this thesis is primarily in Bourke’s response to it when it first happened. As he explained:

I was still under Abraham’s influence at the time and it stung and hurt me to hear the way people were speaking about him. Also the remembrance [sic] of his pretended kindness revived in my memory. It was a very dark hour for him, and I was the first to come forward and plead that there might be some extenuating circumstances behind his and his Board’s action...

Bourke wrote a letter which was published in the Herald, defending Abraham and his Board, though he expressed his sympathy for the unfortunate couple. He said that he had “received much kindness from Mr. Abraham”, and concluded, “Our committee consists of shrewd business men, and they know better than we deaf people what should be done.” The last part of Bourke’s letter is very similar to the comments of Fletcher Booth the year before, when he said, “we can trust the hearing Board to look after the interests of the Deaf and Dumb”. These comments, from two Deaf people who were to take leading roles in later developments, are an interesting measure of how much Deaf community opinion was to change during the 1920s.

Bourke was taken aback when some Deaf people became “very upset” about his letter to the Herald in defence of Abraham. They “believed that Abraham had written it and got me to sign it and send it to the ‘Herald’.” Although he was surprised by this at

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72 “Baby Banned. Father Loses His Job. ‘Regretfully dispensed with’,” The Herald, 2 Feb 1923, 12.
76 J. P. Bourke, “Shrewd Men” (Letter to the Editor), The Herald, 6 Feb 1923, 7.
77 Conference Notes: Australian (sic) Deaf & Dumb Association. 5 Oct 1922. File No. 253, JWF Collection
78 J. P. Bourke, The Story of a Deaf Drudge, 24.
the time, he was later to become very familiar with this tactic of Abraham’s. The fact that people were “upset” indicates that by this time there were numbers of Deaf people in Melbourne who no longer supported Abraham and were well aware of the way he manipulated public opinion and the Deaf community.

This is supported by an intriguing anecdote from one of Abraham’s later successors, Ern Reynolds. In an interview in the early 1980s, Reynolds recalled a group of disenchanted older Deaf people. His recollections seem to be confused with events of the 1930s and in other States, as he referred to an “Association” and a “breakaway”, but the following anecdote is located at the old Flinders Street headquarters of the Deaf Society, when Reynolds himself was a boy accompanying his Deaf parents to the Society, which places it prior to 1925:

There was a [group] in Victoria headed by a lot of the older deaf... They were a little more highly intelligent than the average deaf... it was at the time, and I was only a boy of about 10 or 11 that I was, if you could put it this way, honorary interpreter for the [group].

[At] Flinders Street Mission ... we used to sit up at the back and my Mum or Dad or both would take me in there and the older deaf would sit round and I had to tell them what was being said by the speaker which Mr. Abraham was interpreting the other end of the hall.

Q: What, they refused to watch Abraham?
A: That is correct, that is correct and I was only 10 or 11—...and Mr. Abraham came up, he was my Godfather, and he came up and he said Ernest what are you doing, and I remember this as if it was yesterday, and I said I’m telling the deaf here and he turned round to the deaf and he says why and they said you don’t tell us what should be told us...79

In telling Abraham “you don’t tell us what should be told us”, these Deaf people would have been challenging both Abraham’s authority and the accuracy of his interpreting. The anecdote offers a startling suggestion that not only were some Deaf people seeing through Abraham, but also that they sometimes publicly challenged him as a group, not just as individuals.

A “drudge” again

CHAPTER 3 Things as we Deaf See Them

J. P. Bourke’s final period of employment with the Society was from April 1924 to April 1925. The Society had recently sold its Flinders Street headquarters and acquired a new property at Jolimont Square, with extensive grounds. Bourke himself asked Abraham for the position of gardener, and Abraham agreed. The ensuing year, according to Bourke, was another round of broken promises. These ranged from having to “batch” for himself (cook and clean, though he had furnished quarters) for a period of seven months instead of the few days initially agreed to; undertaking the caretaker’s role for up to three nights a week in addition to his work in the garden; and Abraham’s failure to pay Bourke a portion of the profits from produce he raised, despite a written undertaking to do so.⁸⁰

Once again, Bourke ordered and paid for many items on his own initiative. He claimed that this was because his requests for necessary items were ignored, refused, or delayed, and he wanted to proceed with the job so that he could impress Abraham and others with his abilities. He gave an example of one of these independent purchases (which he always claimed back from the Society):

I had asked him for a pair of scales to weigh broad beans when I sold them to tenants and friends. This is his answer:-

“As to scales I suggest you buy a lb of beans and take what you receive as a guide to your own sales”.

I had more sense than to follow such a silly suggestion, so I bought a pair of scales myself.⁸¹

Society records indicated that Bourke’s unauthorised purchases amounted to almost £15 0.0 during that year, and included fowls and timber. They stated that this was the “chief reason for his dismissal”.⁸² Midway through his term of employment, new caretakers were employed and, as agreed, Bourke moved into lodgings off-site. His salary of 35/- was increased, but only up to £2.15 0, instead of the “living wage” of £3.16 0 which he had hoped for. Bourke was deeply disappointed and tried unsuccessfully to argue his case with Abraham.

⁸⁰ J. P. Bourke, The Story of a Deaf Drudge, 25-35.
⁸¹ J. P. Bourke, The Story of a Deaf Drudge, 30.
⁸² Farm & Home Committee Notes on John P Bourke. File No. 668, JWF Collection.
During this period of employment, the relationship between Bourke and Abraham deteriorated rapidly. Abraham had less compunction about criticising Bourke’s work and dismissing his complaints outright instead of pretending that he would consult the Board. He wrote irritably to Bourke, “Whatever I have tried to do for you has produced its batch of bitter, complaining letters. In fact you are always grousing and I am weary of such epistles”\(^3\) Bourke, for his part, began to develop the manic hatred of Abraham that was to remain with him until Abraham’s death. Although Bourke does not record the incident, the Society’s records allege that towards the end of his employment there, “whenever the Principal was in his office Bourke spent the whole of the day mowing a small piece of lawn in front”\(^4\) Bourke mentioned elsewhere that Abraham hated noise and had nagged him about his cough,\(^5\) so his behaviour with the lawn-mower suggests the furious revenge of a man using one of the few weapons (noise) which he could control and which had no power to harm him!

Towards the end of his employment with the Society Bourke began to make threats. He himself wrote:

> I turned on the brute, and in spluttering and stuttering wrath I told him that I would take my case to the Government and let the public judge between us.

> He said, sneeringly, in deaf signs, “Good! Good!”\(^6\)

The Society’s version was that he “repeatedly threatened that if he was dismissed he would spend the rest of his time in trying to ruin the Principal and the Society.”\(^7\) Notwithstanding this, he was dismissed in April 1925. Later that year, he managed to find a similar position to the one he had at Jolimont, and held it for many years afterwards.\(^8\) His summing up of his employment under Abraham was:

> As his employee, I owe him nothing but four year’s [sic] of drudgery. I always got better treatment and better pay from others than I did from

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\(^3\) J. P. Bourke, *The Story of a Deaf Drudge*, 29.

\(^4\) Farm & Home Committee Notes on John P. Bourke. File No 668, JWF Collection

\(^5\) J. P. Bourke, *The Story of a Deaf Drudge*, 29

\(^6\) Ibid., 34

\(^7\) Farm & Home Committee Notes on John P. Bourke. File No 668, JWF Collection.

\(^8\) He still held this position at the time he wrote *The Story of a Deaf Drudge*, in 1939
him. I did not know what a curse deafness could be until I worked under him.  

Bourke’s ongoing attempts to “take his case to the Government”, which are described later in this thesis, illustrate many of the themes that were to become important in the Australian Deaf community over the next decade – Deaf people’s right to be treated as citizens, to maintain some autonomy in the management of their own affairs, and to seek recognition of the corruption and abuse which arose in some of the organisations which controlled Deaf people.

The national scene

By the mid 1920s, most Deaf Societies in Australia were comfortably established, and had increasing numbers of prominent public figures on to their Boards of Management, such as E. R. Peacock in Victoria, who had been a Consul to Czechoslovakia and had a large printing firm;  

Digby Denham in Queensland, who had been Premier of the State from 1911 to 1915;  

philanthropist J. H Angas in South Australia;  

and William Brooks in New South Wales, who was a member of the State Parliament.  

Most of the Deaf Societies were actively consolidating and expanding their property and services.

In Queensland, Samuel Showell resigned as Superintendent of the Queensland Adult Deaf and Dumb Mission in 1925 and Miss M. Overend Wilson took over temporarily as Acting Superintendent. Although Wilson was also Deaf, the Annual Report in 1926 stated unequivocally that in appointing a new Superintendent, “preference should be given to one not handicapped as Mr. Showell has been in this respect”, and “applications have been invited from hearing persons qualified to fill the vacancy.”  

Showell and Wilson were to be the last Deaf Superintendents of any Deaf Society in Australia.

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89 J. P. Bourke, *The Story of a Deaf Drudge*, 34.
90 “Our Late President, Mr. E. R. Peacock,” *Victorian Deaf News* 3, no. 2 (July-Aug.-Sept. 1932): 2
91 QADDM, Report for the Year Ending 28 Feb 1930, 13
92 R. G. Loader, “The Establishment and Maintenance of the Deaf Community in South Australia”, 40
93 Extract from “Who’s Who,” File No. 855, JWF Collection
94 QADDM, Report for the Year Ending Feb 28 1926.
In NSW the Deaf Society had acquired a new building at 5 Elizabeth Street in the City, and the Board was beginning to consider employing more experienced and qualified welfare staff. Like the Queensland Mission, they looked to Britain to fill this need.

**Abraham’s role**

During the 1920s Ernest Abraham maintained his position as the leading figure in the Australian Deaf world. Although things were becoming complicated for him within his own Deaf Society, these internal rumblings had not yet affected his status as the nation’s “chief expert” on Deaf people. In 1926 he celebrated the 25th Anniversary of his arrival in Melbourne, and a huge celebration was held at the Centre, at which he was presented with a gold watch and chain inscribed to “Our Chief.”95 His anniversary also elicited effusive newspaper articles in the *Argus, Age* and *Herald*, most of which suggest Abraham’s guiding pen. The *Argus* article re-affirmed, “[The Society] is what the deaf mutes claim to be ‘their world’, and Mr. Abraham is its ‘uncrowned king’.”96

An example of his influential standing in the Deaf Societies and general Deaf communities of Queensland and New South Wales is described in a detailed report in *Our Monthly Letter* in 1926, describing a “rest” holiday he took—a sea voyage to Brisbane and Sydney.97 It began with an extract from an article in the Brisbane *Telegraph*, which described Abraham as “the chief expert in Australia in matters pertaining to the Deaf and Dumb”, as well as “a very interesting and original personality”. His earlier visits in support of the Queensland Deaf Society were described, and his preaching, including his use of “flowing and emphatic gesture”, was admired. The article concluded:

> Mr. Abraham praised the work done in the mission, and he criticised too, but criticism from a man with such intimate knowledge of every wide avenue and every blind alley of deaf mission work, and every twist and turn of deaf mute character, could not fail to be well received and to carry weight.98

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95 “The Night of Nights at our Centre – Jolimont Square,” *Our Monthly Letter* 22, no. 12 (Dec 1926)


97 “Our Principal ‘Resting’,” *Our Monthly Letter* 22, no. 7 & 8 (July/Aug 1926)

98 “A Silent World. Memorable Week for the Deaf,” *The Telegraph* (no date provided). Quoted in *Our Monthly Letter* 22, no 7 & 8 (July/Aug) 1926
The references to “every blind alley of deaf mission work” and “every twist and turn of deaf mute character” are interesting, and reflect the more sombre and cynical view of Deaf people that Abraham seemed to be developing during the 1920s.

A more detailed article followed in the same issue of Our Monthly Letter, describing his many rounds of visits to the Mission in Queensland and its various projects, the Society in New South Wales, and the schools in both states. His days were an endless round of visits, meetings, lunches, dinners, escorted motorcar trips to scenic spots, church services where he preached, and “Welcome Socials” where he was greeted by crowds of Deaf people. The names of those who entertained him were all recorded. As well as his meetings with the churchmen, barristers and accountants who made up the Deaf Society boards of the time, he was taken out to lunch at “Brisbane’s most fashionable cafe ‘Rowe’s’” by Miss M. O. Wilson and another Deaf woman. He also had several meetings with A. L. Lonsdale in Sydney. Although their relationship was usually guarded, 99 on this visit they spent considerable time together and praised each other in public. Lonsdale welcomed Abraham at a Social, referring to him as “the Father of the Deaf and Dumb of Australia”; and Abraham told Sydney Deaf people “how fortunate they were in having... Mr Lonsdale... conducting their services and attending to their every need, he knew of no other committee man devoting so much valuable time to the cause of the deaf.” 100

Although Abraham continued to be the dominant personality on the national scene, his position began to crumble a little around the edges during this time. There were several reasons for this. One was that the Australasian Deaf and Dumb Association was largely defunct. The domestic problems he was experiencing with Bourke and others, while not yet widely known, seemed to sap some of his energy and enthusiasm. A number of “pretenders” to his throne made their appearance during the 1920s, although none of them seriously challenged him until later. Lonsdale in Sydney, although never a popular...

99 John Flynn describes them as having a “‘distant’ friendship”. See J. W. Flynn, “Post School Organisations”, 68.
100 “Our Principal ‘Resting’, “Our Monthly Letter 22, no. 7 & 8 (July/Aug 1926)
and charismatic leader in the way that Abraham was, gradually began to accumulate power and influence, and always remained stolidly unwavering by Abraham. Two other hearing superintendents arrived from Britain later in the 1920s—Herbert Hersee in NSW and John Paul in Queensland—and as we shall see, these men did indeed challenge Abraham’s control. Abraham’s image was imperceptibly shifting from that of an energetic young crusader with bold new ideas, to that of an aging patriarch unwilling to cede his entrenched control.

**Bourke and the Deaf community**

At about the same time that Bourke was struggling through his last period of employment with the Society, he began to participate more actively in the organisations within the community. In 1924 he was elected to the Deaf Committee,101 and the following year he appeared on the Committee of the Men’s Guild.102 His actual involvement in general community life is rather difficult to gauge. He never seems to be listed in the social pages of *Our Monthly Letter*, winning prizes at the socials, playing for the sports teams, or sending cheery greetings to his friends while away on holidays (although it is possible that he was always unlucky, had two left feet, and could never afford holidays). But he was certainly not unfamiliar with the social side of Deaf community life.

Happiness is a noted feature of the character of the deaf when they are assembled together. Nature, as if in remorse for her injustice to them, has made the deaf mute a great talker.... On social evenings round the card table at their headquarters they frequently growl at one another for holding up the game to talk. We (the author included) have too much to say at times. In fact, they have a special sign for the loquacious deaf mute.103

Membership of the Deaf Committee was a highly regarded role in the community, and it is worth providing some background to it. Most State Deaf Societies had Deaf Committees (sometimes called Deaf General Committees) up until the 1980s, with

101 J. P. Bourke, *The Story of a Deaf Drudge*, 37
103 J. P. Bourke, *The After-School Problems of the Deaf and Dumb*, 1, 8
generally similar compositions and roles. They were composed almost entirely of
elected Deaf people (usually men during the '20s and '30s), had two or three
representatives on the Board of the Society, and had responsibility for day-to-day
matters such as "the arrangements for Divine worship, classes, meetings, and social
gatherings held at the Centre."104

Bourke left an acerbic description of the workings of the Victorian Deaf Committee
during Abraham's time. It was made up of ten Deaf people, a hearing member of the
Board (appointed, not elected), and Abraham. Abraham was always Chairman.105
Abraham wrote the Constitution, or "Rules of the Deaf Committee", and was usually
able to make sure that the Deaf Committee was stacked with Deaf employees of the
Society, Deaf people on unemployment relief (which he controlled), and others under
his influence, since most of these people could be counted on not to oppose his
wishes.

As Chairman of all committee meetings he arranges the Agenda,
cajoles and flatters those under his influence, sneers at and insults the
strong members if they dare to speak their minds to him, frowns
down the employees if they oppose his wishes, and tries to mould
everyone's thoughts to his own way of thinking and get them to vote
in the way he wants them to.106

Although Abraham may initially have wanted Bourke on the Deaf Committee
because he was an employee, the acrimonious conclusion to Bourke's employment
and his opposition to Abraham and the Society would soon have made him a liability.
So Abraham made use of another of Bourke's problematic attributes to remove him
from the Committee. Bourke was a Catholic, a fact which had already caused some
tensions between him and Abraham.107 Bourke described how Abraham had

104 J. P. Bourke, *The Story of a Deaf Drudge*, 8 This was Rule 2 of the Victorian Deaf Committee's
Constitution in the 1920s
105 Abraham's practice of insinuating himself into and controlling all levels of the Society, from
General Board to Deaf Committee (like Lonsdale in Sydney – See Chapter 4) was similar to the way in
which many British Missioners operated at the time. See Paddy Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture*,
333-334
106 Ibid., 9.
107 For background on sectarian attitudes in Australia at this time, see J. D. Bollen, *Protestantism and
Social Reform in New South Wales 1890-1910* (Clayton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1972),
challenged his involvement in a “denominational Deaf and Dumb Association” while he was working at the Society and on the Deaf Committee. Abraham (although he was not an ordained minister) conducted non-denominational church services at the Deaf Centre every Sunday, and he told Bourke that Deaf Committee members were expected to participate fully in these services. He alternately cajoled Bourke, telling him that “he and I were pals and here I was breaking our friendship and drifting away from the Society”, and threatened him:

He played on my emotions; took advantage of my helplessness and difficulty in securing other work; my love for my job; bullied and browbeat me; threatened that I would lose my job and my place on the Committee, and had me whimpering.
He is a slow-torturing devil! 108

But Bourke refused to “put aside all [his] principles and act the hypocrite for the sake of a job at thirty-five shillings a week.” So, after he had been dismissed from his position, Abraham used his religion to work him out of the Deaf Committee. At the final meeting for the year, just before the election for a new Deaf Committee, Abraham:

...called members [sic] attention to a supposed rule of the Society which read that only members of the Protestant persuasion were eligible to stand for election to the deaf committee.
He brought under notice the fact that I belonged to a different denomination to the rest of the members, and asked the meeting to decide whether I had the right to be a member of the Committee. 109

According to Bourke, only one member of the Committee stood up for him, two supported Abraham, and all the others said nothing. No decision was made at this meeting, but the damage was done, and Bourke was defeated at the election for the next year’s Deaf Committee—“his dirty work had had its effect.” 110 He was not re-elected (or did not stand) at the next year’s Annual Meeting of the Men’s Guild either, possibly for the same reason. 111 Using religious sectarianism in this way would not

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108 J P Bourke, *The Story of a Deaf Drudge*, 37
109 Ibid., 37-38
110 Ibid., 38.
111 “Men’s Guild,” *Our Monthly Letter* 22, no. 3 (March 1926)
have been merely a political tactic. As Bourke said, Abraham also "[threw] my religion in my face in order to hurt my feelings." It provided yet another reason for his implacable hatred of Abraham.

**Other crimes and misdemeanours**

Bourke's condemnation of Abraham did not stem only from resentment at his own treatment. He described many other transgressions which he believed merited exposure and public condemnation. These included Abraham's physical brutality to some inmates of the Farm and Home,\textsuperscript{112} his heavy demands on them for domestic and farm labour, and the meagre allowances he gave them out of their pensions\textsuperscript{113} He also despised Abraham’s hypocrisy in calling himself a "chaplain" and leading church services for Deaf people, while at the same time demonstrating blatantly immoral behaviour. Not only did Abraham regularly "gather us round him at Blackburn and tell us risque stories"\textsuperscript{114} he was a notorious womaniser. Abraham’s affairs with women (especially Deaf women) are legendary. He was reputed to seduce young Deaf women when they became engaged, to "prepare" them for marriage, and to have numerous illegitimate children in the Deaf community. One informant, interviewed in the 1980s, matter-of-factly described Deaf men in the 1930s asking each other, "Is that child yours or Mr. A.’s?"\textsuperscript{115} Bourke wrote that his "taking liberties with the deaf girls" was "the thing that the deaf are most resentful against Abraham for".\textsuperscript{116} Another informant has claimed that a Deaf man committed suicide because of Abraham’s affair with his wife.\textsuperscript{117}

Bourke claimed to have made a sworn declaration about Abraham’s behaviour with women to the speaker of the Victorian Parliament, and he wrote that others had

\textsuperscript{112} J. P. Bourke, *The Story of a Deaf Drudge*, 13.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 11-12.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., p. 25.
\textsuperscript{115} Melby Dyson, interview by Michael Uniscke, 15 July 1982. Mr. Dyson was Abraham’s chauffeur for many years.
\textsuperscript{116} J. P. Bourke, *The Story of a Deaf Drudge*, 53.
\textsuperscript{117} Fred Sandon, interview by the author, 28 June 1995. Mr. Sandon also worked for a time as Abraham's chauffeur.
complained to the Board of the Society, who “merely pooh-poohed the idea and answered, ‘Nonsense, he is an old man’.”

Another charge that Bourke made against Abraham, which impacts on the events described in this thesis, is that he co-opted and corrupted some of the ablest and most intelligent Deaf people in the community. He describes the case of James Johnston in particular, giving him the pseudonym of “P. Clay” in his writings. Johnston was, according to Bourke, originally “a man of fine principle with natural good qualities and noble instincts and ideals.” Not only was he a leader and an active worker in community organisations as a young man, he also saw through Abraham and boldly challenged him—“he used to thrill us all by the outspoken way he opposed Abraham and stood up for our rights.”

Abraham gave Johnston the job of Assistant Missioner at the Society in 1923, a job which he held for over 20 years. According to Bourke, he then “turned [Johnston’s] head” and used the security of his job to coerce Johnston into doing much of his “dirty work”. This included taking action against Deaf people whom Abraham deemed to be troublemakers. Bourke considered that Johnston was “ashamed to do many of the things that Abraham forces him to do”, but that he eventually saw little point in resisting:

He came to see, however, that Abraham was all powerful [in] the Society and that the deaf were quite helpless to do anything against him. Except that some of the deaf grumbled at Abraham’s trickery and deception nobody seemed to be able to put a stop to it all. In the end he took the atmosphere of lies, deceit and treachery that Abraham had created in the Society as a matter of course. To throw up his job for the sake of decency was too great a sacrifice to make when nobody seemed to care whether Abraham was bad or not. He saw that Abraham beat

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118 J. P. Bourke, *The Story of a Deaf Drudge*, 53
119 See Paddy Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture*, 377-78, for a description of similar practices in British Missions. Ladd describes the role of the “Favoured Group”.
120 The identity of “P. Clay” can be confirmed by some of the letters which Bourke reproduced and said were signed by Clay. In original newspaper copies, such as the one in *The Herald* on 19 Jan 1926 (see below), these letters are signed by J. M. Johnston.
121 Ibid., 52-53.
everybody in the end and that nobody could shift him, so [Johnston]
just floated with the tide.\textsuperscript{122}

Since Bourke was one of the troublemakers whom Johnston had to act against on
occasion, his attitude to Johnston may have been influenced by this. He may also
have felt personally hurt by the way Abraham set Johnston above people like himself.
Johnston was working at the Jolimont Centre during Bourke’s stint as gardener there
in 1924-25, and they would initially have lunch together, but Abraham “told
[Johnston] that he degraded himself by having his lunch with me”\textsuperscript{123} However:
Bourke always refrained from being too critical of Johnston, probably because he
knew all too well what the security of a good job meant to a Deaf man. He even
conceded, “I often wonder whether I would have gone the same way if Abraham had
paid me a living wage and left me alone when I worked for him.”\textsuperscript{124}

Abraham’s astute co-option of Johnston and others helped to consolidate his role and
protect him from disaffected Deaf people in the community.

\textbf{Bourke’s campaign against Abraham}

Bourke carried through on his threats to “take his case to the Government” and to try and
arouse public concern for Deaf people. In the years following his dismissal from the
Society, he regularly wrote letters to the Melbourne newspapers and to various
government officials. Most of his dealings with government bodies will be dealt with in
later chapters.

Taking on Abraham and the Society in this way would have made Bourke’s position
within the Deaf community more precarious. Putting his name to public criticisms would
have made further opportunities to participate in organisations like the Deaf Committee
unlikely, and, although he continued to have some Deaf friends and allies, these people
would probably have been taking risks in being seen to be too closely associated with
him. Like Johnston, many Deaf people would have felt that Bourke had no chance of

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 55.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 54.
defeating Abraham and was making life unnecessarily hard for himself. Others would have remained too much in awe of Abraham (or too frightened of him) to see any value in Bourke’s campaign. Bourke acknowledged these community attitudes in his writings, perhaps nowhere more poignantly than when he tried to explain his campaign by quoting Brutus’ speech in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*.

   Romans, countrymen and lovers! Hear me for my cause, and be silent that you may hear: censure me in your wisdom, and awake your senses, that you may the better judge. If there be any in this assembly, any dear friend of Caesar’s, to him I say, that Brutus love to Caesar was no less than his. If then that friend demand, why Brutus rose against Caesar, this is my answer:—\(^{125}\)

It is doubtful whether such literary allusions would have worked for many of Bourke’s readers, though they help his quixotic image for later generations!

In a letter to the *Herald* on 18 January 1926, Bourke asked for more “public interest in the afflicted deaf and dumb at the Blackburn Home”. One of the deaf-blind men there had been in hospital for a month, but had had no visits from Abraham (while it was Johnston’s duty to visit deaf people in hospital—and he had done so—he had been away on holiday for some weeks so the responsibility fell to Abraham). Bourke visited the man regularly and claimed the man told him he had had no visitors for a week. Bourke concluded his letter by saying, “The Deaf of Victoria need a new leader.”\(^{126}\)

Bourke’s letter was met with an indignant reply in the *Herald* the next day, from J. M. Johnston. This letter asserted that Johnston himself and “a large number of deaf mutes” had been to visit the man in question, and declared that the invalid would be “the last man to complain.”\(^{127}\) Bourke insisted, however, that the letter had been written by Abraham, and that he had made Johnston sign it, saying:

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\(^{124}\) Ibid., 55.  
\(^{125}\) Quoted in J. P. Bourke, *The Story of a Deaf Drudge*, 39  
It is a well-known fact that Abraham writes all the letters that appear in the Press about the adult deaf. When he answers complaints he seldom puts his name to them, but gets one of his ... dupes ... to sign them.\textsuperscript{128}

Bourke’s letter and the reply were reprinted in Our Monthly Letter, with an accompanying article called “Now – Lest We Forget”, which attempted to marginalise Bourke and his complaints and rally support from the faithful:

Now there is a younger generation growing up who have found all their ways made smooth for them and perhaps it would be well if only in thought they should be taken back over the stony road of the older generation when the only clubs for the Deaf were convenient lamp-posts and public house bar-parlours. Also, at that period the Blind-deaf, Mentals and Poor Deaf had no one to care for them. Therefore, it is up to us in every way to honor and respect men like F. J. Rose and E. J. D. Abraham who have blazed the trail for practically everything the Deaf of Victoria now enjoy and are ever likely to enjoy. So stand firm, boys and girls, don’t let their work and the work of our pioneer deaf men and women be lightly thought of or damaged by outsiders, keep the flag flying for Our Colours must never be lowered.\textsuperscript{129}

Abraham obviously felt that Bourke’s letter-writing merited a message to the community that such activity was not acceptable. Bourke was thus dismissed as an “outsider”, and as part of an ungrateful younger generation. But Abraham’s approach to dissidents was multi-faceted and creative—he did not merely rebut Bourke’s arguments in public, he also continued to work on Bourke himself:

He ... does not like the deaf to be out of friends with him. If he thinks you are important enough, he will go to a great deal of trouble to get you back on to his side again. He will do it all in a very sly, crafty and cunning way. You need to be very strong-willed to resist him, for he is very persevering and persistent.

...I had not the moral courage to hold him off. He ... forced me to make friends with him against my will and inclination. He still had me under his influence, but I had lost all respect for him.\textsuperscript{130}

Bourke continued his campaign. Another of his letters was published in the Age in May that year, criticising Abraham for the way he was treating the deafblind men at

\textsuperscript{128} I. P. Bourke, The Story of a Deaf Drudge, 40.
\textsuperscript{129} “Now – Lest We Forget”, Our Monthly Letter 22, no 2 (Feb 1926).
\textsuperscript{130} I. P. Bourke, The Story of a Deaf Drudge, 39.
the farm. Bourke claimed that these men, especially one young man who could have benefited from industrial training, were kept at the farm for "propaganda" purposes, and that the youngest one was allowed to "sit for eight years in despair and idleness on a dole of two shillings a week. (Yes, two shillings!)"

Bourke’s activities were having an effect. The Minutes of the Society’s General Board meeting in July 1926 recorded that the Secretary of the Charities Board, Mr. Love, had summoned Abraham and several of the Board members “to meet him in conference relating to the complaint made by Mr Burke [sic], that this Society was receiving pensions and not giving adequate pocket money to the inmates.” The Chairman of the Board pleaded ignorance—"if we had not been complying with the regulations, we failed to do so because of a lack of knowledge.” Further investigations revealed that the Society was not “a proclaimed Institution under the Pensions Act” as it was not subsidised by the Government. It was therefore not obliged to follow the requirements of the Act and provide inmates with a minimum of four shillings out of the £1 per week pension they collected for each of them. Although no wrong-doing was proved, it can hardly have helped the Society’s image to be under investigation for such a matter.

Bourke stayed away from the Deaf Centre for some months after writing these letters, lacking the “moral courage” to go there. When he returned, Abraham was full of charm. “He asked where had I been all this time, and said he was glad to see me back. I told him that I was glad too, and that I could not keep away any longer. He shook me effusively by the hand.” Bourke was still vulnerable to Abraham’s power, not quite able to stand up to him in the flesh, even though he was aware of his motives:

He got talking about my letters to the papers and as I was still a bit overawed by him I muttered something to the effect that I had not meant to attack him, that all I was concerned about was the welfare of

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131 J. P. Bourke, *The Story of a Deaf Drudge*, 40 (no date is given for the letter).
132 Ibid.
133 ADDSV, Minutes of General Board Meetings, 27 July 1926 and 3 Sept 1926.
134 J. P. Bourke, *The Story of a Deaf Drudge*, 40-41
the deaf. He ended up by asking me, "Do you want a job?" I told him I was in work.\textsuperscript{135}

Abraham had seen that Bourke could indeed cause trouble for him, and needed some delicate handling. He knew how desperately Bourke aspired to a decent job, and used that to bribe him, not only face to face, but also through other people:

Some time later an unemployed mate told me that Abraham was going to get us both splendid positions through his Rotary Club mates. The temptation was too much for me and I told Abraham I would be grateful if he would get me a position.\textsuperscript{136}

Abraham used Bourke's temporary weakening to flatter him further and try to entice him back to the fold. Bourke quoted from a letter Abraham wrote him soon afterwards:

In the very short conversation we had you told me that your only motive for recent acts on your part ... was your interest in the deaf and desire to help them.

Now as that has been my only motive for living for the past 40 years and more, why cannot you come and join forces with me? I would welcome your assistance with open arms.

...It is not possible for one to always do the right thing, anyway I have always tried and I believe have accomplished more for the Deaf and Dumb than any living man — And that is no boast. Come along and let us have a heart to heart talk.\textsuperscript{137}

Bourke claimed that he managed to resist this "humbug", though Abraham kept the job promise dangling for some time. It was around this time that Bourke described his vengeful approach to the Deaf Society as changing into a broader interest in the "welfare and future" of Deaf people. This, he claimed, was prompted by visits to the Institute for the Blind, where the young deaf-blind man from the Farm had been transferred after a new manager took over the Blackburn Home. He was most impressed by the workshop there, which had enabled the deaf-blind man to learn a trade (weaving) and earn around £2.7.0 a week. He was struck by the contrast

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 41

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 41.

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 41. This letter, and other personal correspondence between Abraham and Bourke quoted in the next few pages, does not survive outside the pages of Bourke's book. Our acceptance of their authenticity must depend on the rigour Bourke shows elsewhere in his writing, where most of his
between the Institute for the Blind and the Farm and Home at Blackburn—"The whole place was a hive of industry and a heartening and soul-stirring contrast to the dismal, dreary degrading and useless lives these blind men and myself had lead under Abraham."\(^{138}\) He began to turn more attention to proposals for improving the lives of Deaf people, although his writing never lost its strong vein of criticism of Abraham and the Society.

He had two letters published in the *Age* in May the following year, proposing that a vocational training scheme was the only solution to the "hard and hopeless lives which the untrained deaf were leading."\(^{139}\) Abraham sent him a cautious note after the first letter, saying, "I appreciate very much your letter in the "Age" of the 6\(^{th}\). It is just the thing. I would like to see the deaf keep that ball a'rolling." Abraham assured him that he hoped to establish a Vocational Training Institute for the Deaf, but that it would be "very up-hill work and it will be necessary for the better educated deaf to stand by me and help, to a man."\(^{140}\) But Bourke was finding it easier to resist such flattery, and his success at getting letters published in the newspapers (especially the prestigious *Age*) was emboldening him.

His next target was Abraham's appropriation of the misleading title of "Principal", which confused many people and constantly annoyed the administrators at the School for the Deaf. Since both the school and the Society competed for public funds, and it was considered easier to rouse people's sympathy for children, Abraham tried to give the impression that the Society catered for children as well as adults. Using the title "Principal" was one of his strategies for doing this. In response to a mention in the *Age* of Abraham as "Principal", Bourke wrote a letter explaining the differences between the school and the Society, pointing out that Abraham's title should be "Superintendent". He could not resist adding, "We deaf, ourselves, have no voice

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\(^{138}\) Ibid., 43.

\(^{139}\) J. P. Bourke, letters to the editor, *The Age*, 7 May 1927, 25; and 13 May 1927, 11

\(^{140}\) Quoted in J. P. Bourke, *The Story of a Deaf Drudge*, 44
whatever in the policy of [the] Society”, and seemed to plead for the support of the Age in his campaign:

If we can secure a policy of utility, usefulness and uplift we shall owe the “Age” a debt of gratitude for allowing us to reach ‘the great heart of humanity’, for there alone lies our salvation.141

A reply appeared in the Age the very next day, signed by J. M. Johnston, “Deaf Vice-Chairman of the Deaf Committee of Management.” The letter sidestepped the issue of Abraham’s title, going straight to Bourke’s allegation that the Deaf had “no voice” in the affairs of the Society. This, the reply said, was “not quite accurate”. It asserted instead that “the deaf have a powerful voice in the management of all deaf mute affairs connected with the Society”, and that “the whole of the actual work amongst the deaf is under the control of a Committee of eleven deaf mutes and one hearing man (the principal) elected by the deaf and dumb members annually”.142 (This, of course, referred to the Deaf Committee, giving it powers which it had never possessed.) Bourke wrote bitterly that he and “all the deaf” knew that Abraham had written the letter. He “charged [Johnston] with signing that letter at Abraham’s urging. He has never denied it.”143 This letter was a great blow to Bourke. “I had got the ear of a great newspaper and Abraham had ... [taken] advantage of his position ... to discredit me with the “Age”. The letter put an end, as I thought, to all my hopes of reaching the public conscience”.144

Abraham wrote again to Bourke the next day, using every tactic he could think of—a dazzling job offer, an enticement to join a prestigious Committee, a pretension that he and Bourke were on the same side, a declaration of honesty:

Dear Bourke. — Thanks for your letter to “Age”. Such help is appreciated. A few slight errors (sic) but they give opportunity for further letters which is (sic) in its way helpful to the Cause. I’m very tired and this is my last effort of an unusually heavy day.

142 J. M. Johnston, letter to the editor, The Age, 1 June 1927, 15.
143 J. P. Bourke, The Story of a Deaf Drudge, 46.
144 Ibid., 47.
Before writing again may I suggest you come to the Centre and consult the Records of the past twenty-five years. Leave nothing open to debate. Absolute truth is my motto, and will win through and bring into existence that which we are all aiming at. How would a job as ‘folder’ at one of the Newspaper offices suit you? Wages are £4 16.0. This is confidential and in haste and the child of a weary brain. I am proposing an ‘Advisory Board’ of the Deaf to consider plans of buildings, objectives etc. If you care to join that Board I will propose it.\textsuperscript{145}

An outraged Bourke rejected every ploy. In his reply, he dismissed the invitation to look at the records with “I do not need to look at any records to know that you are incurably and contemptibly selfish”. To the suggestion of a place on the putative Advisory Board he wrote, “I have no intention of holding an official position in the Society, and the deaf will not have me if I would.” And to the enticing bribe of a good job he replied unequivocally:

Well you might get me a job at full wages! You have made me pay in ten years of bitter drudgery for believing in [obscured] honour and sincerity. Poor fool that I was. You go and buy someone else, I'm not for sale!\textsuperscript{146}

After this ringing rebuff, Abraham rarely attempted to win Bourke back into his camp, and Bourke no longer had any lingering susceptibility to his lures. He declared in 1939, “I have refused to speak to or have anything to do with him from that day (June, 1927) to this. He had tried often to get me on friendly terms with him. He has never succeeded, and he never will.”\textsuperscript{147} The gloves were off, they were in open enmity.

This chapter has given a broad overview of developments in the Deaf communities and Deaf Societies of Australia during the first quarter of the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century, and has also given more detailed pictures of some individual relationships and struggles. In

\textsuperscript{145} E. J. D. Abraham, letter to J. P. Bourke, dated 1 June 1927, quoted in The Story of a Deaf Drudge, 48.\textsuperscript{146} The two instances of “(sic)” are by Bourke.
\textsuperscript{147} J. P. Bourke, letter to E. J. D. Abraham, dated 1 June 1927, quoted in The Story of a Deaf Drudge, 48-49.
particular, the relationship between John Bourke and Ernest Abraham crystallised the tensions developing between the Deaf Societies and some of the more autonomous and outspoken Deaf people. The Deaf Societies were settling comfortably into the role of benevolent charities, despite their beginnings when Deaf people had collaborated in or led the efforts to establish them. Abraham represented both the "old days" of partnership with Deaf people and the new order of hearing control. As we have seen, not all Deaf people were willing to acquiesce in this new order. Bourke was in many ways an atypical Deaf person, but he articulated both Deaf people's need for security (and the dependence which could result), and their desire for independence, with its associated fears and uncertainties. In doing so, he provided a consistent and valuable "view from below" which intersects with official records and provides us with a richer and more complex understanding of the time and place. The relationship between these two could be seen as a metaphor for the conflict that this thesis explores.

The events of this chapter set the scene for the developments of the late 1920s and 1930s, when the conflicts between Deaf people and those who wished to control them grew from isolated individual struggles towards larger, more organised movements. The first such movement occurred in New South Wales.

147 J. P. Bourke, The Story of a Deaf Drudge, 49
CHAPTER 4: The Prerogative of Every Citizen

I think I have stated enough for anyone to be convinced of the capabilities of the Adult Deaf in organising, controlling, or managing their own affairs. IT IS NO LONGER A POSSIBILITY, IT IS AN ACCOMPLISHED FACT.¹

In this chapter we see an example of the “small land wars” which Wrigley suggests are the proper subject of Deaf history. The isolated individual conflicts described in Chapter Three were developing into organised movements which challenged the comfortable system that had been established. The years of Deaf people’s work in setting up the Missions and Societies were fading from memory, and the hearing businessmen they had invited on to their Societies’ boards were becoming entrenched and powerful. These men had their own ideas of how such organisations should be administered, how they should be represented to the community at large, and their ideas were a function of the society they lived in, where “charity” was the responsibility of the affluent and altruistic.² Funds and publicity became (or were seen to be) dependent on a particular image of deaf people being “looked after” by benevolent hearing people. This image was very different to the ideas of most Deaf people, and by the end of the 1920s conflict was rife in the Deaf Societies of New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria. The forms these conflicts took, and the ways in which they were articulated by both sides, reveal much about social construction of Deaf people and their place in the world. This chapter will focus on events in New South Wales.

The conflicts were not only between Deaf and hearing people. In the charged atmosphere of the time, with volatile events and personalities demanding responses, Deaf people joined forces against other Deaf people, hearing people attacked other hearing people. It would be oversimplistic to portray the conflict as merely one of Deaf against hearing. It was instead a conflict between two ways of conceptualising Deaf people and the institutions which served them. One view saw Deaf people as having their greatest opportunity for security and progress by

¹ “The Deaf A R E Managing their Own Affairs,” The Deaf Advocate 2, no. 6 (June 1932). Capitals in original.
working within the institutions that had already been established, and being loyal
to the hearing people who now controlled those institutions. The other view
rejected this path as denying the achievements and capabilities of Deaf people and
turning them into passive objects of charity, and instead saw Deaf people as
capable of independence and of "managing their own affairs." In Victoria these
differing views were exemplified by J. M. Johnston and J. P. Bourke, in New
South Wales they were to be embodied by many other people.

Deaf people were not the only marginalised group seeking greater equality and a
voice in public affairs during the 1920s, nor were they the only ones to use the
idea of "citizenship" as a way of articulating their aims. Australian women, who
had gained the vote in 1902, continued to organise and educate each other. The
Australian Federation of Women Voters, active during the 1920s, was originally
called the Australian Federation of Societies for Equal Citizenship, and was
committed to the goal of equal citizenship with men. Members educated other
women in the skills needed for good citizenship, such as running meetings,
debating, public speaking and using the media; and sought involvement in national
and international organisations which embodied their aims, such as the League of
Nations. Aborigines were also beginning to organise as "citizens", although this
happened to a greater extent in the 1930s.

Herbert V. S. Hersee

Herbert Hersee's arrival in Sydney in April 1928 to begin work at the Deaf Society
was the catalyst for much of the upheaval that was to follow. He was quickly
accepted by the Deaf community and in a very short time he appeared to change
the culture of the community, creating a large body of people (hearing as well as
Deaf) who identified with the "second way" described above.

Hersee had been Missioner to the Deaf at Portsmouth in England since 1920, and
his domain later included Bournemouth and the Isle of Wight. He was a hearing

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3 See Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1999), 50 and 140
4 Ibid., 139
son of Deaf parents. His parents were prominent in the English Deaf community, and his father was a Missioner for the Deaf in North London. The regular columns in *The British Deaf Times* on the activities of various Missions often commented on the energy and wide contacts of Hersee, and the significant increase in attendance and involvement which followed his appointment at the Portsmouth Mission. He is reported to have written in his first Annual Letter to the members of his Mission, "I found it necessary to drop a bomb, for you were all asleep."

Hersee actively tried to broaden the experiences of the Deaf people he worked with. He encouraged them to participate in other organisations, such as a local Brotherhood, which had "upwards of 3,000 members, where each Sunday famous men in the world of science, letters, art, travel, journalism and public affairs give addresses. These are interpreted by the Missioner, and the deaf are publicly welcomed at each meeting." He also initiated a relationship with Toc H, a service organisation that had its origins in the first World War. Hersee had been a pilot during the war, so his ties with Toc H may have been personal as well as professional. It was an organisation he was to call on again in Australia, in more pressing circumstances. Hersee was involved in the activities of the national Deaf organisation, the British Deaf and Dumb Association. In 1925 he took charge of organising one of the BDDA’s regular Congresses, and he was a member of the Executive Committee in 1927-1928.

Hersee seems to have been unusually outward-looking for his time and his profession. Rather than insulating Deaf people from the dangers of wider society and reinforcing a comfortable little Deaf world, he believed in providing access for

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6 Ibid., 79
7 "Our Missioners. 2 Mr H. V S Hersee, Portsmouth," *The British Deaf Times* XIX, no 221-222 (May-June 1922): 39
8 Ibid., 39
9 The name "Toc H" is derived from Talbot House, a "rest and recreation" house for soldiers, which operated in Flanders from 1915. It was usually called T H., which became Toc H in Signallers’ code. See L. Altschwager, *The First Sixty Years: A History of Toc H in Australia From 1925 to 1985* (Adelaide: Toc H Australia, 1985), 6
Deaf people to the activities, philosophies and practices of other organisations. At the same time, as a child of Deaf parents, he knew and understood Deaf people’s language, and participated actively in their complex social, sporting and political networks. His approach contrasted with the practices of most British Missions of the time, as well as those of Australian Missions, which focused more on creating a “home” and a “retreat” for the Deaf. Hearing organisations were the territory of hearing Missioners, if they were relevant at all. For example, Ernest Abraham regularly attended meetings and luncheons of the Rotary Club and the Masons in Melbourne, but these were his preserve alone, to be used for cultivating influence with the hearing and recruiting powerful Board members. He never brought Deaf people with him to such events—although his Deaf chauffeur was always waiting patiently in the Austin outside.\(^\text{12}\)

After an exchange of correspondence, in 1927 Hersee accepted the offer of the Adult Deaf and Dumb Society of New South Wales to become their "Superintendent-Secretary",\(^\text{13}\) and arrived in Sydney on the *Euripides* with his wife and two small children in April 1928.\(^\text{14}\)

**Trouble looms**

Hersee worked for the Adult Deaf and Dumb Society for little more than a year. The minutes of Executive meetings recorded increasing tension between the hearing Councillors and their new employee, and a particularly acrimonious relationship between Hersee and A. L. Lonsdale, who had been volunteering in the role of Superintendent prior to Hersee's arrival. The minutes of a meeting in August 1928 (barely five months after Hersee's arrival) showed the first ominous rumblings of conflict. "Mr Hersee conveyed desire of deaf mutes for him to represent them on the Board but was informed that Mr Lonsdale acted in this capacity."\(^\text{15}\) Incidentally, this meeting also recorded the Executive's permission for Hersee to allow the local branch of Toch H [sic] to use the Society's Hall\(^\text{16}\)—an

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\(^\text{12}\) M. Dyson, interview by Michael Uniacke, 15th July 1982.
\(^\text{13}\) ADDNSW, Minutes of Executive Meeting, 29 Nov 1927
\(^\text{14}\) ADDNSW, Minutes of Executive Meeting, 17 April 1928
\(^\text{15}\) ADDNSW, Minutes of Executive Meeting, 21 Aug 1928
\(^\text{16}\) Ibid.
indication that Hersee was seeking to establish the same kinds of relationships with wider community organisations that he had developed in England.

