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## It is the paper published as

**Author:** M. Van Heekeren

**Title:** Crossing the great divide: community response to the first year of the Bathurst newspaper, the Bathurst Advocate

**Editor:** D. A. C. Allison Oosterman

**Conference Name:** "Journalism downunder"

**Conference Location:** Auckland

**Publisher:** School of Communication Studies, AUT University

**Year:** 2006

**Pages:** 1-25p

**Date:** December 4-7, 2006

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**CRO identification number:** 10765

# **Crossing the Great Divide: community response to the first year of the Bathurst newspaper, *The Bathurst Advocate***

By Margaret Van Heekeren

## **Abstract**

*In late 1847 printer Benjamin Isaacs brought the first printing press over the Blue Mountains to the settlement of Bathurst, 106 miles north west of Sydney. While it was common in the 1800s for a newspaper to be established quite quickly after a settlement was founded, Bathurst had developed since 1815, more than three decades, without a local press. This paper explores the arrival of the press in Bathurst in February 1848 and the first year of community response to a local paper. This paper will explore response to the Bathurst Advocate through three lenses: subscriptions and advertising, community development and public discussion and exposition.*

In press histories Benjamin Isaacs is known as the man “who brought the first printing press over the Blue Mountains” (Walker, 1976, p.46). In modern vernacular this instance represents the introduction of local media west of the Great Dividing Range, the mountain range dividing the eastern Australian seaboard from the west; a geographical partition that historian Geoffrey Blainey describes as “a wall” (Blainey, 1975, p.71). The feat was a mammoth one. The rudimentary road over the mountains made transportation difficult (Stanger, 1988) and at the end of the road was a settlement that needed convincing that after 33 years it should support a local newspaper. The settlement’s isolation and its relatively long period of development without a newspaper are unusual in colonial newspaper history. This provides a rare framework from which to assess

public reaction. Isaacs launched the *Bathurst Advocate* in February 1848. It folded when Benjamin Isaacs was jailed for libel in September 1849 (Kirkpatrick, 2000, p.15). By that time the newspaper was well established.

This paper is not a history of the *Bathurst Advocate*. Rather, its aim is to examine how a previously unmediated community responded to the introduction of the press and will therefore restrict its deliberations to the first year of the newspaper's publication, from February 1848 to February 1849. The success of the relationship between press and community will be determined through an examination of subscriptions and advertising, the role of the *Advocate* in community development and public use of the newspaper as a medium for public discussion and exposition. This paper will use an integration of empirical research, derived from a study of each of the 56 editions of the *Bathurst Advocate* from 1848 to early 1849, press history and broader social theory engaging notions of public, typified by Jürgen Habermas.

### **Press and the public**

The development of the press in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century was a confluence of technology and ideology. Mechanical advancements including the introduction of the steam press allowed faster printing (Asquith, 1978, p.101). As distribution increased belief in the power of the press grew. With the development of the concept of public opinion in the 1700s, the press was seen as an essential intermediary between governing institutions and the people (Boyce, 1978, p.21). The term "the fourth estate" was not in common usage until after 1852. However, its connotations of the press as a scrutineering institution were firmly fixed in prior rhetoric (Kirkpatrick, 1998, pp.84-85).

These developmental roles of the press have been interpreted by social theorist Jürgen Habermas as a crucial element in his concept of the public sphere in the “world of letters” (literary expression). Through the emergent press private citizens were able to form a public and engage with elite powers in “critical-rational” debate. The press therefore became a “public organ” (Habermas, 1989, pp.2-23). Nineteenth century belief of the press as a powerful “organ” or “engine” was so popular it has been regarded as “axiomatic” (Jones, 1996, p.180).

Until recently, the manifestation of press influence in relation to the Australian colonies has not been explored. In the 1950s and 60s historians were admonished for their “neglect” of Australian press history and urged to consider press influence (Corden, 1956, p.171; Holden, 1961). Henry Mayer’s 1964 book *The Press in Australia* partly addressed the deficit. Yet, with just one of 17 chapters dedicated to a century and a half of Australian press history there is no opportunity for detailed discussion of press influence in the colonial era (Mayer, 1964, pp.10-26).

