

'The Sentiment of Nationality': Bathurst and Popular Support for Federation

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From the earliest days of white settlement, Australia has marked its various notable events and red-letter days with appropriate celebrations. Fanfares, songs, flourishes, pot pourris of old favourite tunes, predictable speeches, sonnets, odes, laments, death marches from Saul, by Chopin and others, have all been summoned up to meet a need. We do not know precisely what was said or played as the weary leaders of the First Fleet gathered to perform their first official ceremony in Australia but their number included a small military band (drums and fife) which officiated at public occasions. Two days after the first flag-raising, it assisted with the drumming out of camp of an officer who had been caught in compromising circumstances amongst the women's tents. His disgrace was accompanied by the first piece of identifiable European ceremonial music played on Australian soil: the *Rogue's March*.¹ Military and civil music-making developed together, professional bandsmen serving the need at balls and other gala events as well as more practical formal functions. As the nineteenth century progressed, the scale of public ceremonies grew until they rivalled, in panoply and pomp, festivals of similar significance in Britain.

The range of material from which an organiser of a large-scale public event might draw had, after the 1850s, grown very considerably. Under cover there were operas and partial operas,

¹ See Roger Covell, *Australia's Music: Themes of a New Society*, Sun Books, Melbourne, 1965, in particular chapter two, 'Colonialism'.

vaudeville, recitals and concerts, recitations and dramas, juggling, acrobats, all manner of circus acts, magicians and, after 1896, the cinematograph. Outdoors festivals and celebrations could include parades, spectacles and fireworks to provide a useful augmentation to an event.

Less than one hundred years after Governor Arthur Phillip's band, and especially after the International Exhibition of 1880, Australia could boast a steady consolidation of musical and ceremonial confidence. This included high public expectations for what local and imported artists might offer to grand civic occasions. In 1888 the Centennial International Exhibition in Melbourne, one such occasion, saw what was certainly the largest forward step taken by transplanted western art music in the Australian colonies.² The events of that year suggest that the process of maturation had delivered Australia to the point where a significant number of its citizens understood and valued recent and contemporary European music, demonstrating an appetite for it on an unprecedented scale. Under the leadership of English conductor, Frederick Cowen, the Exhibition Building in Melbourne rang to the complete cycle of Beethoven symphonies. Ada Cambridge, the Australian novelist and essayist, who spent much of her time at the 263 concerts presented at the Exhibition that year, noted that she 'learned to be a Wagnerite ... after several unsuccessful attempts.'³ Brahms, who was still alive, and whose music was presented by Cowen's large orchestra, must have sounded modern and jagged to contemporary audiences. But listeners were malleable and interested.

Building on these foundations, the 1890s was rich in musical events. Concerts, especially the Promenade Concerts organized by W.J. Turner, gave opportunities for emerging Australian musicians like pianist and composer Percy Grainger and the soprano Lalla Miranda. There had always been a mix of imported and local talent from the very beginning of the line that starts before the 1860s and arrives at a self-confident zenith about 1900. Australia was well-served with native born and overseas performers. Melba had demonstrated that musical accomplishment could lead to huge international fame and also that music was a commodity, like so much else that had been on display at the various exhibitions in the last twenty years of the nineteenth century.⁴

The emergence of Australian federation called for some public celebration to support the efforts of federationists and to temper their constitutional and ideological deliberations with acceptable diversions. These events evolved to include all sorts of cultural support which demonstrated both the richness and maturity of the colonies as well as their sophistication. The various federal conventions were generally fairly small, regardless of their tendency to focus attention in the place in which they were held and in spite of the usually spirited support offered by the local community. In Corowa and Bathurst, the sites of the two people's

² The most accessible account of these activities can be found in a group of essays edited by David Dunstan as *Victorian Icon: the Royal Exhibition Building, Melbourne*, The Exhibition Trustees in association with Australian Scholarly Publishing, Kew, Vic., 1996. The contributions of Mimi Colligan are all valuable but her essay 'More Musical Entertainment', in chapter 5, is the most useful. There are other short pieces about the use of the Exhibition Building for concerts and celebrations, and for major events associated with Federation.

³ See Dunstan, *op. cit.*, pp. 214–218.