Lonsdale's lack of signing skills and his inability to develop any sort of close relationship with Deaf people were embarrassingly exposed by Hersee's instant rapport with the Deaf community and his ease of communication with them; however Lonsdale was unwilling to relinquish the authority he had accumulated and his intimate knowledge of the daily workings of the Society. The relationship between Lonsdale and Hersee obviously caused some concern to the Executive—they agreed in September 1928 that "...it was necessary to define Mr Lonsdale's position as between the Executive Mr Hersee and the Deaf and Dumb".17 They attempted to formalise Lonsdale's role by making him "Executive Officer" of the Council,18 but this did not prevent disagreements from becoming increasingly frequent and explicit. Hersee chafed under what he saw as the restrictive structure of the Society's administration, and he made it clear that he thought there was insufficient communication between the Deaf people and the Executive. He could not accept that he was not allowed to bridge this gap. The minutes of the Executive meeting in October 1928 reported:

...the Executive's view of representation on the Council or Executive was explained to Mr Hersee, the view being held that as a paid official it was undesirable (even if eligible) for the Welfare Director or any other officer of the Society (other than honorary) to have a seat on the Council or Executive. Mr Hersee was asked accordingly to make it clear to the Deaf and Dumb that he was not available to represent them, but Mr Hersee replied that he thought he should have a seat on the Executive with or without a vote. In support of his contention he explained that such was the custom in England and he expected it here.19

Later that month, Hersee requested that "a member of the Council or Executive attend the general monthly meetings of the Deaf Committee". Of course, it was Lonsdale who "undertook to make arrangements".20 Ella Doran, a young sign language interpreter who worked for the Society, recalled:

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17 ADDSNSW, Minutes of Executive Meeting, 4 Sept 1928.
18 ADDSNSW, Minutes of Executive Meeting, 18 Sept 1928.
19 ADDSNSW, Minutes of Executive Meeting, 9 Oct 1928.
20 ADDSNSW, Minutes of Executive Meeting, 23 Oct 1928.
When I joined the society staff, he told me that this meeting [with the Deaf Committee] was a waste of time and achieved nothing, but he needed me there to interpret and thought my presence might "keep them in line". At almost the same time, the committee were saying among themselves that my presence might get Mr Lonsdale to see their point of view. Naturally, I didn't tell either side what the other was saying.

The deaf men did have some good ideas, which I did my best to help them develop because I knew that Mr Lonsdale would never pass on the decisions to the board. ⁡²¹

Philosophical differences about the role of the Council in relation to Deaf people also became evident after the annual picnic for the Deaf and Dumb in January 1929. A dispute arose at the next Executive meeting over Hersee's request that they make up a financial loss in relation to the picnic (evidently incurred because Hersee had distributed free tickets to Deaf people who could not afford to go to the picnic). The Executive refused to do this, and asked for details of "such persons". ⁡²²

The disputes between Hersee and the Executive of the Society escalated during the early months of 1929. The minutes of Executive meetings reported that Hersee "indicated that his activities were impeded by the conditions under which he was working", ⁡²³ and that he "felt himself to be unduly restricted by the Executive". ⁡²⁴ He complained about Lonsdale's hostility and constant interference in his work.

The President of the Executive, the Hon. William Brooks, claimed that Hersee "wanted to decide matters himself, and merely report to the Executive and to have quite uncontrolled authority except in matters relative to the raising of money." ⁡²⁵

The members of the Executive were also unimpressed with reports that Hersee was publicly discussing his relationship with the Executive. This was reflected in a letter they received from the Deaf General Committee in March 1929, which queried a "report of the impending resignation of Mr Hersee". ⁡²⁶ In this letter, three Deaf members of the General Committee—F. S. Booth, J. Sinclair and E.

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⁡²¹ Ella Doran, *Hand in Hand with Time and Change: The Life of Ella Doran and her Work with the Deaf in Australia* (Woden: Molonglo Press, 1998), 170
⁡²² ADDSNSW, Minutes of Executive Meeting, 5 Feb 1929.
⁡²³ ADDSNSW, Minutes of Executive Meeting, 12 March 1929.
⁡²⁴ Ibid
⁡²⁵ Ibid
⁡²⁶ Ibid.
Quinnell—invoked Article 46 of the Society’s Constitution, summoning a special meeting of the full Council of the Society.27

This meeting was duly held on 8 April. Hersee was not admitted to the meeting, although he was in the building and the Deaf people asked for him to be present as their interpreter.28 Booth, Sinclair and Quinnell presented in detail the concerns of many Deaf people about the Executive’s treatment of Hersee, their fears that he would be dismissed, dissatisfaction with Lonsdale’s intrusive role, and suspicions as to Lonsdale’s motives. Quinnell also pointed to the lack of salaried Deaf workers in the Society, and criticised the Executive members for not employing any Deaf workers in their own businesses.29 The Chairman dismissed their complaints as “based upon misconception”, and emphasised the Council’s position that an organisation such as the Society must be firmly controlled by its Executive, “with all the weight of our names”. He declared that Hersee needed only to “do away with the feeling that he must run the show”. He also sharply rebuked the Deaf members for being “absolutely disloyal” and expressed his resentment about “the aspersions that had been cast upon the Executive by our friends”.30 At the conclusion of the meeting, Booth said ominously, “The Executive will have to regret very much for their attitude to the Deaf, also they will pay later on.”31

Booth reported later, “The meeting has been declared ‘the most disgraceful one in the history of the deaf,’ as all protests and requests of the deaf were ignored.”32 Soon after the meeting he wrote to the Executive asking for three copies of the record of the Special Council meeting, but was informed in reply that “the notes could be perused at the President’s office on making arrangements to do so.”33 It is unlikely that Booth found this arrangement very accessible, and he declared:

The Executive’s policy was apparently to keep information and knowledge away from the deaf: they did not want them to know what

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27 Ibid.
29 ADDSNSW, transcript of Special Meeting of Council held on 8 April 1929, 2-6 (File No. 0146, JWF Collection)
30 Ibid., 6-8.
31 Ibid
32 “Why the Association of Deaf and Dumb Citizens was Formed,” Onward! (Jan 1930): 8.
33 ADDSNSW, Minutes of Executive Meeting, 16 April 1929
was being said at the meetings, and this despite the fact that the society was reared up by the deaf and dumb themselves after many years of hard work.\textsuperscript{34}

Booth's statement pointed to the extent to which Deaf people's anger resulted from a feeling of betrayal. This was the Society they had worked to create for themselves over so many years, and they felt it had now been commandeered by hearing people who patronised and manipulated them.

There were other signs of dissatisfaction with the Society, such as the Honorary Secretary of the Deaf Tennis Club writing to ask permission for the Club to withdraw from the Society.\textsuperscript{35} These events indicate that the Deaf community was growing restless, and had a new willingness to challenge the control of the hearing Executive. Deaf people had obviously found an ally in Hersee, and were becoming bolder in their support for him and their efforts to re-shape the Society according to their wishes. It seems likely that Hersee had considerable influence on the beliefs and actions of these Deaf people—only seven years earlier Booth had been on record as saying:

...we can trust the hearing Board to look after the interests of the Deaf and Dumb. The best way is to leave our troubles and disputes and grievances to the hearing Board of Management, they will look after us very well.\textsuperscript{36}

It was evident that Booth no longer had faith in the good intentions of the hearing Board, and was ready to express his anger. The hearing Executive, however, perceived Hersee to be the problem, and do not appear to have given any serious acknowledgment to the mood of independence and rebellion that was growing among Deaf members—to their cost, as they soon found out.

These events were taking place against the backdrop of economic, political and social upheaval in Australian society. During the first months of 1929, as Australian industries became less competitive overseas during the economic downturn, government efforts to lower wages led to strikes by waterside workers,

\textsuperscript{34} "Why the Association of Deaf and Dumb Citizens was Formed," \textit{Onward!} (Jan 1930): 8.
\textsuperscript{35} ADDSNSW, Minutes of Executive Meeting, 16 April 1929.
\textsuperscript{36} Conference Notes: Australian (sic) Deaf & Dumb Association, 5 Oct 1922. File No. 253, JWF Collection.
timber workers and miners. There were frequent and sometimes violent demonstrations by unions, communists and the unemployed. The conservative government of Stanley Bruce was crumbling amid increasing anti-Empire sentiment, disillusionment with those in power was becoming widespread, and dole queues were growing longer.\textsuperscript{37} Although there is no direct evidence of Hersee’s or the Deaf community’s response to these developments, it was a time when a dissatisfied minority group such as theirs could readily take inspiration from events happening around them.

\textbf{Dismissal}

Hersee prepared a letter for the Executive in late April 1929, in which he succinctly pointed out the centrality of Deaf people to the Society: “I hope you will recognise my only aim is to further the work of the Society, and particularly those of its members who are handicapped: without whose membership, of course, there would be no need for the Society, or for me to hold the position I do.”\textsuperscript{38} The Executive was unmoved by this reminder of their reliance on Deaf people. After further altercations, Hersee was asked to tender his resignation on Friday 3 May, due to “an impossible and intolerable situation [that] had been already brought about by Mr. Hersee’s failure to conform to the requirements of the Executive”\textsuperscript{39} He responded by asking that the matter be referred to the full Council of the Society, where Deaf representatives would have some say in the matter, claiming “I feel sure that the majority of the Council are not in accord with the step taken by the Executive, and probably some of them are ignorant of it altogether.”\textsuperscript{40} This request was declined. Hersee refused to resign and was dismissed from his position late on Wednesday afternoon 8 May 1929.\textsuperscript{41}


\textsuperscript{39} ADDSNSW, Minutes of Executive Meeting, 3 May 1929.

\textsuperscript{40} Quoted in “Mr. Hersee’s Dismissal: A Few Facts that Occurred in 1929,” \textit{Onward!} (Aug 1929): 9.

\textsuperscript{41} ADDSNSW, Minutes of Executive Meeting, 9 May 1929.
Revolt

A meeting of Deaf people had been scheduled at the Society that evening, and was attended by over 100 people. As news of Hersee’s dismissal spread among them, the gathering was transformed into what was later described as a “demonstration”\(^\text{42}\) and a “riot”.\(^\text{43}\) The meeting was addressed by Fletcher Booth and other Deaf people outraged at Hersee’s dismissal. Newspaper reporters were soon on the scene, and watched as Lonsdale’s framed photograph was smashed and thrown in a urinal, and William Brooks’ photograph was turned to face the wall. “Fists were flourished,” the *Herald* reporter wrote the next day, attempting to describe the unusual scene of rebellion, “Hats were thrown into the air. Those persons who were not entirely voiceless shrieked with excitement. Others stamped and clapped their hands. The noise could be heard out in the street.”\(^\text{44}\)

The caretaker summoned the police, but the lone constable who arrived found himself unexpectedly out of his depth when he loudly told the crowd to leave the hall. “Although nobody could hear him, everyone understood his mission”, observed the *Herald* reporter. However, instead of a docile and obedient retreat, “someone wrote on the blackboard, ‘We are a hundred to one’, and those present showed the constable that they intended to stand their ground.”\(^\text{45}\) The constable called for reinforcements, but the five additional police officers who arrived were no more effective, “—and so the meeting continued until 10 o’clock, when it disbanded. The police thankfully left.” In this altercation, the reporters were observing a classic Deaf strategy of defiance—even when the shouted words and flailing gestures of the hearing are transparent, Deaf people can choose to retain their privilege of “not hearing” when it gives them an advantage.

The article which appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* the next day was accompanied on the following page by a photograph of a score of Deaf people emerging from the building, smiling broadly, waving jubilantly at photographers.


\(^{45}\) Ibid.
and throwing their hats in the air. It is an image of people asserting independence and equality, not one of meek and grateful recipients of charity.

At a special meeting of the Society’s Executive called the following day, no mention was made in the minutes of this “riot”, nor of the embarrassing publicity it had engendered. Discussion focussed on interim measures for keeping the Society operating, and it was resolved to “close the building at 6 pm daily in the meantime: circulars to be sent out to all deaf members at once”.46 They did not anticipate the response to this decision—Deaf people interpreted it as “locking them out”. This decision sharply illustrated the differing perspectives of the hearing and the Deaf with regard to the Society’s premises. To the hearing Councillors, concerned with property and propriety, this decision was most likely a practical one with a dash of punishment thrown in; to the Deaf, the Society was their meeting place, a “home” which they had worked for many years to create, and to be locked out was an outrage. Deaf people’s indignation at this particular decision echoed through their writings for several years afterwards.47

Aftermath

Hersee fought back swiftly and effectively. He did not scruple to use the facilities and resources he had acquired during his employment with the Society, as well as his support from the Deaf community and his contacts with other organisations such as Toc H. The Executive of the Society claimed at their next meeting that a circular “had been sent out in our addressed envelopes to deaf members generally inviting them to a church service last Sunday at Toc H headquarters” (italics added).48 Hersee was quicker to act than the Society. Although they held a church service that Sunday too, the attendance was abysmal Ella Doran (who interpreted), later recalled:

Mr Lonsdale was there, ready to lead, as he was a lay preacher in the Methodist Church. The congregation consisted solely of the caretaker,

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46 ADDSNSW, Minutes of Executive Meeting, 9 May 1929.
47 For example, on the occasion of the fifth Anniversary of the breakaway, the editors of the Association’s newspaper reminded readers of when “[Deaf people] were helpless when the doors of the Society were closed against them under instructions from the president. Locked out of their own home provided for them by a generous public!” *The Deaf Advocate* 4, no 3 (May-June 1934): 2.
48 ADDSNSW, Minutes of Executive Meeting, 14 May 1929.
cleaners and collectors, with their wives and husbands. Every other member had gone to the place Mr Hersee had arranged...49

Toc H's support for Hersee and the Deaf community was prompt and generous. It was Toc H which sent out the letters inviting Deaf people to the alternative church service on Sunday 12 May (albeit in Deaf Society envelopes), and it was in Toc H's headquarters that this service was held. When Deaf people found themselves locked out of the Society's building on the night of Friday 10 May, they "formed a silent procession to the Headquarters of Toc H in Hamilton-street where they held a breakaway meeting under the Chairmanship of Mr. Hersee..."50 It was there, in Toc H's building, that the decision to form a new organisation was made, with Hersee as Superintendent and Secretary. Gordon Winn, a former Councillor and Life Member of the Deaf Society, who immediately switched his allegiance to the new organisation, guaranteed Hersee's salary for three months, but in the event did not have to pay it, as Deaf people raised enough funds themselves.51 Thus, only two days after his dismissal, Hersee was able to conduct a triumphant newspaper interview:

"Many people when dismissed are ashamed of themselves," said Mr. Hersee, "and hang their heads in sorrow, but mine is up. The executive of the Adult Deaf and Dumb Society have so far refused to tell the public what I was dismissed for. I am not ashamed of the fact that my people were deaf and dumb, and I count the afflicted of Sydney among my personal friends."52

The breakaway group formed at the meeting on 10 May quickly established itself as a viable alternative and rival to the Deaf Society. Although initially called the New South Wales Society for the Adult Deaf and Dumb,53 within a few weeks it was named the New South Wales Association of Deaf and Dumb Citizens.54 It was usually referred to as the "Association", as distinct from the "Society". Its new name not only avoided any legal injunction from the Society against the use of a

49 Ella Doran, Hand in Hand with Time and Change, 45
51 Minutes of Conference between representatives of the Adult Deaf and Dumb Society and the Association of Deaf and Dumb Citizens [sic], 25 May 1936. File No 0144, JWF Collection
53 "Deaf and Dumb: New Society formed," Sydney Morning Herald, 23 May 1929, 12
54 "Deaf and Dumb Association," Sydney Morning Herald, 19 June 1929, 10
similar name, but also signalled a clear departure from existing Deaf organisations in Australia. All of the existing Deaf Societies had been established on the British “Mission” model, which—even with extensive Deaf involvement—was predicated on the need for Deaf people to be supported and given succour by benevolent helpers. Identifying themselves as “citizens” was a rejection of this model. As citizens, Deaf people declared that they had the same rights as everyone else to a free, public education (not yet guaranteed for deaf children in NSW), jobs at the basic wage, and the standard kinds of government support if needed. They were also declaring that they were capable of fulfilling the obligations of citizens, such as assistance to others and participation in the life of the broader community. Later commentators often affirmed and praised the way the Association fulfilled the “obligations of citizenship”.  

The Rev. E. J. Davidson, Padre of Toc H and soon to be a Vice-President of the new Association, wrote soon afterwards:

The Deaf and Dumb of this city of Sydney have passed through a troublous time. Through the failure of that fine sensitiveness which is the characteristic mark of gentlemen, they have been subjected to treatment worthy only of naughty children...the writer has no hesitation in appealing to all friends of the deaf and dumb to support them in this courageous attempt to secure that measure of self-determination which is surely the prerogative of any and every citizen, whether he can hear or not!  

He said elsewhere in the article, “They do not need, nor do they want, our ‘Charity’”. Davidson signalled the key themes which were to be articulated by the new Association. Deaf people were not children, they were capable of self-determination and of managing their own affairs, they rejected “charity” and claimed equality with hearing people and the rights of citizens.

The Society digs in

If the Society was alarmed by these events, the minutes of Executive meetings gave little indication of it. Although the hearing Executive met more often (every

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55 For example, the NSW Attorney General, the Hon. H. E. Manning, K.C., M.L.C., spoke at the Association’s Third Annual General Meeting in 1932, declaring that the Association fulfilled the “obligations of citizenship”—self respect and social intercourse, and mutual assistance. See report in *The Deaf Advocate* 2, no. 8 (August 1932)
few days during the week of Hersee’s dismissal and every week for a while afterwards), the minutes reported the “formation of a new Society and Toc H’s connection therewith” and “various newspaper reports” without comment. They did, however, approve legal action to “apply for an injunction against the use of a name similar to our own”57 and sent letters and statements to the newspapers defending their position and playing down the upheaval. In a statement to the Sydney Morning Herald a week after the dismissal, Brooks said, “The work of the society is being carried on, and any dislocation that has temporarily arisen, will no doubt adjust itself in a very little time.”58

The Society complained to the Federal President and Padre of Toc H, asking for “action to be taken to remove interference with this Society’s work by the Sydney branch of Toc H”,59 and also had meetings with Padre Davidson and a Mr Warren from the Sydney branch.60 However, they were soon obliged to record that “Toc H . . . had decided to adhere to their previous attitude towards our Society.”61

It is revealing that the hearing members of the Society’s Executive, when searching for reasons for this upheaval, looked only to other hearing men for possible causes. They blamed Hersee for “insubordination” and Toc H for “interference”, but at no time did they seem to seriously consider that Deaf people’s own outrage and resolve may have had anything to do with events. They made no attempt to meet or communicate with the Deaf people who had left the Society, to find out the nature of their grievances. In all likelihood, they simply did not see Deaf people as intelligent and capable enough to make such decisions independently. Regardless of whether the Society had been “reared up by the deaf and dumb themselves after many years of hard work”,62 these hearing men now considered it theirs to control. They saw their role as contributing to the socially endorsed work of charity for those less fortunate than themselves, and if their work

57 ADDSNSW, Minutes of Executive Meeting, 14 May 1929
59 ADDSNSW, Minutes of Executive Meeting, 21 May 1929
60 ADDSNSW, Minutes of Executive Meeting, 18 June 1929
61 ADDSNSW, Minutes of Executive Meeting, 16 July 1929.
was not appreciated, then the fault was with the recipients. The closest they came to acknowledging that Deaf people had made things difficult for them was a dour note in the minutes of an Executive meeting a few months after the breakaway—“The present financial depression and the ingratitude of a section of the Deaf made the work of charity peculiarly difficult at the moment.”63 In a classic example of paternalism, the anger and determination of the Deaf people who broke away were regarded simply as “ingratitude”

If it was hearing men that the Society blamed, it was to another hearing man that they turned for advice and assistance. Ernest Abraham, with impeccable timing, visited Sydney the week after Hersee’s dismissal. This time he sided with the Board of the Society, not with the dissatisfied Deaf rebels, as he had in 1913. The Society rallied him to their defence, and he met with the Executive to discuss strategies for ensuring that the Society could retain its position and to suggest possible replacements for Hersee. He met a number of times with Deaf people (it is not mentioned how many attended these meetings), and according to the Executive, did “good work”. The Executive obviously recognised that Abraham had the charisma, eloquence and authority that they lacked, and hoped that he might counter the magnetic pull of Hersee and his followers. Or, as some Deaf writers later asked perceptively, “Was it ... thought the deaf would be intimidated by Mr. Abraham’s magic Victorian rod?”64

Abraham recommended the Reverend George Poynder (a former teacher of the deaf) as a replacement for Hersee, and helped to expedite his appointment.65 Other strategies that the Executive quickly adopted have Abraham’s stamp on them too. One was the placement of weekly notices in all the newspapers, “warning the Public against giving money to Collectors who are unable to produce proper authority from the only Registered Adult Deaf and Dumb Society in this State”.66 Another strategy was the employment of a Deaf man, Mr Samuel

63 ADDSNSW, Minutes of Executive Meeting, 24 Sept 1929.
65 ADDSNSW, Minutes of Executive Meeting, 21 May 1929.
66 Ibid.
Phillips, to “visit Deaf & Dumb with Mr Poynder”, 67 and later to “assist in the work generally”. 68 While this may at first appear to have been a practical move showing a greater respect for the capabilities of Deaf people, it is very similar to the strategies Abraham used in Victoria, surrounding himself with Deaf people such as J. M. Johnston who, although ostensibly holding responsible positions, were also used to protect Abraham from criticism, to help him keep his ear to the ground, and to carry out reprisals against troublesome Deaf people when necessary (see Chapters Three and Six) 69

Gordon Winn later described these men (with whom he had sat on the Board of the Deaf Society) in the pages of The Deaf Advocate:

How can our well intentioned Members of the hearing Boards of Control know anything of the minds or capabilities of the Deaf whose affairs they consider it their right and duty to direct. The majority of them can smile their deaf friends a gracious greeting on their rare occasions of meeting and hold up their thumbs and nod and smile as they would to a small grandchild and that is all they know of their mentality except for hearsay evidence from paid or unpaid superintendents whose interests it may be or whose mental tendency to regard the deaf as incapable. Truly the deaf need protection from their friends. 70

The new order

The Society’s Annual General Meeting was held on 23 August that year, and was a grim indication of the new state of affairs. F. S. Booth described it as follows:

The Annual Meeting of the Society was awaited with anxiety, in the hope that things would improve and reconciliation take place. About 200 deaf and dumb from the Association, accompanied by sympathising supporters, attended the Annual Meeting in August, 1929, and were surprised to find that the Executive of the Society already had the police patrolling the hall, even before the meeting commenced.

The meeting turned out to be an utter farce, as several speakers were rudely ordered by the President to sit down, with the assistance of the

67 ADDSNSW, Minutes of Executive Meeting, 18 June 1929
68 ADDSNSW, Minutes of Executive Meeting, 2 July 1929.
69 Phillips, like Johnston in Victoria, could speak and lipread as well as sign, which probably made him seem ideal for both keeping an eye on the Deaf and reporting to the hearing. (His speaking ability is mentioned in an interview with Alan Fairweather in Michael Clancy, ed., Heritage in our Hands. Stories of the Deaf Community of N S W. (Sydney: Adult Education Centre for Deaf and Hearing Impaired Persons Inc., 1988), 129
70 Gordon Winn, letter to the editor, The Deaf Advocate 2, no. 3 (March 1932).
police; even a Press reporter was asked by the Organising Secretary, Mrs. Gore Jones, not to report the speeches of any but Executive members. I myself was described to a reporter by an official of the Society as "mentally deficient." The President could not, however, prevent Mr. G. R. Winn from speaking, as he is a life member of the Society. Mr. Winn moved an amendment to the Report, and in his speech he was frequently applauded by the deaf for his remarks. The amendment of Mr. Winn was carried by a very large majority, but the Chairman refused to accept the voting result, saying the deaf were not financial members of the Society. This caused a scene of demonstration and protest, as the deaf and dumb always voted at their Annual Meetings for the last fifteen years, and as a demonstration they got up and left the hall. While they were doing this, and with only a very few people remaining, the President declared the Report carried, and the Council elected themselves for another year of office. 71

Newspaper reports the following day were less restrained. Under the headline, "Wild Meeting. Policemen Present", the News described "Rowdy scenes, which terminated in the wildest uproar", reporting that "police officers watched the proceedings from the rear, and were frequently compelled to caution rowdy members." 72

Gordon Winn's amendment was in response to an item in the Annual Report praising Hersee's successor, the Rev G Poynder, whose "knowledge of their need" had "endeared himself to the Deaf and Dumb". 73 Winn's amendment sought to replace the statement about Poynder with the words, "The departure of Mr. H. V. S. Hersee during the year is a great loss to the Association [sic], and it is hoped that he will be induced to resume his former position." 74 Mr E. Quinell seconded the amendment, "on behalf of over 200 adult deaf and dumb", and Winn made a lengthy speech in support of it. A member of the Society's Board, Mr Skye, made an even more lengthy defence of the Society's action in dismissing Hersee, but the majority of those present still voted for the amendment. When the President insisted that only the small number of financial members could vote (a clause in the constitution which had never been invoked before), "Disorder broke

71 F. S. Booth, "Why the Association of Deaf and Dumb Citizens was Formed," Onward! (Jan 1930): 9.
loose. The audience gesticulating wildly, and the din drowned all efforts of the Committee to restore peace. Intervention of the police, however, somewhat relieved the situation." A similar report was carried in the *Daily Telegraph Pictorial*, which quoted a hearing supporter of Winn's amendment calling out to the President, "You're fooling the deaf and dumb!" The man was "cautioned by a policeman." Their article concluded by quoting Padre Davidson of Tooe H, who called for a public enquiry, pointing out that the government was granting £2,500 a year to the Deaf Society, when they had only about 30 Deaf followers compared to the Association's 200.

While it is astonishing to read of a charitable organisation's Annual General Meeting being patrolled by the police, it needs to be remembered that this happened in 1929, during a time of widespread unrest. Arranging a police presence to deter possible protests was probably a more routine precaution at that time. Newspaper reporters were used to describing scenes of "uproar", "disorder" and police intervention, and may have reverted to stock phrases to describe these scenes. They were, however, unused to Deaf people being the source of such unrest, and their lack of experience with Deaf people's communication is reflected in their use of phrases such as "gesticulating wildly" to describe sign language being used. This would also indicate that the interpreter at the meeting might not have interpreted everything that Deaf people said. When reporters wrote that "a man jumped to his feet waving his hands in an effort to be understood" and in the next sentence quoted a hearing person's comments verbatim, they provide a useful reminder that most of what survives is the commentary of the hearing, and that the contributions of Deaf participants have often been reduced to descriptions of people "gesticulating wildly".

At the breakaway group's first Annual Meeting a year later, pointed reference was made to the contrast between the meeting of the new Association and the infamous

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74 Annual General Meeting of the Adult Deaf Society of New South Wales, Friday 23 August 1929. Transcript prepared by W. W. Lesslie, shorthand writer. 2 (File No. 0147, IWF Collection)
76 "Fooling the Deaf and Dumb! Lively Close to Annual Meeting," *Daily Telegraph Pictorial*, 24 Aug 1929, 3
77 Ibid
1929 Annual Meeting of the Deaf Society. The Reverend E. J. Davidson told the more than 400 people present:

I cannot help feeling what a different spirit exists at this Annual Meeting to that at which I was unable, and not allowed, to speak at last year. Many of you will remember that at the old Adult Deaf and Dumb Society’s Meeting several of us felt that there were matters concerned with the life and welfare of the Deaf and Dumb which needed the cool breezes of publicity. We were not given a hearing and we were not able to make ourselves heard. At this meeting with at least three times as many Deaf and Dumb present and a greater proportion of the hearing public, it is possible even now to hear a pin drop and to see and to realise the new spirit amongst the Deaf and Dumb of New South Wales...\(^{78}\)

No quarter

An opportunity for mediation in the dispute arose in September 1929, when the Premier of New South Wales, the Hon. T. R. Bavin, offered his assistance in resolving the impasse between the Society and the Association. Bavin happened to be a Vice-President of the Society’s Council (though he was not on the Executive) and he was also a member of the Council of Toc H. Bavin met with representatives of the Association in September and November that year, and they requested that he “convene a conference to accept a settlement”, in consideration of the additional demands on public subscribers and the use of Government money by the Society. However when Bavin met with Brooks, the President of the Deaf Society, in December, Brooks was said to have “denied categorically” the statements of the Association, and “emphatically declined” any mediation in the dispute.\(^{79}\)

On 24 April 1930, a public meeting of the Sydney Deaf community was convened by two Deaf people, Isabel Winn and Cecil Green (Green, like Alfred Taylor, was a returned soldier who had been deafened during the war). The meeting was not described or promoted as being for members of either the Association or the Society, but as a “publicly convened meeting of adult Deaf and Dumb”\(^{80}\). It was held at the Adyar Hall, and was attended by at least 130 Deaf people (although the

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\(^{78}\) Unnamed magazine (later *The Deaf Advocate*), December 1930, 4.

\(^{79}\) “Adult Deaf and Dumb Society Refuse all Mediation,” *Onward!* (Jan 1930): 2-3

\(^{80}\) “Resolutions Moved at a Publicly Convened Meeting of Adult Deaf and Dumb in the Adyar Hall, April 24\(^{th}\) 1930.” File No. 144, JWF Collection.
Society tried to bribe people away from it by offering free tickets to the circus). The Resolutions passed at the meeting were widely distributed to all Deaf-related organisations in NSW, government bodies and churches, and the press. They included a statement of no confidence in the Council of the Adult Deaf and Dumb Society and a call for their resignation, and a condemnation of “the action of the President of the Adult Deaf and Dumb Society in denying [the Deaf and Dumb] their privileged right to vote at the last Annual Meeting of the Society after the Deaf and Dumb had possessed this privilege for an unbroken period of 15 years.”

Other resolutions deplored the Deaf Society’s attacks on Toc H, and the “misrepresentations and deception to the Premier of this State and the General public by Mr. Brooks and his associates on the Council of the Adult Deaf and Dumb Society.” In an unusual and pointed rejection of the charity philosophy, they also expressed “entire disapproval that the publicly subscribed funds of the Deaf and Dumb should be used for the purpose of private social functions to which the majority of the Deaf and Dumb are refused admission.” This would seem to refer to the regular charity fund-raising events conducted by the Womens’ Committee of the Deaf Society, which were aimed exclusively at the wealthy, and were regularly reported on in the society pages of the newspapers. Deaf people were of course never present at such functions, except for the occasional pretty little deaf girl who might be brought in to present a bouquet to a dignitary. The President of the Society’s Womens’ Committee at this time was Lady Belinda Street, wife of the Chief Justice of New South Wales and mother-in-law of Jessie Street. Jessie Street was one of the most active and outspoken feminists of her time, who later became involved in the United Nations and the application of its Universal Declaration of Human Rights to Aboriginal people. “Red Jessie’s” mother-in-law remained supportive of the Society during the breakaway, and the Organising Secretary wrote to the Executive in March 1930 stating:

Lady Street and the ladies of the Womens’ Central Committee have asked me to convey … their great regret that Mr Hersee’s conduct should have subjected them to such annoyance and unpleasantness.

82 “Resolutions Moved at a Publicly Convened Meeting of Adult Deaf and Dumb in the Adyar Hall, April 24th 1930.” File No. 144, IWF Collection.
83 Marilyn Lake, Getting Equal, 14.
They expressed their absolute confidence in the action of the Executive in the dismissal of Mr Hersee and their sympathy with them in such a difficult position.\(^{84}\)

The Executive of the Society continued to dismiss all suggestions that Deaf people should have any significant control of the Society, or even that this was what Deaf people wanted. In a letter to the Minister for Education in July 1930, William Brooks repudiated further proposals for a conference with the Association, and defended the Society's stance on the relative powers of Deaf and hearing people:

> ...what is called the essential difference between the old Society and the new is on the question of complete self determination and control in what is described as their own affairs, by the Deaf. The policy of our Society from the commencement has been to allow the Deaf as much say and control in the internal and domestic affairs of the Society as is possible by Deaf Committees. It is however, a definite procedure [sic], and has been ever since its formation, that the policy and finances of the Society must necessarily be under the control of an Executive and a Council. On the Executive no Deaf members are considered to be practicable. On the Council there are five deaf members. This arrangement has always worked admirably until the advent of Mr. Hersee, and is still so working.

Brooks did not mention that the Council met only a few times a year, whereas the Executive met monthly (sometimes more frequently) and made almost all administrative and policy decisions for the Society. After claiming that the Society was run in the same way as other Deaf Societies around Australia, in the “best interests of the deaf”, by “men who are in a position to judge what is both desirable and expedient”, Brooks concluded:

> The Deaf did not at any time demand full powers for themselves. Since the break-away, well over one hundred Deaf have returned to the old Society and many who have been interviewed deny that they ever made any demand for what is called self determination.\(^{85}\)

Brooks’ unwillingness to accord significance to the claims of dissatisfied Deaf people was evident in his phrasing—“what is described as their own affairs” and “what is called self determination”. The assurances of those Deaf people who had returned to the Society were enough to confirm his belief in sticking with the practices he was familiar with.

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\(^{84}\) ADDNSW, Minutes of Executive Meeting, 4 March 1930

\(^{85}\) Letter from President of the ADDNSW to the Minister for Education, 30 July 1930 In File No 0144, IWF Collection.
The New South Wales Association for Deaf and Dumb Citizens

After one or two temporary billets (including a room in the Toc H headquarters) the Association leased premises in McIlrath’s Building on the corner of Pitt and Goulburn Streets from late 1930 onwards. Hersee was immediately employed as its Superintendent-Secretary. The Association provided the same services as the Society—welfare work (assistance with employment, domestic, legal and financial problems), interpreting, church services, and (later) limited accommodation facilities. It also provided a meeting place and a rich variety of social activities, so important in binding a community together. Deaf people comprised 51% or more of its Council, and Fletcher Booth soon became Chairman (the Chairman for the first year was Padre Davidson of Toc H). Most of the hearing people on the Council had Deaf relatives. Rather than a shadowy “Executive” or “Finance Committee” making the decisions, this Council had a Management Committee, composed entirely of Deaf members. Membership was free to all Deaf people—the declared policy was that, rather than a fee, “The Council simply look for the good will and support of the Deaf in their efforts on their behalf.”

The Association published two issues of a magazine called *Onward!* in August 1929 and January 1930, then from December 1930 until 1937 it regularly published a magazine called *The Deaf Advocate*.

The Association was occasionally challenged by the Society, but managed to avoid legal problems by a mixture of adroit word play and insouciance. For example, in April 1931 the Society’s solicitors wrote to Fletcher Booth, who was Chairman of the Association’s Council, objecting both to *The Deaf Advocate* (which they referred to as a “pamphlet”) and to a Circular distributed by the Association. The Society took exception to the *Advocate*’s claim to be “the Official Magazine of the New South Wales Deaf?”, and to the Circular’s statement “That this is the only Association of Deaf and Dumb in New South Wales”. The solicitors scolded, “As you must be perfectly aware this is absolutely incorrect...” and claimed that “the

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86 For example, in February 1933, nine of the fourteen Councillors were Deaf, and four of the five hearing Councillors had Deaf relatives. Editorial, *The Deaf Advocate* 3, no. 2 (Feb 1933).
87 Editorial, *The Deaf Advocate* 1, no. 3 (March 1931)
circular and magazine is [sic] doing considerable damage to the Adult Deaf & Dumb Society of New South Wales.” The letter concluded:

We are writing to you in order to give you the opportunity of withdrawing the circular letter that you are issuing, and correcting the error, and also of deleting the statement on the Magazine. Unless you accede to our request and notify us accordingly, we have received instructions to apply for an injunction against you, but we trust that this will not be necessary, and we shall be glad to hear from you at your earliest convenience.  

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Following instructions from his Council, Hersee sent a detailed reply to this letter. Although gallantly acceding to the Society’s requests, he took obvious pleasure in using sophistry and sarcasm to claim the moral high ground, with the result that he appeared to be humouring the Society in granting their requests, rather than backing down from a legal threat:

In regard to the circular, I wish to point out that the statement complained of viz., “that this is the only Association of Deaf and Dumb in New South Wales”, is not intended to imply that there are not other Associations interested in the welfare of the deaf and dumb, but merely that this is the only Association the membership of which is constituted by the deaf and dumb themselves.

I may further state, that while my Association consider [sic] that you have no ground for complaint, it does not contemplate sending out further copies of this circular neither does it intend to issue any further circulars containing the statement to which you take exception.

I am to point out that the circular complained of was not addressed to the general public, but only to the present members of this Association. It is therefore difficult to see how such circular could in any way cause your clients any injury.

In deference to your objection, we purpose describing our magazine in the future as “The Official Magazine of the N.S.W. Association of Deaf and Dumb Citizens.”

I may add that it is our desire not to encroach in any way upon your Society and to avoid anything that may lead to confusion and we trust that the Adult Deaf and Dumb Society of N.S.W. will reciprocate this attitude.

Without wishing to be critical, I am asked to draw your attention to the statement in the April Number of “The Silent Messenger” in which it is stated that “a team from the Society, representing New South Wales, will visit Melbourne at Christmas time”. Your clients are requested not to state, in future, that the team in question is one “representing N.S.W.” seeing that it is only a team from their Society.

88 Letter from Walter Dickson & Co. to Fletcher S. Booth, 30 April 1931, reprinted in The Deaf Advocate 1, no. 6 (June 1931)
I am to suggest finally that in the event of their being any further correspondence my Council hardly consider it necessary that such correspondence should come from a solicitor.\(^9\)

Despite these occasional skirmishes, the Society and the Association did not attempt to legally challenge each other, and indeed they seemed to have very little direct communication until changes in government legislation brought them into contact again a few years later (see Chapter Eight).

The *Advocate* editors made enquiries into other Deaf organisations around the world, to demonstrate that their Association was “in step’ with go ahead Deaf organisations” and that the Society was “out of step”. In June 1932 they reported on organisations such as the National Association of the Deaf and the National Fraternal Society of the Deaf (both in the USA), and the National Deaf Club in Britain, which they claimed were all “managed by the deaf themselves” or “managed by the deaf exclusively”. Organisations such as the ones they examined did indeed have similar ideals and used the same rhetoric. The National Fraternal Society of The Deaf had asserted as early as 1904 that its work could “give stronger evidence of the ability of the Deaf to manage their own affairs, prove their independence and settle once and for all time the ‘object of charity’ delusion”.\(^9\) The article in the *Advocate* concluded:

> I think I have stated enough for anyone to be convinced of the capabilities of the Adult Deaf in organising, controlling, or managing their own affairs. IT IS NO LONGER A POSSIBILITY; IT IS AN ACCOMPLISHED FACT.\(^9\)

On the Association’s fourth anniversary in May 1933, they declared their hope that they would “go on and on for ever”. The *Advocate* printed birthday greetings from the Prime Minister Joseph Lyons, the Premier of NSW, the Mayor of Sydney, the Principal of the Western Australian School for the Deaf Mr I. Love, the Superintendent of the South Australian Mission Mr O. Redman, Mr W. J. McCaskill, Superintendent of the Victorian Deaf and Dumb Institute, and many

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\(^9\) Letter from H V S. Hersee to Walter Dickson & Co., 11 May 1931, reprinted in *The Deaf Advocate*, 1, No. 6 (June 1931).

\(^9\) Francis Gibson, in *The Fial* 1, no. 2 (March 1904). Quoted in Susan Burch, *Signs of Resistance*, 107

\(^9\) “The Deaf ARE Managing their Own Affairs,” *The Deaf Advocate* 2, no. 6 (June 1932). Capitals in original
others. Their fourth Annual General Meeting was held the following month, attended by more than 250 people. Their old friend Padre (now Canon) Davidson from Toc H was a guest, and spoke about “this very, very happy Association”, and his wish that if there were a Committee of Deaf and Dumb in the afterlife, whether “up above” or “down below”, he would like to join it—though he was not confident that “all Deaf and Dumb will be gathered together in the one place”. The relevance of that comment to the Sydney Deaf community of the time was probably not lost on his audience.

**Sniping**

The battles between the Association and the Deaf Society were conducted on several fronts. While the Society probably won the fight for public money and a high profile in the society pages of the newspapers, there can be little doubt that the Association won the war of words. Their regular broadsides about the Society still make revealing and entertaining reading.

Alfred Lonsdale was a particular target of the Association’s writers. He was lampooned as “the Shadow” for his ubiquitous presence in the Society’s building—“Visitors are sure to have their passage obstructed by the shadow of Mr. A. L. Lonsdale; for the ‘Shadow’ is everywhere about the premises”, and for his intimate involvement in every aspect of the Society’s affairs—he was Deputy-Chairman of the Society’s Council and a member of the Executive; he also served as the Honorary Welfare Officer, and was Chairman of the Deaf General Committee, Chairman of the Church Committee, President of the Men’s Club, President of the Tennis Club and Vice-President of the Chess and Draughts Club. The *Advocate* editors seized the opportunity to explain “fascism” to its readers in

92 *The Deaf Advocate* 3, no 5 (May 1933)
93 “Fourth Annual Meeting of the New South Wales Association of Deaf and Dumb Citizens,” *The Deaf Advocate* 3, no 7 (July 1933)
94 “Noblesse Oblige,” *The Deaf Advocate* 2, no 4 (April 1932)
95 Lonsdale’s practice of controlling all levels of the Society, from Council to small Club (like Abraham in Melbourne – See Chapter 3) was similar to the way in which many British Missioners operated at the time. See Paddy Ladd, *Understanding Deaf Culture*, 333-334.
July 1932 by using the illustration of the hearing board of the Adult Deaf and Dumb Society.96

One of the Deaf representatives on the putative Council of the Deaf Society, Mr. J. Sinclair, seems to have vacillated between the two organisations. Sinclair’s re-election to the Council of the Society by Deaf members in 1932 was “not confirmed” by the Executive (possibly because he consorted with Association members), and the Executive neglected to inform him of the fact for several months.97 Sinclair’s experiences with the Deaf Society (together with Booth’s and Quennell’s) are the most likely source for a satirical description of a Council meeting of the Society from the point of view of a Deaf representative, called “Good Bye to all That”:

Attending your first “Council Meeting” you will be asked to approve of “Minutes” of which you know nothing! These, no doubt referring to a Meeting of the “Executive” at which you were not present, nor could you have been! or ever likely to be! The Chairman will note your bewildered look, and as if to make amends he will place the “Minute Book” in your hands for your own perusal = the other “hearing members” having it all off by heart they can get on with new business! Looking up from the book, you observe there is a general discussion on and knowing it is bad manners to read in company, you hasten to hand the book back — unread! The Minutes are then put and approved! Because, dear reader, for you to have objected in any way or form would have been considered impolite: nay, it might have spoilt the “harmony” of the Council Meeting, and as the Chairman remarked: - “Harmony must be retained at all costs!—and what a cost! But you are forgiven! many have been in the same position, to their sorrow!

You are a Councillor, certainly: but, “thus far and no further!” Your position is to approve ONLY! Not to execute. That is reserved for themselves alone!

Having finished the Council business you are politely requested to retire: (What for?) So that the “Executive” can propound new Minutes for you to approve of at the next meeting!98

When describing a New Year’s Dance at the Association’s hall at the end of 1933, the Advocate highlighted some politically inspired decorations referring to the headquarters of the Society at No. 5 Elizabeth Street:

96 “Fascism,” The Deaf Advocate 2, no. 7 (July 1932).
97 “Good Bye to all That,” The Deaf Advocate 2, no. 5 (May 1932)
A very sarcastic note was struck by a very large spider, which had spun a large web over a door, marked No. 5. Attached to the web was a notice to the effect that the web had been there for five years, and visitors were requested not to disturb it. We leave our readers to draw their own conclusions.\footnote{Ibid. Underlining and idiosyncratic punctuation in original.}

The Association also took delight in pointing out the many ways in which the Society’s magazine, the Silent Messenger, imitated their own publication The Deaf Advocate. In the August-September 1934 issue, the Advocate editor listed several column headings and editorial features which he claimed the Silent Messenger had copied from them, adding:

One glaring omission in the “Silent Messenger” in comparison with “The Deaf Advocate” is the lack of a Personality Column. We are very loath to think that this is because they have no personality worth recording.\footnote{“Fancy Dress Dance,” The Deaf Advocate 4, no. 1 (Jan-Feb 1934): 8.}

The view from below

What were the real levels of support for the two organisations? The Association had begun with 130 members on 10th May 1929,\footnote{Editorial, The Deaf Advocate 4, no. 4 (Aug-Sept 1934): 2-3} but there do not seem to be any comparable figures for the Society’s membership at the time of the breakaway. Indications are that, at least during the first couple of years, a significantly higher number of Deaf people were supporters of the Association. This is suggested by Doran’s description of the Society’s deserted church services after the breakaway,\footnote{“The Difference Between Sydney’s Two Deaf Organisations”, The Deaf Advocate 2, no. 4 (April 1932).} and Padre Davidson’s assertion in August 1929 that the Society had only about 30 followers compared to the Association’s 200.\footnote{Ella Doran, Hand in Hand with Time and Change, 45} Koschutze has claimed that there was a “boycott” of the Society—however this does not seem to be supported, or if there was one, it was short-lived and not universally observed. Doran recalled that although the majority of Deaf people went to the

\footnote{Jossey Koschutze, “The History of the Sydney Deaf Community’s Boycott of the Adult Deaf and Dumb Society from 1929 to 1937 and the Establishment of their own Rival Association of Deaf and Dumb Citizens (MA thesis, University of Sydney, 1995).}
Association at the beginning, some began to "drift back" to the Society soon afterwards, especially young girls who enjoyed her physical culture classes, and men who wanted to play billiards on the Society's three tables.\textsuperscript{105}

The Society's President, William Brooks, claimed in July 1930 that "well over a hundred" Deaf people had returned to the Society.\textsuperscript{106} In December that year, the Society provided a Christmas dinner, at which "over 200 deaf and Dumb assembled". This, they claimed, was "the largest number of deaf that ever sat down to a Christmas dinner in Sydney, and the tables have never before been provided with such quantity or quality of edibles."\textsuperscript{107} It should be remembered, however, that this was in the middle of the Depression, and political allegiance may not have been the over-riding reason for Deaf people's attendance. The Association claimed 257 members in April 1932,\textsuperscript{108} and 190 attendees at their Christmas dinner in December 1932,\textsuperscript{109} although it was probably not able to provide such lavish meals or entertainments as the Society.\textsuperscript{110}

As the Sydney Deaf community adjusted to their new circumstances, regular club nights and special events tended to be well patronised at both venues. To many Deaf people, that is all they were—two alternate venues. Not all Deaf people understood, or were interested in, the political philosophies behind the two organisations, especially younger Deaf people who had just left school or moved to Sydney from elsewhere. These Deaf people did not have long memories of the Deaf community's efforts to create the Society, and were primarily in search of friendship and entertainment. A series of interviews conducted with older members of the Sydney Deaf community in the 1980s captured some of the memories of people who would have been just entering the Deaf community in the late 1920s and early 30s. None of the interviewees volunteered information about the political background to the two organisations, but several remembered the

\textsuperscript{105} Ella Doran, \textit{Hand in Hand with Time and Change}, 45.
\textsuperscript{106} Letter from President of the Adult Deaf and Dumb Society of NSW to the Minister for Education, 30 July 1930. File No 0144, JWF Collection
\textsuperscript{107} \textit{The Silent Messenger} (Jan 1931)
\textsuperscript{108} "The Difference Between Sydney's Two Deaf Organisations," \textit{The Deaf Advocate} 2, no. 4 (April 1932)
\textsuperscript{109} "Christmas Dinner", \textit{The Deaf Advocate} 3, No. 1 (Jan 1933)
conflicts between them and the disapproval directed at people who attended both
One man remembered:

I went to the Society. There was another place called the Deaf
Association. There were two Clubs. I went to one to have a look where
my friends went. Then I would go to the other one. People called me
"two-faced". They would whisper, "Bob Herman, there's Bob Herman.
He goes to the other Club too." I never worried about that. I only
wanted to see my friends, my mates so I would go to both of them.\footnote{111}

Another man confirmed:

There were two clubs. One called the Association for the Deaf and the
NSW Society for the Deaf. Two different Clubs and I used to go to
both of them... They were in opposition. It would cause trouble if you
went to one then next time go to the other one.\footnote{112}

In reality, Deaf people probably chose their allegiance for a range of reasons—not
only which organisation they supported ideologically, but also which one their
friends or spouses attended, which one had better social functions, which one
provided the best opportunities for sporting participation (a consideration well
exploited by the Society), and—as the Depression took hold—which one could
provide the most practical support or threatened the more dire consequences for
lack of allegiance. Religious considerations also seemed to be significant, with
indications that Catholic groups favoured the Association,\footnote{113} in contrast with the
wealthy Protestant ethos of the Society.