From the 1970s, Australian press history is typified by specialist studies focused on individual towns and states. The broadest histories relating to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century are R.B. Walker’s *The Newspaper Press in New South Wales 1803 – 1920* and Rod Kirkpatrick’s *Country Conscience, a history of the New South Wales provincial press, 1841 – 1995* (Walker, 1976; Kirkpatrick, 2000). The country press in Victoria in the 1800s is examined in Elizabeth Morrison’s *Engines of Influence* whilst Rod Kirkpatrick explores development of the provincial press in Queensland in *Sworn to No Master* (Morrison, 2005; Kirkpatrick, 1984). Denis Cryle achieved a more national perspective in editing

*Disreputable Profession, Journalists and Journalism in Colonial Australia*, a collection of essays, each focusing on individual journalists (Cryle, 1997).

Cryle's work attempts to overcome his earlier criticism of the lack of a holistic approach in Australian press history. Cryle argued that many newspaper histories were too linear and failed to engage with a broader perspective assessing national trends and social mythologies (Cryle, 1992, pp.101-102, 110). Morrison used such an approach in *Engines of Influence*, opting for a perspective of newspapers in history rather than history in newspapers (Morrison, 2005, p.3).

Through such works as Morrison, Cryle, Kirkpatrick and Walker a greater understanding of the role of the press in colonial Australia can be achieved. The early to mid-nineteenth century press is portrayed as an institution developing from a parasitic replica of the English press to a vociferous supporter of colonial individuality. Proprietors were patriotic proponents of their settlements, vigorous in their commitment to development and confident in their power to advance development (Kirkpatrick, 1998, pp.97-98). Yet, amidst this confidence, did the press hold real power? Kirkpatrick has found ideology of the fourth estate concept was subsumed by economic and development concerns (Kirkpatrick, 1998, pp.99-100). Morrison writes it is difficult to prove Victorian newspapers influenced politics in 1878 (Morrison, 1999, p.54). In an examination of the power of nineteenth century New Zealand newspapers Ross Harvey suggests press power was perceived rather than actual (Harvey, 1996, pp.130-145).

Yet press development was propelled by the dominant ideology of the press as a necessary and influential component of a settled society. A typical belief was that of Edward Smith Hall, editor of the early Sydney newspaper the *Monitor*. Hall believed the

press could be used as a civilising influence on a chaotic colony (Ihde, 2004, p.246). In provincial areas this was particularly so. White settlements were developing for the first time, often at great distances from governing centres. Along the Australian east coast this remoteness was further accentuated by the Great Dividing Range,

The first pressman to penetrate this barrier was Benjamin Isaacs. Isaacs was an omnipresent figure in early Australian and New Zealand newspaper history. Yet, he remains largely untouched as an historical figure.

In press histories Benjamin Isaacs receives mentions from Kirkpatrick and Walker and in an unpublished manuscript and notes by A.T. Shakespeare (Kirkpatrick, 2000, pp.14-15; Walker, 1976, p.26; Shakespeare, 1959). Kirkpatrick briefly suggests the community did not initiate the *Bathurst Advocate* and points to a hostile reception from authorities (Kirkpatrick, 2000, p.15). This belief is based on an opinion given in Shakespeare's manuscript (Shakespeare, 1959, p.24). However, no evidence is cited and further research is necessary to reveal in detail how the Bathurst public responded to their paper and whether the paper had an impact on development. Isaacs, like many editors of the day, used the newspaper for campaigns on community issues (Shakespeare, 1959, pp.51-59; Kirkpatrick, 2004, p.15). However, there has been no analysis of his motivations or the effect of the campaigns.

Cumulatively, available literature on the *Bathurst Advocate*, like the broader press history of Australia, is arbitrary and fragmentary in nature. While much can be gleaned from existing publications a more detailed analysis of the relationship between press and public is needed.

## **Bathurst in 1848**

The first edition of the *Bathurst Advocate* on 5 February 1848 firmly identified the newspaper's intended role:

In this enlightened age and colony, it seems desirable that so large, wealthy and respectable portion of the community as are settled in and around Bathurst, should be regularly supplied with a vehicle for the general diffusion of knowledge, communication of sentiment, and interchange of ideas....A Printing Office and Newspaper are necessary requisites in every community which seeks to be prosperous (*BA*, 5 February 1848, p.1).