⁴ Oscar Comettant proposed at the time (1888) that 700,000 pianos had been already imported and had become a desirable addition to the homes of, perhaps, the majority of Australians. His assessment is cited in *A New Britannia* by Humphrey McQueen. Comettant's own book carries the title *In the Land of Kangaroos and Goldmines* in the translation by Judith Armstrong, published by Rigby (Australia) in 1980.

conventions, potential audiences were small and the economy of scale in mounting a presentation that might attract a large number of paying customers simply was not there. Corowa had put federation firmly back on the national agenda, in 1893. While the Corowa Peoples' Convention was not an event on a particularly large scale, the support of two groups was crucial. The Australasian Federation League participated, particularly its Sydney members, but also its regional representatives. The Australian Natives Association, too, helped to underpin Corowa's success. Regardless of the small attendance (72 delegates), the host town's local pride was quickly established and still flourishes. The citizens of Corowa contend, even today, that their town saw the birth of federation.

The need for celebrations in Corowa in 1893 appears to have been less clear than it would be in Hobart (for the 1895 'secret' premiers' meeting and a Federal Council meeting), Bathurst and Adelaide (for the first session of the Australasian Federal Convention in March 1897). What we can say with a fair degree of certainty is that the incremental growth in the desire for celebration ran parallel to the growing confidence exhibited in each federation gathering as Australians moved towards the final vote. And, of course, it also ran parallel to the emergence of the urban audiences whose patronage stimulated the development of concertising and the 263 Exhibition Building concerts in 1888. These forces are evident in the place accorded the various cultural events proposed by the organising committees of federation gatherings.

It was a matter of local pride to fill out the spare time of visiting delegates with a program of activities. It was also important for the organizing committee to underline the significance of the convention both as a local initiative and in the context of a national agenda for change and nationhood. The limitations were clear enough. A town could only do what a town could do. How would smaller hosting towns assemble a cultural program to satisfy convention delegates and local pride? How would a national movement meld with a regional group in activities that signalled the magnitude of the events that were unfolding?

Festivities and Social Events for the Bathurst Delegates

Preparations for the People's Federal Convention in Bathurst saw a variety of jobs identified and given different degrees of priority. Planning went ahead under the resonant, galvanizing motto: 'By our union we are made equal to our destiny.' The special federal edition of the *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal* on 6 November noted the results of extended deliberation about appropriate recreational activities under the broad heading of 'Festivities and Social Events':

<i>During the week</i>	Art Show
<i>Sunday 15th</i>	Federal Sunday (special Services at all churches)
<i>Monday 16th</i>	Public meeting
<i>Tuesday 17th</i>	Illuminations, Fete at Machattie Park
<i>Wednesday 18th</i>	Proposed Concert (replaced by Colonel Bell's Oration)
<i>Thursday 19th</i>	Foundation Stone Laying of Technical College
<i>Friday 20th</i>	Party at Logan Brae Convention Dinner
<i>Saturday 21st</i>	Outdoors: Rifle-shooting, cricket, tennis, handball, golf and bowls. Indoor: Chess and drafts

Although they come last on this list, sporting activities seem to have been the highest group of diversions on the agenda. What was not obvious to planners was that delegates were unlikely to linger after the conclusion of their business and the closing of the final session.

As it happened, the rifle shooting proved to be less popular than expected and a regular newspaper report about the sport, on the Monday after the Convention, coolly noted where the failure might be sheeted home:

During the time the convention business was on, several delegates—who were distinguished rifle shots—thought that arrangements might be made with the reserves and Volunteers so that a friendly contest might take place on the Bathurst range. The secretary of the Reserves was waited on by a delegate, and arrangements were made for a match on Saturday afternoon, but only two of the ‘Federal Team’ put in an appearance. The Secretary of the rifle team informs us that he sent a letter to the officials of the convention, containing an invitation to the delegates for a friendly contest, but it appears that the letter was not read. Consequently the match fell through.⁵

The activities of the Ladies’ Committee were reasonably well-reported in the local presses before the opening of the Convention in anticipation of good support for what seems to have been its principal festivity: a garden party. Occurring on the final day, it provided a chance for an informal assessment of the meeting and a chance to relax before the Convention dinner, held on the same evening. The ladies of Bathurst took charge:

At a meeting of the Ladies’ Committee there was a large attendance ... Details in connection with the proposed Garden Party at ‘Logan Brae’, the use of which has been kindly granted by the Minister for Mines and Agriculture were discussed and dealt with. Mr Fullerton of South Bathurst offered to supply ferns for the purpose of decorating the convention hall during the federal week and Mrs Rutherford kindly undertook to supply materials for decoration.⁶

The garden party was a huge success and those who attended enjoyed the playing of a military band on the lawns of one of the grander local mansions, Logan Brae.

The need for entertainment (planned by the Ladies’ Committee) for Wednesday evening, designed to mark the mid-point of the Convention and to provide some light but edifying relief, was brought into question from the floor of the meeting chamber. The proposed program was to include local nightingales and the noted public speaker and American Consul to New South Wales, Colonel Bell. John Norton, editor of the *Truth*, made his thoughts known:

⁵ *Bathurst Daily Times*, 23 November 1896.

⁶ *ibid.*, 24 October 1896.

Mr John Norton, while fully appreciating the kindly offices of the ladies and others who desired to entertain the delegates, thought that there was important business for transaction. The Convention should not be interfered with. They would have ample opportunity of hearing the silver tongued orator of the Pacific slopes on other occasions.⁷

It was, however, agreed that after the day's proceedings had been concluded Colonel Bell should speak and that the delegates would re-convene after his lecture. This is not recorded in the published *Proceedings*. Indeed, there was no apparent opposition to Bell's speaking recorded in the formal report nor any suggestion that the Convention's time might be wasted or 'interfered with' should he be given the opportunity.

It is not clear if, as a result of the reorganization, local talent was no longer required to follow Colonel Bell. Indications are that the Ladies' Committee had some acts in reserve, particularly local songbirds and instrumentalists. John Norton moved an enthusiastic vote of thanks after Bell's speech, which dealt with union and liberty with considerable energy and which was calculated to stir popular passions. Bell focused upon the idea of unity and the people, keeping a weather eye on his own republican roots and the predominantly monarchist leanings of his auditors. Norton did not mention the contributions of local talent.

The venue for the Convention was the School of Arts. The *Bathurst Daily Times* (16 November) boasted that there 'is no town in Australia blessed with a more handsome and comfortable School of Arts than Bathurst'. Delegates, who were given 'privileged use of the reading room', occupied the ground floor level. Balcony spaces accommodated a gallery where young ladies could assist delegates in the organisation of correspondence and a public viewing gallery. There was free access to the gallery in the mornings and afternoons on a first-come basis for the first four days, but seats could be reserved for the Friday session at two shillings each. Local traders declared Friday a public holiday, indicating in the press that businesses would not open. The Convention itself became the centre of attention and, just as they might attend the School of Arts to take in Lottie Lyell and Raymond Longford in their latest penny-dreadful drama, local people were given an opportunity to see and hear delegates, some of whom were gathering considerable status.

Advertising Allegiance

In addition to declaring the last day of the Convention a holiday, local traders were quick to capitalise on the language of federal endeavour. Some of their regular advertising spilled over into political exhortation and unambiguous support. They prove to have been opportunistic but also capable of a clear commitment:

John Hunter's 'Federal Boots' were 'Unequaled for Comfort, Durability and Appearance.' Under the banner 'Federation', John Hunter declares that 'The hope and desire of all patriotic Australia is

⁷ *ibid.*, 19 November 1896.

gradually emerging from the land of dreams, until it will burst forth into the bright sunshine of accomplishment.’⁸

E. Webb and Company, owners of one of Bathurst’s largest mixed businesses, were more cautious and restrained, preferring simply to play with the idea of unity and the language of consensus.

The Great Convention! The Wonderful Attractions Cause Confederation Without Debate! All Classes Meet Around E. Webb and Co. Charming Novelty Windows and Federation Follows Immediately.

Directly below this advertisement, butcher J.P. Ryan broadened his usual appeal:

Federationist and Others. J.P. Ryan Jun. is the cheapest butcher in Town for Prime Beef and Mutton. Call and see the new Federal Freezing Window! The only one of its kind in the west.