Modern researchers, in search of evidence to support claims that Deaf people have
always been a proud, united and independent community, need to be careful of
according too much political weight to the support given to the Association.
Especially from a social history perspective, it should be kept in mind that the
rhetoric of the leaders, while it may resonate splendidly decades later, was not
necessarily of interest or relevance to all of the rank and file at the time.

\footnote{110} See Appendix A for a discussion of the likely population of Deaf people in Sydney at the time
\footnote{111} Bob Herman, interview in Michael Clancy, ed., \textit{Heritage in our Hands: Stories of the Deaf
Community of NSW} (Sydney: Adult Education Centre for Deaf and Hearing Impaired Persons
Inc, 1988), 117.
\footnote{112} Bill Quinn, interview in Michael Clancy, ed., \textit{Heritage in Our Hands}, 119
\footnote{113} For example, the NSW branch of the Australian Catholic Deaf Mutes' Association
The role of *The Deaf Advocate*

*The Deaf Advocate* is unique in the history of Deaf newsletters and papers in Australia. No other publication has adopted such an uncompromising ideology of Deaf autonomy and capability, whilst so unequivocally and fearlessly opposing the dominant institutions within the Deaf world. While it never avoided the responsibility of providing local news and information for the New South Wales Deaf community, it actively welcomed contributions from other states. It is not an exaggeration to say that *The Deaf Advocate* was a significant factor in the existence and survival of not only the NSW Association of Deaf and Dumb Citizens, but also later organisations such as the Queensland Deaf and Dumb Citizens Reformed Association and the Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf and some of its state branches. The *Advocate* provided a sympathetic channel for these organisations, especially during their shaky beginnings, to reach the Australian Deaf community and make their aims explicit. Since none of these organisations ever developed their own magazines, *The Deaf Advocate* became a de facto mouthpiece for them at times. Disaffected individuals who had no forum within their own states were able to publish their letters and articles freely in *The Deaf Advocate*—there were many contributions from Bourke and others from Victoria, and from John Paul and other individuals from Queensland. Because of this, the *Advocate* often appears to be a national magazine rather than a local one. From the perspective of the researcher many decades later, it is a goldmine of primary sources, the “view from below” par excellence. Many personalities, events and organisations that have all but vanished from the official record retain a ghostly voice in the pages of the *Advocate*.

The magazine began in December 1930 as a 12 page duplicated paper. Its Honorary Joint Editors, P. S. Booth and E. Quinell (both of whom were Deaf) emphasised in this first issue that the magazine was to be “the official publication for all the Deaf and Dumb, published entirely by the Deaf and Dumb.” The first issue had no title, and the Editors called for members and friends to propose a name. The following month it appeared for the first time as *The Deaf Advocate*, with the sub-title “Integrity, Unity, Liberty”. The cover declared that it was “The

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114 Editorial, unnamed magazine (later *The Deaf Advocate*), Dec 1931, 1.
Official Magazine of the New South Wales Deaf, Published under the Auspices of the Association of Deaf and Dumb Citizens.” This was an obvious challenge to the Deaf Society and its newsletter The Silent Messenger.

Koschutzke has pointed out that the Advocate responded to Deaf people’s need for “openness of information” by printing complete and unabridged texts of important letters or speeches, and therefore allowing Deaf readers to judge for themselves the authors’ motives and the appropriateness of the responses. This was recognised as a key strategy in Deaf people’s greater management role, as articulated in one of the early Advocates: “The Association has always stressed the point that the Deaf and Dumb should have complete knowledge of what goes on in the management of their own affairs.” For example, in June 1931 the Advocate printed the complete texts of the letter from the Society’s solicitors threatening an injunction against the Association, and the Association’s reply, introducing them with, “We publish same without comment and leave our readers to form their own opinion.”

There were many other examples of the Advocate’s policy of “openness of information”. After the 1931-32 Cricket Carnival in Melbourne, from which the NSW Association’s cricket team had been barred, the Advocate devoted seven pages to re-printing the entire correspondence between themselves and the Carnival organisers (principally J. M. Johnston) relating to their unsuccessful attempts to be represented in the Carnival. The story is lively and absorbing, laced with jaunty and sarcastic commentary, pointing out “to what despicable ends some people will stoop even in the grand old game of cricket”.

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115 The Deaf Advocate 1, no 1 (Jan 1931).
117 “The Adult Deaf and Dumb Society,” The Deaf Advocate 1, no. 6 (June 1931)
118 Ibid.
119 “The Melbourne Cricket Carnival. Why the Association was Not Represented. How Some Cricketers ‘Play the Game’,” The Deaf Advocate 2, no. 2 (Feb 1932).
At a time when Deaf people were given so little information by those who ran the Societies, this policy of "openness" was appreciated. An unnamed "Deaf Subscriber in Victoria" wrote in response to the Cricket Carnival article:

The correspondence on the Xmas Carnival was an eye opener to many of us. It's a pity the light of day is not shed on many other subjects as well. There would be less suspicion and a better understanding all round then... With grateful thanks from the many Victorians who have gained so much strength and courage from the pages of the Advocate.120

Gordon Winn succinctly described the Advocate's role and its ideological stance in several letters he wrote to the editors. In early 1932 he declared, "Your paper is making articulate deaf aims and ambitions and the deaf spirit of independence."121 Later that year he wrote again:

[The Deaf Advocate] doesn't merely record the harmless jottings in regard to Mrs. So & So's baby having cut a tooth, but it expresses the aims and ambitions of the deaf world, and it expresses them in a way that demonstrates the character and intelligence that are behind them, in the minds and hearts of the deaf community. The deaf have become a thinking and articulate unit, capable of self-expression and this is a big attainment.122

The first issue of The Deaf Advocate in December 1930 had a circulation of 300. It remained a monthly newsletter until the beginning of 1934, when it became a bimonthly, professionally printed 24-page magazine. By the middle of 1934 it claimed a circulation of 4000,123 which has probably never been achieved by any other Deaf-related publication in Australia.

This chapter has described how the opposing ways of conceptualising Deaf people and their institutions took shape in New South Wales. People such as J. M. Johnston in Victoria and the supporters of the Deaf Society in NSW remained supportive of the established Societies and the hearing people who ran them. Others, like J. P. Bourke, F. S. Booth, H. V. S. Hersee and the members of the Association in Sydney, rejected the Societies' perceived charity and paternalism and sought a way for Deaf people to "manage their own affairs". By mid-1929, the

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120 Letter to the editor, The Deaf Advocate 2, no. 3 (March 1932).
121 Gordon Winn, letter to the editor, The Deaf Advocate 2, no. 3 (March 1932).
122 Gordon Winn, Christmas message, The Deaf Advocate 2, no. 12 (Dec 1932).
latter group was becoming a distinctive movement, not merely a few radical individuals.

The breakaway and the establishment of the Association in Sydney impacted significantly on Deaf communities and Deaf Societies of other states. Their relationships to the Sydney community suddenly became more complicated, and a new kind of diplomacy was required when engaging in routine Society business, organising sporting competitions, and other matters. The seeming success of the breakaway group provided inspiration or inflammation (depending on one’s perspective) to restless and disaffected groups and individuals in other states. A new model for dealing with repression had suddenly arisen, and it was to prove effective in at least one other state, as will be seen in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: An Open and Official Break-Away

My deaf friends, it is of no use that you say you have proofs, evidence, first hand information, direct complaints. That according to the moral standards ruling among men of repute you are right. You are only the deaf and dumb, what is praiseworthy among hearing people as a desire for justice, honourable conduct, the upholding of moral standards, the maintenance of common rights IS IN YOU, A SUSPICIOUS NATURE.¹

John Paul, 1932.

Events in NSW exacerbated feelings of discontent and frustration in other Deaf communities, especially those in Queensland and Victoria. This chapter will examine the way in which the mood of unrest expressed itself in Queensland, leading to the formation of another breakaway group. These events provide further affirmation of the belief emerging among many in the Deaf communities of the 1920s and '30s that Deaf people should “manage their own affairs”. In Queensland, the voice of revolt is more difficult to recover, because fewer records survive. Neither the Mission nor the breakaway group seems to have had a magazine or newsletter at this time. It was, ironically, in the pages of the NSW Association’s magazine The Deaf Advocate that Queenslanders left some of the most direct and detailed accounts of their breakaway. These sources are supplemented with newspaper articles and a collection of papers which John Paul, Superintendent of the Mission and later of the breakaway group, left on his retirement.²

John Paul

John M’Caig Paul’s arrival in Brisbane in 1927, like Hersee’s in Sydney a year later, was an important catalyst for the upheaval that was to follow, so it is important to understand something of his background. His Deaf father, James Paul, had established a mission for Deaf people in Ayrshire, Scotland, in 1881, and worked there as Missioner for many years.³ James Paul was also elected the

¹ J. M. Paul, “A Letter from Queensland,” The Deaf Advocate 2, no. 2 (Feb. 1932); capitals in original
² John W Flynn Collection, State Library of Victoria, MS 00/38
³ “Ayrshire Mission to the Deaf and Dumb,” British Deaf-Mute V, no. 50 (Dec. 1895): 42
first Treasurer of the British Deaf and Dumb Association on its establishment in 1890. His hearing son John spent most of his life working with Deaf people. He came to Australia before the first World War, and spent the years 1914 to 1918 working as a Missioner at the Adult Deaf and Dumb Society of Victoria, where he worked under Ernest Abraham. There are few indications of what their working relationship was like, although one commentator, Ern Reynolds, referred to a “bust-up” between them at the end of Paul’s tenure there. Reynolds also recalled that Paul and Abraham “didn’t see things eye to eye on many occasions”, as Paul was “rather forthright in his expressions and belief” and Abraham did not take kindly to anyone who disagreed with him. Paul returned to Scotland in 1918 when his father became ill and was later reported taking up the position of Missioner and Superintendent at the Aberdeen Deaf Mission in 1921, where he was said to have rendered “excellent services”.

Much of John Paul’s character is preserved in a collection of his papers which he gave to John W. Flynn, who knew and corresponded with Paul during the 1950s and 60s. Flynn has described Paul’s wide-ranging contacts with Deaf organisations in several countries, his long-standing interest in studying and recording sign language and preserving its integrity, and the idealism that found expression in his writings for overseas journals as well as Australian publications. Paul wrote for American Deaf papers, sometimes using the pen-names “Lone Coot” or “Ian O’Marnoc”, and these writings are often more revealing of his character than the pieces he wrote for Australian magazines, where he confined himself to commenting on national and state events, often with

4 Ibid., 43.
5 J W Flynn, *No Longer by Gaslight*, 43
6 E A. Reynolds, interview by Michael Unicace, 2 June 1982
10 Held in the John W Flynn Collection, State Library of Victoria, MS 00/38
11 Paul’s interest in the preservation of sign languages may have been influenced by the work of the National Association of the Deaf in the USA during the early decades of the 20th Century, when they made several films to preserve their language. See for example, George W. Veditz, “The Preservation of the Sign Language,” (1913) trans C. A. Padden & E. Maltzuhn, in Deaf World. *A Historical Reader and Primary Sourcebook*, ed L. Bragg, (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 83-85.
some acerbity. One article written in 1920 for the *Deaf Mutes Journal* in New York indicated how strongly Paul was influenced by his father and other Scottish Deaf pioneers, and described how Gallaudet College in the USA was an international beacon inspiring him and his forebears.\(^{13}\)

Paul’s approach to working with Deaf people is best summed up in a short greeting he sent to an Australian organisation in 1933:

> Every effort which has brought real benefits to the Deaf has been one which enlarged their freedom, increased their opportunities, called for their co-operation and raised their status. The same principles apply to the “hearing” world, so in a sentence it is “To treat the deaf as you treat the hearing.”\(^{14}\)

This approach was not destined to be a comfortable fit with the paternalistic charity culture of Australian Deaf Societies in the late 1920s.

John Paul was recruited by the Queensland Adult Deaf and Dumb Mission in 1926. After searching for some time for a replacement for Samuel Showell, they asked a Minister of the City Tabernacle, the Rev. W. G. Pope, to take advantage of his forthcoming trip to England to find them a new Superintendent. Pope secured the appointment of Paul, who arrived in Brisbane with his wife and young son to take up his new position in March 1927.\(^{15}\)

Paul had stayed in contact with the Victorian Deaf community after his return to Scotland. The newsletter of the Victorian Society, *Our Monthly Letter*, carried occasional reports of him, such as a notice about the birth of his son in September 1925,\(^{16}\) and quoted from a letter written by him on the retirement of Mrs. Abraham in 1926.\(^{17}\) He visited the Adult Deaf and Dumb Society of Victoria when his ship docked in Melbourne en route to Brisbane. He was greeted with a Social presided over by Mr. Abraham, who “welcomed Mr. Paul back to Australia.


\(^{14}\) J. M. Paul, "Birthday Greetings," *The Deaf Advocate* 3, no. 5 (May 1933)

\(^{15}\) QADDM, Report for the Year Ending February 28, 1927.


\(^{17}\) "Our Little World," *Our Monthly Letter* 22, no. 3 (March 1926): 5.
wishing him success in his new sphere.18 The sort of success that Paul was to achieve was not quite what Abraham had in mind.

Early tensions

John Paul’s experience working for the Queensland Mission was soon to become similar to Hersee’s experience with the NSW Society. Initially welcomed and praised for his work,19 Paul’s quick rapport with the Deaf community and his disapproval of some of the Mission’s policies soon began to strain relations with the Management Committee. The Queensland Mission’s Committee was unusual in at least two ways: firstly, it included women as full members of the Management Committee and had no separate “Ladies Committee” for charity fund-raising until 1932; and, secondly, it always seemed to include an unusually high number of teachers of the deaf. While teachers may have brought wide knowledge and experience to their position on the Committee, it seems that some also brought an unfortunate tendency to persist in seeing Deaf people as children. The Annual Reports of the Mission sometimes referred to the Deaf members as “girls”, “boys” and “lads”;

20 and the Queensland Mission had a greater focus than other Deaf Societies on providing “classes” in skills such as cookery, dressmaking and cabinet-making.21 They considered that such intervention was particularly important for the deaf, referring to “lads who were only too apt to drift into idle and vicious ways, from the very nature of their infirmity”.22 Like teachers everywhere, they were mindful of the approval of parents—“the parents are deeply grateful for all the Mission has done and is still doing for their sons and daughters.”23 A man like John Paul, reared by a generation of Scottish Deaf people who struggled to be independent, and who believed in “treat[ing] the deaf as you treat the hearing”,24 was not likely to be at ease with these attitudes.

18 “Queenslands New Missioner,” Our Monthly News 23, no. 3, 4 & 5 (March, April, May 1927): 5
19 For example, QADDM, Report for the Year Ending 28 Feb, 1928.
20 For example, QADDM, Report for the Year Ending 28 Feb, 1925; Report for the Year Ending 28 Feb, 1933, 17-18
21 Ibid
22 QADDM, Report for the Year Ending 28 Feb, 1925
Paul survived in his position for four years, compared to Hersee’s one year, but the four years were marked by conflict and tension. That he lasted as long as he did may be attributed to the Management Committee’s lack of unity and consistency during the late 1920s, which made it difficult to supervise and control their sometimes recalcitrant Superintendent. Paul also seems to have had a less mercurial temperament than Hersee, although he could be obdurate and scathingly outspoken when he chose his course.

Trouble brews

Paul and many others, both Deaf and hearing, became increasingly dissatisfied with the management of the Mission. They complained that public money was not being spent wisely, and there was particular dissatisfaction with an Industrial Training Scheme that was being run for the Mission at the Brisbane Polytechnic and the diversion of funds to the young Deaf men in this scheme at the expense of others. A Depot established to sell the furniture produced through the Industrial Training Scheme was also criticised as a waste of funds, particularly as it employed some of the young Deaf men who had been through the Training Scheme. These men should, it was considered, have been able to find work in the general community, given the resources the Mission had expended on their training. Paul’s objections to this system, and to the general attitude of the Mission, are set out in a Memorandum sent to the Management Committee, dated 27 February 1928:

The Deaf and Dumb are not mentally below par, and the Mission having given them a vocation, a start in life, they, like hearing persons must fight for themselves. Up until quite recently the attitude of the Mission has been to regard the Adult Deaf and Dumb as just an ordinary citizen, more heavily handicapped in the race for a living than the hearing competitor; it is certainly our business to “level up” that handicap, but not to “molly coddle” the Mute, or rob the mute of his independence and manhood, and there is ample evidence that this attitude is in general agreement with leaders of the Deaf in other parts of the world. There are certain pressing

24 J. M. Paul, “Birthday Greetings,” The Deaf Advocate 3, no. 5 (May 1933)
25 For example, C. C. Garner, “Queensland Deaf and Vocational Training,” The Deaf Advocate 2, no. 6 (June 1932)
26 Although Paul’s name is not on the Memorandum, the Secretary of the Management Committee noted that it was from “a servant of the Mission”, and Paul’s style and philosophy are evident in it.
improvements needed in our Women’s Department. It is not fair to
tie up so large a portion of our resources in helping boys to learn a
trade, and thereafter continue them in work.\textsuperscript{27}

M. O. Wilson continued working at the Mission as Paul’s Assistant Missioner,
and they appear to have worked well together and shared a similar philosophy. A
suggestion that Paul was influencing Wilson and changing some of her ideas was
raised rather ominously by W. R. Kingwell, a Committee member who was from
the Brisbane Polytechnic, in a meeting in June 1928:

\begin{quote}
Arising out of Miss Wilson’s report... Mr. Kingwell said that the
report did not show the real Miss Wilson but someone behind her. It
was a sinister influence which was at work.... The same sinister
influence he had seen in matters concerning himself and the same
was behind the meetings of the Deaf. Miss Wilson gave an emphatic
denial that any sinister influence actuated her or that anyone had
influenced her.\textsuperscript{28}
\end{quote}

It appeared that the Committee was beginning to regret its appointment of Paul. It
was decided that he not be allowed to attend the Cricket Carnival and Conference
of Superintendents in Hobart that Christmas, because he was “under a cloud”.\textsuperscript{29}
Divisions within the Committee were hinted at in the minutes, and some of the
longer-serving members, who had worked for years with Wilson and other Deaf
people, began to resign. E. J. T. Barton resigned in May 1928, and the President
the Hon. D. F. Denham and I. Dickson resigned in April 1929. A sharp and
peremptory tone became more evident in the minutes of meetings. Wilson, now
that she was tainted with Paul’s “sinister” influence, was treated dismissively—in
response to a letter she sent the Committee in January 1929, it was agreed that she
be written to, “instructing her that the Committee wish her to confine her attention
to her duties as set out”.\textsuperscript{30}

A former member of the Committee, Mr R. F. Tunley, was becoming an active
opponent of the Mission, allying himself with the more dissatisfied Deaf people in

\textsuperscript{27} Queensland State Archives: Home Secretary’s Office; Correspondence re blind deaf and dumb,
general, 1900-1937; Extracts from Minute Book on Training Scheme Verified by & Initialled by
Supt. Paul 23-2-31; RS12383-1-21. [These documents were prepared for the Bradbury Inquiry, see
following] Stress in original.
\textsuperscript{28} QADDM, Minutes of Committee meeting held 21 June 1928.
\textsuperscript{29} QADDM, Minutes of Committee meeting held 13 Dec 1928
\textsuperscript{30} QADDM, Minutes of Committee meeting held 21 Feb 1929
the community. The Mission Committee evidently considered that Tunley was one of the people “inflaming” the Deaf, and were distrustful of his acceptance by them, but Deaf people responded by saying that Tunley “had a right to speak as an old friend of the deaf but not as their representative” 31 Tunley spoke out at the Mission’s 1930 Annual General Meeting, declaring to the public that “the Report they had read was not a true account of the affairs. He was sure they did not know what was going on.” 32 Soon after this the Committee was obliged to seek legal advice to deal with an allegation by Tunley that “the sum of £500 had been appropriated by a member or members of the Committee”. 33 No information survives about the outcome of this allegation.

The breakaway and formation of the Association in Sydney were having an influence in Queensland. This can be seen in an interesting resolution taken by the Queensland Deaf sports teams in early 1930, as reported by Paul:

An inter state Deaf Athletic Carnival is to be held in Melbourne at Christmas. Our deaf have turned down an invitation to attend because doing so would be to participate in a boycott of one of the Deaf Societies [the NSW Association, whose cricket team was barred] which has the loyalty of many of their deaf friends.
I am entirely in agreement with the action of the deaf. 34

As will be seen below, when The Deaf Advocate began publication in 1930 Queenslanders quickly began using it as a forum for their complaints about the Queensland Mission.

A new Constitution

A major source of anger against the Mission was a new Constitution which was prepared during 1930 and passed in 1931. The President of the Mission, Mr. C. A. Midson, later acknowledged that the decision to revise the Constitution was taken in part to give the Mission more protection against “attacks” from disaffected

31 QADDM, Report of Sub-Committee appointed to meet the Deaf-Mutes, attached to Minutes of Committee Meeting held 5 June 1930. There is some ambiguity about Tunley’s status, with some records indicating that he was Deaf himself, but this does not seem to be the case (personal communication, Joe Conley, 14 May 2003). It is possible that he may have been hard-of-hearing
32 “Deaf and Dumb Cost of Training Deficit of £262,” The Daily Mail, 29 April 1930, 12.
33 QADDM, Minutes of Committee meeting held 5 June 1930.
34 QADDM, Superintendent’s Report for May, presented at Committee meeting held 5 June 1930.
members. The original Constitution had been very simple and only a page long, but the new one was extremely detailed. Whereas previously those who had paid a subscription were automatically members, Clause 8 in the new Constitution declared that “The Council [usually referred to as the Committee] may elect any person who shall have subscribed”. Not only did the Council now have the right to decide who could become members, they also had new powers to “prohibit from entering the Mission premises any person or persons who in the opinion of a majority of the said Council are a menace to the peace and happiness of the deaf and dumb and to the realisation of the objects of the Mission.” In case there should be any ambiguity about whose peace and happiness was at stake, the Constitution also offered a “Definition of Adult Deaf and Dumb” (marred by an unfortunate typesetter’s error) which declared, “The term ... shall mean persons over sixteen years of age who are: (a) Congenitally Dead [sic] (Deaf from Birth); (2) Such other cases of deafness as shall from time to time be determined.”

Meetings could no longer be held on the Mission premises without written permission from the honorary secretary of the Council. An explicit “Loyalty” clause was inserted, declaring that “The policy outlined by the Mission Council in office shall be loyally supported by all officers and servants of the Mission.” The issue of “loyalty” was raised many times by Missions and Deaf Societies during these troubled years, and the Queensland Mission had already found cause to rebuke both Paul and Wilson for questioning decisions and policies of the Committee. The Constitution also provided indirectly for the withholding of information from Deaf people in a section of Clause 14 ironically called “Information for the Deaf.” This declared, “For the benefit of the deaf and dumb the Honorary Secretary shall prepare from the minutes of each Council meeting

35 Queensland State Archives: Home Secretary’s Office; Statement by President of Q. A. D & D. Mission (Incorp) at the Inquiry held by Mr Bradbury, Home Department 8-5-31; RS12383-1-21, 35.
36 QADDM, Report for the Year Ending 28 Feb 1931, 9
37 Ibid., 11.
38 Ibid., 9.
39 Ibid., 11.
40 Ibid., 11.
41 Queensland State Archives: Home Secretary’s Office; Statement by President of Q. A. D & D. Mission (Incorp) at the Inquiry held by Mr Bradbury, Home Department 8-5-31; RS12383-1-21, 24-25, 31.
those portions of the minutes which in his opinion are likely to be of interest to
the deaf and dumb community."  

This Constitution did not have an easy passage. In a rather surreal development, it
"went missing" in November 1930, and the CIB was called in to investigate. After
a fruitless search by these officers of the law, Paul eventually produced a draft
copy, which had been in his office all along. His explanation was that he had re-
written the Constitution in "proper order" from this draft, and given the revised
version to a Deaf man to deliver to the Mission’s solicitors, but it never arrived.
The Mission Committee was "gravely concerned" at Paul's action in not
immediately revealing to the CIB that he had this draft copy. Paul had nothing to
say. When the Constitution was finally ready, the Mission allegedly "stuffed the
rolls" in order to pass it. Paul later wrote, "...those having financial interests can
flood a voting roll through an irregular channel, taking in even a message boy...
and endeavouring to insist on his voting on an elaborate constitution." It was
passed at a Special Meeting on 8th May 1931 by a motley collection of people,
some of whom were described sarcastically as, "Message boys, their 'Bottle O',
their typists, their staff and relatives, deck hands on their ferry, and their
sweethearts (not exceeding 3 each) the Char-lady and her father in law, business
associates and wives, their tradesman, the rat gang."  

Paul’s contract with the Mission was due to expire or be renewed at the end of
January 1931. Unsurprisingly, the Committee decided that it would not be
renewed. They requested their solicitors to prepare a letter for Paul giving him
three months notice of the termination of his employment, and at the same time to
prepare another letter with which to re-engage him on a "month to month basis." So,
although he continued to work for the Mission, Paul knew from the beginning
of 1931 that his position was precarious. There is no evidence that this made him

42 QADDM, Report for the Year Ending 28 Feb 1931, 14.
43 QADDM. Minutes of Committee meeting held 4 Dec 1930.
44 J. M. Paul, "A call 'to think'," The Deaf Advocate 2, no. 5 (May 1932).
45 Will Downen, letter to the editor, The Deaf Advocate, (Sept-Oct 1931). [This is likely to have
been Paul writing under a pseudonym.] No volume or issue number – special issue on Queensland.
46 QADDM, Minutes of Committee meeting held 22 Jan 1931.
any more submissive, even though it was the middle of the Depression—indeed, the contrary seemed to be true.

This was evident in his comments at a "surprise celebration" given to him and his wife on the occasion of the fourth anniversary of their arrival in Brisbane in March that year. At this event, he praised his Deaf friends and thanked them for their kindness and support, "under the almost unbearable oppression thrust upon us without just cause or reason." Among the supporters who gathered to show their appreciation were two of the erstwhile Committee members, E. J. I. Barton and Isaac Dickson, both of whom voiced their support for Paul and their condemnation of the misguided new Committee. Dickson was particularly explicit:

[He] made a scathing exposure of the element in the Committee which had made Mr. Paul's life unbearable, called upon the Deaf to maintain the fine spirit they were showing in rallying round Mr. Paul and protect their freedom before they found they would have to go down on their knees and beg for even the right to meet in their own Institute: Mr. Paul had never had a chance and the deaf should show the subscribers they could organise to protect their liberties and keep the man they want.

A long account of the celebration, quoting Paul and Dickson at length, was published in *The Deaf Advocate* the following month, indicating that Paul was making no particular effort to hide his feelings about the Committee or to protect his position. The vigilant Kingwell tabled this article at the next Committee meeting, but at that time they could not take any action against Paul because of a new development—an official inquiry into the Mission.

**An inquiry into the Mission**

In early 1931, some hearing subscribers (allegedly at Paul's and Tunley's instigation) successfully requested a Government Inquiry into the affairs of the Mission. This request was discussed at a special meeting held on 10 February, which some Deaf members asked to attend. The meeting was moved to another

48 Ibid
49 QADDM, Minutes of Committee meeting held 21 May 1931
location at the last minute, because of "reliable information" that Deaf people planned to storm the meeting, release the main electrical switch to plunge the building into darkness, and then attack Mr. Holle (the Hon. Secretary).\footnote{51} The police were notified of this "information", and (it seems) asked to patrol the next meeting of the Committee.\footnote{52} The climate of heightened distrust and suspicion was savagely satirised in a letter to the Editor of The Deaf Advocate, by "Benedict Arnold II".\footnote{53} It is most probable that it was actually written by John Paul or R. F. Tunley:

The Brisbane Deaf sent notice that a deputation of two would wait on the Committee to ask for information. After a display of officious shuffling, the Committee secretly changed the place of meeting so that it was not held at the Mission. The Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent and Deaf representatives were \textsc{NOT INFORMED}, but the office girl knew all about it.

At the next meeting of Committee the deputation of two found the Institute patrolled by police in pairs and under surveillance \textsc{sic} of plain clothes officers. Why should our noble and intimate friends the Committee be subjected \textsc{to} such awful risks. We demand that the Military be mobilised in future. For a deputation of three, bombers should fly round the Institute; for a deputation of four, the Fleet should come up the river and anchor just off the lawn. But the decks must be cleared for action and every man at his battle station. A deputation of more than four shall not be allowed as it would be a menace to life, property, currency, codlin moth, the sugar bounty, starting price betting, the climate, Cockatoo \textsc{sic} Island, conceit, evasiveness, lying.\footnote{54}

The Inquiry into the administration of the Queensland Adult Deaf and Dumb Mission was conducted by Mr W. Bradbury of the Home Secretary's Department. He consulted extensively with the Management Committee of the Mission and the staff of the Polytechnic, somewhat less with staff and very little with Deaf people themselves. Paul initially refused to give evidence unless he was allowed "the right to make a statement", but the Committee ordered him to appear, telling him that "they looked upon his action as a crass order of insubordination".\footnote{55} The Deaf people who were paraded to give evidence (including Alf Eaton) were those who

\footnote{51} Queensland State Archives: Home Secretary's Office; Statement by President of Q. A. D & D. Mission (Incorp) at the Inquiry held by Mr Bradbury, Home Department 8-5-31; RS12383-1-21, 38 \footnote{52} QADMM, Minutes of Special Meeting held 10 Feb 1931. \footnote{53} Benedict Arnold was a traitor during the American War of Independence \footnote{54} Letter to the Editor, The Deaf Advocate 1, no 3, March 1931
were receiving relief payments from the Mission. When they too tried to refuse, they were ordered to comply, or their “weekly allowance [would] be at once withdrawn.”\textsuperscript{56} But another Deaf man, C. C. Garner, later claimed he “was not allowed to go in, though he had evidence to offer.”\textsuperscript{57} Garner was not receiving relief payments, and so was less amenable to control by the Committee.

While Bradbury prepared his report, the Mission held their Annual General Meeting on 29\textsuperscript{th} May, at which the mutinous feelings of the audience were very much in evidence. Eaton criticised the Annual Report for not giving credit to the work of Paul, his wife, and Wilson. Garner complained about the number of teachers on the Committee, pointing out that it did not happen in other states. He protested, “it is not right for [the deaf] to be bossed as if they were children.” Eaton also requested that there should be some Deaf people on the Committee (there had been one in the past, but at that time there were none). He pointed out that the Queensland Mission was the only one in Australia without any Deaf people on its Board or Committee. Three Deaf people were duly nominated, but none of them were elected. The meeting concluded with the retiring President (Midson) lamenting that it was “very distressing on my last night to find the deaf people engaging in personal remarks.”\textsuperscript{58}

The Bradbury Report

Bradbury’s report was released on 19 August 1931.\textsuperscript{59} He found that, in general, funds had been carefully supervised and accounts well kept, although the costs of collection were high and salaries and wages “excessive”. He supported the Manual Training Scheme and said, “Critics of the scheme had very little foundation for their objections”, but that the Depot’s costs were excessive and could not “justify its existence as at present conducted”. His assessment of Paul and his work was that:

\textsuperscript{55} QADDM, Minutes of Committee meeting held 16 April 1931
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{57} “Definite Break New Body Formed: Deaf and Dumb Act Protest at Committee’s Actions,” The Daily Mail, 19 Aug 1931, 8
\textsuperscript{58} QADDM, Minutes of Annual General Meeting, 29 May 1931
The Superintendent has had a wide experience through his work among the deaf. He has, however, failed to grasp the true perspective of his position. He has evidently forgotten his obligations to the responsible controlling body of the Mission, in order to make himself popular with the Deaf.

C. C. Garner later wrote in reply to this accusation:

Oh! Yes! I say he did make himself popular with the deaf, not... by calling us to him like “bawbees” and feeding us on lollies and candy. Oh! No! but by giving it to us “in the neck” to waken us up out of our slumbers, where we sinned we paid for it in full; and the... committee would have quailed before his wrath, when he shed it on us, The Deaf. For doing so he was not hated, but loved as a man who stood to moral right and sound principle.

This description of Paul’s approach is reminiscent of Hersee’s claim to his British Mission in 1922 that he “found it necessary to drop a bomb, for you were all asleep.” It is an interesting indication of the similarities between Paul’s and Hersee’s approaches to working with Deaf people—a refusal to cocoon them in a narrow world or to provide excessive support, and a sometimes tough insistence that Deaf people be treated as much like hearing people as possible. Paul wrote his own response to the Bradbury Report, though it does not appear to have been published anywhere and only a fragment of it survives among his papers. In this response, he addressed the accusation that he had lost the “perspective” of his position. He claimed that the position was changed so often and arbitrarily, “to suit individual whims” and without his being notified, that “...‘perspective’ would have been possible only to one of those creatures of ancient mythology who had eyes before and behind.”

Bradbury wrote elsewhere in his report that, “Mr Paul... should know that the usually suspicious nature, which is generally apparent in the deaf, should not be inflamed or provoked.” If any Deaf people commented on this allegation about their “suspicious nature”, their responses have not survived. Paul, however, wrote

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60 Ibid., 14-15
61 C. C. Garner, “To the Advocate,” The Deaf Advocate 2, no. 3 (March 1932)
63 J. M. Paul, untitled fragment File No. 0683 in JWF Collection.
about this "harmful falsehood" in a letter to *The Deaf Advocate* the following year, giving several sarcastic examples of why Deaf people should indeed have been suspicious of the Mission’s Committee, such as, “...when one of these suspicious deaf sat before a man who blackguarded him verbally to the hearing committee and had not the courage to spell [interpret] it to the deaf man, why be suspicious?” He continued rhetorically:

My deaf friends, it is of no use that you say you have proofs, evidence, first hand information, direct complaints. That according to the moral standards ruling among men of repute you are right. You are only the deaf and dumb, what is praiseworthy among hearing people as a desire for justice, honourable conduct, the upholding of moral standards, the maintenance of common rights IS IN YOU, A SUSPICIOUS NATURE.\(^{65}\)

The attribution of traits such as “suspicious” to Deaf people has been observed elsewhere, and has been particularly characteristic of educators. It has been compared to the attribution of negative or child-like traits to the colonised by colonisers.\(^{66}\) Given Bradbury’s acknowledged lack of experience with Deaf people, it is likely that he had been advised on their “nature” by some of the Committee members.

The Mission’s Management Committee felt that the Bradbury Inquiry “completely vindicated” them,\(^{67}\) despite a clause stating that “...the Committee is largely to blame for the present state of affairs. Members of the Committee individually have not in some instances adopted the proper course in their dealings between the Superintendent and the Deaf.”\(^{68}\) They decided that they had “no option but to dismiss Mr Paul for disloyalty”\(^{69}\)

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\(^{65}\) J. M. Paul, “A letter from Queensland,” *The Deaf Advocate* 2, no. 2 (Feb 1932). Capitals in original

\(^{66}\) See Harlan Lane, *The Mask of Benevolence: Disabling the Deaf Community* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 35-39. Lane observed, “trait attributions may reveal little about Africans or deaf people but much about the colonial authorities or hearing authorities and the social contexts in which they operated.” (37). Earlier work on post-colonialism describes similar processes, for example Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

\(^{67}\) W. R. Kingwell, letter to A. L. Lonsdale dated 26 Oct 1931. File No. 0255, JWF Collection

\(^{68}\) W. Bradbury, “Inquiry into the Working of the Queensland Adult Deaf and Dumb Mission,” (1931) File No. 0255 in JWF Collection, 11-12.

The Committee’s decision to dismiss Paul was taken at a meeting on 31 July, after reading their advance copy of the Bradbury Report. However, they agreed to wait until he was away on holiday the following month, and then send him a letter giving him one week’s notice. Meanwhile, they arranged for Alf Eaton to be appointed “Attendant” at the Mission during Paul’s absence. As soon as Eaton was in place, earning his much-needed £3.10.0 per week, they approached him and offered him the job on a longer-term, temporary basis. When Eaton realised the job was available because Paul had been dismissed, he consulted with Deaf people and informed the Committee that “as he was a deaf man he must take his instructions from the deaf and not from the Committee”, and refused the offer. The Committee then approached M. O. Wilson, but she “made it clear that she would not stop without Mr. Paul, she too saying she must work for the deaf, not the Committee.”

A new breakaway
There then followed what M. O. Wilson described as “the determined and orderly retreat of the Deaf from an intolerable and humiliating position, an open and official break-away” Deaf leaders, along with Paul and Wilson and many hearing subscribers, moved quickly to establish a new organisation. Writing in the Advocate later, Garner said that the actions of the Mission Committee “inflame[d] the Deaf and provoked them to such extent that they caused us to break away and form a new and free body in which we could have a say in our own affairs.” The actions of Queensland Deaf people immediately after Paul’s dismissal were similar to those of the Deaf people at the “angry meeting” in Sydney two years before, and attracted similar interest from local newspapers:

...Deaf and Dumb Act...
Members of the Queensland Adult Deaf and Dumb Mission seceded from the organisation at a protest meeting held last night... The meeting...was attended by about 100 persons, most of whom were either deaf or dumb, or deaf mutes...Convened by Messrs. C. C. Garner and A. Eaton, the meeting was held in the mission rooms,
and Mr. G. D. Harrison (a deaf mute) acted as chairman. Consequently, all “speeches” by deaf and dumb members were interpreted by the former superintendent, Mr. Paul... The meeting had been convened, stated Mr. C. C. Garner, by the manual language of the deaf and dumb, as a protest against the dismissal of the superintendent. He had been dismissed and no reason for it given by the committee. They had no faith in the general committee, he said... The [Bradbury] inquiry was a farce, he declared...

Mr. E. Mackenzie (a subscribers’ representative) said that the committee was not working for the best interests of the subscribers of Queensland. The money was subscribed for certain privileges for the deaf and dumb, whereas the committee, he said, had not been giving those privileges. The money had been wasted...

The meeting then decided to appoint a provisional committee of four speaking members and four deaf and dumb members, to be augmented later to eight of each. The committee chosen comprised: Messrs. E. Mackenzie, G. Merson, H. Clark, and A. Justin (speaking members), Messrs. A. Eaton, C. C. Garner, G. D. Harrison, and J. Allardice (deaf, dumb members). Mr. J. M. Paul was appointed superintendent, with Miss M. O. Wilson as assistant. It was decided to elect other ladies and well-known men as the other committee members later. The new name of the society was decided upon as the Queensland Deaf and Dumb Citizens Reformed Association.74

Paul’s presence at the meeting seemed to be in the role of interpreter only, allowing the Deaf people to speak for themselves and to have their statements reported fully in the newspaper. It is interesting to note that this account has no references to Deaf people “gesticulating wildly” or “waving [their] arms in an effort to be understood”, such as appeared in Sydney newspapers75—these Queensland Deaf people were fully understood and their statements reported in a coherent way, giving a clear picture of their outrage, decisiveness and control of the situation. Paul’s skill as an interpreter would have contributed significantly, if unobtrusively, to this.

For at least the first year of their existence, the breakaway group was given free use of the premises of the Church of Christ Scientist in Tank Street (little more than a block from the Mission, which was on the corner of Turbot Street and

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75 For example, reports in the News, 24 Aug 1929, quoted in Onward! (Jan 1930): 13-14; and “Fooling the Deaf and Dumb! Lively Close to Annual Meeting,” Daily Telegraph Pictorial, 24 Aug 1929, 3
North Quay) to meet, work and conduct church services. Later they moved to rented premises in Fortitude Valley. As in NSW, the new body was usually referred to as the "Association", in contrast to the "Mission".

The breakaway group invited Mr Hersee, of the NSW Association, to visit Brisbane and conduct an alternative investigation. He claimed that he "was given the task of endeavouring to find out the causes of the trouble and also to try and suggest some means whereby a reconciliation might be possible." This seems to have been the Mission's initial understanding also, as Mr. W. R. Kingwell, from the Mission's Committee, said that Hersee was invited to "heal the breach". Hersee arrived just a few days after the Bradbury report was released, and talked with many people on both sides of the dispute. He reported that he was "cordially received" by the Mission Committee, and he met with numerous others such as Bradbury himself, former members of the Mission Committee, staff at the Blind, Deaf and Dumb Institute and the Polytechnic where the much-disputed Training Scheme was conducted, and of course (unlike Bradbury) with Deaf people themselves.

An account of Hersee's investigations and conclusions was printed in *The Deaf Advocate* soon after, detailing "an entire loss of confidence in the Committee by the Deaf and Dumb", "roll stuffing", "a lack of understanding of the Superintendent's duties", "serious dissatisfaction re the Training Scheme", and most tellingly, "Various protests have been made by the Deaf and Dumb and ignored. The Deaf and Dumb resent being treated as intellectually inferior and incapable of managing their own affairs." Hersee concluded with several recommendations for restructuring the Mission, such as a new Constitution and a new Management Committee with equal representation of Deaf and hearing people; however, no one seems to have acted on these recommendations, certainly not the Mission. Kingwell wrote in a letter to Lonsdale (of the NSW Society) that,

76 "Deaf and Dumb Citizens Reformed Association," *The Cairns Post*, 1 Sept 1932, 10
79 H. V. S. Hersee, "Impressions of my Visit to Queensland," *The Deaf Advocate*, (Sept-Oct 1931)
“All Mr. Hersee did was to fan the flame of extremism” and that, “Our Committee here is convinced that there is a definite move by a few extremists to get control of the Deaf and Dumb Societies of the Commonwealth... We were given to understand that Victoria is to be the next move.”

Indeed, some Victorians hoped so too. A number of anonymous “Melbourne Sympathisers” wrote collectively to The Deaf Advocate praising the actions of the Queenslanders, and declaring, “The growth of exclusive ASSOCIATIONS for the Deaf out of the primitive biased societies... show brilliant signs of promise for the future of the deaf.” These Victorians obviously envied their northern friends the support and leadership of Hersee and Paul, and their letter contains barely suppressed hope that a similar saviour might emerge in Victoria to “unconditionally free the deaf from the ‘prussian’ methods adopted by the prehistoric prejudiced ‘hearing’ Boards of all the Societies throughout the Commonwealth.” The letter concluded, “Hats off again to the N.S.W.A. [sic] under Mr. Hersee, and the new Q.D.D.A. [sic] under Mr. Paul. Will the next move be in Victoria!!!?”

Kingwell would have found further justification for his suspicions in an Editorial in the Advocate, which could have been read as a “call to arms”:

Let us hope that the experiences in New South Wales and in Queensland will be the forerunner of strengthening the Deaf in other States to safeguard their interests and demand a recognition of their rights, so that they are no longer regarded as incapable of managing their own affairs. These prejudices against the Deaf must be swept away once and for all and co-operation, goodwill, and fellowship must be firmly established.

In his letter to Lonsdale, written in October 1931, Kingwell dismissed the new Association in Queensland as providing only “a job for Mr. Paul and easy billets as Collectors for the extremist Deaf”. In a comment very revealing of his criteria for a respectable organisation, Kingwell sneered, “There is not one prominent

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80 W R. Kingwell, letter to A. L. Lonsdale dated 26 Oct 1931 File No 0255, JWF Collection
81 “Hats off to Mr. J M. Paul and Mr H V S Hersee!” The Deaf Advocate, (Sept-Oct 1931).
82 Ibid.
citizen associated with it."\textsuperscript{84} However, this was not the case for long. Within a year the Association had secured the patronage of both the Governor of Queensland and the Hon. D. F. Denham, a former Premier of the State who had been President of the Mission's Committee from its beginnings in 1903 until 1929.\textsuperscript{85} Denham was not the only long-standing supporter of the Mission who switched his allegiance to the Association. Mr Isaac Dickson (Superintendent of the Blind, Deaf and Dumb Institute) had been at the original meeting which established the Mission in 1902 and had remained on the Mission Committee until 1928, and Mr E. J. T. Barton had been on the Mission Committee from 1907 until 1928, serving as Secretary or Vice-President under Denham for many of those years. Both of these men joined Denham in accepting seats on the new Association’s Council.\textsuperscript{86} The fact that these prominent stalwarts of the Mission took the radical step of publicly switching their support to the Association gives some indication that the Mission had departed from its original ideals, and that these were now better embodied in the Association.

The upheaval in Queensland drew the attention of Deaf communities around Australia and overseas. \textit{The Deaf Advocate} in Sydney ran regular reports and served as a public forum for Paul, Garner and others. The \textit{British Deaf Times} reported on Hersee’s visit to Queensland, and concluded:

\begin{quote}
One thing seems paramount from the reports to hand and that is, the status of the deaf needs to be raised in Queensland, and a fuller appreciation of the rights of the deaf to manage their own affairs.\textsuperscript{87}
\end{quote}

Reports such as this indicate that Hersee and Paul were in regular contact with former colleagues in Britain. They also illustrate that the over-riding theme of Deaf people “managing their own affairs” was one that resonated broadly during the late 1920s and 1930s, not only within Australia but in Deaf communities in other countries as well.

Few records of the composition of the Association’s Council survive, but \textit{The Deaf Advocate} reported that it had an equal number of Deaf and hearing

\textsuperscript{84} W. R. Kingwell, letter to A. L. Lonsdale dated 26 Oct 1931. File No. 0255, JWF Collection.  
\textsuperscript{85} "Deaf and Dumb Citizens Reformed Association," \textit{The Cairns Post}, 1 Sept 1932, 10.  
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
Councillors A 1932 newspaper interview with Alderman Massey, one of the hearing Councillors, confirmed:

Our constitution secures to the deaf and dumb representation on the council and the management committee from among their own members... Experience has proved the value of enlisting their sympathy and knowledge of the needs of their fellows in the Land of Silence.

Among the many Deaf people who moved to the Association were three of the Mission's four Collectors, and M. O. Wilson, who continued to hold the position of Paul's Assistant Superintendent in the Association. Her long-standing commitment to "unity" must have been sorely tried by these adversarial circumstances, especially since she had been involved with the Mission from its very first meeting in 1902. However, her support for the Association was prompt and wholehearted. She was probably the Deaf person mentioned in an article in the Cairns Post, which reported, "one of the deaf and dumb, who was one of the original founders of the Mission, immediately advanced a generous sum to enable the Association to begin its operations." Her long involvement with the Queensland Mission was widely known, and the editors of the Advocate pointed out that "Miss M. O. Wilson who has given such devoted service to the cause must now start her work of building up all over again..." Although there is no surviving account of how the Mission Committee felt about these defections, they hastened to make use of one of the clauses in their brand new Constitution, and revoked all five of their existing Life Memberships (including those held by Miss M. O. Wilson and Mr E. J. T. Barton) after the breakaway.