What was this community? Sixty miles (100km) beyond the Blue Mountains, Bathurst had developed haphazardly from 1815. By the 1840s it was a predominantly pastoral community emerging from economic depression (Barker, 1992; Fry, 1993; Greaves, 1961; Sloman, 1994)). In 1848 there were 1883 people living in Bathurst (Wells, 1848, p.300). The population included free settlers, squatters, of which a growing number were emancipists, and convicts. Throughout the 1840s there was an emerging middle class of shopkeepers and professionals including doctors and lawyers. However, the bulk of the population, estimated to be around 80 per cent in 1841, were working class (Fry, 1993, p.172). The most popular form of entertainment was drinking, prompting a contemporary observer to conclude: "A stranger would argue that there cannot be customers for so many grog-shops" (Mundy, 1852, p.96). The settlement was yet to be connected by bridge across the Macquarie River to Kelso on the eastern (Sydney side), schools and churches were makeshift buildings and the depression had

halted work on a new jail (Barker, 1993, pp.120, 131-148). By the time the *Bathurst Advocate* was launched in 1848 the settlement was 33 years old, the oldest inland settlement in New South Wales. The delay between settlement and press inception at Bathurst was undoubtedly due to difficulties in transportation over the Blue Mountains.

Until the *Advocate's* arrival in 1848 the settlement would have relied on Sydney and overseas newspapers, delivered by mail coach. While Sydney papers frequently ran columns from "Our Bathurst correspondent", news of the settlement was minimal and, for the local inhabitants, probably stale. Chamberlain writes the need for a newspaper in Bathurst was first suggested in 1845. However, even then, it was felt the settlement was too young (Chamberlain, 1988).

Morrison identifies dual forces in the development of the Victorian press in the 1840s. They were either borne out of a local need or initiated by newspaper proprietors from other towns seeking to expand into "newspaper-less" communities (Morrison, 2005, pp.16-27). The *Bathurst Advocate* arose out of both motivations. The discussion in 1845 suggests community support. Benjamin Isaacs responded to this and it is suggested he arrived in Bathurst following a request from friends there (Parker, 1937). However, with a failed publishing history in Parramatta and New Zealand it is evident he was seeking a new market for his business.

The growth of a liberal middle-class in Bathurst, typified by the election of a liberal representative to the Legislative Council in the 1843 election (Fry) further advanced press development in the settlement. With liberal belief in the press as an essential organ of public opinion, it is not surprising moves were underway to start a newspaper. In January 1847 Geoffrey Amos Eagar registered the title the *Bathurst Advertiser*, however he was

resident in Windsor at the time and it was never published (Newspaper Affidavits, 1847).<sup>1</sup> There is some speculation that Eagar backed Benjamin Isaacs to set up the *Advocate* (Kirkpatrick, 2000, pp.14-15). However there is no direct evidence supporting this. The newspaper registration reveals a Bathurst tailor and draper, Frederick Morgan and another Bathurst resident, David Smart, gave the £300 surety for the venture (Newspaper Affidavits, 1848).<sup>2</sup>

The earlier manoeuvrings reveal at least some level of local support for a newspaper. However from February 1848, when the *Advocate* was launched, it became beholden to a greater part of the community, rather than a few, as to whether the settlement desired a local paper.

### **The *Bathurst Advocate* 1848 – 1849: Subscriptions and advertising**

In his first leader in the *Bathurst Advocate* on 5 February proprietor Benjamin Isaacs acknowledged the risk he was taking in launching the paper without a “very respectable list of subscribers”. However, he rationalised, with “an obstinate opinion of his own, that once started, his paper will meet with encouragement from a discerning public” (*Bathurst Advocate*, 1848, 5 February, p.2). The encouragement expected by Isaacs was not immediately forthcoming and two months later the newspaper’s leader called for greater support:

It seems somewhat marvellous, that with a population of about two thousand, we should not be able to number more than *seventy* on our list of subscribers....we are now publishing the paper at a great pecuniary disadvantage...If there is not an increase in the list of subscribers, we

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<sup>1</sup>Newspaper Affidavits, op.cit., 4/1275.1, 12 January 1847.

<sup>2</sup> Newspaper Affidavits, op.cit., 4/1275.3, 20 January 1848.

shall be obliged (against our will) to relinquish the undertaking, and the large and wealthy district of Bathurst will be without a provincial journal (*Bathurst Advocate*, 1848, April 8, p.2) .