⁸ *Bathurst Daily Times*, 24 October, 1896.

On the final Friday of the Convention, Webb and Co, with wind in their sails, announced that for many years 'they had imported direct from English, Continental and American markets. Commercially they are Federated with the World'. They also noted that they had six tons of ice 'ready for visitors', enough to accommodate large amounts of convivial and celebratory Scotch. Like the executive members of the rifle club, Webb's managers must have been disappointed by the quiet Saturday the 21st (especially having sacrificed Friday's trading in the cause) for they were left with a large stock of unused ice.

Music

There is little conspicuous evidence of musical events that were directly linked to the Convention, apart from the Ladies' Committee Concert scheduled for Wednesday evening. This was carefully planned but not presented. The local band, which had numerous successes in competitions, does not seem to have participated in any formal sense. In a history of this group, *Fiftieth Anniversary Souvenir of the Bathurst and District Band and Its Only Bandmaster, Mr S. Lewins* (1935),⁹ the year 1896 is, surprisingly, overlooked. It reports that:

There is nothing of great importance recorded in this period [1896-97] other than the usual park programs, hospital and poor relief benefits; Bathurst Show and races jobs as usual. The Band also played at the foundation stone laying of the Technical College.¹⁰

This seems an odd oversight given that on page five of the same publication, in a list of notable Bathurst events, 1896 is given as the year of 'Federal Convention at Bathurst'. Bathurst Mounted Rifles Band went on, the anonymous author contends, to lead the procession in 1901 in Sydney's most elaborate federation celebrations, culminating in the signing of documents and the Centennial Park military march past. The author of the *Fiftieth Anniversary Souvenir* rightly acknowledges the significance of these celebrations: 'This procession was probably the most historic in Australia.' The Band is not conspicuous in the filmed record of the event.¹¹

The Band certainly played for E. Webb and Co. and might have been on stand-by to be a part of the Wednesday evening 'entertainment'. Foundation Stone Laying at the Technical College is listed as a performance for the Band, although its contribution is not reported. The ceremony certainly occurred during the Convention and shared some of the broadly altruistic and nationalistic rhetoric that was in good supply in Bathurst that week, but it does not seem to have been formally connected to the Convention program. Could the military band that certainly played on the lawns of Logan Brae have been some rival group?

Bathurst and the Flowering of Federation Verse

A less conspicuous cultural activity which was neither a festival nor a social event in the conventional sense, as these were used by the organizers at Bathurst, was the flowering of incidental verse inspired by federation. A number of the major players who shepherded Australians towards federation had of course penned poems encouraging readers to share their zeal and determination. The Bathurst newspapers record those poems that were read during the formal Convention proceedings and others that were contributed rather as one

⁹ This slim, illustrated volume was published by the Bathurst Band in 1935.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 18.

¹¹ The New South Wales Government commissioned the Salvation Army to record on film the event surrounding the creation of the Commonwealth. Much of the footage is of the street parade that preceded the formalities involving the inauguration of the Commonwealth of Australia. Of the state premiers, only Lyne (NSW) was filmed signing the official documents, as NSW was paying the bill. The Bathurst Band is not obvious in the surviving footage. See the video documentary *Federation Films*, produced by noted media historian Chris Long for the National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra, 1989.

would send a letter to the editor. As early as 6 November the *Bathurst Daily Free Press and Mining Journal, Special Federal Edition* had carried a sonnet by William Gay, the consumptive Bendigo poet who was, as the Convention sat, in the last months of his short life. The poem was tabled on the morning of the third day of the Convention.

AUSTRALIAN FEDERATION

From all division let our land be free
For God has made her one: complete she lies
Within the unbroken circle of the skies,
And round her indivisible the sea
Breaks on her single shore; while only we,
Her foster-children, bound with sacred ties
Of one dear blood, one storied enterprise
Are negligent of her integrity—
Her seamless garment, at great Mammon's nod
With hands unfilial we have basely rent
With petty variance our souls are spent
And ancient kinship under foot is trod;
O let us rise united penitent,
And be one people—mighty, serving God!