As in NSW, the existence of rival organisations created (or emphasised) splits within the Deaf community. Kingwell referred to tensions among the young Deaf men studying at the Polytechnic, saying "some boys at work [were] calling those

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88 Editorial, The Deaf Advocate 3, no. 2 (Feb 1933)
89 "Deaf and Dumb Citizens Reformed Association," The Cairns Post, 1 Sept 1932, 10
90 Ibid
who went to the Mission scabs”. The Mission allegedly adopted tactics of bribery and intimidation to stop the Deaf people they employed going to the Association, or to entice them back to the Mission. Paul wrote:

The payment of wages in the opinion of certain officers of the Mission entitles them to dictate in matters of sport, friendships, social life. The deaf concerned have expressed their contempt for the methods used but the pay envelope is a serious thing these days. Now one man has had to leave our team and his wife has had to withdraw from the circle of her friends as a result of pressure, and the fact that his wage will be kept down till she attends the social functions arranged by the Mission.

Some Deaf people managed to resist these tactics, though at personal cost to themselves. The editors of the Advocate described, “... the collectors who gave up their positions rather than be a party to such tyranny [sic]: Mr. Eaton who refused a tempting bait to be disloyal to the deaf but who preferred poverty with honour rather than riches with dishonour...” M. O. Wilson also confirmed these tactics when she described, “How the Deaf and Dumb stand together in spite of tempting baits held out by the old Society, all the world will be theirs if they will only go back without Mr. Paul...” John Paul described the alternatives more starkly: “The Deaf world now knows the fight is on — Fear or Freedom.”

The relationship between the Mission’s Committee and the staff of the Queensland School for the Deaf became even stronger after the breakaway, with Paul indicating that several extra seats on the Committee were provided to teachers as a “reward” for their assistance to the Mission. He alleged that this assistance included “getting school children to swell the attendances” at Mission functions, and using the school’s direct contact with parents to ensure that young school leavers were directed to the Mission rather than to the Association. Hersee had, during his investigation, addressed the problems of teachers being on the Committee. He wrote in the Advocate:

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93 QADDM, Minutes of meeting held 15 Sept 1931.
94 J. M. Paul, “Queensland Deaf and Dumb Association News,” The Deaf Advocate 2, no. 3 (March 1932).
95 Editorial, The Deaf Advocate, (Sept-Oct 1931)
96 M. O Wilson, “Queensland — A Lady’s Point of View,” The Deaf Advocate, (Sept-Oct 1931)
97 J. M. Paul, “Queensland Deaf and Dumb Association News,” The Deaf Advocate 2, no. 3 (March 1932)
98 J M Paul, “Self Advertisement by Insult,” The Deaf Advocate 2, no. 6 (June 1932).
The school authorities should co-operate with the adult deaf work to the greatest extent but that does not mean that they should put themselves into the position of managing the affairs of the adult deaf. The position in itself is rather one of contradiction: the teachers openly take credit for turning out deaf pupils fitted to take their place in the world on an equal footing with those who are not handicapped. Mr. Holle even states that the deaf children under him are “abnormally intelligent”. Surely then with these facts in mind it is not too much to ask “are they not able then as grown men and women ... to conduct their own affairs?” Yet Mr. Holle and two of his assistant teachers sit on the Mission Committee on which no deaf are allowed because the Committee consider the deaf are totally unable to manage their affairs. Apparently the school teachers need to express their own views more forcibly upon their fellow committee members and practise what they preach.\(^9\)

Despite the Mission's efforts, it seems that (as in NSW), the majority of Deaf people in Queensland supported the Association, at least in the early years. Hersee reported that when he visited in August 1931, just after the breakaway, the church services and functions of the Association were attended by at least 70 deaf people, whereas “I visited the Mission headquarters twice and saw two or three deaf and I also attended a Mission Service at which there were present 10 deaf and 8 hearing people.”\(^10\) The article in the *Cairns Post* in September 1932 claimed that approximately two-thirds of Deaf people in the State were with the Association:

> According to the best information available, there are 194 deaf mutes in Queensland, of whom 117 are resident in the metropolitan area. Of the latter, 82 are members of the Association and 42 country deaf are with us, making a total of 124. The deaf membership is entirely voluntary and subject to no pressure, and the fact that a large majority of the people for whose benefit the public so generously subscribe, are with us, is noteworthy.”\(^11\)

**Relationships with other organisations**

Compared to the rather cavalier attitude of the New South Wales Association, the Queensland Association seems to have been more committed to trying to maintain good relations with other organisations, including the Deaf Societies of other states. Paul and Wilson frequently sent messages and greetings to other

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99 H V S Hersee, “Impressions of my Visit to Queensland,” *The Deaf Advocate*, (Sept-Oct 1931); stress in original  
organisations, even managing to have a New Year’s message included in a 1932 issue of *The Victorian Deaf*, although this publication rarely allowed news of the unseemly breakaways in northern states to appear in its pages. They evidently counted on the residual feelings of goodwill towards John Paul among the Victorian Deaf people he had worked with from 1914 to 1918.

**MESSAGE FROM QUEENSLAND**

The opportunity to send a message to the Deaf of Victoria is a gladsome thing. One of our objects is to “advance friendships and good feeling amongst all Deaf and Dumb.” The interests of the Deaf are one, and we who are sacrificing greatly to stand for a higher conception of our true weal send to you all the wish that 1932 may be a year of worthy peace and progress toward our highest ideals. May mutual trust and friendship enrich your lives and service yield its golden harvest.

It can be no intrusion for me to add a personal greeting to the folk whose great kindliness and trust made my years among them a memory that still comforts and is held dear. I do sincerely wish you all that is good.102

The gleeful jibes at the Society which regularly appeared in the pages of *The Deaf Advocate* do not seem to have been echoed in Queensland, once the angry outbursts of the initial split had subsided. There was, nevertheless, no forgiveness. The Queensland breakaway was to prove a tougher survivor than its New South Wales counterpart.

At the beginning of this thesis, Owen Wrigley’s challenge to Deaf history was quoted:

Isn’t Deaf history really about the small land wars at the margins of society and self-identity, exactly where the Hearing administrations of the Deaf through these institutions don’t quite succeed in controlling or suppressing Deafness? Isn’t Deaf history more about the resistances to subjugation and oppression than about the success of the institutions into which Hearing people put Deaf people?103

Events in New South Wales and Queensland during the late 1920s and early 30s were good examples of such “small land wars”, when Deaf people resisted the control of hearing administrators, and when the success and relevance of the

101 *Deaf and Dumb Citizens Reformed Association,* *The Cairns Post,* 1 Sept 1932, 10
102 “Message from Queensland,” *The Victorian Deaf,* (Jan-Feb 1932): 11-12.
“institutions into which Hearing people put Deaf people” were significantly challenged. In these stories of resistance to institutions, it is possible to see Deaf identities being examined and redefined. From these points of view, the breakaways are very important to the “true Deaf history” of Australia.

These events also suggest a gathering resolve and assertiveness within Deaf communities, not only in New South Wales and Queensland, but in other states as well. From the perspective of the modern researcher, this new spirit of independence would surely seem to be leading to greater things, to larger spheres of “managing their own affairs”. As has been seen, there were widespread fears and hopes that “Victoria was to be the next move”. The next chapter will examine events in Victoria during the late 1920s and early 30s. Did it become “the next move”? 
CHAPTER 6: The More we are Together

The more we are together, together, together,
The more we are together, the happier we will be.
For my friends are your friends,
And your friends are my friends,
The more we are together, the happier we will be.

A frequently-used refrain at Deaf Society events in Melbourne in the early 1930s.¹

There was little chance of a breakaway succeeding in Victoria. The hostilities and tensions described in Chapter Three continued to grow during the late 1920s and early 1930s, encouraged by the events in New South Wales and Queensland. But for every dissident who took the bold step of speaking out, there was a counter-movement from Ernest Abraham and the many Deaf and hearing people who were enlisted (willingly or not) on his side. His “magic Victorian rod” was still an effective weapon, however tarnished it may have appeared to many people. He continued to be a master of illusion, so that the events and personalities of the time seem, in retrospect, to be cloaked in an atmosphere of genial bonhomie, with people regularly linking arms and singing (in voice or sign) “the more we are together, the happier we will be.”

This facade is only penetrated by close examination of the records. If Queensland’s story is difficult to recover because of missing and fragmentary sources, Victoria’s is difficult for the opposite reason. The records there present an embarrassment of riches, with volumes of effusive newsletters and well-ordered meeting records, “daybooks”, correspondence, frequent newspaper articles, and of course, Bourke’s prodigious output of booklets.² However, apart from Bourke’s writings, the records

¹ For example, it was displayed on the notice board of the Adult Deaf Club House during the 1931-32 Cricket Carnival in Melbourne (See “Interstate Visit of Deaf Cricket and Tennis Teams”, The Victorian Deaf 2, no. 6 (Jan-Feb 1932): 8). It was regularly signed during gatherings of deaf people at the Society. Abraham used it in his Christmas greeting to readers of the Victorian Deaf News in December 1933.

² These resources are now relatively accessible, with most being preserved in two large collections in the State Library of Victoria—the Victorian Deaf Society Collection (MS13362) and the J. W. Flynn Collection (MS 00938). Some are held in the La Trobe University Library. Copies of J P Bourke’s booklets are also held in the National Library of Australia, among other places.
often need to be read between the lines or “against the grain”, to discern the pattern of conflict seething beneath the surface, what one commentator called the “deep, bitter thing”\textsuperscript{3} dividing the community.

Why were Abraham and his allies so effective? The Deaf community in Melbourne was one of the largest and best-educated in Australia. Their school and Deaf Society had been among the very first to be established and had had relatively stable histories. Melbourne had a long and venerable tradition of Deaf pioneers such as F. J Rose, the Muir brothers and Matthew Miller, whose achievements were remembered and celebrated. It would appear that Melbourne should have been one of the first places for Deaf people to assert their independence and take a leading role in their organisations – and some interpretations of their history might say that this was in fact the case. There is no shortage of prominent Deaf people from that time to be held up as examples of leadership. But most of these people were firmly controlled by Abraham. The more dangerous rebels were met with formidable (and usually successful) opposition.

Abraham used many tactics. He drew on the traditional role of Missioner in British Deaf institutions for some of these, others he cultivated himself.\textsuperscript{4} The most immediate was to isolate and punish the rebels, if possible using other Deaf people to administer the punishment, or presenting it as a decision of the Board or the Deaf Committee. This could be a simple matter of removing an offender from a job or a role, denying them basic entitlements or special privileges, or (in one extreme case) debarring an individual from Deaf Society premises. But it could usually be achieved more subtly and gradually by labelling people as “outsiders”, “not really Deaf and Dumb” or “not one of us”, or by wearing them down through humiliation and unacceptable conditions. As some commentators phrased it, “you were put outside”\textsuperscript{5} or “worked out of [your] respective locality”.\textsuperscript{6} Abraham would arrange rallies or mass meetings to summon grand displays of loyalty and support.

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\textsuperscript{4} See Paddy Ladd, \textit{Understanding Deaf Culture}, Chapters 8 and 9, for an insightful analysis of the practices of British Missioners.

\textsuperscript{5} E. A. Reynolds, interview by Michael Uniacke, 2 June 1982.
from his followers, making dissenting voices appear irrelevant, disloyal, and unrepresentative. Some of the most lavish and enjoyable festivities in the community were arranged around Abraham’s birthday, or the anniversary of his arrival in Melbourne, cleverly linking his role with images of munificence and generosity.

If a new and threatening organisation or publication emerged, Abraham would often present a more dazzling and enticing alternative to whatever the dissidents were attempting to establish, making their efforts seem amateurish and irrelevant.

He also used preventative strategies to discourage or frighten the “waverers” within the community. He would make use of their shared history, remind them that they were a “little band of pioneers” who had come through hard times together and were marching forward to greater things. Since he had been in Victoria for almost 30 years at that stage, he was able to tacitly remind many of them that he had dandled them as babies, known their parents, interpreted at their weddings. It is impossible to know if Abraham made tactical use of his alleged sexual relationships within the Deaf community, but they never seemed to have held him back, and possibly provided him with an additional hold over certain people. Abraham cultivated an almost literally paternal relationship to many Deaf people and their families, which would have made it complicated for them to take sides in the acrimonious events of these times. When Deaf people moved interstate, Abraham’s connections moved with them.7

Abraham’s most visible and powerful weapon was his eloquence in using sign language. He was widely acknowledged as a master, an “artist”, and his style of

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7 An example was Iris Boortz, a Deaf daughter of Deaf parents in Melbourne, who later moved to NSW and married A. D. Taylor—her husband was a Collector for the NSW Association, and Iris was active in the Association too. Abraham had known her all her life. At her twenty-first birthday party, he “made a very sincere speech for he had nursed Iris as a baby and watched her grow to girlhood, and now young womanhood, with much pride” (*Our Monthly Letter*, Jan-Feb-March 1925). He later interpreted for her wedding and proposed the toast to “The Bride and Bridegroom” (*Our Monthly Letter*, April-May-June 1925). Even after Iris joined the Association Abraham would remind her of their shared history, and once instructed her, while she was visiting her mother, to take back his “best wishes” to the Association in NSW [*By the Way,* *The Deaf Advocate* 1, no. 6 (June 1931)].
signing (particularly interpreting) was emulated and admired by a generation of younger people.

Well he was an artist, he was an artist, his language of gesture was beautiful to watch, it really was, it was in many ways so simple that it could be fully understood by hearing people and he had many gestures that added into the language which [were] not at that time used and he enlarged it, he enhanced it.  

It may seem strange to call this skill a “weapon”, as fluency in sign language is usually highly valued by Deaf communities. Hersee and Paul were also acknowledged as fluent signers and charismatic leaders, but neither was considered to use this skill in a manipulative way. However, it is possible to use language skill (especially minority language skill) as a way of infiltrating communities, accessing private information, and making those who use the language feel exposed and vulnerable. Such privileged knowledge can, in the wrong hands, become a tool of oppression, a weapon—and Abraham provides a good case study of this process.

Abraham had also mastered the nuances of what we would call today “Deaf culture”. This meant that, as well as knowing the language, he was able to demonstrate the behaviours, idioms and attitudes of deaf people with great fluency. As one newspaper article at the time struggled to express it, “He can assume deaf mutisms so well that strange deaf folk will not believe that he is not like themselves.” Abraham had cultivated this familiarity from his earliest years working with Deaf people in England. Being familiar with Deaf culture also meant that he understood the Deaf world view, their perceptions and interpretations of things, and this was part of what made him a successful Missioner. However, he did not hesitate to manipulate this knowledge to his own advantage, and as he became older his attitude to Deaf people seemed to become more cynical. As another newspaper article declared, he was “a man with...intimate knowledge of...every twist and turn of deaf mute character”.

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9 The Age, 9 Oct 1926, 19
10 An article in the British Deaf-Mute had once praised him by saying rhetorically, “If all the superintendents mixed with their people, and acted as though they were of them, the deaf would certainly appreciate their efforts the more.” [Joseph Hepworth, “Christmas at the Home of the BDM,” The British Deaf-Mute V, no. 51 (Jan 1896): 91]
11 Brisbane Telegraph, quoted in Our Monthly Letter 22, no. 7 & 8 (July/Aug 1926) (The Telegraph quote was undated)
In Victoria it tended to be the late-deafened or oral deaf people who rebelled, several of them migrants from England or Scotland. This contrasted with New South Wales and Queensland, where many or most of the activists were long-standing members of the Deaf community. These Victorian dissidents were less susceptible to Abraham's charisma and hypnotic signing style, and, being already somewhat marginal to the community, they had less to lose by his sanctions. But for the culturally Deaf people who had grown up within the Melbourne Deaf community, whose social, sporting and personal lives were closely tied to this community and its central meeting place, to rebel was to risk all that they most valued. Abraham was quite simply able to make the stakes too high for them.

This chapter describes some of the attempts by groups and individuals (most of them Deaf, but some hearing) to establish an independent voice for Victorian Deaf people. As in New South Wales and Queensland, this activism initially took the form of criticising the workings of the Victorian Deaf Society and its figurehead, Abraham. In Victoria, however, the critics were met with much stronger and more sophisticated opposition. The resulting repression and divisiveness within the Victorian Deaf community were to be replayed on a national scale soon afterwards, when Deaf people attempted to form an independent Australia-wide organisation. This will be described in the next chapter.

**Going public**

In September 1928, before the breakaways in New South Wales and Queensland, the Board of the Victorian Society recorded their concern about the appearance of a paper or booklet called the *Commonwealth Silent Courier*. They resolved that “...the Collectors be notified that the Board cannot agree to them, while being employees of the Society, also selling copies of a paper which reflects upon the Society.” The *Commonwealth Silent Courier* was the official organ of an obscure and short-lived group called the “Deaf Welfare Association”. Bourke referred to

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12 For example, W. H. Crush was English and spoke as well as signed, R. H. Lambert was Scottish, Bourke was late-deafened, Mrs. M. Gladman had grown up in hearing schools rather than the State Deaf school

13 ADDSV, Minutes of General Board meeting, 17 Sept 1928.
CHAPTER 6 The More we are Together

them as “a section of the deaf”, who “controlled and financed [the magazine] by themselves”. The Honorary editors were A. F. Hull and E. Johnson, and the Hon. Secretary was Mrs. E. Gladman. Although Bourke wrote of them with approval, he does not seem to have been involved. The magazine’s title and contents showed aspirations to a national readership, and it was professionally typeset and printed. It ran to 17 pages, and the contents included a brief round-up of news from around Australia, and many short pieces reprinted from American magazines. It contained advertisements from local Melbourne businesses, which may have supported the printing costs. The content was largely innocuous, except for some bold statements in the opening pages. When describing events in other states, the editors declared that the deaf people of Queensland and New South Wales were “fortunate” to have Mr J. Paul and Mr H. V. S. Hersee as their superintendents. Hersee in particular was praised as someone who “welcomes constructive criticism” and had “many new methods”. But when the editors came to Victoria they stated:

Melbourne deaf are not so happy like other States. There is something radically wrong with the whole Society.
Several hearing business men on the Board resigned after 10 years’ service. It was understood they resigned through lack of confidence in the superintendent.

The editors also criticised the old ADDA—“...once a mighty army, where is it now? Is it suffering from senile decay?” Such public comments were unprecedented (The Deaf Advocate would not be published for another two years) and the Deaf people behind them showed considerable daring.

This first issue was ambitiously numbered Volume 1, Number 1, but no subsequent issues have been found, or were ever referred to by the Society’s Board or by Bourke. It seems highly likely that no further issues were ever printed. As Bourke wrote later:

Here were the deaf writing against Abraham and running a paper which he was not allowed to control! He was not going to have it and in his crafty and treacherous way he set out to use all the

14 J P Bourke, The Story of a Deaf Drudge, 56
15 Commonwealth Silent Courier 1, no. 1(Sept 1928)
16 Ibid
resources of the Society including the deaf and dumb to smash up the "Courier".  

Since the magazine was being distributed by the Collectors, a Sub-Committee of the Board investigated the performance of each Collector, and they later recommended that two of them be dismissed. One of these was Robert Luff, who, apart from having unsatisfactory collections, "is apparently not acting in the best interests of the Society".  

Luff was evidently one of the Collectors distributing the Commonwealth Silent Courier. He had been a stalwart of the ADDA and an earlier supporter of Abraham, but had obviously become disillusioned and willing to join other dissidents. The dismissal of these Collectors would have served as a warning to those involved in the Courier venture—transgressors would be punished.

Abraham used his own resources to present an attractive alternative to the Courier—a magazine called Our Deaf Mute Citizens. This was a cut and paste of older magazine pieces he had published in his more energetic journalistic days, from The Gesture and other pamphlets and magazines. It included many photographs of Deaf people’s signs, the fingerspelling alphabet, sporting teams and “statuary”, and was promoted as a way of helping unemployed Deaf people. Only two issues seem to have been published, and the price of the second doubled, from sixpence to one shilling. Bourke attacked the magazine, its price hike, and the fact that it was printed by the firm of printers owned by E. R. Peacock (the President of the Board) in a series of letters to the Police Commissioner, the Premier and the Board of the Society. The magazine seems to have petered out after just two issues (possibly because of Bourke’s complaints). However, it would have made the point that any magazine Deaf people tried to put out could easily be bettered by Abraham.

17 J P. Bourke, The Story of a Deaf Drudge, 56.
18 ADDSV, Minutes of General Board Meeting, 29 Oct 1928, attachment.
Complaints to the Government

More than one Deaf person in Victoria tried to take formal action against the Deaf Society by writing to their Members of Parliament and Government departments. Bourke later claimed that he had been writing to the Charities Board (which he compared to the "Circumlocution Office" in Dickens' *Little Dorrit*)\(^{21}\) since 1925, but that whenever the Charities Board approached Abraham about the complaints, they always believed Abraham's denials.\(^{22}\) There were, however, occasional supporters in Parliament who tried to keep Deaf people's concerns on the agenda. Between July and September 1929, Mr Jackson MLA (Member for Prahran—J. P. Bourke's local member), raised the issue of unresolved complaints against the Adult Deaf and Dumb Society in State Parliament several times. On 24 July he stated:

> Three deaf mutes associated with the institute conducted by Mr. Abraham have written to me, and, I understand, to other members of Parliament, complaining about the treatment they have received at his hands. They have endeavoured to get their case brought before the Chief Secretary, as well as before the Charities Board, and before the public generally... I have received so many letters in connexion with the matter that I want the whole subject ventilated, and if these men have a grievance, it should be remedied.\(^{23}\)

When asked for details of the complaints, Jackson reported that the letter-writers alleged "Brutal treatment in some cases, and very harsh treatment in others."\(^{24}\) He claimed that calls for an inquiry into the affairs of Society had been made since 1925, and possibly earlier. He quoted from a letter that the previous Secretary of the Charities Board had sent to one of the complainants in 1928, promising a full inquiry.\(^{25}\) This letter had in fact been sent to Bourke, who also quoted from it in his writings.\(^{26}\)

Jackson raised the matter again on 28 August, saying that he had had no response from the Chief Secretary's Department, and promising not to rest until the

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\(^{21}\) Ibid., 70-71.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 70-71.

\(^{23}\) Supplementary Estimates [Assembly], 24 July 1929, *Hansard*, 430.

\(^{24}\) Ibid., 430.

\(^{25}\) Ibid., 430.

\(^{26}\) J. P. Bourke, *The Story of a Deaf Drudge*, 71.
“inmates” had been given “a fair hearing”. Another member, Mr Tunnecliffe MLA (Member for Collingwood), followed up Jackson’s complaint the next day. The Chief Secretary did not consider it a matter for his Department, dismissing it as an issue for the Charities Board, which was administered by the Treasurer. This disagreement and confusion over who was the appropriate authority was deplored by Bourke on many occasions.

The Society’s Board showed some alarm at these developments. At their September 1929 Board meeting, a resolution was passed “to arrange for the Committee to view the papers re statements made by Mr Jackson M.L.A.,” and also to “arrange for parliamentary representation in both Houses”. The Honorable Herbert Brooks MLA subsequently agreed to represent the Society in Parliament.

Whether there was ever an actual “inquiry” is open to interpretation. From the Society’s point of view, there was. At the October Board meeting, the President E. R. Peacock reported “interviews with the Charities Board”. In damage control mode, the Board stressed “the necessity of the Deaf being loyal to the Staff and the Society”, and the two Deaf representatives on the Board, Mr Paterson and Mr Frewin, “assured the Chairman that the Society had their hearty support.” A report from the Charities Board, dated 14 October, was forwarded to the Society on 8 November, and (although no copy seems to survive) it evidently exonerated the Society from any wrong-doing. The Board of the Society resolved to send a copy of the letter accompanying the report to “each of the persons Bourke had communicated with”, singling him out as the person most responsible for visiting this embarrassing incident on them.

28 Supplementary Estimates [Assembly], 29 August 1929, *Hansard*, 1237.
29 Supplementary Estimates [Assembly], 28 August 1929, *Hansard*, 1183, and 29 August 1929, 1237.
31 ADDSV, Minutes of General Board Meeting, 16 Sept 1929.
32 ADDSV, Minutes of General Board Meeting, 20 Oct 1929.
33 Ibid.
34 ADDSV, Minutes of General Board Meeting, 25 Nov 1929.
35 Ibid.
From the point of view of Bourke (and presumably of his fellow complainants), “No inquiry was ever held.”\textsuperscript{36} His scathing assessment of the “inquiry” was as follows:

\begin{quote}
...the Government sent the Inspector of Charities down to the farm ... to make an inquiry. This consisted of the Inspector strolling through the farm on Sunday afternoon, October 13, 1929 accompanied by the President of the Society with Abraham’s Secretary as interpreter. The inspector reported:-

“Careful inquiry and personal investigation failed to reveal that other than proper consideration and sympathetic treatment is accorded the inmates. All those with whom I came in contact expressed themselves as happy, contented and well treated. The Home, in my opinion, is a credit to the Society.”\textsuperscript{37}
\end{quote}

If the dates reported by Bourke and the Board were both correct, the Inspector wrote his report the day after this “stroll” around the farm.

\textbf{The banning of Bourke}

The ramifications of “banning” a Deaf person from a Deaf Society may be difficult for modern readers to comprehend. But during these decades, the Deaf Society represented a great deal to a Deaf person. Not only was it the centre and focus of almost all community activities, celebrations, sporting contests, religious services and practical assistance with interpreting, employment, dealings with bureaucracy and other everyday issues, it was also a Deaf person’s only recourse to certain types of assistance. Many government agencies which later became part of the Australian welfare system did not yet exist, and their functions devolved on Deaf Societies. An example of this is the Deaf Societies’ distribution of sustenance funds or “relief” to Deaf people who were out of work, particularly during the Depression. It was not always possible for a Deaf person, especially someone with limited proficiency in English, to arrange independent access to such services. So to ban or expel a Deaf person from his state Deaf Society was a punishment of such severe symbolic and practical proportions that it was almost never used.\textsuperscript{38}

Indeed, apart from occasional temporary restrictions on individuals because of

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{J. P. Bourke, \textit{The Story of a Deaf Drudge}, 71.}
\footnote{Ibid., 72-73.}
\footnote{See Paddy Ladd, \textit{Understanding Deaf Culture}, 377, for a British comparison: “Given the vital importance of the club to Deaf people, the ability to ban someone for disagreeing with the missioner carried immense resonance, which served to keep other less bold souls quiescent.”}
\end{footnotes}
drunkenness or destructive behaviour, the only incidence of “banning” Deaf people in these years seems to be the case of Bourke in Victoria, and later, general exclusions of Association members in New South Wales and Queensland. But the latter had access to support and community within their Associations. Bourke had nothing except his pride, resourcefulness, and a few long-suffering friends.

According to Bourke, Abraham tried to persuade the Deaf Committee to expel him from the Society on two occasions in early 1929, but the Deaf Committee refused to do so.⁴⁹ It would have been unusual for Abraham not to get his way with the Deaf Committee, since he was the Chairman, and always had several of his Deaf staff on the Committee. But Bourke claimed that the Deaf Committee was particularly strong that year: “There were as many as four Abraham haters on it. There were another four whom those could sway. The rest were made up of employees of the Society.”⁴⁰ Abraham would of course have preferred it if Deaf people could have been persuaded to expel Bourke, but since he could not arrange that, he seized an opportunity at Board level later that year. At its September meeting the Board received a copy of a particularly long and vitriolic letter Bourke had sent to the Premier about Abraham and the Society, and resolved that it be “not read”. They then passed the following resolution:

“That J. P. Bourke be excluded from all privileges of the Society until such time as he writes a satisfactory letter of apology withdrawing all his misstatements and promising not to repeat them”.⁴¹

This decision was initially disputed by the Deaf Committee. They insisted on forming a sub-committee of five members to interview Bourke. This sub-committee told Bourke to “take no notice of the Board’s embargo, that the right to discipline members rested with the deaf committee alone.”⁴² Bourke’s incidental descriptions of the Deaf Committee provide a rare and interesting glimpse of that group’s own power struggles with Abraham and his Board.⁴³ If this incident is an

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⁴⁰ Ibid., 58
⁴¹ ADDSV, Minutes of General Board Meeting, 16 Sept 1929.
⁴³ Bourke’s account is particularly useful, as the only other surviving records of the Deaf Committee of the time seem to be some Annual Reports.
example, it would seem that the Deaf Committee was particularly protective of its role in managing the Deaf community.

On the urging of the sub-committee, Bourke cautiously attended the Society’s premises for a meeting, then a social. At the social, J. M. Johnston beckoned Bourke to the back of the hall, but Bourke refused to leave his seat in the audience. Bourke later told Johnston that he had “meant no offence to him personally”, but Johnston informed him that the sub-committee “had no power to interfere in the matter of [his] expulsion.”

He said he had communicated this to Mr R. H. Lambert (one of Bourke’s supporters on the Deaf Committee). Lambert, however, “had watched and guarded me all the evening – the act of a gentleman and a true friend.”

The next time Bourke tried to attend the Society was on one of the regular Saturday night gatherings, to which he usually brought a deaf-blind man. Abraham attempted to prevent his attendance by sending Johnston to escort the deaf-blind man instead, but the deaf-blind man opted to go with Bourke. When Bourke arrived (Johnston had “rushed back... to tell Abraham I was coming”) he was handed a note by the Caretaker, saying, “I am requested by the Board of Management to ask you to leave the building.” There were only three members of the Deaf Committee there, Johnston, Hull, and a third whom he described as “weak”, and Bourke appealed to them for help. Only Hull stood by him. Johnston “told me that it was useless fighting Abraham; that he was too strong for the deaf; he told me not to be a fool... shake hands with Abraham and have done with it all.” A humiliated Bourke left the premises, accompanied by his friend Hull.

The tactic of using Johnston and the Caretaker (who would have been Deaf) to actually remove Bourke from the building was consistent with Abraham’s practice of trying whenever possible to have troublesome Deaf people denounced from within the Deaf community, rather than by himself. As Bourke wrote bitterly,

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44 J. P. Bourke, The Story of a Deaf Drudge, 62.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid., 63.
“Abraham had kept out of it all, but was behind the scenes pulling all the strings.”

The minutes of the October Board meeting reported perfunctorily, “John P. Bourke had presented himself at the Centre and been refused admission.” It would seem that they had accomplished their mission. But Abraham knew he should not rest there, and continued to work on the Deaf Committee. He was able to produce, at the next Board meeting, a resolution and statement from the Deaf Committee. The statement read:

Having had a letter of one J. P. Bourke read to us, in which he claims to speak for the Adult Deaf and Dumb, we beg to say that Mr. Bourke is not a member of the Society and the views he expresses are not ours, nor is he authorised to speak for us. We are the elected representatives of the Adult Deaf and Dumb members of the Society, and we believe that the work, as at present carried on, is in the best interest of the members.

This statement was signed by six members of the Deaf Committee—Paterson, Newnham, Puddy, McLean, Mortimer, and Frewin. But there were at least four other members of the Deaf Committee who had NOT signed it, including Lambert, Hull, Crush, and—interestingly—Johnston. The meeting at which Abraham managed to elicit this statement from a divided Deaf Committee would have been an interesting one.

Bourke then resorted to legal action, an unprecedented step for a Deaf person at that time. He claimed that his purpose was to “test the matter of my expulsion in court, and so bring Abraham and his Board out into the open and show them up to the public.” He managed to procure the services of Mr. L. S. Lazarus, whom he described as “one of Melbourne’s most prominent legal men”, who took up his case pro bono. Lazarus told Bourke to get a copy of the Society’s Constitution—a relatively straightforward matter which Bourke had great difficulty achieving. Lazarus evidently found that the Committee had not acted within the Constitution,

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47 J. P. Bourke, The Story of a Deaf Drudge, 63.
48 ADDSV, Minutes of General Board Meeting, 20 Oct 1929
49 Described in ADDSV, Minutes of General Board Meeting, 25 Nov 1929; actual statement is attached to minutes of 17 Feb 1930
50 J. P. Bourke, The Story of a Deaf Drudge, 61
51 Ibid., 64.
because he wrote to the Board in January 1930, "threatening to issue a Supreme Court Writ to challenge the validity of its action in expelling [Bourke]." The minutes of the Board meeting that month recorded receiving Lazarus's letter, and mentioned an "informal meeting" between Lazarus and the President of the Board. Abraham and the Secretary of the Board subsequently met with the Society's solicitor Mr. Martin, and the Board decided to instruct Martin to "obtain Counsel's opinion from Mr. R. G. Menzies." (Menzies was an even more prominent Melbourne solicitor, a King's Counsel, whom the Society used in times of special need. For example, a few months after this, they used Menzies to introduce a special deputation from the Society to the Premier, seeking financial assistance. This incident achieved considerable favourable publicity for the Society, and the presence of Menzies would have been a factor in this.)

Lazarus's threats and Menzies' advice evidently combined to induce the Board to reverse its ban on Bourke. In March 1930, the minutes recorded:

\begin{quote}
THAT having reviewed the case of J. P. Bourke's exclusion, and his manifest desire to take advantage of the privileges which the Society wishes to afford to all deaf-mutes, and believing that he will endeavour to refrain from giving cause for complaint in future, at the request and on the motion of the deaf members of the Board of Management who originally proposed his exclusion, and on the recommendation of the Principal, the Board now lifts the embargo placed upon Mr. Bourke by the resolution of 16th September, 1929, excluding him from the privileges of the Society.
\end{quote}

Bourke, who was sent a copy of this "capitulation", claimed that the Deaf representatives denied being the ones to originally propose his exclusion (no proposers are named for that resolution in the September 1929 minutes). The motion reversing Bourke's embargo was declared "Carried Unanimously", but the

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Ibid., 65.}
\footnote{ADDSV, Minutes of General Board Meeting, 20 Jan 1930.}
\footnote{ADDSV, Minutes of General Board Meeting, 17 Feb 1930.}
\footnote{ADDSV, Minutes of General Board Meeting, 21 March 1930. Menzies was at that time the MLA for the State seat of Nunawading, which would have included the Blackburn Farm and Home. He was later to become Australia's longest-serving conservative Prime Minister, serving two terms from 1939 to 1941 and from 1949 to 1966. One of his proteges was to be Andrew Peacock, a relative of the then Deaf Society President, E. R. Peacock.}
\footnote{See, e.g., "Deaf and Dumb Society: Government Guarantee Asked," The Age, 15 March 1930, 25.}
\footnote{ADDSV, Minutes of General Board Meeting, 21 March 1930.}
\footnote{J. P. Bourke, The Story of a Deaf Drudge, 65.}
\end{footnotes}
word “Unanimously” was later crossed out and initialled. Nothing seems to have been unanimous in these contentious times!

There was further evidence that the Board had reluctantly lifted the embargo for legal reasons, rather than from any belief that Bourke would “refrain from giving cause for complaint”. At their April 1930 meeting, they received correspondence from their solicitors Martin & Martin with a “proposed resolution empowering the Committee to exclude from privileges of the Society.”59 This would indicate that Menzies and Martin had recommended they change their Articles so that they would be able to impose such bans again if necessary, without fear of legal challenge. They resolved that “each hearing member of the Committee” be sent a copy of the proposed resolution, along with the solicitors’ letter and the Memorandum and Articles of Association. The two Deaf representatives from the Deaf Committee were present when this resolution was passed, so the decision to send these documents only to the hearing members is further evidence of the continuing disempowerment of Deaf people on the Board.

Bourke might have been banned for six months, but he could not be gagged. He continued to write letters to the Board of the Deaf Society, to the Charities Board and the Premier, and to various other city and state officials. Many of these agencies sent copies of Bourke’s letters to the Deaf Society, so he was mentioned constantly in the minutes of Board meetings, usually with barely suppressed exasperation.60

The incident of Bourke’s banning is a useful study of a strategy used by Abraham and the Board of the Society to control Deaf people, and also demonstrates that resistance met with occasional success. In this episode, Bourke was able to summon quite a lot of support from Deaf individuals. People like Lambert, Crush, Hull and Mrs H. Gladman actively championed his cause. Mrs Gladman wrote to the Board on his behalf 61 He may even have had some oblique support from others such as Johnston. His legal challenge to the Society forced them to reverse a

59 ADDSV, Minutes of General Board Meeting, 28 April 1930.
60 For example, ADDSV, Minutes of Executive Committee Meetings, 13 Aug 1930, 15 Sept 1930, 16 Dec 1930, 24 Feb 1931, and many others.
significant decision and change their Articles, probably incurring unwelcome legal costs in the process. Such small victories were all too rare, particularly in Victoria.

**Excluding Deaf people from power**

The Board meeting of June 1930, had as its heading, “Minutes of Meeting of Hearing Members of Committee”. During this meeting, without any Deaf representatives present, new arrangements were made for the composition of Board Committees and their meeting schedules:

(a) The General board to meet quarterly at 8.00 p.m. on third Monday.
(b) Executive Committee of Hearing Members to meet at Intermediate months to deal with all matters between General Board Meetings.
(c) Home and Farm Committee to meet at Blackburn monthly.
(d) Finance Committee to meet monthly.
(e) Business of assistance to indigent deaf etc. to be transferred to Deaf Committee for consideration and recommendation to Executive.

Since it had already been agreed some years before that the “Farm and Finance Committee ... consist of the hearing and speaking members of the Board”, this new arrangement effectively limited the Deaf representatives to attending four Board meetings a year, instead of the monthly meetings which they had attended up till that time. After this one incident, it was no longer necessary to specify that a meeting was for the “Hearing Members of Committee”; meetings were referred to as either “Executive” or “General Board”, with the implicit understanding that all but the General Board meetings were for hearing members only.

This, along with similar moves in New South Wales, South Australia and Queensland, demonstrates the deepening distrust between hearing and Deaf people involved in the Deaf Societies, and the overt and covert tactics adopted by Boards of Management to consolidate power in the hands of the hearing members.

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61 ADDSV, Minutes of General Board Meeting, 20 Jan 1930
62 ADDSV, Minutes of General Board Meeting, 3 June 1930.
63 ADDSV, Minutes of General Board Meeting, 20 June 1927.
64 See statement about separation of Council and Executive in NSW (Letter from President of the ADDNSW to the Minister for Education, 30 July 1930 In File No. 0144, JWF Collection); the SA Mission Committee’s 1905 action to establish a separate Finance Committee of hearing members only, which took over most of the administrative matters of the Society, effectively disenfranchising the Deaf members of the Mission Committee (R. G. Loades, “The Establishment and Maintenance of the Deaf Community in South Australia,” 43); and Eaton’s complaint that the Queensland Mission’s Committee had no Deaf members by 1931 (QADDM Minutes of Annual General Meeting, held 29 May 1931)
Many of the "arrangements" put in place during this time were to remain in force until the 1970s or later, establishing deep gulfs between the Deaf community and the administration of the Societies, often shrouding their affairs in mystery and rendering their decision-making processes inaccessible to Deaf people.

**Withholding relief**

By the early 1930s, the Depression was having an effect on the finances of the Society, as it was everywhere else. This caused considerable inconvenience to Abraham, forcing him and his family to leave the large suburban house they were then living in and relinquish the £200 annual "house allowance" he received on top of his salary (which was also reduced). At the Board’s request, he and his family returned to live at the Blackburn Home and his wife took up her former position as Matron once again.\(^{65}\)

However, these changed circumstances allowed for new variations on Abraham’s strategies for controlling Deaf people. With high levels of unemployment, Deaf people were reliant on the Society for providing sustenance or relief money, and for occasional casual work such as gardening. But this assistance had strings attached. Abraham’s successor remembered:

> And if you crossed his path, he had ways and means of making sure you knew he was boss. (Laughter). Oh yes...
> Well, if you argued with him and told him that he was wrong, you would find that next week he didn’t have enough money for you on relief...
> He’d have it for this fella and that fella, but it’s run out.\(^{66}\)

But, as Reynolds remembered, "...yet if the family was having hardship he would be the first there with money to help them out. Not his, the Society’s money, it was welfare."\(^{67}\) This would have been an astute way to use the financial resources at his disposal. Being able to deny a Deaf person the public assistance they were legitimately entitled to, probably in front of other Deaf people, would have been humiliating and would have reminded Deaf people of their helplessness; but being

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\(^{65}\) ADDSV, Farm & Home Committee’s Recommendations, attached to Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting, 21 Oct 1931.


\(^{67}\) Ibid.
there with “welfare” assistance in truly dire circumstances would have helped cement his image as a generous saviour, and reinforced to Deaf people how much they needed him.

Bourke (who managed to keep himself in employment through this time and so did not find himself a victim of this particular brand of humiliation) saw in the Depression a metaphor for the condition of Deaf people everywhere:

The depression that has overtaken Australia is no new thing to the intelligent impotent deaf. The hopeless and worried lives being led by the hearing unemployed on sustenance and on employment relief is a measure of the lives the impotent deaf have had to lead from time immemorial. Thousands of them in all parts of the world have lived in the midst of such depressions from generation to generation all down the ages. 68

A hearing protester

Although the Society’s Board usually seemed to reach agreement on its position and course of action, there were regular divisions among Board members, and between Board and management. In 1927 several members of the Board had intervened to stop Abraham conducting a public appeal for funds for the Society. 69 In February 1930 one of the Board members, Mr. E. Simpson Hill, resigned after an altercation with Abraham and the Farm and Home Sub-Committee. 70 (He had commenced on the Board in September 1929, only six months previously.) In his letter of resignation, he claimed that his role as adviser or assistant in the management of the Farm had been misrepresented. He evidently perceived this as a strategy to make him take responsibility for the many problems besetting the Farm and Home, and stated emphatically, “I decline to be made a scapegoat for the failures past and present of the Principal or any Committee”. 71 He also declared his intention to personally inform the Deaf members of the Board of the reasons for his resignation. More seriously, he called for a Royal Commission:

I have so often heard the expression “We invite the fullest inquiry — there is nothing to hide, the inmates are free to come or go, they are happy,” etc., etc. that I venture to suggest to the Board to ask the

69 Sec 1 P. Bourke, The Story of a Deaf Drudge, 45, for a more detailed description.
70 Letter from E. Simpson Hill, attached to ADDSV, Minutes of Meeting of General Board Meeting, 17 Feb 1930.
71 Ibid
Government to appoint a Royal Commission to investigate fully the whole of the affairs of the D. & D., if all is proved correct, you will have absolutely the strongest case to present to the public for assistance and the unrest, suspicion and statements one so constantly hears would be set at rest once for all, and I will support it. If, however, the Board cannot do this, then I may consider the advisability of requesting the Government to do so myself.\textsuperscript{72}

This indicated that at least one Board member had strong reservations about Abraham and the workings of the Society, and was sympathetic to the "unrest" and "suspicion" among the Deaf community. There seems to be no further information about whether Simpson Hill followed up his proposal to request a Royal Commission—like the Deaf dissidents, he was probably marginalised and his concerns trivialised.

\textit{The Victorian Deaf magazine}

Victorian Deaf people had tried at least once to develop an independent voice, with the experiment of the \textit{Commonwealth Silent Courier} in 1928. Although that attempt had been quickly suppressed, the desire for an autonomous publication continued. They tried again in late 1929, this time aiming for control of an existing magazine, \textit{Our Monthly Letter}. Bourke wrote later that a number of Deaf people were stirred into action by Abraham's disappointing performance in editing the Letter (by then a "bi-monthly"), allowing it to become irregular and writing too many flattering articles about himself. Bourke claimed that in 1929 the Deaf Committee "put its foot down and forced Mr. Abraham to relinquish the editorship of the 'Letter'\textsuperscript{73}" The Deaf Committee took over the newsletter at the beginning of 1930 and changed its name to \textit{The Victorian Deaf}. Mr. A. Hull (who had been one of the editors of the \textit{Commonwealth Silent Courier}) was once again editor, and Mr. R. H. Lambert, a Deaf Scotsman, was manager. Bourke, who was involved in the group this time, wrote:

\begin{quote}
We deaf were all very proud to be allowed to run our paper... it was written of the deaf, for the deaf, by the deaf and it appeared regularly. The deaf were expected to finance it themselves, and Mr. Abraham did everything he could to discourage, thwart and hamper Mr. Lambert...
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid

\textsuperscript{73} J. P. Bourke, "The Victorian Front," \textit{The Deaf Advocate} 1, no 4 (April 1931): 8.
Both Mr. Hull and Mr. Lambert, and later Mr. W. Crush – worked hard and sacrificed their leisure to make our paper a success. Although they had the right to be fearless, outspoken and aggressive the tone of “The Victorian Deaf” was temperate, calm and manly. No one could object to one word of it.  

Lambert took over as editor during 1930 (Hull was killed in an accident in June), with Mr. H. Puddy as his assistant. The “temperate” tone of the magazine became bolder, and the Christmas issue included several items indicating that the Victorians were making some radical alliances. One was a short piece by “Bananalander” (probably John Paul or R. F. Tunley of Queensland), criticising the vocational training scheme operating in Brisbane.

Another was a letter from Mrs M. Gladman:

Hearty congratulations on the latest issue of “The Victorian Deaf.” You certainly have made it ‘Deaf for the Deaf.’ I enjoyed every page of it. It is time we Deaf woke up and demanded full liberty rights, and may ‘The Victorian Deaf’ be the means of securing the object which deserves the support of all classes of the Deaf.

But the most provocative item was a long “Christmas Message” from Mr. H. V. S. Hersee, Superintendent of the new NSW Association of Deaf and Dumb Citizens. Hersee congratulated the Victorian Deaf community for successfully publishing their own magazine for a year, and delivered a little sermon based on the words of Marcus Aurelius:

“Seek the truth by which no man was ever injured.” The Deaf of Australia have for too long allowed themselves to be governed by a few people who have been incapable of really understanding the needs and point of view of the Deaf. The Deaf have been regarded as incapable of thought, and incapable of expressing their opinion—merely a body of afflicted people in need of charitable relief and pity.

…it is a vital necessity for the Deaf “to seek the truth,” especially of the management of their own affairs.

Almost as an afterthought, Hersee warned the Victorians that “The truth may make enemies, for it is often a bitter pill to swallow”.