In a further bid to increase sales the paper's cover price had been dropped from nine pence to six pence with quarterly subscriptions reduced from seven shillings to six shillings (*Bathurst Advocate*, 1848, April 1, p.4). The price cut and the low number of subscribers could be interpreted as an indication of poor community support for a local press. However, it appears Isaacs had set the original cover price too high. The *Sydney Morning Herald* sold for three pence a copy in 1848 (Walker, 1976, p.42). Mayer (1964, p.15) puts the average price of newspapers in that year at three to six pence for four pages. Once the four-page *Advocate* price was lowered to six pence it met the market norm. There were no further warnings of the paper's demise due to a lack of subscribers and in the last edition of 1848 Isaacs thanked the continuing support of subscribers and wrote the paper was on a "firm foundation" with improvements planned (*Bathurst Advocate*, 1848, December 30, p.2).

The *Advocate*'s cash flow shared the common problem with many contemporary publications of late payment of subscriptions (Blair, 1997, p.36; Erdos, 1961, p.21). *Advocate* columns were frequently peppered with reminders to subscribers to pay on time. At times these were expressed with humour: "A RECIPE – To obtain refreshing sleep, put a receipt for a printer's bill in your pocket" (*Bathurst Advocate*, 1848, November 4, p.2).

The number of subscribers was also inconsistent with the number of readers. Mayer (1964, p.17) uses an 1864 estimate to suggest there were five or six readers for every city newspaper copy in that decade, although in England readership ran as high as

30 readers per copy. These estimates exemplify comments in *Advocate* editorials calling on readers to become subscribers (*Bathurst Advocate*, 1849, January 6, p.2).

Apart from subscriptions the other form of newspaper income was advertising. From the outset advertising in the paper was dominated by local businesses. The first issue contained two and a half columns of paid advertising throughout the paper's sixteen columns. Ads included a coach company, general stores, auctioneers and personal classifieds. A further column was used to advertise Benjamin's Isaacs' printing business (*Bathurst Advocate*, 1848, February 5). However, this ad was dropped in the second edition, which contained four columns of paid advertising. This level of paid advertising was maintained throughout the first year with each issue running between three, and sometimes up to eight columns, or half the paper, in advertisements.

The diversity of advertisements reveals the *Bathurst Advocate* played an important role in the community. Not only were local merchants able to advertise their wares but individuals were able to seek servants and tutors, promote meetings and warn residents of debtors. The success of the paper's advertising role appears to have surprised its proprietor. In a New Year leader Isaacs' thanked advertisers and, in what can now be judged as a profoundly prescient comment, added: "The mysterious wonders of advertising have not yet been half told to the world" (*Bathurst Advocate*, 1849, January 6, p.2).

Apart from early problems with sales it can be seen that by the end of its first year of publication the *Bathurst Advocate* had strengthened its position enough in the community to warrant ongoing subscription and advertising support. This continuing support reveals the paper was needed in the community.

### **The *Bathurst Advocate* 1848 – 1849: Community development**

The belief that a newspaper had a key role in encouraging the prosperity of a community saw the first edition dominated by ideas for improving Bathurst. It was suggested an agricultural society be established and a society for the protection of property. Calls were also made for increased restrictions on hawking, building work and a quick decision on the location of a market place. It was an ambitious start but firmly set the agenda for coming issues.

Just how much the residents shared Isaacs' vision for town development can be ascertained through their response to his agenda. The call for an agricultural society was ignored. Between February and May the paper raised the issue three times, arguing the pastoral nature of the settlement boded well for such an organization (*Bathurst Advocate*, 1848, February 5, p.3; February 19, p.2; March 11, p.3). In August the paper led with a prominent page one article expressing surprise "our call was not responded to" (*Bathurst Advocate*, 1848, August 12, p.1). Yet, again there was no response and the issue was dropped from the paper's agenda. More marked was apathy towards calls for restrictions on hawking and a society for the protection of property. After the initial mention the subjects were not raised again. Later calls for a Mechanics Institute and a singing association also failed (*Bathurst Advocate*, 1848, May 5, p.2; May 13, p.2).