The ideas of a 'single shore' and of Australia's 'foster children' suggest some depth of thought about the issues at hand and also the invisibility of Aboriginal people.

Professor Gosman, a member of the Federation League from Melbourne and a prominent figure in the record of discussion, was the author of a 'Federal Hymn' read at the Convention. It has the four square-ness of the genuine thing but appears to have had no formal musical setting. God willing, Federation would be achieved. Gosman's 'Hymn' is also a prayer. It was read on the morning of the fourth day and the delegates were impressed enough to order that it be included in the published *Proceedings*:

A FEDERAL HYMN

Great God of Nations, throned on high
And yet to us forever nigh,
The Federal cause be pleased to bless
And crown the movement with success.

The pilgrim fathers in their zeal
For freedom and the church's weal
By persecution sorely pressed
For refuge sought the distant west,

But no such persecuting fires
Drove from their home our pilgrim sires

And we their children hope to rear
In time a greater Britain here.

The British flag floats o'er our land
The British fleet our sons command,
The love of freedom in the race
Grows stronger here by ample space.

The wealth of British thought is ours
Its life through every channel pours,
The mother tongue in our discourse
Maintains its purity and force.

Then let the Federal spirit rise
To quicken all our energies
The glorious mission to fulfil
By virtue of the people's will.

There is very little room for Colonel Bell and his American countrymen amongst Gosman's protracted enthusiasm for a 'greater Britain here'. Perhaps the most important sentiments are those connected to the identification of a 'wealth of British thought' and the weight given to the idea expressed in the final line.

Another 'Federal Hymn' had been read in the opening session, the composition of Mrs Kearney of Orange. She selects an dactylic metre rather than the more traditional four-stressed iambic quatrains of Professor Gosman, and her spirited work canters along:

A FEDERAL HYMN

God of the Universe, smile on our union;
God of the mighty triumphant and free;
Smiling and virginal, unstained by slaughter
Thy last and thy brightest born, laughs up to thee.

Look down, O Father—O Father of Nations!
Without whom the mightiest melt like the sand
Gathered by children in mounds by the ocean
Swept out to nothingness. Father, thy hand

Only can gather us up to the splendour
Of empire majestic, to shine o'er the sea
A diadem'd nation, serene and immortal
Revered by her sisters, and cherished by Thee!

Set like a radiant gem on the forehead

Of ocean, Australia laughs in the dawn—
Laughs in the dawn of a new day, whose splendour
Shall leap to the light on the pinions of morn.

God of the Universe smile on our union,
By union we grow to our strength, 'tis to Thee
We turn to preserve it—O Lord of the Nations
Serene and majestic—O, God 'tis to Thee.

God of the Universe, smile on our union,
God of the mighty, triumphant and free
Set like a gem on the forehead of ocean
Thy last and thy brightest-born laughs up to Thee!

G. M. V. K.

Orange, 3rd Nov., 1896

Mrs Kearney, probably the wife of the Mayor of Orange, a Convention delegate, lifts her eyes to an authority even mightier than the 'British'.

Clearly poetry could assume an important place in the articulation of ideas, in the expression of feelings about issues of great moment. The God of the 'mighty, triumphant and free' would reward effort and watch over the infant Commonwealth. The sense of the future stirring in the present, and of Australia achieving maturity, is expressed by ordinary people such as Mrs Kearney, but also by the more exalted. Edmund Barton gilded his dull but urbane presentation with another 'Federal Sonnet'. It is a competent but unmemorable piece. Cardinal Moran, too, quoted at length from a poem by Sir William Jones, 'One with whose writings many of you are familiar', the Cardinal suggested. This enthusiasm for poetry is not unexpected eloquence in a society where, later in the Federation period, many poems articulating the pros and cons of union were received by newspaper editors. This tendency was especially evident during the referenda of 1897 and 1898.