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74 Ibid., 8-9
76 “Vocational Training as it is,” *The Victorian Deaf* 1, no. 6 (Nov-Dec 1930): 14.
77 Ibid., 6
Sure enough, in the next issue, Lambert’s name had disappeared from the Editor’s space on the front page of *The Victorian Deaf*. There was a short notice on the second page reporting the new editorial arrangements—a “Magazine Committee” of E. J. D. Abraham (chairman), J. M. Johnston, Geo. Newnham, J. McLean, and H. Puddy (manager). 80 Abraham had, it seemed, got his magazine back again. Lambert confirmed this in a letter he sent to *The Deaf Advocate*:

> As Editor of “The Victorian Deaf” — last year’s magazine, I respectfully beg to inform you that the Deaf Committee ... decided to accept the proposal of Mr. Abraham that “The Victorian Deaf” be continued for another year on the old way, of which I did not approve, so I withdrew from the Editorship. 81

According to Bourke, Abraham had objected to the inclusion of Hersee’s article and their refusal to include “flattering paragraphs” about him so, “...claiming the right to choose our friends for us, he has taken our paper away from us.” Bourke said that although Lambert had tried to reject the interference, “he was not strong enough for Mr. Abraham”. 82

In Abraham’s first issue of the magazine for 1931, he included a “Message from our President”, Mr. E. R. Peacock. Peacock gently chided the rebels:

> It is ... quite understandable that some who now are reaping the benefits of the work of others should think that they can kick away the ladder which has enabled them to climb, and that they can manage by themselves. This is a serious mistake

Peacock also deplored the fact that “many of the deaf are easy victims to plausible agitators”, 83 a comment which foreshadowed the accusations of Kingwell in Queensland a few months later. 84 Bourke expostulated, “Mr. Peacock admonishes us to be good little boys and girls and to beware of the company we keep.” 85

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79 Ibid., 4.
80 “Magazine Committee,” *The Victorian Deaf* 2, no. 1 (Feb 1931): 2
81 R. H. Lambert, letter to the editor, *The Deaf Advocate* 1, no. 3 (March 1931): 9
82 J. P. Bourke, “The Victorian Front”, *The Deaf Advocate* 1, no. 4 (April 1931): 9
83 “A Message from Our President,” *The Victorian Deaf* 2, no. 1 (Feb 1931): 2
84 W. R. Kingwell, letter to A. L. Lonsdale dated 26 Oct 1931 File No. 0255, JWF Collection
85 J. P. Bourke, “The Victorian Front”, *The Deaf Advocate* 1, no. 4 (April 1931): 9
Although Lambert had resigned rather than been dismissed, he obviously felt himself to have been forced out of the role of Editor, and the incident rankled with him. He sent another article to *The Deaf Advocate* in June 1931, comparing his experience on *The Victorian Deaf* magazine with his involvement in Deaf communities overseas (probably in Scotland and England), and concluded with an accurate (if awkwardly phrased) summary of the tactics used by Abraham and his associates:

> Since twenty year’s harmonious association with the Over-sea Deaf, it is the first time here I ever learned this kind of “proved” experience, which is met very similarly by the local bolder spirits in their endeavour to right the wrongs of the deaf, who have been ruthlessly suppressed by gradually being worked out of their respective locality.\(^{86}\)

Bourke and other “local bolder spirits” would have been quick to agree. If they had not already experienced these tactics, many of them would over the next several years.

An example of the dissidents “gradually being worked out”, or publicly marginalised, was reported in the July-August issue of *The Victorian Deaf* magazine, which described a “mass meeting of the deaf and dumb people of Melbourne” in July, at which two resolutions were “unanimously adopted”:

> “In view of misstatements that have from time to time appeared in certain publications above the signature of unauthorised persons purporting to be the opinions of the deaf and dumb community, we, the deaf of Melbourne, desire to put upon record that those views, opinions and statements are not authorised by nor do they represent the views and opinions of the deaf community.”
> “That this meeting of deaf wish to place upon record their implicit confidence in the Deaf Committee as their elected and authorised representatives.”\(^{87}\)

The staging of such events, and the reporting of such “unanimous” resolutions, would have had the effect of placing the dissidents outside the community. They would also have served as an ominous warning to any wavering still within the community of their likely fate should they begin expressing “unauthorised” opinions.

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\(^{86}\) R. H. Lambert, “Why I Withdrew from the Editorship of ‘The Victorian Deaf’ Magazine,” *The Deaf Advocate* 1, no. 6 (June 1931).
At the beginning of 1932, the magazine was again taken over by a Deaf editor—Mr. W. H. Crush. Crush was another migrant (from England) and like many of the Victorian activists, had not grown up under Abraham’s benevolent shadow. He seems to have moved with some ease between Deaf and hearing worlds, and often writing on behalf of the “hard of hearing” or those on the cusp of the two communities. Crush moved around and changed jobs frequently, and it is probably only a fortuitous coincidence that he lived in Melbourne during these critical years. He had worked for some years as a Collector for the Victorian Deaf and Dumb Institute (the school for deaf children).

Although Crush’s background was similar to Bourke’s in some ways, he seems to have been accepted more readily by Deaf people, possibly because he had the sporting prowess so highly valued in Deaf communities (Bourke seems never to have set foot in a sporting arena). Crush was mentioned more often in the social and sporting pages of Our Monthly Letter—serving, for example, in the Cricket Club and the Lacrosse Club. He had written for the Commonwealth Silent Courier and The Victorian Deaf under Lambert’s editorship, and there is evidence that he privately despised Abraham, referring to him as an “unscrupulous schemer”. However, he seems to have maintained an acceptable reputation in all camps—the Deaf community, the small group of activists, the Society’s Board and Abraham. He had been on the Deaf Committee for some years, and was elected as one of their representatives to the General Board of the Deaf Society in August 1931.  

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88 Records of Deaf people, (n.d.), Box 31, VDS Collection, SLV. Records stated that Crush was born and educated in England under the oral system, that he was a wood machinist, now collector, and was single.
90 Letter from Mr W. H. Crush to Mr Adcock, Superintendent of the Victorian Deaf and Dumb Institute), n.d. (but refers to imminent Charity Appeal in 1927) PROV, VA 02707 Charities Board of Victoria, VPRS 4523/P1, “Closed” Agency and General Correspondence Files, Unit 68, File 656.
91 ADDSV, Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting, 17 Aug. 1931.
Crush was announced as the new Editor for the magazine's first issue of 1932. The name was changed to *The Victorian Deaf News*. In his first editorial he compared the need for Deaf people to work together on the Deaf Committee to the teamwork needed in a successful sporting team, always an effective metaphor in the Deaf community.\(^{92}\)

It was not long before a few bold statements began to find their way into the magazine again; though Lambert's fate may have taught Crush to be, at first, a little more cautious. In his second issue, he quoted an "appreciative letter" from a reader: "The June 'Vic. Deaf News' proved to be a real Deaf paper, and now may I venture to hope that the deaf will be permitted to express their own views in its columns in future".\(^{93}\) However, this quote was carefully hidden in the middle of a paragraph.

*The Deaf Advocate* in Sydney, always alert to radical developments in other states, quickly hailed Crush as a "real" Deaf editor of *The Victorian Deaf News*.\(^{94}\) Crush travelled to New South Wales and Queensland later that year, and was evidently impressed by events, organisations and personalities in those states. 1932 was also the year that Deaf people formed a new national organisation, the Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf (see Chapter Seven), and Crush was elected Chairman of the Victorian branch. In the final issue of the magazine for 1932, he wrote at length about his trip to New South Wales and Queensland, and looked forward with anticipation to seeing his interstate friends again that Christmas at a conference of the new AAAD. He ventured to praise and promote the AAAD in *The Victorian Deaf News*:

> The formation of the AAAD has created great enthusiasm in Australian deaf circles recently, as is evident by the increased membership, especially in New South Wales and Queensland. Of a total membership of about 400, Victorians number over 130 already. By uniting, the Australian deaf are merely following the example of, and coming into line with, the deaf of overseas, notably the "N.A.D." of U.S.A., and the "B.D.&D. Association" of Great

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\(^{92}\) "Team Work", *The Victorian Deaf News* 3, no 1 (April-May-June 1932)

\(^{93}\) *The Victorian Deaf News* 3, no 2 (July-Aug-Sept 1932): 5.

\(^{94}\) "The Victorian Deaf News," *The Deaf Advocate* 2, no 7 (July 1932).
Britain, and marks a progressive step forward in the history of the adult deaf of Australia.
It is one other evidence that the deaf of Australia are emerging from the limbo in which they have existed for so long and are assuming a recognised place in the universal scheme of things.\footnote{The Victorian Deaf News 3, no. 3 (Oct-Nov- Dec 1932): 8-9 Emphasis in original.}

\textit{The Victorian Deaf News} had not mentioned the AAAD before this point. Since 130 Victorians had already joined it and Crush was Chairman of the State branch, the magazine's silence on the subject had been noticeable, and had almost certainly been influenced by Abraham's and the Society's opposition to the AAAD. The fact that Crush boldly spoke out about it in this issue of the magazine suggested that he was soon for the high jump!

The next issue was subdued, except for two short paragraphs reporting that Crush and Lambert had gone to the AAAD Conference in Sydney as delegates from Victoria. No further reports of the Conference were included.\footnote{ADDVS, Minutes of General Board Meeting, 27 March 1933. Crush's resignation letter was dated 16 March 1933.} However, it was to be Crush's last issue as editor.

Melbourne was the scene of a pivotal public meeting on 15th March 1933 (see Chapter Seven for a full description), at which conflicts between the national aspirations of the AAAD and the Deaf Societies came to a spectacular climax. When Crush tried to speak on behalf of Deaf people at this meeting, he was publicly humiliated by Deaf Society officials. The following day, 16th March 1933, Crush resigned from the Deaf Committee, the General Board, the editorship of \textit{The Victorian Deaf News}, and (it seems) the Lacrosse Committee and the Cricket Committee.\footnote{The Victorian Deaf News 4, no. 1 (April-May-June 1933)} He left Melbourne later that year. Another “bolder spirit” had been “worked out”.

The following issue of the magazine did not mention Crush as editor or indeed any editor or editorial committee.\footnote{The Victorian Deaf News 3, no. 4 (Jan-Feb-March 1933).} The next issue reported on the annual meeting of the Deaf Committee—although Lambert and Crush had both been
on the Deaf Committee the previous year, their names had vanished without comment from the new line-up.99 This issue also announced that the newly elected Honorary Editor of *The Victorian Deaf News* was Mr. J. M. Johnston. Abraham had evidently decided that he needed one of his own men in the job.

At the Anniversary Rally in October, which celebrated the anniversary of Abraham’s arrival every year, Mr. F. E. Frewin, a Deaf member of the Deaf Committee and an old stalwart of the Society, made a “very forceful speech”, praising and congratulating Abraham for his many achievements, and castigating the rebels:

> He regretted to find that there were even a few in our midst who are still blind to [Abraham’s] active goodness and achievements, preferring to find fault and magnify it. He appealed to them to show a friendly spirit and loyalty toward Mr. Abraham, concluding with the hope that the present happy harmony will continue.”

In the next issue, Abraham reprised the ditty, “The more we are together, the happier we will be” in his Christmas message to the Deaf community.100 When viewed against the background of Deaf people’s struggles to assert an independent voice, his jolly assurances of, “For my friends are your friends, and your friends are my friends,” have the appearance of a thinly veiled threat.

**Taking protests across the state border**

The New South Wales Association’s publication, *The Deaf Advocate*, provided an alternative forum for disgruntled Victorian Deaf people to express their views on what was happening in their state. Since their own newsletter proved so difficult to wrest from the control of the Society, Victorians may have deemed it safer to send their more outspoken comments and articles interstate, rather than risk trying to publish them in *The Victorian Deaf News*, even when it was being edited by Lambert and Crush. Once the experiments with the *Commonwealth Silent Courier* and *The Victorian Deaf News* failed, there was no local outlet for their writings, and many Victorians became regular contributors to *The Deaf Advocate*. It is interesting to note that many (or most) of the Victorian correspondents in the

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99 *The Victorian Deaf News* 4, no. 2 (July-Aug-Sept 1933): 5
Advocate would not sign their names to their letters or articles. Bourke, Lambert and Crush signed their contributions, but most others used nom-de-plumes like "A Victorian Deaf Defender", their initials, or simply remained anonymous. The most obvious explanation is that the writers feared reprisals against them if they put their names to criticisms of affairs in Victoria.

At first the contributions from Victorians were merely congratulatory and focused on the achievements of the Association in New South Wales. In one early example, "Mrs. Gladman of Victoria has written to say how she appreciates the 'Advocate' with its policy of freedom of speech which is so different to what the Deaf have been used to for so many years past." As the radical tone of the Advocate became more evident, Victorians saw its potential as an alternative outlet, and they began to send articles which commented on and criticised events in their own State.

Bourke wrote in February 1932, attacking Abraham's comments about Deaf people in the Adult Deaf and Dumb Society of Victoria's Annual Report for 1931. Abraham had written:

The deaf community, mainly of the artisan class, includes all sorts and conditions, and embraces all religious beliefs, all degrees of mentality and morality—the good, indifferent and viciously bad. With few exceptions, they are of the artisan class and the main avenue to mental development—hearing—being closed, it is not surprising that they are not as developed intellectually as normal people.

This was deeply offensive to many Deaf people, and was in fact quite different from the more positive comments Abraham had usually made about Deaf people earlier in his career. The tensions and conflicts within the Victorian community during the 1920s and 30s were evidently souring his views. Bourke railed against
the statement, using it to criticise Abraham and his kind: “As if some hearing people are not viciously bad and intellectually undeveloped.”

The Advocate’s willingness to print exposés of events such as the Cricket Carnival held in Victoria at Christmas in 1931, and its refusal to allow Deaf cricketers from the NSW Association to participate (see Chapter Four), also drew comment. An unnamed “Deaf Subscriber in Victoria” wrote in response to the Cricket Carnival article:

The correspondence on the Xmas Carnival was an eye opener to many of us. Its [sic] a pity the light of day is not shed on many other subjects as well. There would be less suspicion and a better understanding all round then... With grateful thanks from the many Victorians who have gained so much strength and courage from the pages of the Advocate.

This, and similar articles, drew attention to the sharp contrast between the openness of information practiced by the Advocate and the NSW Association, and the climate of secrecy, suspicion and fear which prevailed in the Victorian Deaf community of the time. The Advocate editors seemed to relish their paper’s opportunity to attack and mock the Victorian Society, especially Abraham’s claims to grandeur. One article which wittily deconstructed Abraham’s role as “uncrowned and unabashed King of the Deaf of Australia” referred back to the days when Abraham was editor of the British Deaf Times in the 1890s. The paper at that time had an anonymous “Special Commissioner” who praised Abraham regularly:

...one looks through old files of the “British Deaf Times” and finds that its “Special Commissioner” walking down the street meets Mr. Abraham by chance, and finds him the foremost of all his brethren in the work. Think of that tribute!! Half a hundred men, many of whom were respect [sic] and revered, and whose memory is still sweet today, whose work stands high because of the high character they put into it, and above and beyond them all “Our Special Commissioner” finds a place apart for Mr. Abraham. The mere fact that “Our Special Commissioner” IS Mr. Abraham should not be allowed to detract from the high tribute he has paid to himself, any more than these splendid articles by himself of eulogy and flattering references of himself in “Our Monthly Letter” ... should create

105 Ibid. (The piece is unsigned, but has several Bourke trademarks, such as a quote from King Silence.)
106 Deaf Subscriber in Victoria, letter to the editor, The Deaf Advocate 2, no. 3 (March 1932)
criticism. It is axiomatic in English Law that the King can do no wrong.\textsuperscript{107}

In May 1932, an anonymous Deaf person who claimed to have been "condemned as 'mentally unfit' by the so-called leader of the Victorian Society" wrote an article for the \textit{Advocate} about the ills of the Society. In awkward English, he or she attempted to describe the profound difference in the way Deaf and hearing people perceived deafness:

\begin{quote}
In fact, there is practically nothing wrong with the .... deaf except the physical difference – the trivial loss of hearing – ....

It is a matter of "astigmatism" [sic] of the eye – the inability of a "hearing" person's eye to fathom and sound the meaning of the handicap of deafness.

The word "handicap" ... has no mien [sic] upon the deaf...\textsuperscript{108}
\end{quote}

This was an interesting expression of the ongoing historical tension between Deaf people and those who wished to control them. Like many other Deaf people before and since,\textsuperscript{109} this person declared that the problem lay not with Deaf people's "trivial" lack of hearing, but with the deep-seated "astigmatism" in the way hearing people viewed them.

There were occasional references in the early 1930s to plans for establishing a new national magazine. R. H. Lambert wrote to the \textit{Advocate} in March 1931 of his "aim and endeavour to preserve the personality of the deaf by means of a proposed new magazine"\textsuperscript{110} A few months later the \textit{Advocate} editors reported, "We hear that there is talk of establishing an independent magazine for the deaf of Australia. It is to be run entirely by the deaf, that is to say it is to be both managed and edited by them."\textsuperscript{111} Once again Lambert was named in connection with the proposal, and the \textit{Advocate} promised its support in the venture. However, nothing seems to have come of these aspirations, and \textit{The Deaf Advocate} remained the closest thing to a national magazine that Australian Deaf people had during these years.

\textsuperscript{107} The Call Boy, "Brotherly Love", \textit{The Deaf Advocate} 3, no 2 (February 1933). The style of this article, and the author's knowledge of the British scene, suggest that John Paul may have been the author.

\textsuperscript{108} "What is wrong with the A. D. and D. S. ?", \textit{The Deaf Advocate} 2, no. 5 (May 1932).

\textsuperscript{109} E.g., Pierre Desloges' claim in 1779 that "Nature has not been as cruel to us as is commonly assumed." (See Chapter 2, n. 1)

\textsuperscript{110} R. H. Lambert, letter to the editor, \textit{The Deaf Advocate} 1, no. 3 (March 1931)
"A house divided"

Although there was never a formal breakaway in Victoria, it seems clear that there was a loosely connected group of disaffected people who moved in and out of various short-lived projects together. Erin Reynolds, recalling this group fifty years later, referred to them as a “breakaway” and a “deaf association”, but these terms were never used at the time. Reynolds described the group as being “headed by a lot of the older deaf”, especially Bourke. He also remembered Robert Luff and Mrs Gladman as regular members, and said that they “got a lot of younger deaf in”, such as Crush. He recalled that they were “a little more highly intelligent than the average deaf”. Reynolds would not give an estimate of the size of the group, but it seems to have been quite small, and probably no more than 20 or 30. The group did not have formal meeting rooms, usually meeting in the home of Mrs Gladman in Prahran, but Reynolds recalled that they sometimes met at the school premises, where the Superintendent Mr McCaskill was sympathetic to them. He described the group as being driven by a “personal bitter feud” against Abraham, a “battle of wills”. The division created in the Victorian Deaf community was “a deep bitter thing, very deep and bitter.”112

Political activism was not the only way Deaf people expressed their opposition to conditions at the Deaf Society under Abraham. It was during these years that significant numbers of Deaf people left the Society and their close-knit community, and joined the Exclusive Brethren, a religious sect.113 Reynolds claimed that these people were “more intelligent” and “deep thinkers”, and that they objected to Abraham’s assuming the role of minister or chaplain to the Deaf when he was not formally ordained.114 Bourke also described them as people who “took their religion seriously”, and said that once they had joined the Brethren they “keep to

111 “An Independent Magazine for the Deaf,” The Deaf Advocate 1, no. 5 (May 1931)
113 Deaf people may initially have joined because some large Melbourne companies, including the flour and biscuit factory McAlpin’s, were owned by members of the Brethren at that time, and they gave Deaf people work during the Depression. Many hearing members of the Brethren learned to communicate easily with Deaf people through fingerspelling, an important factor which made Deaf people comfortable joining and staying in the church. (Andrew Wiltshire and Tim Earl, personal communication, 11 January 2004.)
themselves and will not come near the Centre.”115 Unlike the political dissidents, the Deaf membership of the Brethren lasted throughout the rest of the 20th Century, with successive generations of Deaf families remaining within the “EB”. They were an almost exclusively Melbourne phenomenon in the Australian Deaf community.

These political and religious dissenters were the two main examples of collective opposition to Abraham and the Society. Victorian Deaf people may not have come as close to “managing their own affairs” in these years as those in New South Wales and Queensland, but they faced and challenged a more wily and dangerous opponent. As in the other States, they paid a heavy price in the fragmentation of their community. But in Victoria the divisions within the community were not as easily identified with separate organisations—instead they spread within what appeared to be a single, unified group. Bourke described the Victorian Deaf community of this time as being “a house divided against itself”,116 and Reynolds called the rift a “deep, bitter thing.” This was the darker side of the cheerful choruses of “the more we are together, the happier we will be”.

As we have seen, these events in Victoria overlapped with the beginnings of a movement to establish a national organisation of Deaf people. It was inevitable that such a move would be contested by the Societies, and Victoria was to be the site of the most significant clashes on the national front. The tactics which had been developed by Abraham and his associates in their domestic conflicts were to be used again on a much larger scale.

116 Ibid., 75.
CHAPTER 7: Managing Their Own Affairs: The National Scene

*The next generation of the deaf will not be unmindful of what you are doing now—and will benefit by it. By joining up as a member of the Australian Association you will help in putting down the barriers of blind ignorance and prejudices and further advancing a new era in the history of the deaf.*

*Fletcher Booth, 1932.*

The upheavals of the late 1920s and early 1930s were making many people feel the need for action on a national level. Deaf people from the breakaway Associations in NSW and Queensland, and the struggling rebels in Victoria, were feeling emboldened and ready to emulate Deaf people in other countries who had active national associations. Hearing people in charge of the Societies, along with some of their Deaf allies, were feeling that they needed stronger national networks to counter the new and threatening activism from Deaf people. Both of these groups began to make national moves during the early 1930s. This chapter describes the organisations they established and the inevitable clashes between them.

As always, these developments did not happen in isolation. The early 1930s were a time of widespread political activism in Australia as elsewhere. The effects of the Depression highlighted inequalities and social divisions, and gave impetus to the efforts of minority groups to articulate their needs and organise to protect their interests. Such groups wanted not only to better their socio-economic conditions, but also to enjoy equality and autonomy and have their contributions to society recognised. The role of “citizen” was used to embody these rights and responsibilities. Parallel to Deaf people’s activism in Australia was that of Aboriginal people, who continued to reject their status as “permanent little children on the fringe of society”2 and moved to begin national organisations such as the Australian Aborigines League in 1932. Such parallels were rarely commented on by those involved in the Deaf community—I. P. Bourke was perhaps the only one to claim that, “The problem of the aborigines and the problem of the deaf and dumb is

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1 Editorial, *The Deaf Advocate* 2, no. 4 (April 1932).
almost identical in every respect (i.e., of making them good and happy citizens and an economic asset to the nation).” He considered that the Deaf were more disadvantaged.

**The Australasian Deaf and Dumb Association’s last appearance**

The ADDA had all but vanished from the scene by the late 1920s. During Hersee’s brief time with the NSW Society, he accompanied the NSW Deaf Cricket team to a Cricket Carnival held at Hobart in December 1928, and found himself appointed Secretary of another meeting called to discuss the future of the ADDA. By that time the only surviving Branch of the ADDA was in Victoria, and Ernest Abraham seemed to be the lone voice calling for its revival, although he asked the meeting initially to “discuss the advisability of the formation of some Inter-State Organisation”, and left the way open for a new organisation to replace the ADDA. The record of the meeting (prepared by Hersee) was cursory and carried little information about the contributions of those present, apart from that of Abraham. It mentioned that Mr W. H. Crush, a Deaf man from Victoria, suggested a referendum of “all the deaf”. Another person identified as preferring to leave the matter with “the Deaf and Dumb as a whole” was South Australia’s new Superintendent, Mr. O. Redman.

Hersee recorded his own contribution, which was that:

> whilst he agreed in much that had been said, he did not think that those present had the authority or the power to definitely reform the A.D.D.A. or to form some new organisation. He was strongly in favour of there being some body that would unite the Deaf of this great Commonwealth, providing it was organized and conducted on straightforward lines.

Hersee also moved the closing resolution that those present consult with the “Deaf and Dumb of their State” as to what sort of organisation they wished to see at the national level. Once again this resolution appears not to have been pursued, and

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4 Minutes of a Meeting of the Deaf and Dumb at Hobart, 27 Dec 1928. File No. 254, JWF Collection.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid
7 Ibid.
there seems to be no further mention of the ADDA in Australian records, apart from historical references.

Two national organisations are planned
In April 1931, a “Circular Letter” was distributed by Fletcher Booth and Ernest Quinnell (Deaf councillors of the NSW Association of Deaf and Dumb Citizens) proposing a conference of “deaf and dumb representatives of each State”. It was stressed that the conference should be “organised by the deaf independently...not...under the auspices of any organisation for the adult deaf”. They also insisted that it was not to be “domineered in any way by any Superintendent: in fact it is not yet decided whether Superintendents should even be invited to attend.” The conference was proposed because:

The time has evidently come for the deaf to get together to exchange ideas and to try and form a common policy for the recognition of their rights. The A.D.D.A. is obviously either dead or else has become a one State show, and there being no organisation in existence we felt we had no alternative but to send this letter to you in an attempt to start the ball rolling.

This seems to have been the first call to Deaf people of Australia to meet independently. Booth and Quinnell followed it up with an editorial in their new magazine, *The Deaf Advocate*, calling for “independent management” for “the whole of the Deaf community”. A preliminary meeting was held in Sydney in July 1931, where “a prominent worker consented to set the ball rolling”, and it was agreed that a Constitution be prepared by “tried friends of the Deaf, well fitted for the task”. These “friends of the Deaf” would almost certainly have included Hersee, and he may also have been the “prominent worker” referred to.

Deaf people were not the only ones setting balls rolling. In March 1930, the President of the Board of the Victorian Society, Mr. E. H. Peacock, had visited Sydney and held discussions with the President and members of the Sydney Society. After this visit he wrote a letter to his Board proposing that:

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8 “Circular Letter,” reproduced in *The Deaf Advocate* 3, no. 10 (October 1933)
9 “Editorial”, *The Deaf Advocate* 1, no. 6 (June 1931).
10 First Report, Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf, June 1936.
...an Australian Council of hearing and speaking representatives of the Boards of Management of the different Incorporated Societies holding property should be created. The idea is not to create a new governing body with authority but an honorary supervisory and consultative Council to protect the public and serve the Deaf and Dumb community in Australia.\(^{11}\)

He introduced his proposal by saying that, "It is recognised that the Adult Deaf and Dumb constitute an Australian problem and not simply a State interest." It is interesting to note that he considered that only "hearing and speaking representatives" of the Societies should be chosen to deal with this "Australian problem". No longer was there any attempt to placate supporters of the dying ADDA by saying that Deaf people could be involved in the proposed Council.

Among the objects of Peacock's proposed Council were:

...the drafting of a model constitution to protect the public who contribute money for the work, and secure the continuity of Policy and Administration.
...the training of Australian Leaders or Teachers for the work in the Commonwealth.\(^{12}\)

Peacock suggested that "the President and Management of the Sydney Society be invited to take the initiative, with the assurance of the cordial support of the Melbourne Society."\(^{13}\) Correspondence was duly exchanged, and by August that year the Victorian Society was suggesting that a conference be held in Melbourne that Christmas (1930), at the same time as "the Festival" (Sports Carnival), and that representatives of the schools for Deaf children also be invited to attend.\(^{14}\) No record survives of such a conference, if it was held.

Little more seems to have been said on the subject until September 1931, when Mr Gladwin of the NSW Society wrote to the Victorian Society about the proposed Council (referred to in the Victorian Society's minutes as the "Commonwealth Society"). The Victorian response was evasive, with the Secretary being instructed to reply:

\(^{11}\) Letter from E. H. Peacock dated 27 March 1930, attached to ADDSV, Minutes of General Board Meeting, 28 April 1930
\(^{12}\) Ibid
\(^{13}\) Ibid
\(^{14}\) ADDSV, Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting, 13 Aug 1930.
...that the General Board regarded the matter sympathetically, but they would like to have some information as to what the proposed constitution will be, how it is proposed to function the Interstate Committee, and what liability there would be, before they can come to a definite conclusion.\textsuperscript{15}

Officials from the Victorian and NSW Societies met during a sports Carnival in Melbourne in December 1931, and evidently held further discussions about the proposed new organisation. It was reported on cryptically in the NSW Society's magazine \textit{The Silent Messenger} in January 1932: "The discussion will, no doubt, lead to a big forward movement in the course of a very short time."\textsuperscript{16} The editors of \textit{The Deaf Advocate} decried this "secret conference", suspecting that it was called to plan the formation of a Council of Adult Deaf and Dumb Societies, which was prompted by fear of the success of the NSW and Queensland Associations of Deaf and Dumb Citizens.\textsuperscript{17} As was noted in Chapter Five, there were certainly some such fears after the Queensland breakaway the previous year, as evidenced by Kingwell's speculations about "a definite move by a few extremists to get control of the Deaf and Dumb Societies of the Commonwealth."\textsuperscript{18} These two proposed organisations did not seem destined to be compatible.

\textbf{The Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf}

J. P. Bourke in Victoria also urged the establishment of a new national body of Deaf people in a letter to the editors of \textit{The Deaf Advocate} in February 1932. He was careful to distinguish his proposed new organisation from the earlier ADDA, which he associated with Abraham:

Let us form an Australian Deaf and Dumb Association composed entirely of the deaf themselves. An interstate Association that will champion the cause of the deaf, protect their rights, encourage and help the State Societies and Associations to uplift them spiritually and morally, and guard our less fortunate brothers from exploitation, is long overdue in Australia.

...I ask the deaf not to be frightened by the Bogey of the old (so-called) A.D.D.A. This ... was formed by Mr Abraham for propaganda purposes while he was building up the Victorian Society. The

\textsuperscript{15} ADDSV, Minutes of General Board Meeting, 21 Sept 1931
\textsuperscript{16} Quoted in J. P. Bourke, \textit{The After-School Problems of the Deaf and Dumb No. II}, 17
\textsuperscript{17} "A Secret Conference Exposed Plans to 'Rule' the Deaf," \textit{The Deaf Advocate} 2, no. 2 (Feb 1932)
\textsuperscript{18} W R. Kingwell, letter to A. L. Lonsdale dated 26 Oct 1931 File No 0255, JWF Collection
Association I have in mind is to be as different as possible from the ADDA.\textsuperscript{19}

The editors of The Deaf Advocate were only too ready to join in criticising Abraham and dismissing the ADDA. They described the ADDA as a "sickly and weak child" which had accomplished nothing useful and "died a natural death."\textsuperscript{20} This contrasts with the statements of the previous generation of Deaf people (see Chapter Three), claiming that the ADDA had achieved important results. The change in attitude suggests that the ADDA had become tainted by its association with Abraham.

The Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf (AAAD) was established at a meeting in Sydney on 22 and 23 March 1932, convened by M. Overend Wilson. The meeting was attended by four people from Queensland, one from South Australia, and nine from NSW.\textsuperscript{21} Although no Victorians attended, supportive messages were received from them and all of the other States.\textsuperscript{22} Wilson was the only woman, and Hersee, Paul and Tunley the only hearing people present. Hersee and Paul were invited "because of their long standing knowledge of the Deaf in Great Britain and for the assistance it was known they could render in helping to draw up a satisfactory Constitution."\textsuperscript{23} M. Overend Wilson became the Acting Honorary Secretary of the new Association, and wrote after this first meeting, "Preliminary ideas and strong feelings of the necessity of such an Association have been in the air for a long time and finally crystalized".\textsuperscript{24} F.S. Booth, who presided over the conference, wrote in the next edition of the Advocate:

I hope you will give your unselfish co-operation to the new organisation because it will be the means of promoting your social and moral welfare and higher education. The next generation of the deaf will not be unmindful of what you are doing now—and will benefit by it. By joining up as a member of the Australian Association you will help in

\textsuperscript{19} J P. Bourke, letter to the editor, The Deaf Advocate 2, no. 2 (Feb 1932).
\textsuperscript{20} "Editorial, The Deaf Advocate 2, no. 7 (July 1932)
\textsuperscript{22} "Notes on the New Association for the Deaf of Australia," The Deaf Advocate 2, no. 4 (April 1932).
\textsuperscript{23} "Conference Notes," The Deaf Advocate 2, no. 4 (April 1932).
\textsuperscript{24} "Notes on the New Association for the Deaf of Australia," The Deaf Advocate 2, no. 4 (April 1932).
CHAPTER 7: Managing Their Own Affairs. The National Scene

putting down the barriers of blind ignorance and prejudices and further advancing a new era in the history of the deaf.25

The founders had high hopes for the AAAD. They saw it not only as a vehicle for carrying out some of the aspirations of the breakaways and other reformists on a wider scale, but also as a way of transforming public attitudes to Deaf people and bringing Australia into the international community of Deaf organisations.

The Council gathers its supporters

Meanwhile, the organisers of the Societies’ proposed Council were also becoming active. The Honorary Acting Secretary, Henry Gladwin of the NSW Society, wrote to Deaf Societies in early 1932, describing plans to act on some of the aims of the Council. These aims were:

1. Co-operation and help between the Societies in each State.
2. The Training of Australian Welfare Officers and Teachers who would be available for work in any State as the need arose.
3. Research into and consideration of the best methods of providing Vocational training and employment of the Deaf.
4. Medical research with a view of exploring all possible avenues for the curing of Deafness 26

The proposed plan for training new welfare officers was to place recruits with Abraham in Melbourne for a period of instruction. There seems to have been some muted opposition to this, suggesting that Deaf people were not the only ones who saw Abraham as self-aggrandising and hypocritical. A staff member of the South Australian Society left some revealing notes in the margins of their copy of Gladwin’s letter—beside the declaration that Abraham was the person best fitted to do this training, this person has written several exclamation marks and a note “thought so”. He cryptically underlined words such as “spiritually, morally”, “great need for ladies”, “Christian ethics”, and beside the proposal that Societies pay an “annual quota” to cover the costs of this training scheme, he has added “For Mr. A.” 27

25 Editorial, The Deaf Advocate 2, no. 4 (April 1932)
26 Attachment to letter from H. Gladwin to Deaf Societies (copy received by O. Redman of SA Deaf and Dumb Mission), 21 March 1932. File No. 0649, JWF Collection
27 Attachment to letter from H. Gladwin to Deaf Societies (copy received by O. Redman of SA Deaf and Dumb Mission), 21 March 1932. File No. 0649, JWF Collection.
By the middle of that year, the Council was formally inviting all Deaf Societies, and even the hearing officials of the breakaway groups, to join up. John Paul retained a copy of the letter his Queensland Deaf and Dumb Citizens’ Reformed Association received from Gladwin in June 1932, inviting them to become a member of the proposed National Council of Deaf and Dumb Societies in Australia:

Each affiliated body is permitted to forward the names and addresses of three delegates who must be hearing members of the Board. No reflection of course is imputed upon non-hearing persons, but it is felt that the business of the Conference can be expedited between hearing delegates who must obviously know the points of view on all matters of their Deaf and Dumb colleagues.\(^{29}\)

At this early stage, the National Council clearly had no plans to involve Deaf people in its new organisation. It is important to note this, because they were to change this plan abruptly several months later.

The AAAD expands

The AAAD quickly established itself in the eastern States during 1932. Queensland formed the first branch, and by November it had 81 members.\(^{30}\) In July a branch was established in NSW (96 members joined up on the first night),\(^{31}\) and in the same month one began in Victoria with “well over 100” members.\(^{32}\) Although other States did not establish branches, individual members joined the AAAD from all states, and there were indications of support from organisations such as the Adult Deaf and Dumb Society of Western Australia, which sent “a kind letter of encouragement and congratulations on progress.”\(^{33}\)

The Acting Honorary Secretary, M. Overend Wilson, wrote the first of many letters to members of AAAD via The Deaf Advocate in its September 1932 issue, because

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\(^{29}\) Letter from H. Gladwin to J. M. Paul, dated 17 June, 1932, File No. 0258, JWF Collection.

\(^{30}\) Editorial, *The Deaf Advocate* 2, no. 7 (July 1932); and Vol. 2, no. 11 (Nov 1932).

\(^{31}\) “Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf,” *The Deaf Advocate* 2, no. 7 (July 1932).  


\(^{33}\) “Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf: Federal Secretary’s Bulletin for September,” *The Deaf Advocate* 2, no. 11 (Nov 1932).
“your very live paper reaches most Australian Deaf friends.” She called for more members, “because numbers will carry weight in the eyes of the world”, and exhorted, “There may be no Branch in your State or district, but there is always a post office”. The Deaf Advocate remained an important tool of mass communication to AAAD members, and they do not seem to have ever established their own magazine or newsletter. The Advocate not only published AAAD publicity material sent to them by Wilson and some of the state branches, but frequently commented in its editorials on the progress of the AAAD and its importance to the Deaf people of Australia, and urged people to become active members of it.

The Victorian branch of the AAAD

It proved to be particularly difficult to set up a branch of the AAAD in Victoria. Since the AAAD branches in Queensland and NSW had been facilitated by the breakaway Associations in those states, some people immediately perceived the Victorian branch of the AAAD to be a de facto breakaway group. A Victorian “Deaf Defender” had written to the Advocate a few months previously, helping to create the climate for such assumptions:

The “Powers that be” in Victoria are inciting the deaf...and will only have themselves to blame if a breakaway occurs here sooner or later and the example of Queensland and New South Wales followed by forming a new Association controlled by the deaf themselves.

The editors of the Advocate warned of the opposition being faced by those in Victoria trying to set up a branch, describing how Abraham had vetoed their request to the Deaf Committee for use of the Society’s hall for the inaugural AAAD meeting. The editors also described Abraham using “co-ercion, intimidation, and even threats to prevent the Deaf from joining”, and concluded, “we may be sure their Branch will be one of the most active of all, for having suffered as they have they recognise what a power for good this A A A D. will be.”

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34 “Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf,” The Deaf Advocate 2, no 9 (Sept 1932).
36 Editorial, The Deaf Advocate 2, no 7 (July 1932).
The meeting which was eventually held to set up a branch of the AAAD in Victoria was held in July 1932, at the Central Hall, Collins Street. It was chaired by Mr W. J. McCaskill, the Superintendent of the School for the Deaf, and the school’s headmaster also spoke at the meeting. The suspicion that it was a breakaway continued to dog the new branch, and made it difficult for it to gain support. Mr W. H. Crush, the President of the new branch, was also on the Deaf Committee and was one of its representatives on the Board of the Society. He was careful to deny that the AAAD branch planned a breakaway from the Society, describing such rumours as “nonsensical notions.”

The School for the Deaf, although initially supportive, had some ambivalence about being publicly associated with the AAAD branch. W. J. McCaskill later wrote a letter to the editors of the Advocate, which distanced himself and his colleagues somewhat from the AAAD. He stressed that the school did not support the idea of a breakaway group in Victoria, and stated their concern that their attendance at the meeting “might be misconstrued by some workers for the deaf”. Despite this public protestation, McCaskill remained supportive of the AAAD, and appears to have been a personal friend of Hersee’s. The Advocate editors praised McCaskill as “out solely to serve the deaf in whatever way he can”. In a peculiarly contemporary tribute, they added, “we are sure the Victorian Deaf will readily agree that he is ‘a white man’.”

M. Overend Wilson, in one of her regular Bulletins to AAAD members, gave encouraging reports about the perseverance of the Victorian branch in the face of its many trials:

The Victorian Branch has come through great difficulties treacheries and attacks in a wonderful way...Freedom is the right that is being

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38 Letter to the Editor, *The Deaf Advocate* 2, no. 10 (Oct 1932).
39 Letter to the Editor, *The Deaf Advocate* 2, no. 9 (Sept 1932).
40 For example, the Victorian Branch’s Third Annual Report stated that, “The Victorian Deaf and Dumb Institution always open a warm heart towards the A.A. A.D., and by this happy manner it is a gem of encouragement”, Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf (Victorian Branch) Third Annual Report, 1934-35 File No. 0856, JWF Collection.
41 This is suggested by the fact that Hersee usually stayed with the McCaskill family when he visited Melbourne.
42 Editorial, *The Deaf Advocate* 2, no. 9 (Sept. 1932).
taken from the Deaf, always a great price has to be paid to win Freedom.\textsuperscript{43}

Although she may have been speaking rhetorically at the time, she articulated the growing certainty that this new independence would come at a cost.

**The AAAD is consolidated**

AAAD members met again in Sydney in December 1932 to ratify their Constitution, elect a Federal Executive, and make further plans for their new organisation. The conference was attended by five people from Queensland (Miss M. O. Wilson, Messrs J. Allardice, G. D. Harrison, F. Barstow and J. M. Paul), two from Victoria (Messrs W. H. Crush and R. H. Lambert) and many Sydney members. During his official opening, Mr Gordon Winn (a hearing Vice-President of the NSW Association) said that:

...the deaf of Australia should be entirely free from the fetters of prejudice and given every encouragement to manage and use their voice upon their own welfare in the spirit of an ordinary hearing person’s independence.\textsuperscript{44}

In spite of this, one of the more important items for discussion was the “co-option of hearing helpers”, and it was agreed to give Hersee and Paul “equal standing with other delegates and full voting powers”. Indeed, when office-bearers were formally elected, Hersee was elected as President. This may seem an odd decision for an organisation which was so concerned with hearing people’s control over other organisations for Deaf people; however it seems the AAAD adopted the practices of the British Deaf and Dumb Association, which had traditionally had a hearing President and a Deaf Secretary.\textsuperscript{45} The new Constitution specified that the Secretary-Treasurer must always be a Deaf member, and Miss M. O. Wilson was appointed to fill this post. She defended Hersee’s election as President, saying that it gave the Association “a very fine point of contact with the public... as well as providing a wise leader of business deliberations”.\textsuperscript{46}

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\textsuperscript{43} “Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf. Bulletin for May 1933,” *The Deaf Advocate* 3, no. 5 (May 1933)

\textsuperscript{44} R. H. Lambert, “A Conference Impression,” *The Deaf Advocate* 3, no. 1 (Jan 1933)

\textsuperscript{45} Editorial, *The Deaf Advocate* 3, no. 4 (April 1933).

\textsuperscript{46} “Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf. Official Report of the First Delegates Conference,” *The Deaf Advocate* 3, no. 1 (Jan 1933)
Delegates agreed to seek affiliation with the British Deaf and Dumb Association and the National Association of the Deaf in the USA. A Sports Secretary was also appointed (Mr. E. L. Quinnell of NSW), and the AAAD proposed to hold regular Sports Carnivals.\(^47\) Their Constitution was adopted (see Appendix B),\(^48\) with the declared objective that the AAAD would "unite the Deaf and advance their interests in every possible way". Membership was open to "all Deaf persons in Australia", and this was clarified with an explanatory clause, "The term 'DEAF' in the Constitution includes those who are Hard of Hearing, Deaf, or Deaf and Dumb." It was also possible for hearing persons to become members, "subject to the approval of the Executive Committee", however they had to pay an annual subscription of five shillings instead of the one shilling paid by Deaf members—probably a commentary on the greater earning power of most hearing people, and possibly an attempt to build in a deterrent to large numbers of hearing people joining.

In the next issue of the *Advocate*, an anonymous scribe offered a triumphant "Welcome to the New Federal Executive Council":

Our "A A A D" has come to stay:
We care not what the Societies say,
Let Alfred scoff, and Ernest sneer,
We know their Council is full of fear,
So Comrades all, let's give three cheers,
And congratulate our Pioneers.\(^49\)

The defiant tone of this piece indicates that the AAAD knew their arrival was not universally welcomed. By the end of 1932, they were acknowledging that the Societies were working against them. Wilson referred to "influences at work which are calculated to hinder progress",\(^50\) and she and others made repeated calls for unity. W. D. Crush, President of the Victorian Branch, warned, "The

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\(^47\) "Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf Bulletin for January and February, 1933," *The Deaf Advocate* 3, no. 2 (Feb 1933).

\(^48\) Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf (n.d.), Constitution File No 0457, JWF Collection.

\(^49\) "The Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf Welcome to the New Federal Executive Council," *The Deaf Advocate* 3, no. 1 (Jan 1933). It was possibly written by Alf Taylor, who wrote other satirical verses for the *Advocate* under the nom-de-plume "The Murrumbidgee Chap". He was the Association's Collector for the Southwest region of NSW, encompassing the Murrumbidgee River.

\(^50\) "Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf Federal Secretary's Bulletin for August", *The Deaf Advocate* 2, no. 10 (Oct. 1932).
A.A.A.D. was founded to unite, not split up the Deaf.” The AAAD’s first Report, describing the organisation’s beginnings, said, “An opposition organisation for the Deaf, controlled by hearing Committees, immediately came into the field.” The jocular ditty above made an unequivocal declaration that the AAAD was in opposition to the Societies, symbolised by “Alfred” (Lonsdale) and “Ernest” (Abraham), and under no illusions about the struggle that was to come.

A collision course

Most of the Deaf Societies viewed the formation of the AAAD with alarm, and tried a variety of tactics to discredit and undermine it. In Melbourne they refused AAAD branches the use of the Society’s meeting rooms; in another (unnamed) state the Deaf Society allegedly sent staff members to visit parents of young deaf people, warning them against the AAAD. The Societies pointed out perceived inconsistencies in the AAAD’s practices, such as their having a hearing President despite their proclamations of Deaf independence. The editors of the Advocate complained: “In an attempt to injure the Association these people are trying to discredit it because it has a hearing President... The Association makes no apology for having a hearing President.” The editors compared the AAAD to the British Deaf and Dumb Association, which they claimed had always had a hearing President and a Deaf Secretary.

But the Societies’ master stroke was to quickly transform their proposed National Council into an alternative national Deaf organisation, which would undermine the AAAD’s claim to be the only national body representing Deaf people. Their earlier proposals that the Council should be restricted to hearing representatives of the Societies gave way to bold claims that Deaf people would be at the forefront of their new Council. The Advocate reported, “Mr Gladwin... referring to this so far

51 “Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf,” The Deaf Advocate 2, no. 11 (Nov. 1932)
52 Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf, First Report, June 1936.
53 J. P. Bourke, After-School Problems II, 22.
54 Editorial, The Deaf Advocate 3, no. 4 (April 1933)
non exisitant [sic] National Council said ‘We will have deaf officials, the president will be deaf’.”

The Societies’ plans were revealed at a climactic public meeting in Melbourne in March 1933. This meeting also provided the setting for the first public clash between the two organisations. In March 1933 Hersee planned a visit to Melbourne to farewell his wife and children, who were sailing to England for a visit, and whose ship would dock briefly in Melbourne en route. Local Deaf people took the opportunity of inviting Hersee to address the fledgling Victorian branch of the AAAD, and a public meeting was arranged for 16th March. Abraham and the Deaf Society swung into action, seeing a chance to pre-empt the AAAD. They hastily sent a request for Mr Gladwin of the NSW Society, the Honorary Secretary-elect of the proposed National Council, to come to Melbourne at the same time. This was discussed at the NSW Society’s Executive meeting on 6th March:

A confidential letter from Mr Abraham re Adult D & D Federation [sic]. It was decided to authorise Mr. Lonsdale to act on his suggested [sic] and if possible arrange for Mr Gladwin to go to Melbourne with regard to same.

With the wheels in motion for a confrontation, Abraham could not resist dropping a few teasing hints to AAAD members. Bourke described his behaviour a week before the public meeting with Hersee:

Round about the 8th of March [Abraham] was going about amongst the deaf asking, “Are you still a member of the A.A.A.D.?” “Yes,” he was told. “We shall see,” said he triumphantly, and we knew that there was something in the wind.

Abraham then placed advertisements in all the Melbourne newspapers announcing a public meeting “to inaugurate a National Council comprised solely of Deaf members for the advancement of the interests of the deaf and dumb of Australia.”