Bathurst residents of 1848 may have been unenthused to form societies but it appears they were concerned about public facilities. In the first edition the *Bathurst Advocate* lamented that it had been three years since a foundation stone had been laid for

the All Saints (Anglican) Church and queried the reason for delay in building (*Bathurst Advocate*, 1848, February 5, p.2). Not long after building work commenced and the church opened in August (Barker, 1992, p.140).

The issue that raised the greatest response was the call for a quick decision on a site for a market place. Throughout the decision-making process the issue prompted five lengthy letters from residents (*Bathurst Advocate*, 1848, February 12, p.2; February 26, p.3; March 25, p.2; May 6, p.2; May 13, p.2). Here, it is evident the community was quick to use the newly established newspaper as a forum for argument. This use of the newspaper correlates with the view that the development of the press in the nineteenth century enabled new relationships to be created within a society. Newspapers allowed an interaction between people that had not been possible through books (Jones, 1996, p.49).

The agenda set out by Isaacs had not met with success. Only two of his seven agenda items, the Church and the market place, were resolved and the remaining five lapsed for lack of interest. Yet, while the community did not respond uniformly to Isaacs' agenda it did have an agenda of its own.

The primary concern was the state of the road to Sydney. From its first edition the *Advocate* gave the issue considerable coverage, documenting a local committee set up to lobby the colonial government for road improvements (*Bathurst Advocate*, 1848, February 5, p.3; March 4, p.2; March 11, p.2; July 1, p.2; November 25, p.3; December 2, p.2). Throughout the debate the paper's role was one of commentary rather than advocacy, detailing the progress of committee efforts. It was only when the campaign culminated in a petition to the governor, signed by 140 residents, that the *Advocate* took an editorial stance. A copy of the petition was inserted as a paid advertisement. An

editorial drew attention to the advertisement and called for speedy action so “we shall then be able to undertake a trip to Sydney without the fear of having our necks broken along the way” (*Bathurst Advocate*, 1848, December 2, p.2).

This example is noteworthy. It is evident the Sydney road issue was a major concern as no other local committee, or lobby group, was set up in 1848. The number of signatures on the petition is also indicative of the concern’s importance. Yet no letters on the topic were published in the paper. Likewise, support for the petition was not garnered through the newspaper. In effect, the road campaign was held autonomously of the *Advocate*. Yet, the paper did have a role in informing the public of the campaign’s progress. Its value in this regard is evidenced by the decision of the committee to advertise the petition.

### **Public use of the *Bathurst Advocate* for discussion and exposition**

Just as residents realised they could use the *Advocate* to put forward their own agenda they quickly embraced the opportunity for exposition and discussion. Their enthusiasm to write to the paper was not unique. Writing of England in the nineteenth century, Aled Jones says the practice of corresponding to newspapers became a “veritable cottage industry” as readers found a new way to communicate (Jones, 1996, pp.187, 202). In Bathurst in 1848 the first correspondents were published in the second edition of the *Bathurst Advocate*. This began a trend that saw at least one, more usually two and sometimes three letters published in each edition. It is relevant to note that prior to the *Advocate* residents would not have had the opportunity to give a public voice to their opinions. Competition for space in the Sydney newspapers would have been great with

little interest in letters on local Bathurst issues. This indicates an important public use of the *Bathurst Advocate* as a forum. Numerous local issues were raised, including policing, patient treatment at the Bathurst hospital, religious development in the district and suggestions for such initiatives as a museum and flax growing (*Bathurst Advocate*, 1848, October 10, p.3; September 9, p.2).

The most vigorous letter debates arose from the colonial government's land policy (*Bathurst Advocate*, 1848, June 10, p.2; June 24, p.3; September 16, p.2; October 7, p.2). In March 1847 the government had enacted legislation that overhauled land tenure in the colony. The changes were considered a victory for squatters who essentially received perpetuity of occupation (King, 1957, pp.54-55). The Act had come into force in October 1847 but, in what became a struggle between squatters and the people, opposition continued until free selection was introduced in 1861 (Roberts, 1924, p.194).