Other Bathurst Convention poems spoke of the 'City of the Plains' much as Corowa's poem¹² speaks somewhat grandiosely of Corowa and Wagunyah as the 'twin cities' on the Murray. The messages are almost always the same, the appeal numbingly constant. God is urged to help achieve the desired union, regardless of the fact that delegates and even those federalists who could not attend, put a heavy emphasis on the need for the Convention to begin the move towards widespread and irresistible popular ownership of the idea of a federated Australia. Perhaps the most significant outcome at Bathurst was the emphasis it placed on the need for a conspicuous and irresistible surge of national feeling in favour of union. The case would be put at a referendum, so all forms of public utterance would be valuable in making the case. In the Conference *Proceedings* it is noted that in the closing session 'several sets of verses on the federation theme were reported to the Convention. They were taken as read.' The Bathurst delegates accepted the relevance and power of poetry.

¹² Randolph Bedford's poem 'Hymn of Federation' appeared in the *Corowa Free Press*, 1 August 1893 (see the introduction to this volume). It had been published in Melbourne the previous day. It is probably the most widely published piece of federation verse.

As federation enthusiasm increased, additional effort was put into setting words to music. Somewhere amongst the genuine piety and exhortation of the poems published in Bathurst in 1896 the germ of a truly national song might lurk. There were precedents. As early as 1859 Carl Linger had written a memorable tune to the words of Mrs Caroline Carlton. 'Song of Australia' carries some of the sentiments so common later: 'no shackled slave shall breathe the air'.¹³ But like much of the Christian focus of Mrs Kearney (and others), and regardless of its rather naive energy, the verse begins to pall through repetition of the same similes and metaphors, the same sets of ideas. Australian society was more complex than Mrs Kearney's poem suggests. She proposes one context and a particular set of values that is conspicuously Irish Catholic. There were others, some of them still shadowy. The energy that informed their production seems to have issued from bland political roots and an educated middle class. It is verse that has some equivalence to the maudlin and predictable parlour ballad. These were not the spontaneous or even the heavily didactic effusions of red-ragging socialists, not even the relatively domesticated ones who are well-represented on the late Victorian bookshelf.

But poems and songs were, of course, not the only vehicles for public declamation and for rhetoric urging federation. In a letter read to the Bathurst Convention from Bernhard Wise, English-educated attendee at earlier federalist gatherings, the author delivers his opinion in powerful, stirring prose. A single line, 'Unity is Strength', runs through the various poems and the urgings of men like Wise (who, as it happened, went on to write even grander prose in *The Making of the Australian Commonwealth 1889 to 1900* (1913)). Unity is strength, if the people recognise and appropriate the ideology for which such sentiment is a catch cry:

The Bathurst Convention must remove all doubts of the timid and compel the secret enemies of union to declare themselves ... To my mind there is no other cause worth fighting for in public life when put beside the cause of Australian unity ... Men will write, and speak and work as members of a nation and not as provincials and the importance of this fact as a means of elevating civic life no student of history can ignore ... the impulse to all great movements is given by sentiment rather than reason, and no statesman who ignores the sentiment of Nationality can be regarded as practical.

The Bathurst Convention took up the challenge, moving early in its proceedings to ensure that it carried the title, 'Bathurst Peoples' Convention'. The need to educate and organise and, perhaps, to agitate were all articulated and to some degree lived out at Bathurst. There is an earnestness and urgency in its agenda and the manner in which it approached the debate. That is, perhaps, why so few of its deliberations appear trivial, even when they are delivered in language and, sometimes, in mannerisms that have seriously dated. As we approach the inevitable Republic it is likely that the underlying ideas and the primary motivation to change will be taken a step further. But we are, I think, unlikely to find popular poets rising to the occasion or butchers installing the republican equivalent of a 'federal freezing window'. The

¹³ Caroline Carlton crafted the words of 'Song of Australia' and Carl Linger, German-Australian composer resident in South Australia, the music. Of all of the surrogate or substitute anthems with a national emphasis composed in Australia, 'Song of Australia', is in my opinion the best. The rising line of its melody has an inspirational effect like other successful national anthems. At the 1897 Adelaide Federal Convention efforts were made to create a profile for the piece. The promotion was not successful and the anthem failed in later competitions to be selected as a national song.

'sentiment of Nationality' has been buried in political correctness where popular versifying and patriotic cantatas seem both embarrassing and passé. It is difficult to see how modern republicanism will rally and focus popular support and achieve the same levels of energy and success as the Federation Leagues like the one at Bathurst were able to do.