This meeting was called for 15th March, the night before Hersee was to address the Victorian branch of the AAAD.

55 Ibid.
56 ADDSV, Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting, 6 March 1933.
Members of the AAAD branch attended the 15th March meeting, and several Press reporters were there in response to Abraham’s publicity. The Age described the tense atmosphere: "Feeling was high among deaf and dumb people last night when, not without opposition, the [Society] decided to affiliate with an Australian Council."59 Gladwin presented the proposed new Council to the meeting in glowing terms, and (according to the Advocate’s reporters) lied about the overwhelming support of Deaf people in NSW for the Council. He explained that there would be two Councils—

...one of hearing persons of the National Council of Societies and one of Deaf persons of the National Council of Deaf and Dumb. They will meet in perfect harmony and the hearing will sponsor the Deaf where their views are in accord.60

As the Advocate’s editors tartly pointed out later, "If there is to be that perfect harmony there can be no views which are not in accord."61

After Gladwin’s talk, W. H. Crush rose to address the meeting. He announced that such an organisation already existed in the AAAD, and opposed the motion to form a National Council. According to reports in the Advocate, Crush was "hurriedly gagged", and "assisted off the platform" (since his views were so blatantly not "in accord")62 Bourke claimed that Gladwin "kept trying to push [Crush] off the platform"63 Local newspapers commented too—The Age reported, "In opposing the motion, Mr. W. Crush said an organisation similar to the proposed one was already in existence. After a show of hands, the motion was declared carried, amidst uproar."64 Bourke claimed that these newspaper reports embarrassed Society officials,65 though this may have been wishful thinking on his part. Bourke was exultant that some Victorian Deaf people had finally "show[n] the same spirit as our brethren of the associations in New South Wales and Queensland", and

60 "The Face of the Societies National Council," The Deaf Advocate 3, no. 4 (April 1933)
61 Ibid
62 Ibid
63 J P Bourke, After-School Problems No II, 20
64 "Welfare of the Deaf: Move to Form Federal Council," The Age, 16 March 1933, 11.
65 "The Victorian Branch of the A A A D Advances," The Deaf Advocate 3, no. 4 (April 1933)
triumphantly (though prematurely) declared, "And so the Victorian branch of the A A A D. stormed the enemy's stronghold, and won a great victory!"\(^{66}\)

Up until this time W H. Crush had doggedly retained his seat on the Board of Management of the Victorian Deaf Society (as one of its two elected representatives from the Deaf Committee) and was also editor of *The Victorian Deaf News*. On 16\(^{th}\) March 1933, the day after he was hustled off the stage at the National Council meeting, he resigned from editorship of the magazine, from the Deaf Committee and from the Board.\(^{67}\)

The Victorian Deaf Society's account of the meeting differed from the Advocate's and also from the local newspapers' accounts. A report appeared in the next issue of the *Victorian Deaf News* (which Crush had edited until then), asserting that the meeting "was the outcome of a request from the Sydney Deaf, seeking the enlistment of support from the Deaf of Victoria." Rather than a strategically organised coup to pre-empt the AAAD's public meeting, this article suggested that Gladwin just happened to be visiting town: "As he was coming to Melbourne, the Sydney Deaf deputed Mr. Gladwin to seek our opinion and, if agreeable, to second their motion." As for Crush's intervention, the *News* reported disapprovingly of its erstwhile editor, "Mr. W. Crush dissented and spoke on subjects quite out of order to the aims of the meeting." The article also reported that, whatever "uproar" might have been observed by *The Age*, the motion to form the National Council was carried by 71 votes to 20.\(^{68}\) The "Daily Record Book" of the Victorian Deaf Society (probably kept by J. M. Johnston) carried an almost identical account, adding that the interpreter for the meeting was Abraham. It also claimed that the motion to form the National Council was "carried with applause [sic]",\(^{69}\) in contrast to *The Age*, which had described it as being carried "amidst uproar".

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\(^{66}\) "The Victorian Branch of the A A A D. Advances," *The Deaf Advocate* 3, no. 4 (April 1933)

\(^{67}\) ADDSV, Minutes of General Board Meeting, 27 March 1933. Crush's resignation letter was dated 16 March 1933.


\(^{69}\) ADDSV, "Daily Record Book 19 Oct 1931 to 14 July 1934," entry for 16 March 1933. Box 34, VDS Collection.
The editors of *The Deaf Advocate* wrote at length about this infamous meeting—their most eloquent comment was another sardonic verse offered for “a little community singing”:

There is a home of pure delight,
It’s called “The Society”:
Where deaf and hearing never fight—
They have such harmony!
The hearing help the deaf along—
When views are in accord.
Could heaven possess a happier throng
Than Alf’s harmonic Board?  

They were clearly in no doubt that the National Council of the Deaf was merely the Societies in another guise.

The following night, as originally planned, Hersee addressed the Victorian branch of the AAAD, denouncing the National Council as a “sham and a mockery”. An anonymous correspondent for the *Advocate* pointed out that although Hersee had gone to hear Gladwin speak, Gladwin and his cohorts did not put in an appearance at the AAAD meeting. However, the *Advocate*’s correspondent revealed that the Society hired a professional shorthand writer to attend the AAAD meeting and prepare a transcript of the proceedings for them. No-one was aware of this at the meeting, as the shorthand writer would probably have been mistaken for a press reporter. The correspondent sent the *Advocate* a copy of the shorthand writer’s bill (for four guineas) and demanded to know who had authorised all the expenditure (Gladwin’s trip to Melbourne, newspaper advertising for their meeting, and the shorthand writer) from “the funds of the deaf.”

Henry Gladwin himself provided an account of his Melbourne visit in a number of letters to Kingwell in Queensland. He adopted (or genuinely professed) an air of vagueness about the AAAD:

I have to-day returned from Melbourne where some ten days have been spent in assisting the Victorian Society who are just now undergoing perplexing times owing to the presence there of Hersee who is trying to form a federal branch of a new Deaf

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70 “The Farce of the Societies National Council,” *The Deaf Advocate* 3, no. 4 (April 1933)
72 “Further Exposures on the Farceical National Council: Who Paid the Four Guinea Bill?” *The Deaf Advocate* 3, no. 5 (May 1933)
Advancement Federation the purpose of which appears to be to make a split in Victoria. 73

Since the AAAD had been active for a year in NSW and six months in Victoria, Gladwin was either unusually ignorant or deliberately disingenuous. In a more formal letter, sent a few weeks later and requesting the Queensland Mission to call a public meeting of their Deaf members to support the formation of the Council, he elaborated:

From details received anent another meeting held in Melbourne on the 16th March, and addressed by Mr. Hersee under the auspices of a body unknown to me, named the Australian Association for Advancement of the Deaf, I conclude this new move was to be the disruptive instrument to create a split amongst the Victorian Deaf. Fortunately the Society’s National Council was able to frustrate these designs. 74

Whether he was being deceptive or merely unworldly, Gladwin’s letters indicate the depth of the Societies’ fear of “splits” and breakaways, and the perceived importance of the new Council as a strategy for “frustrating” the AAAD and protecting the Societies.

The AAAD resists

The AAAD members did not need this public confrontation to make them aware that their organisation’s role was contested by the Societies. Their 1933 writings were full of references to “difficulties” and avowals of unity and determination in the face of opposition. Wilson wrote soon after the public clash in Melbourne, “The A.A.A.D. could have no greater tribute paid to its standing and spirit than the character and methods of the opposition.” 75 Bourke alleged, “The deaf of one of the States were favourable to the A.A.A.D but one of its opponents got amongst them and tried to turn them against it.” 76 W. H. Crush attacked “unworthy outside criticism, founded on deliberate misrepresentation”, though he insisted it had “unit[ed] us together more solidly and has increased our strength, faith and

73 Letter from H. W. Gladwin to W. R. Kingwell, 17 March 1933. File No. 691 JWF Collection
74 Letter from H. W. Gladwin to W. R. Kingwell, 31 March 1933. File No. 691 JWF Collection
confidence.” There was recognition that they would be faced with continuing struggles—Wilson referred to their fund-raising as filling “the war chest.” Doggedly optimistic, she wrote in mid-1933, “We have met with wonderful success in spite of difficulties. The ideals and spirit of our Association have taken a strong hold.”

Being forced to defend themselves so quickly seems also to have helped AAAD members define what made their organisation different from the National Council. W. H. Crush declared:

The A.A.A.D. is an independent self-supporting organisation, founded and controlled by the deaf themselves, and is the only National Association in Australia in which the deaf have a full, free and unfettered right to advance their own interests.

In another defining statement, the Advocate presented a laborious acrostic for the letters spelling “Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf”: “A United Sincere Trustworthy Radiant Association Lifting Into A Natural...And Splendid Sphere Our Comrades’ In Adversity This Institution Organised Nationally...Forms Orderly Rules. That Help Everyone...And Defies Vulgar And Noxious Councils Engineering Mischief Expounding Nonsense To...Our Friends...That Helpfully Encourage...Deaf Eagerly Attempting Freedom.”

Their attacks on the National Council became more provocative, or possibly they seem this way because so many were filtered through The Deaf Advocate and its fearless editors. In the July 1933 issue, the Advocate editors accused the National Council of being undemocratic in not consulting with Deaf people about its plans, comparing its shadowy leaders to the emerging dictators of the era—Mussolini in Italy and Hitler in Germany.

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81 “Can You do Better Than This,” The Deaf Advocate 3, no. 8 (August 1933). [emphasis added].
82 Editorial, The Deaf Advocate 3, no. 7 (July 1933).
By April 1933, just one year after its establishment, the AAAD claimed over 400 deaf members, and seemed confident and determined to forge ahead. As Bourke declared:

The A A A D. was formed not by any hole and corner policy but out in the open and with clean hands. Those who form the so-called hearing Council cannot be really interested in the deaf. If they were they would encourage the A A A D. and not try to break it up. For who can object to the deaf forming an association to advance their interests? The deaf in every part of the world form similar [sic] associations to help and protect one another. … We who formed the A A A D. are in the right, and we are going straight ahead.

The National Council’s first year

After the meeting in Melbourne in March 1933 which had voted for the establishment of the National Council, Abraham used some of the regular Thursday night gatherings at the Victorian Society to further the cause. These gatherings usually started with a prayer meeting in the Church, followed by a “lecturette” in the Assembly Hall, then other activities such as games, small committee meetings and supper. Just one week after the 15th March public meeting, on Thursday March 23rd, the Daily Record Book recorded that Abraham gave a lecturette on the “National Council of the Deaf”. The Record Book also noted a meeting on 7th May to discuss a proposed Conference of the National Council in Sydney that Christmas. A “Provisional Committee” of the National Council met on 15th May and 1st June, but no other meetings related to the National Council were recorded for that year.

A national Sports Carnival was scheduled in Sydney over the Christmas and New Year period at the end of 1933. Both the AAAD and the National Council announced that they would hold conferences at this time too. The Sports Carnivals, which were enormously popular with Deaf people, were controlled

83 Editorial, The Deaf Advocate 3, no. 4 (April 1933)
84 J. P. Bourke, “The Parting of Ways for the Deaf of Australia,” The Deaf Advocate 3, no. 5 (May 1933)
85 ADDSV, Daily Record Book 19 October 1931 to 14 July 1934, entry for 23 March 1933. Box 34, VDS Collection.
86 Ibid., entries for 7 May 1933, 18 May 1933 and 1 June 1933
by the Deaf Societies, and they made use of this "ownership" to debar teams from the breakaway Associations in NSW and Queensland from participating in the sports. This would have meant that many of the younger and less politically inclined Deaf people would have been drawn more easily to the conference of the National Council than that of the AAAD, since the Council's conference was connected with the busy sports and social programme of the Carnival.

The National Council's conference was called a Congress (in line with the Congresses of the old ADDA) and was held at the premises of the Deaf Society in Elizabeth Street. A. L. Lonsdale presided at the opening, and a Congress Committee was elected, comprising the Deaf representatives of each state with J. M. Johnston (of Victoria) as Chairman and S. Phillips (of NSW) Acting Honorary Secretary. The evening was then given over to "the reading of a paper on 'A Survey of the Position of the Adult [sic] Deaf,' by the Principal of the Victorian Adult Deaf and Dumb Society." The Congress met only on two evenings (the days being taken up with sport), and on the final evening a number of recommendations were presented and adopted. They confirmed that the preferred name for the organisation was the National Council of the Deaf. The current State Representatives were to become a temporary Council for the following year, and be responsible for drawing up a draft Constitution "on the lines of the extinct Adult Deaf and Dumb Association [sic]", to be approved at another Congress the following Christmas. Unlike the AAAD, whose membership was open to "all Deaf persons in Australia", the Council proposed to restrict membership to "deaf ex-pupils of Australian schools for the deaf"—a move which would exclude migrants or late-deafened people such as Bourke, Crush, Lambert and Wilson. Associate membership was to be extended to "hearing sympathisers" and "the deafened" who had demonstrated their active involvement with the Deaf; however "any hearing benefactor officer of any Adult Deaf and Dumb Society" could become an active

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87 Others on the Congress Committee included: Victoria: Messrs F E Frewin, A Stephens and Miss Rose Dow; South Australia: Messrs G S Dunnet, W. A. Abbott and Mrs R. Medcalf; Queensland: Messrs A. O. Flay, C Beutel, and Mrs P Spranklin; Tasmania: Messrs W Limbrick, F. Williams and C. Webb; W A.: Messrs C Plunkett and J. Bircher; N S W. Messrs. W Molloy, H L Emerson, and C H Richards
88 The Victorian Deaf News 4, no. 5 (Jan-Feb-March 1934): 2.
member on the advice of the Council (without paying the higher subscription fee that the AAAD required). This would have ensured that hearing men like Abraham and Lonsdale could have become voting members if they so desired. But even if they preferred to wait in the wings, two other recommendations ensured that the Council would have to work with them:

That the present Chairman and Superintendents of Incorporated Adult Deaf & Dumb Societies of Australia be and are here elected Honorary Advisers to the National Council of the Deaf for a period of twelve months.

That this Council consults, co-operates, and acts with the National Council of the Adult Deaf and Dumb Societies upon all matters in relation to the work of Adult Deaf and Dumb Societies and the National well being of the Deaf.\(^{90}\)

The Congress also passed some resolutions, urging the New South Wales government to make education compulsory for deaf children as other states did, to work towards the development of vocational training for Deaf people, and most significantly:

That this Congress deplores the fact that other organisations for the Adult Deaf, with seemingly identical objectives as existing Societies, have been established in N.S.W. and Queensland, and strongly urges upon the Adult Deaf and Dumb Societies of New South Wales and Queensland to take such action as will bring to an end these detrimental conditions affecting the general well being of the Deaf.\(^{91}\)

The AAAD Congress

The AAAD also held a Congress in Sydney over the Christmas 1933 period, in the rooms of the NSW Association, away from the excitement of the sports Carnival. Many more papers were read and discussed at this Congress than at that of the National Council—John Paul presented one on “Vocational Training for the Deaf”, Alf Eaton on “The Deaf in their Own Association”, M. O. Wilson on “Thirty Years Work for the Deaf”, Fletcher Booth on “The Deaf Citizen”, and Frank Martin on “Trades for the Deaf”.\(^{92}\) The Advocate noted that some South Australian members

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\(^{89}\) *The Silent Messenger* (Jan-Feb-March 1934).

\(^{90}\) *The Silent Messenger* (Jan-Feb-March 1934).

\(^{91}\) “Resolutions Passed at Congress of the Deaf, 29 Dec 1933 ” File No. 0691 in JWF Collection

\(^{92}\) Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf, Report, (June 1936).
were in attendance, and hoped to form a branch in their own State (although this does not seem to have happened). 93

The paper presented by Alf Eaton, an active Deaf member of the Queensland Association, was a remarkably prescient analysis of the problems facing the new Association, and the high standards of organisation, conduct, fund-raising and public relations required to meet these challenges (see Appendix D). 94 The influence of John Paul is evident throughout, particularly in the insistence that Australia needed to catch up with developments in other countries, and that the AAAD needed to be brought into “co-operation with, and knowledge of, the worldwide deaf interests.” 95 Eaton sternly called for Deaf members to “back their Association with their money” by establishing a Foundation Fund, and warned against “sentimental appeals for unity” instead of genuine “unity of effort”. He reminded members that, “We set out to do this work. Opposition came into the field BECAUSE we took up the cause of the deaf.” He considered this placed greater responsibility on them to succeed, because if they failed they would be ceding control to a “clique” and a “dictatorship”, and “That means the position is worse”. Such responsibility meant there was no time to be wasted on “enmity and bitterness” (he could well have had Bourke in mind). The AAAD needed to work for all Deaf people, not only its members. “Every difficulty, wrong, injustice, loss or harm that comes to any deaf person is the business of all of us ... We must be loyal to their interests, whether they are with us or not.” 96

Despite this inspiring call to action, or perhaps because of the enormity of the task it hinted at, things did not go smoothly for the AAAD in 1934. “Defections and other difficulties” were mentioned, probably due to the efforts of the Societies and the National Council of the Deaf. 97 A new Federal Executive took over during that year, after some “objection to the methods used [by the old Executive] and the need to uphold the provisions of the Constitution”. 98 Alf

93 “A A A D. News,” The Deaf Advocate 4, no 1 (Jan-Feb 1934), 8.
95 Ibid., 2
96 Ibid
97 Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf, Report, (June 1936).
98 Ibid.
Eaton became the new President, with Jack Allardice, another Queenslander, replacing Martha Overend Wilson as Honorary Secretary. Wilson’s chatty pieces for the Advocate ceased, though she continued her involvement with the Queensland branch. The Advocate itself changed—it became a bi-monthly rather than a monthly magazine, and the two Deaf editors moved on. Quinnell had become a Collector, and Booth “relinquished the position, owing to his leaving Sydney to take up residence in the Mountains”. Hersee took on the role of editor in October 1934, but obviously had less time to devote to the job—after that point the Advocate relied more on reprinting articles from other sources, and had fewer letters and news items from other States. It carried no further reports of AAAD after the August-September issue in 1934. It thus becomes more difficult for the researcher to follow the AAAD’s fortunes without this regular item written for a broad audience.

At the second Annual General Meeting of the Victorian Branch of the AAAD that year, they were still being forced to defend and explain their role:

The acting president (Mr. M. Gladman) said the association was not, as many thought, a new club started in opposition to the Adult Deaf and Dumb Society, but had been founded by the deaf themselves to further the highest needs and aspirations of the deaf. It was not doing the work which the society was supposed to do, but, like a trades union, was intended to safeguard the interests of its members.

At this meeting their membership was 72 (compared to “well over a hundred” two years previously). Their accounts showed a deficit, largely due to the need to rent meeting rooms, since the Society still refused to let the organisation meet in its premises.

Another account of this meeting was published in the Age, by a reporter who was more interested in the novelty of Deaf people’s rules of order than in the topics under discussion:

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100 It is possible that Hersee may have lost some enthusiasm for the AAAD when he was replaced as its President that year.
101 “Advancement of the Deaf: Association’s Annual Meeting Deaf and Dumb Society Criticised,” The Age, 23 June 1934
102 Ibid
Silence to visitors somewhat oppressive in its intensity prevailed throughout the annual meeting of the Association for the Advancement of the Deaf at 174 Collins-street last night. For the person possessing the faculty of hearing there was something at once poignant and inspiring in the cheerful and orderly conduct of the business by the brisk signs and facial expressions of the members. The lady president secured attention not by rapping the table, but by switching the lights off, and her audience could have been recognised as sufferers from grave disability only by the intent look customary to those who are unable to hear. They smiled cheerfully at jokes and applauded silently.\textsuperscript{103}

But even this reporter noted that “the meeting revealed a rift between the two organisations striving to ameliorate the conditions of sufferers from deafness, a dispute which in the interests of all parties should be speedily settled.” It seemed the Victorian branch was branded with an image of an organisation which existed chiefly to oppose the Deaf Society. Bourke, whose campaign against Abraham and the Society continued, was probably in large part responsible for this.

\textbf{The National Council potters along}

The National Council was sporadically active during 1934, mainly in Melbourne. Gladwin followed up the Sydney Congress by writing to all Deaf Society Boards a few weeks later, informing them of the names of their state Deaf representatives to the Council, and advising them that these Deaf representatives were required to “consult, co-operate and act with” the National Council of Societies. He warned that “the Council of the Deaf can only be kept alive by a stimulus from our own National Council”.\textsuperscript{104} The new Chairman and Secretary of the National Council of the Deaf, J. M. Johnston and S. Phillips, seemed to agree with this sentiment. They sent letters to the Superintendents and Chairmen of all the Societies, inviting them to become Honorary Advisory Officers to their Council, and declaring:

\begin{quote}
We fully appreciate the magnificent [sic] work of the Adult Societies and are convinced that only by co-operation with these bodies can the real social status of the Deaf be advanced.\textsuperscript{105}
\end{quote}

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\textsuperscript{103} “A Silent Meeting,” \textit{The Age}, 23 June 1934.
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\textsuperscript{104} Letter from H. W. Gladwin to President of Queensland Adult Deaf and Dumb Mission, 15 Jan 1934. File No. 0691, JWF Collection.
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\textsuperscript{105} Letter from J. M. Johnston & S. Phillips to Queensland Adult Deaf and Dumb Mission, 20 Feb 1934. File No 0691, JWF Collection.
\end{flushleft}
Ironically, their new letterhead had a slogan at the bottom proclaiming “The only Australian organisation controlled by the Deaf” (Probably in response to this, the Queensland Branch of the AAAD proclaimed in its Annual Report that year: “The A.A.A.D. is NOT controlled by or acting under any other Society, Mission or Federation. It is the Only Free Association for the Australian Deaf ... We are not compelled to accept officers of Societies or Missions to control our business.”)

The NSW Society’s Executive noted in February 1934 that Deaf people there had formed a National Council branch, but included no details about its composition or plans. In March a meeting was held at the Deaf Society in Melbourne, at which J. M. Johnston gave a report about the recent Sydney Congress. At this meeting they formed a Victorian Branch of the Council, and elected a Committee of 10 members. This Committee met in July and again in December, when they discussed the draft Constitution and programme for the forthcoming Congress. There is little or no information about National Council activities in other States, although Johnston sent the draft Constitution and Programme to the various State representatives in September 1934.

There was some anxiety among the Deaf Societies about whether the Melbourne conference of the National Council of the Deaf would actually happen, and the Boards were urged to cover the costs of Deaf representatives if necessary. An article in the New South Wales Society’s magazine, The Silent Messenger, stressed, “Can we urge each State Board to make it possible for a number of

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106 Queensland Branch of AAAD, Second Annual Report, 30 June 1934.
107 ADDSV, Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting, 3 Feb 1934.
108 ADDSV, Daily Record Book 19 October 1931 to 14 July 1934, entry for 8 March 1934 Box 34, VDS Collection. The Committee was comprised of Messrs J. M. Johnston, A. Stephens, W. Ashby, F. Sandon, J. O’Gorman, F. Rees, Mrs. J. M. Johnston, Misses R. Dow, Elsie Stephens and Alice Smith.
109 ADDSV, Daily Record Book 14 July 1934 to 23 July 1936, entries for 24 July 1934 and 18 Dec 1934 Box 10, VDS Collection.
110 Letter from J. M. Johnston to undisclosed recipients, with draft Congress Programme and Constitution attached, 20 Sept 1934 File No. 0261, JWF Collection. Also in PROV, VA 02707 Charities Board of Victoria, VPRS4323/P1, “Closed” Agency and General Correspondence Files, Unit 68 File No. 656.
their deaf to visit Melbourne". Abraham used more forceful exhortations, writing to the Queensland Mission in October:

I have received a letter from your Mr. Lack in which he says no Queensland deaf will be attending the Congress & Festivities to be held in Melbourne at Christmas. I hope this is not a definite decision. Under existing conditions in the deaf and dumb world it would be most unfortunate if your Mission is not represented at the National Council of the Deaf and its Congress. There are three Queensland representatives on this National Council & its in the best interests of the Queensland Mission that they be present at the Congress. Together with the members of the Council of other states, I understand, they are engaged in drawing up a Constitution to be submitted. We hope that your Mission will see your way to arrange for the representation of its organisation by the deaf.  

Abraham’s letter made it clear that he considered the National Council of the Deaf to be in the Societies’ interests, and the Deaf representatives to be emissaries of the Societies.

The Melbourne conference did proceed, along with an accompanying conference of the National Council of Adult Deaf and Dumb Societies, and a programme of games and festivities held to celebrate Melbourne’s centenary year in 1935. The conference was lifted out of the ordinary by being held at the Exhibition Building, one of Melbourne’s grandest public buildings, which had been the site of Australia’s first Parliament after Federation in 1901. It is very likely that Abraham had worked to secure this venue, instead of following tradition and holding the event at the Society’s premises, as a way to attract publicity and raise the profile of the National Council—especially in relation to the AAAD, which held a small national meeting in Melbourne at the same time, in much humbler premises—Central House on Collins Street.  

The National Council seems to have adopted the proposed Constitution which had been prepared and distributed in September (although no record of its adoption, or any amendments, survives). This Constitution (see Appendix C) had modified the rules for membership developed at the previous Congress,

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111 The Silent Messenger 6, no. 4 (Oct-Nov 1934): 5
stating only that “membership... shall consist of deaf and dumb people domiciled in the Commonwealth of Australia who are ex-pupils of any school for the deaf and dumb.”¹¹⁴ The Congress further determined that “Newcomers to Australia, from the British Empire only, shall be entitled to membership after twelve months’ residence in Australia”.¹¹⁵ Although the draft Constitution had used the name “The Commonwealth Association of the Deaf and Dumb”, this name does not seem to have been adopted, and the organisation was always referred to as the National Council of the Deaf and Dumb. The new Constitution was very similar to that of the old ADDA, and was notable for its dense and legalistic language, especially compared to the more streamlined and accessible Constitution of the AAAD.

The conference’s only discussion of more general issues seems to have been in a presentation by a Victorian Deaf man, E. Johnson (not J. M. Johnston), who addressed the gathering on the barriers Deaf people faced in the workforce, such as their lack of access to technical training. He also suggested that Deaf people should be exempted from joining Trade Unions and participating in strikes, as “with their disability in conversing and exchanging ideas with others, they were liable to be misled”. Johnson also objected, like generations of Deaf people before and after him, to the rise of oralism in the education of deaf children. He declared that, “All deaf children should be taught the manual system. The oral system would never allow a deaf persons [sic] to understand a sermon or a lecture.”¹¹⁶

The Council evidently discussed the AAAD and its annoying tirades against them, and passed a motion by Mr. S. Phillips of NSW, in which they “emphatically protested against published statements to the effect that the deaf people were ‘brow-beaten and neglected’ by the council,” declaring that, “such statements came only from a small and discontented body of the Deaf.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ PROV VPRS 4523/P1, Unit 68, File 656. The Commonwealth Association of the Deaf and Dumb, Constitution (n.d.).
¹¹⁷ Ibid., 9.
Congress passed a resolution affirming that the National Council was "composed of and controlled by deaf and dumb persons only."\(^{118}\)

The National Council's conference was described in *The Age* each day, though one article was possibly by the same naïve reporter who had written about the AAAD branch's AGM the previous June. This time the reporter was so taken with the novelty of sign language that he neglected to say anything at all about the content. At this "noiseless conference", he marvelled, "there was scarcely a sound in the room", and "the speakers showed remarkable dexterity in making the requisite motions of the fingers and hands" as they went about their business.\(^{119}\) J. M. Johnston, who had used his "vocal power" to interpret the proceedings for the reporter, must have felt that he had wasted his breath.

This conference, with its splendid venue and admiring press coverage, seems to have been the last real activity of the National Council of the Deaf. No further correspondence has survived, no more Congresses or meetings of the Council or its state branch were listed in the Daily Record Books of the Victorian Society (where its Chairman J. M. Johnston worked), and no other State branches appear to have been active. Although the AAAD continued to refer to "opposition", and some further records may yet emerge, the National Council of the Deaf seems to have effectively disappeared after December 1934, less than two years after its formation. Its work had largely been done—the AAAD was in disarray and on the defensive. As Bourke wrote later of the Deaf Societies, "they formed the Council for the purpose of drawing into it all the deaf who are under their influence, in order to prevent them joining up with the ... Association."\(^{120}\)

**The AAAD falters**

The AAAD gathering which was held in Melbourne that Christmas found it hard to compete with its splendid rival. The few accounts of the gathering suggest that the Association was becoming isolated and defensive, and was struggling to retain its members. It was not an official conference, but rather a single meeting

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hosted by the Victorian branch of the AAAD, for visitors from around the country. Visitors attended from every state except Western Australia, but the papers were all presented by Victorians—Mrs Gladman (the President of the Victorian branch), Bourke, Lambert and one or two others.\textsuperscript{121}

The Melbourne \textit{Herald}, publishing an announcement of the meeting, said:

\begin{quote}
Having dissociated itself from all other associations and organisations, the Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf (Victorian branch) will hold a special meeting at Central House, 174 Collins Street, tonight. Papers will be read by deaf members, and an explanation given of the difference between the aims of the association and those of other organisations for the deaf.\textsuperscript{122}
\end{quote}

This suggests that the AAAD was beginning to see itself solely in terms of its opposition to other organisations, and was losing its focus on a grand vision for uniting Australian Deaf people. It is also possible that this view may only have been that of the more battle-weary Victorian branch, rather the whole organisation. The Honorary Secretary of the Victorian Branch later described the meeting as “a most encouraging gathering”, which showed that with “a little more local support we would achieve our objective of forming a branch whose strength would benefit all”\textsuperscript{123} The Victorian branch was still in existence, so this statement can probably be interpreted to mean that it was declining and struggling to reclaim relevance.

The backdrop to these competing gatherings of Deaf people over Christmas 1934 was similar to that of a Carnival, with a Games program and social gatherings, as well as meetings of the rival bodies. At the New Year’s Eve dinner for the combined National Councils, Abraham was making the most of being on his home turf. Not all guests, however, were happy to let him enjoy the limelight. An interpreter from the NSW contingent, Ella Doran, wrote later:

\begin{quote}
Each State’s leader or captain spoke and Mr Abraham made most of the interpretation back and forth. Finally Mr Lonsdale rose to make his remarks for New South Wales. He didn’t want Mr Abraham to sign for him and asked me to rise.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{121} Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf (Victorian Branch). Third Annual Report: 1934-35 JWF, File No 0856.

\textsuperscript{122} \textit{The Herald}, 27 December 1934.

\textsuperscript{123} Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf (Victorian Branch). Third Annual Report: 1934-35 JWF, File No 0856.
I thought it wrong as we were guests and Mr Abraham was the official host, but I rose and began to pass on [intercept] Mr Lonsdale's talk. Mr Abraham interjected and said he was capable of better work then [sic] I was, anyway it was not women's work. "No lady would do such a thing." It was not the kind of situation that I wanted to occur over me, so I sat down with Mr Lonsdale breathing fire across my head. No-one was telling the deaf what was going on between them. After a few more remarks things settled down as Mr Abraham wanted. A few minutes later he asked his granddaughter to rise as he wished her to present the Cricketer's Shield with a few words on her hands. If I wasn't a lady, I didn't think his granddaughter was either; so I got up and walked out of the room.

Next morning Miss Empson, secretary to Mr Abraham, telephoned to say he would like me to come in and have morning tea with him so that I could see what he had meant the evening before. I refused.124

Abraham's disarming invitation to morning tea the next day is consistent with the strategies he used with people like Bourke—he had no qualms about humiliating people in public, but would make a point of trying to win them back to his "fold" afterwards.

Struggles and setbacks

During the following two years, the AAAD continued to lose momentum. The NSW branch does not appear to have been very active, though the branches in Victoria and Queensland continued to meet and publish Annual Reports. The Federal Executive seems to have been centred in Queensland, and Queensland was also the only state that contributed funds to the Federal body125 As the Advocate became a quarterly (rather than bi-monthly) magazine during 1935, the amount and quality of information about the AAAD declined.

The Third Annual Report of the Victorian Branch of the AAAD in 1935 showed an organisation in difficulties. The Honorary Secretary, R. H. Lambert, described "two tremendous set-backs" for the branch during 1934-35—the "deliberate denial" to them of meeting rooms at the Deaf Society, forcing them to pay for the hire of rooms for meetings and socials; and the "organisation of well-trained opposition formed particularly to mislead public opinion in respect

124 E. Doran, Hand in Hand with Time and Change, 76-77
to the A A A D.\textsuperscript{126} This obviously referred to the National Council and their meetings during the Conference and Carnival the previous Christmas. These setbacks, combined with an "unfriendly atmosphere prevailing in Victoria... towards the A A A D," meant that their membership had dropped from 72 to a mere 26. Two of their meetings had to be adjourned because of the lack of a quorum.\textsuperscript{127} They were determined to keep going, however, and continued to reject the tactics of the Society and its appeal to charity:

Every set-back during the progress of the local A A A D. is a spur to the higher endeavour of success which should be of certain help in building the A A A D. its conspicuous [sic] signpost of protection of the welfare of the deaf and dumb. The display of the affliction of the deaf before the public is FATAL to the welfare of the deaf.\textsuperscript{128}

Lambert, like many others associated with the AAAD, placed his faith in the "educated deaf", and suggested that it was the "uneducated" who were most susceptible to the manipulations of the Society.\textsuperscript{129}

The Queensland branch's Annual Report that year also reported problems, though it was more optimistic:

We believe that the difficulties which the Association has passed through during the last year have provided a splendid test as to the honesty of purpose, loyalty to the members' interests and rights, proper methods of management, and an intelligent carrying out of the work of the Association. The progress made during the year has proved that those who refused to desert the cause of the Deaf have every reason to be satisfied that loyalty has proved the better course...\textsuperscript{130}

The strong early voice of the AAAD, full of optimism and conviction, was becoming muffled and defensive. Members were obviously wearied by desertions, internal dissension and lack of direction.

This chapter has described the attempts to establish two national Deaf organisations in Australia during the 1930s, and the formation of an organisation

\textsuperscript{126} Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf (Victorian Branch). Third Annual Report: 1934-35. File No. 0856, JWF Collection
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 3.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., covering letter
\textsuperscript{130} Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf (Queensland Branch), Annual Report for the Year ending June 30, 1935.
to bring together the various Deaf Societies. The establishment of these organisations can be seen as an outgrowth of earlier movements in Australian Deaf history. The Australasian Deaf and Dumb Association, begun in 1904, had established a precedent for a national organisation in line with those of other countries. The growth of Deaf Societies and the disaffection of some of their members, individual protests, small group opposition, and the successful establishment of breakaway organisations in two states had prepared the way for the Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf. The reactions of many people associated with the Deaf Societies to the earlier conflicts, and the strategies they had developed to contain those protests, led to the National Councils and set the stage for the conflicts that ensued.

At the time, there were a variety of explanations for these rapid developments in the Australian Deaf community in the late 1920s and '30s. People in the Deaf Societies downplayed the upheaval as the work of a few individual troublemakers:

[Hersee] deliberately worked on the excitable nature of the D. & D. [Deaf and Dumb] to such an extent that after he had been with us for less than a year some of them thought that they should have practically full control.  

This differed, of course, from the explanations of those who worked to establish the breakaways and the AAAD, who tended to explain the changes as organic and inevitable:

Great changes for the better came to pass. These changes were not the work of rebellion against their own good as the societies are always telling the world; they are the natural result of the work done among the Deaf in the last forty years—natural results of the march of education with the light as natural as the tides of the sea, and as little subject to human control.

Other commentators, such as John Paul, adopted a broader perspective, observing succinctly that "Totalitarianism... is always reflected in having no faith in the powers or possibilities of ordinary folk."
There are many possible reasons for the limited success of these organisations, but reasons attributed retrospectively are usually coloured by the ideological views of their proponents. Some may decide that Deaf people were “not ready” for such national responsibilities, others may explain their difficulties solely in terms of the sophisticated opposition the Deaf organisations received from hearing people. Such explanations do not fully account for the complexities of these events, the many Deaf people who demonstrated perception, commitment and willingness to work towards greater autonomy, and their many hearing supporters and well-wishers. It seems reasonably clear that all of the newly-formed organisations became too focused on their conflicts with each other, and did not always keep sight of their original objectives or develop clear strategies for advancement. Even when acknowledging this, there is still much to be learned from people such as Wilson, Eaton, Booth, Bourke, Paul and Hersee among many others, who did articulate a sustained vision for the Australian Deaf community and its future, and tried to bring it to fruition.

Reflecting the political events of the wider community, the early 1930s were some of the most fertile years of political activism in the history of the Australian Deaf community. Over the next few years, almost all of the new Deaf organisations—breakaways and national bodies—were to disappear. The final chapter chronicles their decline.
CHAPTER 8: All to no Purpose

*Every agent ... has his tragic tale to tell you of his sad experience in the Colonial Office ...*¹

This chapter describes the disappearance or collapse of most of the radical Deaf organisations and movements established in the late 1920s and early 30s, and the demise of many of the key individuals connected with them. Beginning from the mid-1930s, it analyses the background to these changes and explores the impact on the community over the following few decades.

On an international level, the late 1930s and early 1940s saw significant changes in the conditions of Deaf people in many other countries. Eugenics movements in the USA and most noticeably in Germany grew in intensity. Thousands of Deaf people were sterilised in Germany throughout the 1930s, and during the early 1940s institutionalised deaf people, along with other disabled people, were killed by starvation or by prototypes of the gas chambers that were later used in concentration camps.² Although these events were not widely revealed until the 1980s, and Australia may have been particularly isolated from them, the general climate of conservatism and repression was reflected in Australian politics too, and may have contributed to events in the Deaf community.³ The Australian government in the 1930s cracked down on dissident groups such as communists, limiting access to public meeting halls and street gatherings and placing restrictions on the kinds of material that could be sent through the mail. Censorship was strict and Australian writers had difficulty publishing works dealing with controversial topics such as Aboriginal-white relationships.⁴ Refugees from repressive regimes in Europe were accepted with reluctance, and Jewish refugees had to pay exorbitant

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³ For a description of Australian conformity and repression in the mid- to late 1930s, see Stuart Macintyre, *The Oxford History of Australia, Vol 4, 1901-1942 The Succeeding Age*. (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1993), 307-324

⁴ For example, Katherine Susannah Pritchard’s *Coonardoo* was rejected by the main Australian publishing house, Angus & Robertson. See Stuart Macintyre, *The Oxford History, Vol 4, 311-312*. 
landing fees. Australian government officials were not averse to expressing their admiration for some of the fascist movements in Europe, and clamped down on those who attempted to attack them, such as Italian anti-fascists in Australia.\footnote{See Stuart Macintyre, *The Oxford History*, Vol. 4, 308-309.}

On the other hand, Deaf people in many countries, including Australia, benefited from the labour shortages created by the Second World War – like women, they were recruited to fill jobs left vacant by absent men. Unemployment and underemployment were greatly reduced in Deaf communities in Australia during the 1940s, and these newly comfortable circumstances affected Deaf people’s involvement in the wider community and their reliance on the services provided by Deaf Societies.

Some of the decline in political activism in Australian Deaf communities during the late 1930s and beyond may be attributed to these wider influences, and some (such as the disappearance of the NSW Association) was triggered by changes in Government legislation. It was also likely that the small Deaf communities in most states were wearied by the energy required to maintain opposition, and grew tired of the continuing negativity. One person who never tired of it was J. P. Bourke.

**Bourke’s continuing campaign**

Although Bourke was an enthusiastic supporter of Deaf community initiatives such as the AAAD and the Deaf editorship of *The Victorian Deaf News*, during the 1930s he continued to wage his own campaign against the Deaf Society and particularly against Abraham. He kept the Society under the eye of government agencies such as the Charities Board, but he also acquired a reputation as a crank. His campaign eventually damaged the AAAD, and alienated him even further from many people he sought to influence.

Although he had been a regular contributor to *The Deaf Advocate*, he also wrote more detailed information for a wider audience. He self-published a number of booklets during the 1930s,\footnote{Bourke’s booklets included: *The After-School Problems of the Deaf and Dumb*, No. 1. *The Problem of a Central Meeting Place for Them* (1933), *The After-School Problems of the Deaf*} and he is also likely to have been responsible for the
appearance of articles criticising the Deaf Society in other newspapers, such as one in the Communist Party’s paper *The Worker’s Voice*. This article described the Deaf Society as being run by “capitalists and their friends”, and concluded:

...it is no wonder that considerable numbers of deaf people look upon it as a Society for their subjection not their protection, but then where is there ever a people suffering from affliction who are not taken advantage of by capitalists and their agents.7

Bourke acknowledged with disappointment that his booklets did not reach a large audience—“I had to give most of them away”,8 and that very few of the influential public figures he targeted made any significant response. There were occasional successes, such as when humanitarian and politician Dr W. R. Maloney, M.H.R., attended the Society’s 1935 Annual General Meeting, brandishing one of Bourke’s booklets and calling for an inquiry into the Society’s management.9 But such people were rare exceptions.

Bourke frequently deplored the fact that Board members of the Society were not elected, comparing Deaf people with those in colonised nations, “we adult deaf of Victoria, like the natives of India, Egypt, and South Africa do not elect those who govern us” For a time he placed the blame in the Society’s Articles, comparing them with those of contemporary dictatorships, “If the Germans or the Italians have State Constitutions they must be something like this.”10

Bourke claimed that the hearing Board members would not appreciate being subjected to the kind of conditions they decreed for the deaf.11 He described the outrage of Mr. E. L Morton, a former board member of the Society (1926-1933) and Melbourne City Councillor, when he lost an election to one of the City Council committees to an alderman (aldermen were un-elected). Morton met with the

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7 Article by “Demos”, *The Worker’s Voice*, 8 January 1935. Copy in File No. 0381, JWF Collection
10 J. P. Bourke, “Fiction and Fact” — *A Pamphlet*, 16.
11 For example, J. P. Bourke, “Fiction and Fact” — *A Pamphlet*, 19.
Premier to propose changes to the constitution of the City Council, and told the
*Age*, “The ‘aldermanic’ system was obsolete ... Having no electors to face, and
responsible only to their own views and ideas, ‘aldermen’ needed superhuman
qualities to avoid irrational conservatism and a tyrannic despotism towards those
who opposed their views.”

Bourke could have rested his case. But of course he didn’t.

**The NSW Association goes under**

The NSW Government revised its Charitable Collections Act in 1934, and the
following year wrote to charitable organisations informing them of the new
definitions and inviting them to apply for registration or exemption under the Act.

Both the NSW Association of Deaf and Dumb Citizens and the Adult Deaf and
Dumb Society applied for registration. They each received a reply from the Chief
Secretary’s Department, advising them of the other organisation’s application, and
of the Department’s wish to avoid “overlapping and duplication of effort”. They
were informed:

> I am desired by the Minister to suggest that the governing bodies of
both organisations should make an effort to effect a fusion or
amalgamation as this is considered to be the best means of
eliminating the possibility of duplication. Furthermore, such a fusion
or amalgamation would be in the best interests of the deaf and dumb
as well as charitably minded people on whom the institutions are
largely dependent.

This set the scene for a long-drawn-out process of amalgamation between the two
organisations. After the request from the Chief Secretary’s Department, a meeting
was set up between the two organisations on 13th February 1936. The Deaf Society
sent Messrs. Larke, Mortlock and Dey as their representatives, and the
Association’s Council appointed Messrs. A. and G. R. Winn and the Reverend
Edgar Potter as their delegates.

All of these men were hearing.

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13 For example, letter from E B Harkness, Under Secretary of Chief Secretary’s Dept, to
ADDSNSW, 11 June 1935 State Records NSW; Colonial Secretary; CGS905, Main series of
letters received, 1826-1982; items [12/7524 No. 1026 and No. 1085]. Copies of items also in
File No. 0144, JWF Collection. (Subsequent references will use JWF Collection File No.)
14 Letter from Harkness to ADDSNSW, 12 December 1935 File No. 0144, JWF Collection.
The Association proposed that both organisations be dissolved, and a new one established, with a provisional Committee and an outside Chairman. They stipulated that Deaf members should have majority representation on this Committee and the right to vote. These proposals were quite unacceptable to the Society, whose principal concern seemed to be that Hersee have no role in the new combined organisation – which they assumed would be the Society, with the addition of the members and assets of the Association.

The Society wrote to the Chief Secretary a few weeks later, setting out their objections to the Association’s proposal. It is difficult not to see their arguments as those of wealthy and privileged hearing men alarmed at the prospect of losing their power. They considered that the public contributed money to the Society because of the “high standing in the community of those who comprise the Patrons, Officers, and members.” They described the Society’s assets in detail and used these to strengthen their hand, declaring, “It is quite impossible for this Society to give equal representation to an organisation with only one-fiftieth part of the Society’s Capital.” (There was no acknowledgement of the fact that much of this capital had been raised by Deaf Collectors.) They also protested the impossibility of allowing Deaf people to have a majority on any governing body; or of allowing Deaf people to vote (since they would always form the majority of the organisation’s members):

With our knowledge of world wide conditions, we are convinced that this Society must maintain its [sic] present form of administration, and cannot be a party to forming an organisation to be controlled by a Council with a balance of power in favour of the Adult Deaf & Dumb.