Through use of its letter columns for debate over the issue the *Advocate* had a pivotal role in a local campaign opposing the regulations. The *Advocate* responded to requests from residents and published the new regulations in full (*Bathurst Advocate*, 1849, February 3, p.4). In August, a public meeting was held, described by the *Advocate* as "the largest and best public meeting that has ever been held in Bathurst on any political subject" (*Bathurst Advocate*, 1848, August 25, p.2). A petition was drawn up, calling for the Act to be repealed. The government's response, rejecting the petitioners' cause, was made through the *Advocate* as a paid advertisement (*Bathurst Advocate*, 1848, December 16, p.3). Similarly, the Bathurst representative on the Legislative Council, John Darvall, used the paper to publicise the Colonial Secretary's response to a petition seeking a site for a town common (*Bathurst Advocate*, 1849, February 10). Government use of the

paper to advertise these responses indicates the paper's important public role in disseminating information.

Collectively, it can therefore be argued the *Bathurst Advocate* was used as a multichannel conduit between residents and readers and the government and the community. The *Advocate's* role as an intermediary of opinion in the land debate enabled a strengthening of the settlement's sense of self, distinct from the Sydney capital. This helped to invoke what has been described as a "countrymindedness" (Aitken, 1985, pp.34-41). Aitkin argues countrymindedness arose out of the railways and the telegraph. However, the vigorous use of the *Bathurst Advocate* by the community reveals an earlier development of local identity, or, as Kirkpatrick describes, social cohesion (Kirkpatrick, 1999, p.35).

Another feature of 19<sup>th</sup> Century newspapers was the publication of original poetry and prose. Much of this content was reproduced from English newspapers and it wasn't until later in the century that Australian authored literature began to dominate (Goodwin, 1986, p.36). The *Bathurst Advocate* became one of the earlier newspapers to publish local fiction when it featured the romantic serial 'Maria Mildred: or The Irish Orphan' from its eighth issue on March 25, 1848. It prefaced the first chapter with the following:

We have been favoured with the manuscript of the following Tale. Independent of its merit, it may be acceptable to our readers on account of its having been written by a resident of our own district (*Bathurst Advocate*, 1848, March 25, p.3).

The caveat on the quality of the serial was borne out when one long-suffering reader wrote to the paper in August that "it was all trash, and not fit to put in a newspaper

like this". The aggrieved reader quoted friends who held the same belief about the courtings of Maria (*Bathurst Advocate*, 1848, August 5, p.3). The complaint was heeded and after 11 lengthy instalments the *Advocate's* foray into local fiction ended in that issue.

Despite the failure of the local serial the *Advocate* remained a regular outlet for local poets. As with Original Correspondence, poetry allowed residents to put forward their views on local issues. The diverse inspiration for local poets included the district countryside, candidates for the Legislative Council election, copper mining and the opening of All Saints Church (*Bathurst Advocate*, 1848, July 15, p. 3, August 29, p.3, September 23, p.3., 1849, January 20, p.3). The volume of local poetry published in the *Bathurst Advocate* was exceedingly large by contemporary standards. Elizabeth Webby's bibliography of early Australian poetry reveals 95 poems were published in the 20 months of the *Advocate's* existence (Webby, 1982, pp.169-170). This surpassed the number published during the same period in each newspaper throughout the colony. Through correspondence and literary contributions the *Advocate* gave residents an audience for local material that would not have otherwise existed.

As mentioned, one inspiration for local poets was the Legislative Council election of 1848. In Bathurst the tightly fought election for a local representative was intensely debated in the *Advocate* columns. In the July 8 edition a half page advertisement announced the July 29 election. Smaller advertisements were taken out by the liberal incumbent, Francis Lord, and his supporters and a full page of editorial was devoted to election coverage. Subsequent issues had a similar level of coverage with letters and

poetry entering the debate. On Tuesday, August 1 the *Advocate* published a supplement, one- page, edition to give the poll results.

The paper's importance as a local reporter of the election is highlighted in two key areas. Firstly, it broke its weekly Saturday publication to provide a special issue as soon as election results were known, fulfilling an important role as a provider of information. Secondly, the *Advocate* published verbatim accounts of all election public meetings. A letter to the *Advocate* editor on July 15 accused a *Sydney Morning Herald* report of bias in overstating the level of support for one of the two candidates at an election meeting (*Bathurst Advocate*, 1848, July 15, p.3). The *Herald* had received its account from a correspondent, who, it appears, favoured the incumbent candidate. As the local press, the *Advocate* would have risked a considerable backlash if it too had falsely reported proceedings. This instance reinforces the necessity of a local paper in an isolated community as, unlike geographically remote publications, its reputation and success is beholden to accurate reporting of local issues.

## **Conclusion**

Public use of the *Bathurst Advocate* was vigorous and diverse. Through letters to the editor residents used the paper's columns for debate and to suggest initiatives. The publication of fiction and poetry gave a forum to literary aspirants and government use of the paper and election coverage confirmed the *Bathurst Advocate's* pivotal information role. In effect the paper fulfilled what was later enunciated by Jürgen Habermas as an effective function of critical-rational debate within the public sphere (Habermas, 1989). Temporally, the *Bathurst Advocate* was published during a period of transformation

within the public sphere, prior to the impact of mass commercialisation. However, Habermas' discussion of the emerging public sphere in 18<sup>th</sup> Century Europe and England is more relevant in the Bathurst context, which did not have a prior history of a local print industry. In this consideration the *Advocate* held the nascent features of a public organ acting as an intermediary between the private realm of the local population and the sphere of public authority - the government (Habermas, 1989, pp.2, 30). However, this presupposes a fully literate society where all people have access to the public sphere (Poole, 1989, p.15). In effect then, the *Advocate* was an organ of the public sphere for a literate public of gentry and emerging middle class for dialogue with the political realm.

This dialogue is seen in debate over such issues as the Legislative Council election and land regulations, which cemented the paper's role as an outlet for information and discussion. Here, the *Advocate* became a function of public opinion, allowing that opinion to be communicated to the state (Habermas, 1989, pp.2, 30-31). Yet, as has been seen, the public was initially slow in responding to the new medium. A period of adjustment was obviously necessary for residents to include the newcomer in their ways of communication. Similarly, Habermas suggests the educated middle class "learned the art" of critical-rational public debate (Habermas, 1989, p.29).

The use of the *Advocate*'s columns by residents of a literary bent further allowed the literate public into a domain where it could disseminate its interpretations of philosophy and culture. Up until this point, this Bathurst public had been excluded from local participation in the literary arts. Similar to information, these cultural products now became commodities, accessible to all (Habermas, 1989, pp.36-37). The success of this

transformation of local bourgeois literary culture into the public realm is indicated by the enthusiasm with which it was embraced.

The *Advocate* was also embraced by local merchants, service providers and the government as a medium for advertising. There is no reason to suggest the *Advocate* did not follow the trend of its contemporaries, receiving the most substantial part of revenue through advertising (Morrison, 2005, pp.29, 50). The constant level of advertising demonstrated a need of businesspeople and residents in to access a wide audience. Habermas contends the initial role of advertising was eminently secondary to the editorial role of the press as an institution of public opinion. Later, the dominance of advertising led to a breakdown in the original role of the public sphere (Habermas, 1989, p.184). The *Bathurst Advocate* appears to largely conform to Habermas' earlier example. Whilst advertising provided a supportive financial base, the newspaper's sixteen columns were dominated by advocacy and discussion.

Where the *Bathurst Advocate* was least successful was in realising the aspirations of its proprietor, Benjamin Isaacs. His agenda for the newspaper's role in community development did not really come to fruition. This reveals an interesting relationship between the press proprietor and the Bathurst public. Rather than follow the agenda set by the proprietor the community brought its own agenda into the *Advocate's* pages. Whilst it spurned Isaacs' ideas for development it was quick to use the paper for its priorities, such as the Sydney road. Similarly the paper entered the land debate following public agitation.

An explanation for this phenomenon of public exertion of influence is again found in Habermas. He describes the early press as limited to the "transmission and

amplification of the rational-critical debate of private people assembled into a public". It was only later, he argues, that the media took over the public's role as initiators of debate (Habermas, 1989, pp.188). A parallel is seen in a contemporary comment from the provincial English newspaper the *Sheffield Iris*: "Newspapers are first what public opinion makes them; then by a peculiar reaction they make public opinion what they please" (Cranfield, 1978, p.202).

Initial public response to the *Bathurst Advocate* was to exploit the paper as a conduit through which the public fulfilled its information, literary and commercial needs. This indicates why this public was not initially receptive to the media as agenda setter. Ultimately, the *Bathurst Advocate* was steered, not by the proprietor, Benjamin Isaacs, but by its public.

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