The Society insisted that the split between the two organisations was due only to a dispute with their former Welfare Officer (Hersee), and that “the adult deaf and dumb did not ask for any alteration in the management of this Society, nor have

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15 Miscellaneous letters from ADDSNSW and NSWADD to E. B. Harkness, setting up meeting. File No. 0144, JWF Collection
16 ADDSNSW, Minutes of Executive Committee, 19 Feb 1936
17 Letter from Hon Secretary, ADDSNSW, to Chief Secretary, 5 March 1936 (underlining in original). File No. 0144, JWF Collection
18 Ibid.
they made any such suggestion since.\textsuperscript{19} This last statement is contradicted by almost any reading of the events of the time (see Chapter Four)

Due to this stalemate, a conference was arranged between three representatives of each organisation, chaired by a Government representative (Mr Quigley), and held on 25\textsuperscript{th} May 1936. The Society sent Lonsdale (the Society’s General Secretary and Superintendent) and Brooks (the Society’s President) to accompany Dey this time, and the Association’s representatives were the same. Once again, they were all hearing men. A transcript of this conference survives and is a revealing record of the participants’ attitudes and tactics.\textsuperscript{20}

Both organisations strenuously objected to being “swamped” by the other, rather than amalgamated. However, the Association’s representatives seem to have accepted that their preferred option of forming a new organisation was not realistic, and that their task was to argue for the best deal they could in the inevitable re-absorption of the Association into the Society. The debate centred on the accommodations the Society should make in the process. One issue was the number of Association representatives who should be given places on the Society’s Council and Executive. They eventually negotiated it down to six Association members on the Society’s Council (out of a total of 16) – three Deaf and three hearing. The Society was willing to accept three hearing people from the Association on its Executive (out of a total of nine) – but no Deaf people. Although the Association initially reacted to this offer with indignation, they eventually accepted it.\textsuperscript{21}

The Association insisted that Deaf people should be eligible to be voting members of the amalgamated organisation, and argued that they should pay a lower subscription fee. This was strenuously resisted by the Society – Lonsdale alleged that Deaf people were not “clamouring for a right to vote” and had never done so.\textsuperscript{22} He considered that if they allowed Deaf people to vote, “You would hand the

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{20} Minutes of Conference between representatives of the Adult Deaf and Dumb Society and the Association of Deaf and Dumb Citizens [sic], 25 May 1936 File No 0144, IWF Collection.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, 12

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid, 4.
CHAPTER 8: All to no Purpose

whole thing over to the deaf.”23 Gordon Winn drew a distinction between the kind of charity which needed to be fully administered (which he compared to the Red Cross) and one where the members retained their autonomy. The latter he compared to the YMCA:

The charitable public supply the building but the people don’t submit to charity by becoming members and I think that applies to the deaf …. The members are people who will decide for themselves whether they will belong to it and they are entitled to a vote.24

Winn maintained that it was reasonable for Deaf people to expect to vote in their organisations, “considering that three-fourths of them are citizens who have a vote in the Government, who have a Municipal vote”25

Much discussion revolved around the perceived wealth of each organisation. While the Society used their buildings and other assets as bargaining chips, the Association tried to present a different model, with Potter maintaining “Irrespective of buildings I suggest our organisation is as big as the Society and the charitable work we are doing is equal to the Society.”26 When the Society reiterated that they brought £38,000 worth of assets to the proposed amalgamation, A. Winn responded, “That belongs to the deaf.”27 Potter agreed, pointing out, “The £38,000 property was raised to a certain extent by our deaf.” (i.e., Deaf people then in the Association). Potter had evidently been giving this some thought, because he went on to insist, “Legally we have a claim. If you read up the case of the Wee Frees of Scotland — and they got it.”28 Quigley unfortunately cut short this intriguing argument, and it was not pursued. This was a daring claim and a fundamental difference between the hearing men allied with the Deaf Society and the Association. The Society’s men considered the assets belonged to the organisation, and had been accumulated largely because of the status of men like themselves. The Association’s men (though they were from the retail industry and the church)

23 Ibid., 8
24 Ibid., 4
25 Ibid., 11.
26 Ibid., 3
27 Ibid., 9
28 Ibid., 9. The “Wee Frees” were a splinter group of the Free Church of Scotland. After they left the main church in the early 20th Century, they made a successful legal claim for a proportion of the buildings of the Free Church of Scotland, since they had constituted part of its original membership. General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland v Overtoun [1904] AC 515 (HL.)
radically proposed that the assets belonged to the "workers" or those who had toiled to raise the money, and that the Society could not lay full claim to them. It would be interesting to know if this sentiment was shared by the Deaf members of the Association, and to contemplate what might have happened had they decided to pursue such a claim.

Although the participants in this conference seemed to try to maintain civility, there were occasional bursts of hostility. At one point Potter, when asked to offer an "alternative suggestion" to the Society’s proposals, snapped, "My alternative suggestion is that it is about time that the Society had a few modern ideas." When Lonsdale declared once too often, "the deaf cannot control the organisation", Gordon Winn replied, "We’ve had seven years to demonstrate that it is a workable plan." The comments of the Association’s representatives often defended the aspirations and achievements of their organisation, and demonstrate a palpable disappointment that it was all to disappear.

The Adult Deaf and Dumb Society was granted registration under the Charitable Collections Act in late 1936, but it took several more months of letter-writing, meetings, and concessions from the Society before amalgamation took place in August 1937. The Society finally agreed to reduce the membership fee for Deaf people to 5/- with full voting rights, and also promised to employ the Association’s staff on a casual basis – with the exception of Hersee. Quigley had tried to persuade the Society to let bygones be bygones, that "the dead past should bury its dead", but they flatly refused to contemplate working with Hersee. The Association’s practice of having Deaf people fill at least half of their Council positions was not adopted, and was not to happen again in Australian Deaf Societies for more than 50 years.

Amid all the official letters and arguments between hearing men, it is difficult to discern the attitudes of the Deaf people of NSW to the amalgamation. The Society

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29 Ibid., 3.
30 Ibid., 11.
31 Minutes of General [Deaf] Committee meeting of ADDNSW, 4 Nov 1936 File No. 0144, JWF Collection.
claimed that their Deaf people were fully in favour of the amalgamation and did not wish to make significant changes to the way the Society was run. A few letters from the Society’s Deaf Committee to the Chief Secretary survive, confirming this. But no record survives of how the Deaf members of the Association responded. The surviving papers of the Association during its final year or so are mostly brisk and official announcements of meetings to vote on the amalgamation proposals, “winding up” galas, closing of banking services at the Association, and other such administrative matters. The Deaf Advocate ceased to appear, and the strong Deaf voice of the early Association is almost impossible to discern.

Among the surviving Association correspondence are some terse letters to and from the Queensland Deaf and Dumb Citizens’ Reformed Association. John Paul wrote seeking confirmation that the NSW Association was about to close, and requesting that any correspondence from the Queensland Association be destroyed before papers were handed over to the Society. Hersee agreed on condition that the Queensland Association also destroyed the NSW Association’s correspondence. The letters convey no indication of their personal response to these events, other than that implicit in their agreement to keep their correspondence out of the Society’s hands.

Mr A. L. Lonsdale was absent in England from March to October 1937, during the last stages of the amalgamation, with his brother E. J. Lonsdale (who had been on the Society’s Council for a few years) taking over his position during his absence. The tone of communications between the Society and the Association was more cordial during those months, and the final arrangements for the amalgamation seem to have been concluded amicably, suggesting that A. L. Lonsdale’s absence reduced much of the friction. Indeed, the program for a “Unity Social” on 6th August included a tableau with a theatrical “proclamation” devised by the Rev. Edgar Potter:

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32 Minutes of Conference between representatives of the Adult Deaf and Dumb Society and the Association of Deaf and Dumb Citizens [sic], 25 May 1936 File No 0144, JWF Collection, 5
33 E.g., letter from Adult Deaf and Dumb General Committee to Chief Secretary’s Department, 23 October 1936 File No 0144, JWF Collection
34 Letters from J. M. Paul, 22 July 1937, 28 July 1937; from H. V. S. Hersee 2 Aug 1937; from J. M. Paul 4 Aug 1937, and from an Assistant Secretary acting on Hersee’s request, 9 Aug 1937. File No. 0144, JWF Collection
I do hereby proclaim, announce and certify that the deaf of this state, once divided into two kingdoms, though speaking the same language are now and from henceforth to be united into one great Empire, to be ruled over by one Monarch, whose name is ‘Harmony’, whose laws shall be the laws of understanding and goodwill, forbearance and mutual friendship and whose citizens shall be accounted worthy to uphold the high traditions of that great brotherhood which is the foundation of all well being.\(^{35}\)

During his visit to England that year, Lonsdale spent much of his time visiting Deaf Missions, Societies and other Centres, and represented Australia at an International Congress of the Deaf and Dumb in Paris.\(^{36}\) Undoubtedly one of the highlights of his visit would have been going to Buckingham Palace to be presented with a silver coronation medal “for his charitable work among the deaf mutes”.\(^{37}\) But he was home in time to join the early meetings of the newly amalgamated organisations, and by January 1938 had resumed his position as General Secretary and Superintendent of the Society, with his brother Chairman of the Executive.\(^{38}\) The “Shadow” had prevailed.

The demise of the New South Wales Association for Deaf and Dumb Citizens in many ways reflects the major themes of this thesis – the articulation of Deaf independence using the widely-accepted model of “citizens”, and the frustration of this attempt by the institutions of charity and government A simple change in government legislation, easily reinforced by the socially accepted mores of charitable service, was able to shape the possibilities of Deaf communities and their organisations.

**Hersee departs**

Herbert Hersee and his family sailed back to England after the amalgamation, their fares arranged by the Association before its closure. The Association members presented Hersee with an ornate certificate recording their appreciation for his “splendid service” and “ready sympathy with the Deaf and Dumb”, and giving him much of the credit for “the great success of our Association in securing fuller

\(^{35}\) “Programme for Unity Social,” *Deaf Sports Notes* 1, no. 7 (6 August 1937).

\(^{36}\) *Deaf Sports Notes* 1, no. 6 (30 July 1937): 7

\(^{37}\) Ibid., 5

\(^{38}\) ADDSNSW, Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting, 20 Jan 1938.
powers of self expression and more complete self-government for the Deaf and Dumb.” They declared that they would “forever remain grateful” for his achievements with the Association, and concluded:

We ... trust that your labours for the welfare of the Deaf and Dumb in another land may be crowned with that measure of success your skill and knowledge deserve.\textsuperscript{39}

Herssee was never to work with Deaf people again. He applied for positions with Deaf Missions and Societies when he returned to England, but could not secure one. J. W. Flynn, who met with an embittered Herssee in England in 1956, reported that Herssee believed Lonsdale had used his many visits to British Deaf centres in 1937 to turn people against him.\textsuperscript{40} Although Herssee stayed in touch with some of the Deaf people he had befriended in Sydney,\textsuperscript{41} he passed the rest of his career working for a church insurance company.

\textbf{The end of the AAAD}

After the mid-1930s, the only active branches of the Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf were in Queensland and Victoria, and they were faltering. The long-drawn out amalgamation of the NSW Association with the Society probably had a demoralising effect on the AAAD, although this is not mentioned anywhere. Not only did it deprive the AAAD of a public forum for its reports (with the disappearance of \textit{The Deaf Advocate}), the amalgamation would also have highlighted the vulnerability of radical Deaf movements in Australia and the seeming invincibility of their opponents.

The few remaining records do not present a cheerful picture. The Victorian branch’s Annual Meeting for 1936 was reported in \textit{The Age}, describing the branch’s unsuccessful appeals to the Charities Board and the Premier’s Department about the Adult Deaf and Dumb Society. The article also reported that the branch was calling on the Prime Minister, Mr. Lyons, to emulate his British counterpart:

\textsuperscript{39} Certificate, Branson/Miller Collection of Herssee Papers. Copy in File No. 0637, JWF Collection
\textsuperscript{40} J W Flynn, “Post-School Organisations,” 31
\textsuperscript{41} For example, Stan and Isabel Winn’s daughter Edena remembers receiving a sympathy card from Herssee when Stan died in 1959. Miss Edena Winn, personal communication, 12 Dec 2003.
The British Prime Minister, in an appeal some years ago to the English public on behalf of the deaf and dumb, said:—"I think it would be a good thing to investigate, in the light of modern circumstances, the whole condition of the deaf and dumb." The association would like to ask Mr. Lyons to make the same appeal to the public of the Commonwealth. 42

There is a surviving copy of that newspaper article from among Abraham’s papers, with his comments written in the margin. He noted in disgust:

Extraordinary Attitude of “Age”… Practically the “Association” is dead. The only Officers are Bourke Woods Storey. The latter does not understand the objective of the Association and was talked into “office” against his wishes. I am of the opinion that there is not a dozen interested members and Bourke is only one capable of drawing up this “statement”. Lambert dropped out. Others refused to take office. 43

Apart from showing Abraham’s attitude to the Association, these comments also indicate that the Victorian Branch had declined significantly, and had lost the support of previous stalwarts such as Lambert. His comments, and the concerns described in the article in The Age, suggest that the Victorian Branch was being commandeered by Bourke and his continuing campaign against the Society.

The Queensland branch’s Annual Report for 1936 described “a year which has simply meant ‘holding on’.” Not only was their own branch having great difficulties, they reported that “Serious breaks in the work of the Association as a whole have taken place… There are those who wish to boss the Association and make it a machine for their own ends.” 44 There can be little doubt that they were referring to J. P. Bourke in Victoria.

Bourke had become Secretary-Treasurer of the Victorian Branch of the AAAD towards the end of 1935. Some of his familiar diatribes and letters about the Deaf Society and Abraham soon began to appear on AAAD branch letterhead, and he began to publicly define the AAAD in terms of its relationship to the Society: "Whereas an adult Deaf and Dumb Society is an organisation for looking after the welfare of the Adult Deaf; our Association is an instrument for seeing that this is

43 File No. 0722, JWF Collection Underlining in original.
44 Queensland Branch of the AAAD, Fourth Annual Report, 30 June 1936.
properly attended to and the Society managed in an efficient manner." This appropriation of the AAAD's role was not likely to be well-received by other members of the Association, especially those in other states.

Martha Overend Wilson, around this time, sent an open letter to AAAD members. It may have been sent specifically to those in Victoria (possibly aimed at Bourke in particular), but it was a printed circular rather than a typed letter, so would seem to have been meant for wide distribution. She pleaded with members to show the "high idealism" of the Association in their dealings with all Deaf organisations, saying specifically, "This Association is not a tool which individuals can use to attack Societies." She urged people "not to combat individual wrong by bitterness and denunciations", or to "seek satisfaction for our own ... personal quarrels, to the injury of the standing of our Association." She characteristically called for many other virtues to be displayed as well, but her appeal was fundamentally similar to that of Alf Eaton in 1934, pointing out that the survival of the Association was dependent on members rising above petty arguments and demonstrating their commitment to the progress of the Deaf community as a whole.

Wilson's appeal may have influenced some people, but it was not enough to save the Victorian Branch of the AAAD. In its Annual Report for 1937, J. P. Bourke reported:

"...we have to state that the most disheartening happening of 1937 was the closing of the branch by the Federal Executive of the Association. This was due, to use the words of the Executive "Because of continued unauthorised action of the branch".

Bourke was unrepentant, filling the rest of the Annual Report with another of his long spils about the Society and its injustices against the Deaf, and the valiant but unsuccessful efforts of the Victorian branch (of which he was probably the only active member by that stage) to seek justice. As Ern Reynolds recalled later:

45 J. P. Bourke, "The Victorian Branch of the Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf" (pamphlet), 9 October 1936 PROV, VA 02707 Charities Board of Victoria, VPRS 4523/P1, "Closed" Agency and General Correspondence Files, Unit 51, File 477
46 See Appendix E.
47 M. O. Wilson, untitled circular, n.d. File No. 0400, JWF Collection.
... that folded up, in my opinion, because it got too spiteful and J. P. Bourke got to the stage where he could not write a line without condemning the late E.J.D.A. [Abraham] or the Society ... and I think that eventually it made a lot of the sensible deaf feel this is not what we want.\footnote{AAAD (Victorian Branch), Final Report of the Branch, April 1937, PROV, VA 02707 Charities Board of Victoria, VPRS 4523/P1, “Closed” Agency and General Correspondence Files, Unit 68, File 656}

While the Societies and their National Council may have done most of the damage to the AAAD, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Bourke, however unintentionally, dealt the final blow to the Victorian branch and by extension to the AAAD itself. Once the Victorian branch had been closed down, the only remaining branch was in Queensland, where most of the National Executive also lived. Although the Executive was still in existence in 1937 (since it acted to close down the Victorian branch), there are no surviving reports from either the National Executive or the Queensland branch after 1936. After a tumultuous existence of little more than five years, the AAAD quietly disappeared.

A new National Council

Once these rival Australian Deaf organisations had disintegrated, the Deaf Societies took up their national activities again in 1938, as if recognising that the way was now clear for the sort of Council they had originally intended. At a conference held during the Sports Carnival in Hobart in December 1938, they established an Australian National Council of Adult Deaf and Dumb Societies.\footnote{E. A. Reynolds, interview by J. W. Flynn, 26 March 1981, 19. File No. 230, JWF Collection.}

The minutes of the four-day conference studiously avoided any mention of the earlier National Council and its clashes with Deaf communities, or even of the old ADDA. The Rev. Edgar Potter (formerly of the NSW Association, then of the NSW Society) was elected President, and A. L. Lonsdale Honorary Secretary. An article in the Hobart Mercury announced that:

The object of the Council will be the advancement and well-being of the deaf and dumb throughout Australia, and it will meet at least once every two years.\footnote{Minutes, Conference of Adult Deaf and Dumb Societies and Missions of Australia, Copy attached to ADDSV, Minutes of General Board Meeting, 24 Jan 1939}

Although one deaf man was in attendance at the conference (E. R. Noble of Victoria) there was no mention of any commitment to having Deaf people participate in the new Council. Bourke wrote dismissively that this, like the earlier Council, was controlled by Abraham: "The others connected with it are like a string of camels tied nose to tail, and he leads the whole bunch."\(^53\)

Contesting public images of Deaf people

Deaf people's efforts to present themselves in a particular way have always risked being undermined by misguided public opinion, particularly its reflection in the media of the time. John Paul made this point in 1932:

> After forty years among them there is one thing I cannot tell you about the deaf. That is whether the deafness itself or the propagation of fallacious and harmful statements about them really constitutes the greatest handicap in their social and industrial lives.\(^54\)

The breakaways and dissidents of the late 1920s and early 30s had tried to change the public image of Deaf people from one of passive and child-like recipients of charity to one of capable citizens who could manage their own affairs. But their efforts had had limited success. A measure of how resilient the old stereotypes were can be seen in a newspaper article in the Melbourne Sun in 1937, which temporarily stirred up further disputes within the Deaf community.

The article was called "Lives His Shuttered Life with Shakespeare", and appeared under the byline of R. L. Hoffmann.\(^55\) Even by the standards of the time, it was a mawkish and sentimental account of a deaf-blind man – "Old Thompson" (which was acknowledged not to be his real name) – living at the Blackburn Home, which was described as "the Adult Deaf and Dumb Society's idyllic little haven". It segued skilfully into a description of the Society's headquarters at Jolimont and yet another panegyric to Abraham. Abraham was described as having:

> ...a sort of patriarchal authority over the large family. To him they bring their joys and their sorrows, their differences and perplexities. They even approach his advice on matters of romantic interest –

\(^54\) J. M. Paul, "A letter from Queensland," *The Deaf Advocate* 2, no. 2 (Feb 1932)
should they marry, and if they marry, should they have children? And all the whys and wherefores of this shuttered world of theirs.

The article described silent bridge parties and tranquil deaf-mutes whose “anger mounts no further than [their] fingertips”, even when provoked. Deaf people were referred to as children:

The Society assumes responsibility for its children — they are all children, whether 16 or 60 — so soon as they leave school... in every way they are taught to adjust themselves to a world for which nature forgot to equip them.

“Old Thompson” was described as having been born “deaf and muted”, before “Age brought blindness”. He loved Shakespeare, and had most of his plays and poems literally “at his fingertips”. Abraham and his son Douglas (who was then Superintendent of the Blackburn Home), were said to “have a special pride in him.” The article concluded with a glowing description of the Blackburn Home, describing it as “a lovely retreat set among great gardens and an orchard with a lake gleaming at the foot of a hill”, providing an idyllic background for “old Thompson”:

And there along the promenade verandah gropes old Thompson, living in the world of Shakespeare’s yesterdays...taking tea, perhaps, in a Veronese garden with the Capulets... or in the tap room of the Boar’s Head tavern making merry passes with Bardolph, Pistol, Falstaff and the rest... Who can tell?

Of course this article was like a red rag to a bull to J. P. Bourke, and also provoked complaints from others such as Mrs. M. Gladman. In December of that year Bourke produced another of his self-published booklets, “Fiction and Fact” — A Pamphlet, about the story. He contradicted Hoffmann’s article on virtually every point, from the identity of “old Thompson” to the type of card games Deaf people preferred—“we (do) not hold bridge parties... Mostly we play euchre, five hundred and whist”. However he declared at the start, “We do not blame Mr. Hoffmann. We know that he got his information from Mr. Abraham” He and others identified “Old Thompson” as Mr E. Cork, who had not been born “deaf and muted”, but had been blind from an early age, and deaf since 30. He had been educated at the

56 Mrs Gladman wrote a letter to the Sun, protesting about the inaccuracies in the article. It was not published, but Bourke reproduced it in full in “Fiction and Fact” — A Pamphlet, 13
57 J. P. Bourke, “Fiction and Fact” — A Pamphlet, 8.
Institute for the Blind, and "What he knows he learnt long before he ever came under the control of the Abrahams". Bourke and others had arranged for the article in *The Sun* to be transcribed into braille for Mr Cork, and reported that he was "hurt and very indignant" about it.

Bourke wrote that, "another deaf friend asked me to get up a protest, and induce the deaf, their relations and friends to sign it... I asked about sixty of them to record a protest against the statements... but only seven of them would put their name to it." This he attributed to Deaf people’s resigned passivity in the face of Abraham’s control. "The majority of the deaf and dumb resent the way he talks about them, but take all his lies as a matter of course." He quoted one deaf man as writing to him, "I feel it would be no use to answer it, Mr. Abraham is too strong. He has made his seat secure with the Committee... Every dog has his day, and Mr. Abraham has had his and will have to answer to God for it soon."  

This incident demonstrates the persuasive power of portraying Deaf people as "children", usually living in supervised "havens", and dependent on a "patriarchal authority". The Societies’ reliance on charitable funding exerted a constant pull towards this type of publicity, with its reassurance to the public that their charitable contributions had tangible and heart-warming results. Although contested by some Deaf people, these images were very resistant to change.

**Bourke and the Deaf community**

Despite Bourke’s unflagging efforts to improve the lot of Deaf people, he always occupied an uneasy position in the Deaf community. His hearing background would have placed him at a disadvantage, and he did not seem to possess the talents that might have helped him overcome this – he was not a sportsman or a raconteur. He never married (other men with a similar background to Bourke were assimilated more quickly when they married Deaf women). The small circle of supporters he had in the 1920s appeared to dwindle even further during the 1930s.

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58 Ibid., 14
59 Ibid., 8
60 Ibid., 8
61 Ibid., 14
But a more likely reason for his lack of support was that he was not fully in tune with Deaf people’s feelings about themselves. Bourke insisted that:

The adult deaf and dumb of Australia are not a happy people... Lack of knowledge of them and their problems, needs, difficulties and helplessness on the part of the public is one of the chief reasons for the unhappy conditions that prevail amongst them. 63

But was this supported by the majority of Deaf people? Deaf people have usually confounded social activists and reformers by their surprising sang-froid. This does not mean they do not acknowledge their frustrations and injustices, and support those who fight to change them, but in general they value the social and personal pleasures of their community, the clear identity and the ease of using sign language, more than the lonely pursuit of an uncertain political goal.

Bourke’s insistence that all was misery, brutality and unhappiness in the Deaf community would probably not have resonated with most of his peers, and would have contributed to the seeming lack of support he received from them. The unrelenting bleakness of his writing contrasted with that of The Deaf Advocate, for example -- while the editors of the Advocate railed against the Societies and injustice generally, large parts of their magazine simply celebrated the social life and everyday pleasures of a close-knit community.

As the 1930s wore on, it is probable that people became inured to Bourke’s complaints and saw no point in them. As radical Deaf organisations and ventures crumbled around the country, most Victorian Deaf people probably decided to stick even more closely to the devil they knew. Although he probably retained a few supporters, Bourke was generally regarded as a harbinger of pointless conflict, a “troublemaker”. 64

In the early 1930s, during the heyday of the AAAD and the breakaways in other states, Bourke could still summon enough support to organise a public meeting of Deaf people in Melbourne, as he did in April 1934, where a motion was carried

63 For example, Alf Taylor of Sydney, who was deafened in the First World War and later married a Deaf woman, Iris Boortz.
calling yet again for a Royal Commission to enquire into the Deaf Society.\textsuperscript{65} His support had clearly dropped off by the late 1930s, though the Deaf Committee of the time seems to have been more conservative. In early 1938, he drafted a new Constitution for the Society, and requested an opportunity to put it to a meeting of Deaf people.\textsuperscript{66} The Deaf Committee refused to hear him on the subject or distribute his draft Constitution,\textsuperscript{67} and it seems the proposal went no further. Later that year, the Deaf Committee requested the Board of the Society to reject Bourke’s membership and return his subscription, “in view of the harm he has done the Society”.\textsuperscript{68} After seeking legal advice, the Board returned his annual subscription, in effect refusing him membership of the Society.\textsuperscript{69}

In 1939 the Society conducted a public Appeal for funds with the permission of the Charities Board, and Bourke took the opportunity to distribute circulars criticising the Society and attempting to undermine its Appeal. The Board of the Society acknowledged the “serious effect” his activities had on their Appeal, and recorded their view that, “this person had done the greatest disservice to the deaf and dumb that it was possible for any person to do.”\textsuperscript{70} Bourke’s activities in connection with the Appeal also drew a sharp response from the Deaf Committee, which issued a letter dismissing Bourke’s claims as “groundless and without any foundation of truth”, and “a source of exasperation and annoyance to all of us.” They dissociated themselves from Bourke, describing him as “not deaf and dumb in the generally accepted sense of the word”, and assured readers that “Mr. Bourke speaks for himself alone and the Deaf Committee believes he has no support, sympathy or encouragement from amongst the deaf community of this State.”\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{65} “Deaf and Dumb Society”, \textit{The Age}, 12 May 1934, 24.
\textsuperscript{66} Letter from J. P. Bourke to Hon Secretary of Board of Management, ADDSV, 4 Jan 1938 (Confirmed in ADDSV, Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting, 25 Jan 1938.)
\textsuperscript{67} Letter from Deaf Committee to Hon. Secretary of Board, 10 Feb 1938 Receipt noted in ADDSV, Minutes of General Board Meeting, 22 Feb 1938.
\textsuperscript{68} Letter from E. R. Noble (Hon. Sec. to Deaf Committee) to General Board, 17 July 1938. Attached to ADDSV, Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting, 25 July 1938.
\textsuperscript{69} ADDSV, Minutes of Executive Committee Meetings, 22 Aug and 26 Sept 1939.
\textsuperscript{70} ADDSV, Minutes of General Board Meeting, 25 July 1939.
\textsuperscript{71} Letter from E. R. Noble (Hon. Sec. to Deaf Committee) to undisclosed recipients, 11 July 1939. Also signed by other members of Deaf Committee: J. M. Johnston, W. A. Ross, J. N. McLauren, Doris Hickey, Rose M. Dow, H. Puddy, H. Greensmith, W. Ashby, and Mrs A. Sutherland.
CHAPTER 8 All to no Purpose

All to no purpose

By the late 1930s Bourke began describing his quest as a doomed epic:

In his endeavour to expose conditions in the society and the treatment of the adult deaf and dumb, the writer has, for twelve years, been appealing to the governing powers, the Churches, Members of Parliament, public authorities, public bodies, public men, the Press, and to the hearing members of the society, but all to no purpose.\(^\text{72}\)

He was bitter and scathing about the seeming indifference of the Victorian Government to the concerns of Deaf people—“The Victorian Government protects the aborigines, and kangaroos, koalas, and kookaburras, fish and wild duck, but not its adult deaf and dumb.”\(^\text{73}\) His endless railing against Abraham took on the character of a vendetta, an obsession – no matter what the declared topic of his writings, sooner or later each booklet, letter or magazine descended into invective against Abraham, which unfortunately obscured some of his meticulously detailed work.

It would have been difficult for someone attracted to the Victorian social reformers, as Bourke was, not to cast his work in an epic light, and himself as a tragic hero. He quoted Carlyle’s Latter-Day Pamphlets to summarise his experience with the Charities Board, the Government and “the Churches, Members of Parliament, public authorities, public bodies, public men, the Press, and the hearing members of the society”:

Every agent ... has his tragic tale to tell you of his sad experience in the Colonial Office; what blind obstructions, fatal indolences, pedantries, stupidities on the right hand and on the left he had to battle with; what a world-wide jungle of redtape, inhabited by doleful creatures, deaf or nearly so to human reason or entreaty, he had entered on, and how he paused in amazement, almost in despair; passionately appealing now to this doleful creature, now to that, and to the dead redtape jungle, and to the living Universe itself, and to the Voices and to the Silences; - and on the whole found that it was an adventure in sorrowful fact, equal to the fabulous ones by old Knights-errants against dragons and wizards in enchanted wildernesses and waste howling solitudes; not achievable except by nearly superhuman exercise of all the four cardinal virtues and unexpected favour of the special blessing of Heaven.\(^\text{74}\)

\(^\text{72}\) J. P. Bourke, Benevolence and the Banned Baby, 1.
\(^\text{73}\) J. P. Bourke, “Fiction and Fact” — A Pamphlet, 1
\(^\text{74}\) Quoted in J. P. Bourke, Benevolence and the Banned Baby, 1-2
Despite the vivid imagery, it is unlikely that this gained him any extra sympathy from the Deaf community.

Bourke’s last stand

In 1940 Bourke began a new magazine, owned and edited by himself. This was The Australian Deaf Citizen, a quarterly magazine “dedicated to the interests of the Deaf of Australia”. Each issue consisted of a lengthy editorial, some local and national news items, quotes from a variety of sources, and an extract from Bourke’s earlier booklet The Story of a Deaf Drudge, which he began to serialise in The Australian Deaf Citizen. Although he used the terms “we” and “our” in his editorials, there is no evidence that there were any other contributors. It is probable that Bourke could not continue to finance it, as it lasted for only six issues.75

Although the magazine may have met with little success at the time, the six copies were re-discovered in the State Library of Victoria more than 40 years later by a Deaf researcher, Michael Uniacke, who wrote about them for another fledgling Australian Deaf magazine, Sound Off.76 Uniacke was fascinated by these old accounts of Deaf struggles for independence, commenting on how similar they were to the rhetoric of contemporary Deaf activists. He also perceived the conflict between Bourke’s high idealism and his extreme negativity:

[The magazine] was too angry, too vitriolic, and this must surely have contributed to its downfall. Yet Bourke saw and felt what he believed was gross injustice. He was desperate to bring hearing people to account and to shake what he saw was apathy of deaf people around him.77

In The Australian Deaf Citizen, Bourke reported several times on the activities of a new Victorian group called the “Past Pupils Association”, which held social gatherings at the premises of the School for the Deaf. Bourke said the group was founded by the school superintendent Mr W. J. McCaskill,78 however some of the

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75 Issue No. 1 was dated January, February, March 1940, and it continued to appear every three months until Issue No. 6 in April, May, June 1941.
77 Ibid., 4
names mentioned in connection with it (e.g., Robert Luff and Bourke himself) suggest that it may have included many of the dissidents of the 1920s and 30s and attempted to retain some of their ideals – an impression also suggested by modern informants. Bourke described some hostility between this group and the Deaf Society, such as the Deaf Society organising rival events whenever the Past Pupils Association had a social function. There is no indication that the Past Pupils Association was politically active – Bourke’s reports were of card parties and dances rather than of subversive magazines and public meetings. No other records of the group seem to have survived.

**The end of Abraham’s rule**

Ernest Abraham died on 29th July 1940, after almost 40 years as Superintendent of the Victorian Deaf Society. Alfred Lonsdale, whatever his private opinions of Abraham had been, travelled down from Sydney to be a pallbearer at his funeral, along with J. M. Johnston, E. R. Noble, M. Dyson, F. Edgar Peacock (Secretary of the Society) and Sir Julius Bruche (President of the Society).

*The Age* ran a prominent obituary, praising his “unique and extensive experience of educational and missionary work among the deaf and dumb, and his labours to ameliorate their condition [which] were rewarded with remarkable success.” *The Argus* also ran an obituary, but these tributes seemed a little muted when compared with the more glowing articles which had regularly appeared about Abraham during his lifetime. Now that the ghostwriter’s hand was stilled, it seemed the newspapers had less to say about him. A predictable counterpoint was provided by J. P. Bourke’s magazine *The Australian Deaf Citizen*, which did not flinch from speaking ill of the dead, providing a final catalogue of Abraham’s sins and declaring bluntly, “The evil that he has done lives after him.”

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79 For example, Cliff Ellwood, personal communication, 2 June 1995.
81 Unidentified newspaper clipping, 1 Aug 1940 Scrapbook, Box 23, VDS Collection.
Abraham’s wife and daughter had died the previous year. His son Douglas continued as Manager of the Blackburn Farm and Home, although he was bitterly disappointed that he did not inherit his father’s job of Superintendent. When Douglas Abraham died in 1949, his wife and son decided to change their surname to McLeod (his wife’s maiden name), considering the name Abraham “too Jewish.”

Douglas Abraham destroyed most of his father’s papers, although fragments remain in the Victorian Deaf Society Collection. Ern Reynolds recalled remonstrating with Douglas as he burned “bags and bags and bags” of his father’s life work, saying, “Doug, that would be history!” But Douglas was unmoved, replying, “Nobody’s going to have them, they were my father’s and now they are mine.” He thus ensured that Ernest Abraham, who poured his life into “instituting, organising, establishing, founding, manufacturing, and managing”, is revealed chiefly through the words of others, not his own.

A supporter topples

In 1941, one of the few long-standing allies of the Victorian dissidents had a spectacular fall from grace. The School Superintendent, W. J. McCaskill, the “white man” of the AAAD, was arrested for embezzling over £25,000 from the school and subsequently sentenced to five years in prison. Although he was acknowledged to have “done a tremendous amount of honorary work for charitable and other organisations” and to be “held in high esteem”, his trial caused a sensation, and featured in all of the Melbourne newspapers. The school’s directors were publicly criticised for their “laxity in the supervision of the accounts”.

How Abraham would have relished it had he lived another year to see it!

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87 Joseph Hepworth, “Christmas at the home of the B D M.”, The British Deaf-Mute V, no. 51 (Jan 1896): 89
89 “Deaf and Dumb Defrauded. Secretary Sentenced to Five Years,” The Age, 14 Oct 1941, 6.
See also “5 Years’ Gaol for Secretary. Theft of £25,670,” The Argus, 14 Oct 1941, 2.
In view of McCaskill’s humiliating disgrace, and the becalmed state of the national Deaf community in the 1940s, it is rather poignant to re-read a greeting McCaskill had sent to the NSW Association eight years before in the heady days of May 1933, when everything seemed possible:

I submit as a thought a few lines taken from an overseas paper, entitled “Ambition,” which I think everyone can readily adapt to his own life.

I’d rather be a Could Be,
If I could not be an Are;
For a Could Be is a May Be,
With a chance of touching par.

I’d rather be a Has Been
Than a Might Have Been by far;
For a Might Have Been has never been,
But a Has was once an Are. 90

McCaskill was probably not the only person at that time reflecting on what “might have been”.

“A good venture”

One renegade organisation soldiered on amid the ruins. The Queensland Deaf and Dumb Citizens Reformed Association – with John Paul as its Superintendent – continued until 1952. Anecdotal evidence suggests that membership declined during the 1940s and it became an organisation of “old men”. 91 It appeared to be isolated both by its later location in Teneriffe – Paul observed that “The DD [Deaf and Dumb] just won’t come out this distance despite the many comforts and benefits the place offers”, 92 and by Paul’s strict principles, which seemed increasingly old-fashioned in the more liberal post-war climate. Although the Association encouraged local sports teams – indeed, its variety of sports was one of its attractions for many Deaf men – 93 Paul dourly opposed national and international sports gatherings or Carnivals, and the energy and resources which Deaf people poured into them. He lamented the prevalence of “Carnival romances”

90 The Deaf Advocate 3, no. 5 (May 1933) [Underlining in original.]
93 Jeff Armstrong, personal communication, 20 June 1995. Armstrong joined the Association as a young man because it had a Deaf cricket team, whereas the Mission encouraged only tennis as a summer sport.
as a “serious symptom of a growing moral cancer”, and was disgusted with the huge interest shown in the International Games for the Deaf in Brussels in 1953:

It is a shameful tragedy that when so much that is important to the Deaf is just dwindling away through neglect and lack of interest that so much time and money should be given to things like this. It is a serious reflection on our outlook. The work of every pioneer of the advancement of the Deaf will have been thrown away for a little hour of strutting in the arena with a small handful of a very small section of the community — and to no purpose.

He seemed disappointed with the Deaf people of the time, with their preoccupation with sport and their lack of interest in politics, and (he hints) their fickleness. He looked back nostalgically to the Deaf people he had known at the beginning of his career: “I can say that the early years saw the DD at their pinnacle — a solid self respecting, happy, interested and interesting folk with lots of good will and loyalty.”

In 1952 Paul determined to retire, and to close down the Association with his retirement. He “flatly refused to take the responsibility of bringing anyone into the work”, or (evidently) to allow his Board to replace him. Although he was saddened by the changes in the Deaf community which had led him to this decision, citing the “prosperity of the war years” and the development of other organisations, he had no regrets: “…my going will round off the 22 yrs work of [the Association] …Yet it was a good venture.”

Martha Overend Wilson

Martha Overend Wilson died in 1945, after more than 40 years working for Queensland and Australian Deaf organisations, most of it in a voluntary capacity. Her passing went unremarked by the Queensland Deaf Mission, and the papers of the Queensland Association, which would surely have honoured her life, have not survived. At her request, her ashes were scattered over the rose bushes at the Mt

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97 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
CHAPTER 8  All to no Purpose

Thompson Crematorium in Brisbane. There is no memorial to her anywhere and she is all but unknown to the modern Australian Deaf community.

She had seen much that she worked for disintegrate or go awry, but she remained endlessly optimistic and a believer in the power of unity. The conclusion of an article she wrote for the Advocate in 1934 seems an apt memorial:

...though our work is not yet complete we can go on into the unknown future with sure hearts that the cause of the Deaf will by our united efforts be happier and brighter, and that the Deaf themselves will be regarded as a band of people worthy in every way to be looked upon as loyal citizens of Australia.99

James M. Johnston

James M. Johnston died in 1950. Though people like Bourke may have assessed his contributions rather astringently, he is still remembered as someone who worked hard to build up the sports networks of the Australian Deaf community, particularly that of cricket. His most enduring legacy has been his descendants—his Deaf daughter Dorothy Shaw was a long-time activist in the NSW Deaf community, and became the first President of the Australian Association of the Deaf when it was established in 1986. His many grandchildren and great-children are still prominent in the Australian Deaf community, and include the author of the first dictionary of Australian Sign Language, Trevor Johnston.

Fletcher Booth

Fletcher Samuel Booth died in 1956, at the age of 85. His death was reported in the Christmas 1956 issue of the Society's newsletter The Silent Messenger, and he was noted as being a "missioner" in the late 19th century before the Society started, a member of the first Organising Committee of the Society, and for his work in gathering the Deaf for meetings and church services.100 His roles in the NSW Association for Deaf and Dumb Citizens, the Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf, and as editor of the pioneering Deaf Advocate were not mentioned.

99  M. O. Wilson, "Thirty Years Work with the Deaf and Dumb," The Deaf Advocate 4, no. 1 (Jan-Feb 1934); 2
100  The Silent Messenger, Christmas 1956.
Alfred Lonsdale

Alfred Lambert Lonsdale died two years after Booth, and received a more generous and fulsome obituary in *The Silent Messenger*. The growth of the Society during his long association with it was described in detail, and his "untiring energy and far-seeing initiative" were praised. Deaf people were assured that they had "lost a friend who, more than anyone else, was responsible for the high standard of work being done for the deaf and the many amenities enjoyed by them today." Although he had retired from the Society five years previously, the "Shadow" had remained a "frequent visitor" to the premises.\(^{101}\)

"A stormy petrel"

John Patrick Bourke ended his association with the Deaf world where he had begun it – back at the Blackburn Home, this time as one of their "aged and infirm" residents. Some cryptic notes on the back of one of his record cards (on which the Society recorded details of their clients and residents) state that Bourke "met with an accident" on an unspecified date and could no longer keep his employment. He began receiving the old age pension and was admitted to the Blackburn Home in 1954.\(^{102}\) He remained there until his death in 1960.

Bourke in his declining years does not disappoint posterity – he continued to write letters to the newspapers and authorities, complain, demand his rights, and try the patience of those around him right up until his death at the age of 78. When applying for admission to the Home he listed several "conditions" he wished to have met, and was told unceremoniously that "he could only stay ... providing he complied with the rules and regulations laid down for all inmates."\(^{103}\) The Minutes of the Home Committee over the next six years regularly and resignedly referred to Bourke’s letters to the newspapers, the Hospitals and Charities Commission, the Premier, the Pensioners’ Association, the Brotherhood of St Laurence and other bodies, complaining about conditions at the Home and the inadequate allowance he felt he received from his pension.\(^{104}\) He also frequently requested improvements to

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\(^{101}\) *The Silent Messenger*, August 1958.

\(^{102}\) Record cards, Box No 31, VDS Collection.

\(^{103}\) ADDSV, Minutes of Home Committee meeting, 9 May 1954 Box No. 11, VDS Collection.

the facilities at the Home, such as heaters in the dining rooms and in his own room – some of which were granted.\textsuperscript{105} One request, suggestive of failing eyesight, was for a “new magnifying glass”.\textsuperscript{106} He died in the nearby Box Hill Hospital on 2\textsuperscript{nd} April 1960, after a short illness.\textsuperscript{107}

On the back of one of his record cards, a nostalgic staff member of the Society wrote, “Intelligent man. Deafened. Has been a stormy petrel in the deaf world.”\textsuperscript{108} It is an appropriate epitaph for John Patrick Bourke.

**Moving on**

Other people went on with their lives in varying ways. Most, whatever their feelings about the events of the 1920s and 30s, continued to participate with enthusiasm in Deaf community organisations and sporting clubs. Ernest Quinnell, from the NSW Association, was an example: after the amalgamation between the Association and the Society he was actively involved in the Society’s Deaf General Committee and sports clubs for another 40 years.\textsuperscript{109} Some successfully established businesses – Alf Eaton, from the Queensland Association, had his own tailoring business for many years.\textsuperscript{110} However, a few of the Victorian Deaf activists seem to have retreated or withdrawn from the Deaf community, and some remained within the alternative community of the Exclusive Brethren. W. H. Crush moved around rural Australia, regularly changing jobs. He stayed in touch with the Victorian and NSW Deaf communities, but seems to have taken no other active roles in community organisations. There were occasional mentions of him in *The Victorian Deaf News*, describing surprise visits from Crush, “looking the picture of health and quite tanned”, with stories of his work “on motor transport all over northern New South Wales, Riverina, and northern Victoria” or “at Renmark transporting

\textsuperscript{105} For example, ADDSV, Minutes of Home Committee Meetings, 29 April 1956, 29 Sept 1957, 24 Nov 1957, 28 Feb 1960 Box No 11, VDS Collection
\textsuperscript{106} ADDSV, Minutes of Home Committee Meeting, 25 May 1958 Box No 11, VDS Collection.
\textsuperscript{107} ADDSV, “Home Report”, Minutes of Home Committee Meeting, 25 April 1960 Box No 11, VDS Collection
\textsuperscript{108} Record cards, Box No 31, VDS Collection. This comment was probably written by Mr Ern Reynolds, the then Superintendent of the Society.
\textsuperscript{109} Della Bampton, personal communication, 25 June 2003.
\textsuperscript{110} Ken Donnell, personal communication, 20 April 2004.
oranges for the New Zealand trade."\textsuperscript{111} In 1936 he "[took] a selection up the Hawkesbury River way in New South Wales", enthusing over its isolated location, "completely cut off from the daily turmoil of civilisation".\textsuperscript{112}

In the early 1980s, a welfare officer of the Victorian Deaf Society was summoned to attend to an elderly deaf man in a Housing Commission flat in Melbourne. The man was in failing health, surrounded by piles of dusty papers, and obviously in need of assistance. But when it was made clear to him that his visitor was from the Victorian Deaf Society, the man ferociously resisted any suggestion of help. It was R. H. Lambert, another of the 1930s dissidents, and it seemed he had nursed his disillusionment with the Society for over 40 years. The young Deaf welfare officer, sensing a story, persuaded Lambert to agree to an interview at a later date. Lambert died before the interview could take place.\textsuperscript{113}

Abraham's and Lonsdale's names live on in Australian Deaf popular history, on sports trophies and buildings, in folklore and photographs. But the Deaf people described above have been largely forgotten.

**Conclusion**

Deaf political organisations may have disappeared, but important issues still demanded political responses. During the late 1940s and 50s there was a new challenge – Australian Deaf education moved more decisively towards oralism, and signing and fingerspelling were disallowed in most schools for deaf children. Although the move was being proposed in the late '40s, it is usually identified with a visit to Australia in 1950 by two prominent British educators of the deaf, Sir Alexander and Lady Irene Ewing. The Ewings visited Deaf Schools in every state and gave detailed recommendations to State Governments that Deaf education systems should adopt oral methods. In 1953 a conference of the Australian Association of Teachers of the Deaf passed a resolution that all education of deaf

\textsuperscript{111} The Victorian Deaf News 5, no. 2 (July-Aug-Sept 1934): 8.
\textsuperscript{112} The Victorian Deaf News 1 (New Series) (Jan 1936): 12.
\textsuperscript{113} Michael Uniacke, email communication, 19 Feb 2001.
children in Australia should be oral from that time forward, dismissing "fingerspelling and gestures" as "outmoded".\footnote{Cited in Jan Branson and Don Miller, Damned for Their Difference, 206. Original not sighted.}

This was when the Australian Deaf community needed a strong political voice – one of their most universally held values was under fire. But there was little or no organised response by Deaf groups. Although Deaf community gatherings met the Ewings and debated their recommendations, only a few Deaf individuals voiced the concerns of their community in public.\footnote{For example, E. R. Noble in Victoria wrote a letter to the editor of The Age, criticising the Ewings' recommendations and claiming, "The important thing [to hearing educators] is whether the ears work, not the brain in between them." See "Education for Deaf Children," (Letter to the Editor), The Age, 6 Nov 1950, 2.} The lack of a national Deaf organisation was felt, and it seems there was some discussion about trying to establish one again, though there are no records of any attempts. John Paul commented in 1947:

The general tension created by the educational methods question has again led up to the idea of forming a National body of the Deaf to hold a watching brief in any interests that would be outside the ambit of the Societies' work. Previous bodies working under the aegis of the Societies failed. In a crisis such as the present which may result in the status of the Deaf being considerably depressed it can only be regretted that they have not banded themselves nationally and independently to maintain the general interest. Despite the need any move by any of the Societies just now could only result in failure. It should be a voluntary effort of the Deaf themselves completely independent of the Societies or their hearing officers for support.\footnote{John Paul, QDDCRA Superintendent's Report, 2 October, 1947 File No. 0685, JWF Collection}

The lack of an organised political response does not necessarily mean that the Deaf people of this time were submissive and apathetic, or indifferent to the political impact of changes such as the rise of oralism – it may just mean that their experiences in the 1920s and 30s had not encouraged them to persist with organised political activity, or with opposition to the Deaf Societies. The war years had brought them economic benefits and greater employment opportunities, and as often happens, it was hard to maintain fire in a full belly.

Over the following decades, the Australian Deaf community continued to grow, reinvent itself, and expand connections between states and with other countries.
Although the organisations set up in the 1930s may not have survived, they reflected but one aspect of Deaf community life, and modern researchers need to be careful of assuming that they held the community together and their collapse impacted adversely on the everyday lives of most Deaf people. Life went on. Sport and its associated social activities, although deplored by people like John Paul, expanded and strengthened the community, providing another way of keeping it alive and resilient. Church groups were also a way for many Deaf people to explore further dimensions of themselves and their lives within their community. The Exclusive Brethren continued to have a large Deaf membership in Victoria, and other groups such as the Deaf Christian Fellowship became well-established in some states, and attracted some of those who had been active in the dissident groups. Together with the Deaf Catholic organisations, these groups sometimes provided outlets for Deaf people to organise themselves and work towards more idealised communities – in another sense, to manage their own affairs.

The rise of oralism in Deaf education in the late 1940s impacted on Australian Deaf people in ways which are outside the scope of this thesis, but the activities described here ensured that when young Deaf people completed their schooling, there was a thriving community waiting for them.

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117 For example, Isabel and Stan Winn of the NSW Association shifted their energies to the Deaf Christian Fellowship in the late 1930s (Miss Edena Winn, personal communication, 12 Dec 2003) Alf Eaton of the Queensland Association became active in the Catholic Deaf Association (Tony Dooman, personal communication, 29 April 1995).
Epilogue

Australia is a nation consumed by amnesia

Paul Kelly

Forty years after the demise of the Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf, a group of eighteen Deaf people held a meeting during the triennial Australian Deaf Games (formerly the Sports Carnivals) in Adelaide in 1977. Most of these Deaf people had leading roles in the sports organisations and Deaf Committees of their respective states, and some were on the Boards of their state Deaf Societies, which at that time usually had only one or two Deaf members. The purpose of the meeting was “to consider the formation of a national body of the Deaf” \(^2\) During the discussion, there was no mention of the earlier national organisations – the ADDA, the AAAD and the National Council – and what they had achieved or why they had failed.

There was, however, frequent reference to the Australian Federation of Adult Deaf Societies (AFADS). The AFADS was the most recent version of the old Australian National Council of Adult Deaf and Dumb Societies. After its brief revival in 1938 it had disappeared again until the early 1960s, and it was re-formed in 1965 as AFADS. \(^3\) In the absence of a national Deaf organisation, the AFADS seemed to be the national advocate on Deaf issues in the 1970s, and it was the Australian member organisation of the World Federation of the Deaf, to whose conferences it often sent a (hearing) representative. \(^4\) The Deaf people present at the 1977 meeting perceived the AFADS to be a strong organisation, and many of their comments

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\(^2\) Minutes of the General Meeting held at the S.A. Deaf Centre on 1\(^{st}\) January 1977 to Consider the Formation of a National Body of the Deaf (AAD papers) The meeting minutes do not list the names of all 18 attendees, but those who contributed to the meeting were: Mr B Muller (SA), Mr A Mann (Vic), Mr J Lovett (Vic), Mr I McGregor (Qld), Mrs E Gikte (SA), Mr B Bernal (Vic), Mr D Johnston (NSW), Mr W Cooper (WA), Miss D Griffiths (NSW), Mr B Taylor (NSW), and Mrs D Shaw (NSW)  
\(^3\) J W Flynn, *Post-School Organisations*, 107  
\(^4\) The World Federation of the Deaf was founded in 1951 to represent Deaf people around the world. It holds a Congress and General Assembly every four years, inviting representatives from each member country. 
revolved around concerns about possible conflicts between any new national body of Deaf people and the AFADS. Almost all were against the formation of a new Deaf organisation. A Queensland participant considered that, “the AFADS covered the ground sufficiently now and ... there could be a conflict between the two bodies for affiliation with the WFD.” A Victorian man agreed, “the AFADS had produced excellent results for the deaf of Australia and there was no reason for formation of a National Body if [it] was only going to duplicate the AFADS.” They warned each other that the AFADS might not recognise a new national body of Deaf people, and that the Federal Government would probably recognise the AFADS rather than an organisation of Deaf people. After general agreement that “the AFADS represented a great future for the Deaf of Australia,” they passed a motion declaring that “it is inappropriate at present to form a national body of the Deaf in Australia.”

On a first reading of these minutes, it would appear that the struggles of the 1920s and '30s had vanished from the collective memory of the Australian Deaf community. These comments in 1977 seem little different from Booth's 1922 declaration that, “The best way is to leave our troubles and disputes and grievances to the hearing Board of Management, they will look after us very well”; or Bourke's early defence of the Victorian Society: “Our Board consists of shrewd business men, and they know better than we deaf people what should be done.” However, on closer examination, it seems more likely that the Deaf people who met in 1977 did have some subliminal awareness of the events that had transpired 40 years previously. Their comments suggest a shared belief that a national body of Deaf people was likely to lead to “conflict” with the Deaf Societies, and that the Deaf Societies would prevail in any such conflict. What is striking is the complete

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5 Minutes of General Meeting to Consider Formation of a National Body of the Deaf, 1 January 1977
6 Conference Notes: Australian [sic] Deaf & Dumb Association 5 October 1922. Copy held in JWF Collection, File No. 253
7 J P. Bourke, letter to the editor, The Herald, 6 Feb 1923, 7
8 Among the participants in the 1977 meeting, Miss D. Griffiths had been a young employee of the NSW Association when it amalgamated with the Society in 1937, and Mrs D Shaw was the daughter of J M Johnston
absence of any mention of these earlier organisations or events, or of the names of Deaf people who had been associated with them.

The editors of *The Deaf Advocate* in the early 1930s had often pointed to the historical significance of the work their contemporaries were doing. When the Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf was formed in 1932, its founding members were hailed as “advancing a new era in the history of the deaf”, and assured that “the next generation of the deaf will not be unmindful of what you are doing now – and will benefit by it.” ⁹ After the Queensland breakaway, the *Advocate* editors had praised Deaf people such as Martha Overend Wilson and Alf Eaton, who resisted financial lures from the Mission in order to remain loyal to Deaf people, declaring, “their names will ever be cherished as loyal patriots when the history of the Deaf of Australia comes to be written.” ¹⁰ This had not happened. The subsequent generations of Deaf people may have retained a visceral memory of conflict and failure, but there was no commemoration of or homage to these events and pioneers – nothing but a resounding silence.

Such episodes of silence and forgetfulness are, of course, not unknown in Australian history. In 1968, W. E. H. Stanner coined the term “the great Australian silence” to describe the suppression and absence of Aboriginal history in the national story. ¹¹ It has now been widely acknowledged that this absence was not entirely accidental or innocent – Stanner claimed there was a “cult of disremembering”, ¹² and Bain Attwood has suggested that the silence arose from “strategic forgetting”. ¹³ In 2001, the centenary of Australian Federation, historians and government officials lamented the Australian people’s general lack of knowledge of and interest in this historic event:

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⁹ Editorial, *The Deaf Advocate* 2, no. 4 (April 1932)
¹² Ibid, 25.
¹³ Bain Attwood, *Introduction* In Bain Attwood & John Arnold (eds.) *Power, Knowledge and Aborigines*. (Bundoora: La Trobe University Press in conjunction with the National Centre for Australian Studies, Monash University, 1992), x.
All the people, events, and places that federalists declared would be historic never became so. The names of the convention delegates, the electoral battles of Barton against Reid, the landing place of the first Governor-General and the site of his swearing-in, the name of the first Prime Minister — all are forgotten.\textsuperscript{14}

Re-examination and re-writing of neglected or “forgotten” areas of Australian history have been subject to controversy and sometimes officially rejected as too negative.\textsuperscript{15} Perhaps, as a leading journalist wrote in the Centenary of Federation year, “Australia is a nation consumed by amnesia”.\textsuperscript{16}

**Strategic forgetting**

Was “strategic forgetting” part of the reason for the Deaf community’s seeming lack of knowledge of the events of the 1920s and ’30s (or unwillingness to make this knowledge explicit) during the later part of the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century? Information about the breakaways and the AAAD and the conflicts of these years was certainly left out of the official record on many occasions. A “short history” of the New South Wales Society prepared for its 25\textsuperscript{th} Anniversary in 1938, which seems to have been written by Fletcher Booth or the Rev. Edgar Potter, was judiciously edited by A. L. Lonsdale and most of the section about the breakaway Association crossed out;\textsuperscript{17} Booth’s obituary in the *Silent Messenger* commemorated only his work for the Society, not for the Association or *The Deaf Advocate*;\textsuperscript{18} and a pamphlet prepared for the New South Wales Society’s move to a new building in 1975 included a “brief history” of the Society which made no mention of the breakaway.\textsuperscript{19} There are many other examples of such omissions. Records and source material for the dissident groups, where they survive at all, are much less accessible than Society records. Bourke’s books and magazines languish unread in a few State Libraries, and are unknown to most Deaf people. Back copies of the Deaf Society magazines


\textsuperscript{15} See Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, *The History Wars* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2003) for a description of these debates

\textsuperscript{16} Paul Kelly, “Jogging the Collective Memory” *The Weekend Australian*, 21-22 April, 2001, 29

\textsuperscript{17} “A Short History of the Adult Deaf of New South Wales”, n.d. File No. 0011, JWF Collection. John Flynn has identified the editor’s handwriting as A. L. Lonsdale’s

\textsuperscript{18} *The Silent Messenger*, Christmas 1956

\textsuperscript{19} “Official Opening of the Deaf Centre”, 6 December 1975. Pamphlet
from the early 20th Century, such as The Silent Messenger (New South Wales) or Our Monthly Letter (Victoria), can usually be found without difficulty in Society libraries or collections. But copies of the much more revealing, rigorous and interesting (if short-lived) magazine The Deaf Advocate survive only in one or two State Libraries, where they have been stumbled upon by accident or by researchers with prior knowledge of their existence.

The absence of information about the Deaf activists of the 1920s and ’30s may be partially explained by national tendencies towards “amnesia” and “disremembering”, and by official attempts to keep certain information out of the records. But these factors do not seem to account fully for the reduced political activity in the Deaf community during the decades following the 1930s.

Other explanations may lie in the changes to deaf people’s education after the late 1940s. Oral education was pervasive in the 1950s and ’60s in Australia, and mainstreaming of deaf children into small groups in regular schools spread during the 1970s. It has been claimed that oral education can make Deaf people feel less able to participate in political processes, as they are restricted to a language to which they have incomplete access. 20 Mainstreaming weakens the transmission of sign language between and across generations of Deaf people, and delays or reduces the possibilities for learning cultural information and passing on shared history. Critics of these educational practices are quick to point out the connections — isolating deaf children from sign language and the company of other deaf people usually means that historical knowledge disappears too. 21 While earlier educational practices may not have made this historical knowledge explicit either, they provided the conditions for Deaf people to disseminate it among themselves, however imperfectly.

A national organisation again

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21 For example, Harlan Lane, The Mask of Benevolence. He points out that, “Paternalism deprives its beneficiaries of their history and therefore of the possible lives they can envision.” (p. 39)
During the 1980s, conditions became more favourable for the re-establishment of a national organisation. Recognition of Auslan as a community language made it possible to see Deaf people as a language minority as well as a disability group, and the discourses of multi-culturalism, linguistic diversity and disability rights provided new contexts for discussing Deaf communities. Increasing international travel made Deaf people aware that Australia was unusual among developed countries in not having a national organisation. After some years of discussion, the Australian Association of the Deaf (AAD) was established in 1986. Its founding President was Dorothy Shaw, whose father, J. M. Johnston, had been President of the short-lived National Council of the Deaf more than 50 years earlier. Despite this link, most members of the new AAD were under the impression that it was Australia’s first ever national organisation of Deaf people.

The AAD continues to be an active national organisation, and in 1999 hosted an international Congress of the World Federation of the Deaf in Australia. The AFADS is now the Australian Federation of Deaf Societies (AFDS), and in the contemporary political climate where consumer groups are accorded some primacy, the relationship between the AAD and the AFDS is generally one of mutual consultation and cooperation. Public discourse has moved to some extent away from portraying Deaf people as being in need of charity, but this process has been partial, and public images of Deaf people are still contested by various medical, educational and consumer interests.

The collective memory of the breakaways still lingers in the Australian Deaf community, surfacing occasionally in asides and veiled comments. Families with several generations of Deaf people may be more likely to retain such memories – one young Deaf man from such a family recalled that when he went to work for the Deaf Society of New South Wales, his father told him half jokingly that he had

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22 Auslan was first described as one of Australia’s community languages in an early National Language Policy in 1987, after several years of lobbying. Its acceptance was formalised in the Department of Employment, Education and Training, *Australia’s Language: The Australian Language and Literacy Policy, Companion Volume* (Canberra: AGPS, 1991), 20
“betrayed his grandfather”. But such memories are no longer the only repository of the national story. There has been a revival of interest in Australian Deaf history since the late 1980s, though most of the stories recovered have been those of the Deaf school founders Thomas Pattison, F J. Rose and Sister Gabriel Hogan, or of early Deaf settlers such as Betty Steel and John Carmichael. These stories seem to have satisfied, for a time, the need for Deaf “pioneers” and there has been less interest in more complex or ambiguous stories and personalities. In the late 1990s the AAD had to abandon a proposal to commemorate “100 Famous Deaf Australians”, because only a few well-worn suggestions were received. It seems that Deaf people in Australian history, such as the activists of the early 20th Century, are in need of rescuing from “the enormous condescension of posterity”.

**Post-modern citizens**

Australian Deaf people of the 1920s and 30s strove for the right to “manage their own affairs”, and to affirm their citizenship of the wider society and nation. The concept of citizenship has continued to prove a useful one for defining not only Deaf people’s place in their “host” country, but the nature of national and trans-national communities of Deaf people. Just as Ferdinand Berthier’s first Deaf organisation called itself “The Universal Society of Deaf Mutes”, so modern Deaf people are re-emphasising the importance of the global links between Deaf communities. Recent proposals that Deaf people could be re-conceptualised as citizens of a “Deaf Nation” reflect this focus. Many participants and observers have remarked that at international or trans-national gatherings of Deaf people the use of signed languages quickly unifies Deaf people across national barriers.

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23 Personal communication, Stephen Nicholson, 3 Sept 2004. Stephen’s grandfather, Ludovic Nicholson, had been an active supporter of the New South Wales Association during the 1930s
24 See Chapter 2, 54-60
25 Exceptions are the (mostly unpublished) work of John Flynn, Rhonda Loades, Sarah Fitzgerald et al., Melissa Anderson and Jenny Koschutzke, but there has been less general community awareness of the stories they have told.
27 E.g., Doug Alker, “The Realities of Nationhood,” *Deaf Worlds* 18, no. 3 (2002): 79-82. All papers in this special issue of *Deaf Worlds* deal with the topic of the “Deaf Nation”
28 E.g., Owen Wrigley, *The Politics of Deafness*, 102. Although Deaf people use different national signed languages, in trans-national gatherings they also make use of another system called “International Sign”.
Czeslaw Milosz has said that “language is the only homeland”, which has resonated with displaced or exiled people and those seeking to define what creates a community in the absence of place. It could also be used of Deaf people. Owen Wrigley has suggested that in trans-national gatherings of Deaf people, “signing [is] the semiotic marker of citizenship”, describing this citizenship as being unrelated to geographic origin:

What felt odd was a spontaneous sense of universal “citizenry” that did not require a physical place. Like the link between speech and language, the connection between location and belonging suddenly was shown to be unnecessary.

But in a nation or a citizenship without a place, the things that do bind people together – a living language and a shared history – are both more fragile and more vital. The history of Deaf people in particular times and places, such as early 20th Century Australia, contributes to both the “Deaf Nation” of the future, and to the complex and evolving history of each individual country.

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30 The concept of finding “citizenship” through language has also been described by some adult hearing children of Deaf parents who share their parents’ sign languages, and have referred to having a “passport without a country” [Cameron Davies, Passport Without a Country (videorecording), 1992.]
31 Owen Wrigley, The Politics of Deafness, 102
32 Ibid, 103
Appendix A

The Deaf Population of Australia in the 1920s and 1930s

The numbers of deaf people and the incidence of deafness in a population have traditionally been difficult to estimate. This is due to several factors: deafness has many causes and varying ages of onset, and these result in a variety of outcomes for individuals. There are consequently some differences in the way people with hearing losses define themselves (and are defined by others). There have also been historical changes in the measurement of hearing loss, audiological terminology and in accepted ways of describing deaf people.¹

It is nevertheless important to provide some indication of the size of the population being described in this thesis, both in raw numbers and as a proportion of the Australian population of the time. From this, we can attempt to gauge the extent of participation by Deaf people in the events described.

The population I have examined can loosely be referred to (in today’s terminology) as “the signing Deaf community.” The most salient characteristics of this population were (a) their use of a signed language, and (b) their identification as a distinct group, with unique educational, social and welfare needs. Most of these people could be expected to have been born deaf or become deaf in early childhood, to have had a severe or profound hearing loss, and to have been educated in a special school for deaf (or deaf and blind) children. Relatively few of them would have been expected to have facility in oral communication. In the terminology of the time, these people were called “deaf and dumb”, “deaf-mutes”, or sometimes just “deaf”.

Appendix A: The Deaf Population of Australia in the 1920s and 1930s

However, in practice this community also included people who became deaf in late childhood or early adulthood, and retained some oral communication skills in addition to developing signing skills (e.g., J. P. Bourke, W. H. Crush and M. O. Wilson). During the 1920s and 1930s, this number included some men who were deafened during World War I (e.g., A. D. Taylor and J. Allardice). These individuals chose to participate in the Deaf community, possibly because at that time there were few other services or social outlets for people such as themselves. They were usually referred to as “deaf”, “deafened”, or “late-deafened”. They would not have used the terms “deaf and dumb” or “deaf-mute” to describe themselves, although they were sometimes categorised this way by others.

Then, as now, there would also have been large numbers of people whose hearing deteriorated with age. Although this particular population would have been numerically larger than the above groups, such people almost never participated in the Deaf community or learned sign language. They are not considered part of the population examined in this thesis.

The following source material can be used to estimate the Australian Deaf population of the late 1920s and 1930s:
1. The Australian Census of 1933, which included a category for “deaf-mutes”. There was also a Census taken in 1921, but the 1933 figure is more useful for comparing with figures for the Deaf community organisations and events described in the thesis.
2. Comparative Census data from other countries.
3. Enrolment records from schools for the deaf.
4. Figures provided by Deaf Societies or similar organisations.

Australian Census, 1933

This Census found 2,326 “deaf-mutes” out of a total Australian population of just over 6,500,000; or 35.1 per 100,000 of the population. The breakdown of this figure for each state was as follows: New South Wales: 982; Victoria: 578; Queensland:
286, South Australia: 261; Western Australia: 117, Tasmania: 101, Northern Territory: 1.2 There is some evidence that the Census figure was considered conservative by Deaf people – for example, in September 1934, J. M. Johnston proposed that the National Council of the Deaf include the topic “a more reliable census” as an agenda item at its forthcoming Congress.3

**Comparative census data from other countries**

An American study comparing census data for deaf people around the world found the Australian rate to be the lowest of 20 countries surveyed, indicating that it may have been conservative. For example, the rate in Peru was 300 per 100,000 (1940 Census), the rate in Sweden was 87 per 100,000 (1930 Census), and the rate in the United States was 47 per 100,000 (1930 Census).4

**Enrolment records from Australian schools for the deaf**

J. P. Bourke, in his magazine *The Australian Deaf Citizen*, provided a list of enrolment figures for schools for the deaf in Australia for the year 1939, as follows: New South Wales: 266; Victoria: 113; South Australia: 41; Western Australia: 30; Tasmania: 19. No figure was provided for Queensland. The New South Wales figure was disproportionately high because, as well as the enrolment figure for the State school, it included enrolments for two Catholic schools for the deaf, which accepted children from other states as well.

No comparable snapshot exists for the early 1930s. However, my colleague Trevor Johnston has compiled detailed figures from available enrolment records. His figures indicate that there would have been at least 230 deaf children under the age of 16 in NSW in 1933,5 which is consistent with Bourke’s figures.

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2 Australian Census 1933: Vol 2, Part XV.
3 Letter from J. M. Johnston to undisclosed recipients, with draft Congress Programme and Constitution attached, 20 Sept 1934 [PROV: VPRS4523/P1 Unit 68 File No 656.]
Figures compiled by Deaf Societies or similar organisations

Deaf Society officials sometimes quoted figures for the deaf populations in their states. It is assumed these figures were derived from their records of attendances and services provided to Deaf people, as well as the observations and reports of Collectors who regularly travelled throughout their states. No raw data survive from the 1920s and '30s, except for “address books” and index cards in the Victorian Deaf Society Collection.6

Henry Gladwin of the New South Wales Society, in his address to the public meeting in Melbourne on 15 March 1933 (see Chapter 7), claimed that there were 1500 adult Deaf people in Australia “linked up to Welfare Organisations”, and 583 deaf school children, adding that there were “many more not so linked up”.7 These figures, totalling 2083 plus those “not so linked up”, are consistent with the Census figure that year of 2,326.

Some figures quoted by Deaf Society officials vary from Census figures. An example is the Annual Report of the Adult Deaf and Dumb Society of Victoria for 1931, in which E. J. D. Abraham claimed, “In Victoria is a little community of about 1000 people whose normal difficulties are accentuated by the absence of hearing and speech”.8 This is almost double the 1933 Census figure for Victoria of 578, and is probably an exaggeration.

Another figure is mentioned in Chapter 5, where Alderman Massey, a Councillor of the Queensland Deaf and Dumb Citizens Reformed Association (which provided similar services to the Deaf Society) reported, “According to the best information available, there are 194 deaf mutes in Queensland, of whom 117 are resident in the

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6 Personal communication, Trevor Johnston, 15 April 2003. These figures were compiled for his article “Whither the Deaf Community?” See note 1
7 H W Gladwin, Address to the Deaf and Dumb of Victoria at a Public Meeting held at Jolimont on 15th March 1933, File No 691, JWS Collection.
8 Quoted in The Deaf Advocate 2, no 2 (February 1932)
metropolitan area." The figure of 194, with the addition of children under 16, would also be reasonably consistent with the 1933 Census figure for Queensland of 286.

The extent of Deaf people's participation in the events described
According to the 1933 Census, the total figure of "deaf-mutes" in the state of New South Wales was 982. There is no information about the proportion of these who lived in metropolitan and rural areas. If approximately 70% lived in Sydney there would have been 687 deaf people resident there. Subtracting 230 (number of deaf children under 16 – see above) gives a figure of approximately 460 adults. Even if this figure is conservative, when we read that 200 Deaf people attended the crucial 1929 Annual General Meeting of the Deaf Society, or that the NSW Association of Deaf and Dumb Citizens had 257 members in 1932, there was clearly a high level of participation in these events by the local Deaf community.

The Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf claimed a membership of over 400 in April 1933. (The National Council of the Deaf never made any claims about its membership figures.) AAAD's membership would have included a small (probably insignificant) number of hearing members. This can be set against the national Census figure of 2326 "deaf-mutes", and Gladwin's estimate (above) that approximately 1500 of these were Deaf adults "linked up to the Welfare Organisations". Even if we add around 150 late-deafened people to the national total, AAAD's membership, at its height, would seem to have comprised around a quarter of the adult Deaf population of Australia.

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9 "Deaf and Dumb Citizens Reformed Association," The Cairns Post, 1 Sept 1932. 10
10 P. S Booth, "Why the Association of Deaf and Dumb Citizens was Formed," Onward! (Jan 1930): 9
11 "The Difference Between Sydney's Two Deaf Organisations", The Deaf Advocate 2, no 4 (April 1932).
The available figures confirm that the events described in this thesis would have been significant and widely-known within the Deaf community of the time, and seem to have attracted high levels of participation.
Appendix B

AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE DEAF

PREAMBLE

The Deaf of Australia agree to form themselves into a National Association for mutual effort in the protection and forwarding of their interests in every possible way.

The term "DEAF" in the Constitution includes those who are Hard of Hearing, Deaf, or Deaf and Dumb.

CONSTITUTION

NAME:
AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE DEAF.

OBJECTS:

(a) To unite the Deaf and advance their interests in every possible way.

(b) To hold Conferences and Congresses.

(c) To advance and protect the social, educational and industrial status of the Deaf by affording to all Public Bodies, Government Departments, and others, reliable information as to the condition, education and welfare of the Deaf.

(d) To collect and preserve all information relating to the Deaf and to promote the diffusion of the same by means of the Press, leaflets, or in any other manner thought desirable by the Executive Committee.

(e) To assist in promoting the establishment of organisations for the welfare of the Deaf, to assist in co-ordinating existing organisations and to co-operate with them in promoting the objects of the Association.
MEMBERSHIP:

(a) Membership of the Association [sic] shall be open to all Deaf persons in Australia on payment of a minimum Annual Subscription of 1/-.

(b) Hearing persons who approve of the objects of the Association shall, subject to the approval of the Executive Committee, become members on payment of a minimum Annual Subscription of 5/-.

MANAGEMENT:

Each branch shall be entitled to elect two members to the Executive Committee.

The President shall be elected by the Executive Committee.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:

(a) The Executive Committee shall remain in office for four years and shall be eligible for re-election.

(b) They shall meet at least once a year. Four to form a quorum.

(c) They shall carry out the business of the Association, and take steps to raise and control any funds that may be required by the Association.

(d) The Executive shall have power to co-opt persons whose services they believe will further the interests of the Association, and set out the conditions, if any, under which services may be given.

(e) The President shall preside at all meetings of the Association. In his absence a Chairman shall be elected from among those present. He shall have a deliberate as well as a casting vote.

(f) The Executive Committee shall submit an Annual Report on the work of the Association and a Balance Sheet.

(g) The Reports, Balance Sheet, and other business of the Association or matter affecting its objects shall be published in a such a manner as shall, in the opinion of the Executive Committee, ensure the greatest publicity among the Deaf.
SECRETARY-TREASURER:

(a) The Executive Committee shall appoint a Secretary-Treasurer who shall be a Deaf member.
(b) The Secretary-Treasurer shall be ex-officio a member of the Executive Committee and the appointment shall not be subject to confirmation by the Congress.
(c) The Secretary-Treasurer shall conduct all business of the Association under the direction and authority of the Executive Committee.
(d) Subject to a vote of two-thirds of the full Executive Committee, the appointment may be terminated at any time.

BRANCHES:

(a) On receipt of an application signed by 10 or more Deaf persons the Executive Committee may permit the formation of a Branch of the Association. The permit to be signed by the President and Secretary Treasurer.
(b) A Branch shall elect its own officers, and shall have power to admit persons to membership in accordance with the Rules of the Association.
(c) A Branch Executive shall transact all business of the Branch, including the keeping of a list of members, the collecting of subscriptions, etc., and shall forward to the Secretary-Treasurer of the Association a duly audited Balance Sheet and Members List not later than one month previous to the end of the financial year of the Association.
(d) The Executive Committee shall have the right to cancel or rescind the appointment of any Branch Office-bearer or member should it have reasonable grounds for so doing. In case of default, the Executive Committee shall have the right to cause a Branch to be discontinued or re-formed, whichever they deem best in the circumstances.
(e) A Branch shall be allowed for management expenses 50 per cent. of the Member’s subscriptions. The balance shall be remitted with the Audited Accounts to the Secretary-Treasurer of the Association for the General Fund of the Association.
(f) In the event of any Branch ceasing to exist notification by a copy of the minute dissolving the Branch shall be forwarded within three days to the Secretary-Treasurer, together with the books and money in hand.
(g) Each Branch shall hold an Annual Meeting for the presentation of Report and Financial Statement and to elect officers for the ensuing year.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF DELEGATES:

(a) There shall be an Annual Conference of Delegates from Branches of the Association at a convenient centre, and upon a date decided upon by the Executive Committee, to receive the Annual report and Statement of Accounts, and to further the objects of the Association.

(b) Each Branch shall be entitled to elect two Delegates. The Election Form of the Delegate, signed by the Secretary of the Branch, must be sent to the Secretary-Treasurer of the Association one clear month before the Conference.

(c) A Branch may pay the expenses of its Delegate from its own funds.

(d) Each Delegate shall have one vote at the Conference.

(e) Members of the Executive Committee shall be ex-officio members of the Conference.

(f) All business for the Conference shall be sent to the Branches at least 30 days before the opening date of the Conference.

CONGRESS:

(a) There shall be a Triennial Congress of the Association to be held in each state in rotation as decided by the Executive Committee.

(b) The Social arrangements for Congress shall be in the hands of a Local Committee, but the business agenda shall be drawn up by the Executive Committee.

(c) The Executive Committee shall invite suitable persons to read papers in Congress.

(d) The first business of Congress shall be to receive the Report and Financial Statement and the Installation of President.

(e) At a Congress of the Association only those members who have been financial for at least the previous six months shall be eligible to vote.
(f) Congress business shall be transacted under Standing Orders, and in cases of dispute the ruling of the Chairman shall be final.

(g) All business for the Congress shall be sent to the Branches at least 30 days before the opening date of Congress.

Funds:

(a) The Financial Year shall begin on July 1st and close on 30th June.

(b) Investments shall be made in the name of three Trustees, who shall be the President, Secretary-Treasurer, and the Senior member of the Executive Committee by election, and their successors in office.

(c) The Executive shall choose a bank into which all monies received by the Secretary-Treasurer for the Association shall be placed.

(d) The cheques in payment of Accounts shall be signed by any two of the three Trustees.

Audit:

All accounts shall be audited annually.

Arrears:

No member who is in arrears shall be entitled to take part in the business of the Association.

Transfers:

(a) Members changing their domicile may transfer from one Branch to another without additional payment of subscription. Their subscription for current year to be retained by Branch to which it has been paid.

(b) Members in temporary residence may, with the consent of the Branch, be invited to take part in Branch meetings.
CANCELLATION OF MEMBERSHIP:

On proof of good cause any person may be expelled from the Association by the Branch, or by the Executive Committee, subject to a vote of two-thirds of the full membership of the Branch or Executive Committee. Such person must be cited to appear. If expelled by a Branch he shall have the right to appeal to the Executive Committee.

ALTERATION OF CONSTITUTION:

No alteration of the Constitution shall be made except at a Congress of the Association, and then only by a two-thirds majority of the members present. Such intended alteration or addition shall be submitted to the Executive Committee in writing at least three months prior to the Congress, and forwarded by them to each Branch at least one month prior to the Congress.

BYE-LAWS:

The Executive Committee may also, if it is deemed expedient, make Bye-laws regarding the conduct of business of any Branch or Committee, and all Branches or Committees shall conform to such Bye-laws. On all matters concerning the Association on which the Constitution is silent the Executive Committee shall have power to act.

WINDING UP:

(a) In the event of the winding up of the Association the funds remaining shall be returned to the Branches from which they were collected less a proportionate amount of the expenses of winding up.

(b) If the Association shall be reduced to a Branch or membership in one State only, through the maladministration of the Executive Committee or their failure to maintain the provisions of the Constitution the seceding Branches shall have the right to claim return of their contributions less a proper proportion of Management expenses.
Appendix C

The COMMONWEALTH ASSOCIATION of
The DEAF and DUMB

CONSTITUTION.

1. The name of the Association shall be the Commonwealth Association of the Deaf and Dumb.

OBJECTS.

2. To unite the deaf and dumb of the Commonwealth of Australia in efforts for their general welfare.

3. To ascertain recommend and/or provide ways and mean for the advancement of the deaf and dumb of Australia socially industrially and otherwise and do all or any things necessary for the elevation of their status generally.

4. To gather and preserve all facts statistics and opinions relating to the deaf and to promote by every legitimate means the diffusion of the same by means of public meetings the press or other publications as shall be thought advisable by the Council.

5. To arrange for periodical meetings in each state between the Councillors of this Federation and the Delegates of the National Council of Deaf and Dumb Societies in Australia to discuss and consider Deaf and Dumb Commonwealth problems.

6. In all respects to assist co-operate with and act in conjunction with all or any of the Deaf and Dumb Societies of the several states of the Commonwealth of Australia and also with the National Council of Adult Deaf and Dumb Societies of Australia for all or any of the objects of herein set out.

7. To organise congresses bi-annually in different parts of Australia for the discussion of matters relating to the deaf and dumb and to further any of the objects herein

1 This name was later changed to The National Council of the Deaf
set out and to make recommendations to the Council herein specified.

CONSTITUTION.

8. The membership of the Association shall be unlimited in number and shall consist of deaf and dumb people domiciled in the Commonwealth of Australia who are ex-pupils of any school for the deaf and dumb. Provided however that the Council hereinafter specified may at any of its meetings invite any hearing and speaking person or person who has or have [sic] been of outstanding assistance and/or rendered signal service to the deaf and dumb community of Australia or any of the states thereof to become a member of the Association and on acceptance of such invitation such hearing and speaking person or persons shall become a member or members of the Association and shall be entitled to all the privileges thereof and shall also be eligible for election to any Board or Council.

9. The members of the Association shall be elected by the State Boards hereinafter mentioned.

10. The membership fee shall be 1/- per year and such fee shall become due and payable immediately upon election.

11. The members of the Association resident in each of the States of the Commonwealth of Australia shall form themselves into a Branch of the Association and elect 12 of their number to form a Board to control the affairs of the Association in each such State respectively (one Board only in each of the States).

12. The members of the Board in each State shall meet at least once in each 3 months. Five to form a quorum. All Board meetings shall be convened by the Secretary of the Board who shall give not less than 14 days previous notice in writing by prepaid letter addressed to each member of his Board stating the time and place of the meeting and the nature of the business to be transacted.

13. The members of the Board when elected shall remain in office for a term of 2 years.

14. The members of each Branch of the Association shall meet at least once each year and the meetings shall be convened by the Chairman of the Board of each such branch by notices in 2 daily papers published in the capital of the State which each such Branch represents. Such notices shall be so published twice not less than 14 days
and not more than 30 days before the date of the meeting
and shall set out shortly the business of such meeting.

14a. Special Meetings. On receipt of a request in writing
requesting him so to do stating the nature of the
business and signed by 35 members of the Association the
Secretary of a Branch shall call a special meeting of the
members of the Branch in manner set out in the last
preceding paragraph hereof.

14b. The first Boards shall consist of the following persons
selected at a Congress held in Sydney during Christmas
vacation 1933.

New South Wales: ...(illegible)..., W. Molloy,

Victoria: J.M. Johnston, Chairman, A. Stephens, F.E.
Frewin, and Miss R. Dow.

South Australia: G.S. Dunnett, W. Abbott, Mrs. C.J.
Netcalf.

Queensland: O. Flay, H.T. Beutell, Mrs. Spranklin.

Tasmania: W. Limbrick, C. Webb.


14c. Immediately a Board is elected it shall elect from its
number a Chairman an Honorary Secretary and an Honorary
Treasurer.

15. The Chairman of the several Boards respectively shall
preside at all meetings of the Boards and also at all
meetings of the members of the respective Branches and in
the event of the absence of the Chairman some member of
the Board elected by the members present shall preside.

16. The Boards shall elect the Council in manner herein
mentioned.

17. Should any member or members of the Board die retire or
otherwise cease to be or act as a member of the Board
during the currency of the term for which he or she or
they were elected the remaining members of such Board may
elect a member or members of the Association to be a
member or members of the Board in place of the retiring
member or members for the remainder of the then current
term.

18. Duties of Honorary Secretaries. The Honorary Secretaries
of the several Branches shall convene meetings and record
minutes of the business of the Boards and Branches. They shall keep a list of members of the Association giving the full name address and occupation of each. They shall have charge of all documents etc. belonging to the Branches and Boards and hand all monies received to the Honorary Treasurers.

Duties of Honorary Treasurers. The Honorary Treasurers of the several branches shall receive all monies belonging to their respective Branches keep accounts of all receipts and expenditure. They shall also preserve all vouchers. They shall open accounts in the names of their Branches with the local Government Savings Bank.

19. Council. The Council shall consist of 18 members elected as follows:

Four to be elected by the Board of the State Victorian Branch.

Four to be elected by the Board of the State New South Wales Branch.

Three " " " " Queensland Branch.
" " " " " South Australian Branch.
Two " " " " West Australian Branch.
" " " " " Tasmanian Branch.

20. The Council when elected shall remain in office for a period of 2 consecutive years. Any retiring member shall be eligible for re-election.

21. Should any member of the Council die retire or otherwise cease to be a member of the Council during the currency of the term for which he or she was elected a member belonged of the Council the Board of the Branch of which such member belonged may elect another Councillor in his or her stead for the remainder of the then current term.

22. The Council when elected shall immediately proceed to elect from amongst its member [sic] a Chairman and Honorary Secretary and an Honorary Treasurer.

Mode of Election of Council.

23. The Honorary Secretary of the Board in each of the States of the Commonwealth of Australia shall convene a meeting of the members of each such Board respectively by notices in at least 2 daily papers published in the capital of the States which he or she represents. Such notices shall be so published twice not less than 14 days nor
more than 30 days before the date of the meeting and shall set out shortly the business of the meeting.

24. No person shall be elected a member of the Council unless he or she is personally present at such meeting and signified his or her willingness to be so elected or alternatively notifies the convenor of the meeting in writing prior to the hour of such meeting of his or her willingness to be so elected.

Conduct of Meetings of the Council and Duties of Executive Officers.

25. The Chairman of the Council shall preside where practicable at all meetings of the Council.

26. Councillors shall give their full name address and state their occupation to the Secretary and keep him informed of any change of residence. They shall endeavour to attend every meeting whenever possible and to advance the interests of the deaf and dumb of Australia especially by enlisting the aid of the public in furthering its aims and in securing additional members.

27. The members of the Council shall be liaison officers between this Council and the Deaf and Dumb Societies in the various States of the Commonwealth.

Meeting of Council.

28. The members of the Council shall meet at least once in every 2 consecutive years in the capital of the State in which the bi-annual congress is held from time to time. Such meetings to be held during the week of each such congress - 9 to form a quorum.

29. The Honorary Secretary of the Council shall convene meetings of the Council by giving at least 1 calendar month's notice in writing to each member of the Council and such notices to be given by prepaid letter addressed to each member of the Council at the address last registered under clause 26 hereof.

30. At each of the Council meetings the Councillors shall name the time and the place of its next meeting. Providing however that on receipt of a request in writing requesting him so to do signed by not less than 12 members of the Council and stating the nature of the business to be transacted and the place of meeting the Honorary Secretary of the Council shall call a meeting of the Council in the manner set out in clause 29 hereof.
31. Each member of the Council shall have 1 vote at all meetings of the Council and in cases of equality in number the Chairman shall have a casting vote. The proceedings of meetings of the Council shall be governed by ordinary parliamentary practices and in cases of dispute the ruling of the Chairman of the meeting shall be final.

32. The Council shall bi-annually appoint an auditor who shall audit the books of the Council and report to the Council thereon.

Alteration of Constitution. No alteration of or addition to the Association shall be made except at a meeting of the Council and then only by a two-thirds majority of the members present. Such intended alteration or addition shall be submitted to the Councillors in writing at least three calendar months prior to the date of the meeting of the Council at which such alteration or addition is proposed to be submitted.
Appendix D

An address delivered by Mr. A. Eaton of Queensland at a Conference of the Australian Association for the Advancement of the Deaf in Sydney, December 1933.

"The deaf in their own Association."

Sometimes men and women in our Association become too busy thinking about "the things it will do". They forget that they need to think about themselves. An Association can be no better than the men and women in it. No matter what its objects, constitution claims, advertisements, it is no better than the conduct of those in it, make it. NOW is the time to fact [sic] facts.

FIRST - CONSIDER THE CONDITIONS.
Australia is 50 years behind most nations in the forming of an independent Association for the Deaf. That loss is not going to be got over by fine words and speeches. Sports and banquets will not redeem one hour of it. We need constant attention to the vital interests of the Deaf. We need to build up the mind, heart and will to serve those interests.

SECOND - LOSS BY ISOLATION.
Then again, Australia is out of the way. Its distance is a handicap. You would note that after a visit from a man prominent in the British Deaf World practically nothing was said of the Deaf of Australia in the British papers for the Deaf. The conditions in America have been reported on often. Denmark, Sweden, France Germany, Italy, interest has been shown in these... Isolation handicaps us.
THIRD - TO IMPROVE THE CONDITIONS.
It is no use to complain: we should act. That means every member shall act to enable the Executive to bring the A.A.A.D. into co-operation with, and knowledge of, the world wide deaf interests. We should be affiliated to all organisations where it is possible - The B.D.D.A, N.A.D., even the "National" Council of Australia. It should not be a formal affiliation in name only, but by paying our membership dues and so being entitled to all their reports and literature. These should be circulated. We should also subscribe to all the papers we can possibly afford, to keep us in front of every deaf interest.

FOURTH - AFFILIATION IS NEEDED.
That means MONEY and it is no use turning the job over to the Federal Executive. It needs 1/- per year from each member. Some can pay and it will be within the power of branches to raise the rest. One other piece of practical work before I turn the issue. EVERY movement for the deaf that has stood THE TEST has had at the beginning deaf who backed their Association with their money. They were not as well off as we are. Yet their early balance sheets bring a blush to our cheeks. On the same level as the B.D.D.A. we would have about £300 today. They believed in the work and THEY BELIEVED IN PAYING FOR IT. The facts of the balance sheet today call for action. We need a Foundation Fund. We can adopt a scheme of Foundation Members paying a sum of 5/- per year to build up a fund which will put our work on a safe basis. There is going to be a yell "We can't afford it". IT IS LESS THAN 2d. PER WEEK. We would not miss it out of our luxuries - smokes, cinemas, etc. Other people are going to pay far more than that into organisations to crush us. All our 2d. a week may change the whole Australian D.D. world at a crisis. I am not raising an alarm. I am stating a plain fact. We will deserve no sympathy if we are too careless or selfish to lay foundations. Now I have to turn to the most difficult part of my work What
of ourselves? The men and women of A.A.A.D.? We start off under a handicap that shuts us off from the chance to learn much and often it suits the purposes of those calling themselves "friends" to leave us at the disadvantage of our own ignorance. Some of us refuse to face the facts and think we can drive our own way through. That way lies disaster. First we should carry on our work as speaking people do Chairmanship, Executive work and routine, order, business, responsibilities, we should become masters of them. We are set the task of proving our fitness to carry on our work. The lack of opportunity and teaching have been obstacles in our path of progress. For some of us the day of freedom has come, but it brings responsibilities. Let us accept them. The stricter the conditions the better for us as we have to become masters of method, and of our destiny. Next we have to save ourselves from being an Association which collects subscriptions, smiles and says nice things. The past year had had its lessons for us. We must make it our business to read, learn of, and think over, the problems of the deaf to apply ourselves so that the Association will represent more than a membership list and a Constitution. We are fact [sic] to face with competition in the field. Socially and financially we should not compete with selfish and wasteful ways. We should strive to outwork our competitor in everything that will bring lasting benefit to the Deaf. That means an end of all selfishness, personal jealousies, office seeking. The growth of ideals, character, service, will be the great things in that work. We have to cultivate our own selves to fit us for the work. Interest, study, knowledge, are needed. That is why we want the deaf papers of the World. An appeal to our mind, will, strength, is as important as the appeal to our sentiment. There is no fellowship like that of service. Soon the sentimental appeal for unity will be worn out and fail. Unity of effort devoted to unselfish ends will gain in strength and it is to train ourselves to bear our share in it that is of the first
importance. We should ACT now. To allow the years before next Congress to pass without action, will bring us into contempt. Time has been lost. We have not a clear field. I know how, purposely, swift, businesslike, decisive and well prepared the opponent is.

To us the deaf in our own association, the time for decision is now. You have two plain proposals before you. You can accept or reject them. You have also a call.

DO NOT FORGET THE FACTS.

1. We set out to do this work.
2. Opposition came into the field BECAUSE we took up the cause of the deaf.
3. If we neglect our job we let it pass from an association of the deaf, for the deaf, by the deaf, into the hands of a clique, some of whom have refused to listen to the deaf and who maintain a dictatorship which controls an organisation. That means the position is worse, and if we do not get on with the job, the greater the blame. It is a challenge to our honesty and sincerity. We need only find an answer and the answer must define practical action.

Every difficulty, wrong, injustice, loss or harm that comes to any deaf person is the business of all of us. Equally, we should be able to share the progressive ideas, the benefits of experience, and the good won by others outside this Association and with them.

It is a solemn duty to strive for unity. We have to show honesty, courage, continued effort in the best interests of the Deaf to win the respect and co-operation of the whole of the Deaf. I know that we could win many sympathisers today, by keeping the A.A.A.D. as an entirely independent work
carried out with patience and involving courtesy, and honestly tackling this job. To-day, anything else is not only to belie the objects of our own Association, but to deceive our members and to have betrayed the true interests of the deaf.

In conclusion, I would impress upon you one thing. We must never forget the A.A.A.D. seeks to unite the Deaf. We must be loyal to their interests, whether they are with us or not. We must not spread or encourage enmity and bitterness as some people are doing. We must show them that our ways are good, our hands clean, our thoughts are honest and unselfish, and our hearts are open. There are things which we believe it is our duty to oppose. Let us oppose them courteously, and let us always attend to the principle involved, not seeking personal ends.
Appendix E

AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION

Box 74A, G.P.O., BRISBANE

DEAR FRIENDS,—

I do most earnestly plead with you that in these trying times you will remember that the high idealism of our Association must be shown, not only in its Executive and Official actions, but also in the personal actions of its members in relation to all matters concerning the Deaf and Dumb, or their organisations.

This Association is not a tool which individuals can use to attack Societies. Such actions are not only outwith the rights of members, but are practically certain to bring discredit on our organisation. And, equally, it is wrong, improper, and harmful for any section or individual to launch any personal attack under the auspices of the Association.

We are building not only for to-day, but for the future. I feel sure you will appreciate that the character, spirit, and outlook of those who build will have a great, deep and lasting influence on our Association and upon the position which it will hold in the estimation of not only the public, but also of those sincere well-wishers of the Deaf who wish to see them advance by all means which evidence a sense of character, responsibility and practical idealism in outlook and conduct.

We have to strive to secure better things, NOT to weary ourselves and repel others by fighting AGAINST persons.

The positive is always the weakest side in life. The positive is strongest and highest. The foremost need, to-day, is not to combat individual wrong by bitterness and denunciations.

The first need is to so conduct ourselves toward and among our fellow Deaf that they will believe in our fellowship. From this we will gain influence to imbue them with a spirit of idealism, a keen sense of right, a desire for progress, a passion for unity and service. These things, and these alone, are the only worthy, secure, confidence begetting foundations upon which we can build.

Let us not seek satisfaction for our own wrongs, of our own personal quarrels, to the injury of the standing of our Association. Patience, courtesy, and loyalty count more to-day than any personal matter. We have experienced the same kind of trouble that faces you, and we have always found that patience, courtesy, and the entire exclusion of personalities has not only won the case, but has achieved those greater things—won the unanimous support of the Deaf and the goodwill and agreement of the opponent.

This is not a plea of weakness, nor an appeal for anything other than the highest courage—the courage of patience and determinedly choosing the higher and more difficult task in which we do not count what we suffer against what we give and teach. Let us build up the positive good holds in our own minds and hearts and in our conduct toward all others (even our “enemies”) and the evils, which make bitterness to-day, needs must die because they will have no soil in which to take root. In all matters, appeal to PRINCIPLES, and make your appeal with courtesy, leaving abuse and personalities to those who lay hold of them because they have not the weapons of truth or right on their side. Those now in opposition to the Association will most worthily be won over by seducing us the things which call to the best that is in them.

Some of you will remember that great friend of Christ, Mat. Miller, He is a striking example of what I mean. No influence could compare with his, no prestige reached so high, no words carried such persuasive influence and power as his, and the Secret of his influence was that he lived in the spirit which we desire all members of our Association to make their own.

The blessing of such a great example being known to so many of you, I believe there is no need for me to say more.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Rev. W. Wilson
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