Letter written by Stan Savige to President of Legacy in 1945 about membership concerns

16 July 1945

Mr W. Perrin
President, Melbourne Legacy Club,
Market St, Melbourne

Dear Bill,

I appreciate very much indeed your birthday greetings by telegram which reached me in time.

I hear from Frank Meldrum and Bill Cremor of the good job of work you are doing, and of the way in which you have smoothed out some of the difficulties facing you when you took over the Presidency.

Although I am receiving the Weekly Bulletin, I have not received copies of minutes of Board and JLC meetings, which were regularly sent me in the past. I would be glad if you would have a word with John Barnes to send them regularly as they do keep me in touch with current affairs of the club.

I am particularly anxious to receive the minutes of your special meeting covering the admission of candidates who have served in this war. I gathered from the Bulletin that, although satisfaction with the result of the meeting was expressed, the headway was not of material importance.

Ever since my return from the Middle East I have been really concerned about the necessity to admit members who served in this war in a manner which would give a regular flow and provide a good basis for the intake of those it is desired to admit on their return from the war.

This was first taken up during the Presidency of Jim Gillespie at his invitation, and when able to speak to the Club, I have endeavoured to impress this point of view on the members as a matter of vital importance.

Such little headway has been made, that I cannot escape the fear that Legacy may find itself in its new premises with large sums of money at its disposal, but hampered by a similar type of work being carried out by other organisations formed by soldiers of this war.

When the opportunity presents itself I speak to men, who are the right type for membership, of the necessity to consider the Club as an avenue of service after the war.

Quite recently I have met men who know about Legacy, but are more concerned about their own Unit Associations taking up our type of work in its application to the widows and orphans of the men killed within their units.

A few weeks ago, in discussing this matter with a young Brigadier from Sydney, I found he knew all about Legacy, and his Association had gone so far as to suggest to the Sydney Legacy Club that they would be glad to assist them in their work through their Association, but not as members of the Legacy Club. They considered that their own point of view is so far apart from that of the soldiers of last war, and the need for service to their own people is so great, that they will do the job in their own way through their own Associations. Naturally I tried to remove this point of view, but I am afraid without much success.

I feel that there are several important factors to consider in order to ensure long life and service for Legacy, which I emmorate as follows:

1. The men who founded Legacy were those who fought in the Great War and who had no interest or knowledge of the Boer War and the men who participated in that war, because those fellows were of a previous generation.
Members of the Legacy Club were personally interested in the fighting of least war upon which all their experiences and points of view were based. They know the solider of that war, his qualities as a fighter in that particular type of warfare, and the natural emotions emanating from those experiences which directed their attention to the welfare of the men of that war, and the orphans of the soldiers who lost their lives.
2. In the natural course of things, the men of this war have no more interest in the last war than did members of Legacy have in the Boer War.
3. The men who fought in the last war were conscious of the success they achieved as soldiers, and their point of view cannot be created and developed on other than those fighting experiences. They are naturally proud of their standing as men who accomplished great things and who can solve their own problems in their own way because of the qualities they developed as a result of the last war. They are independent of the patronage and direction offered by previous generations in other wars. That in itself is right and proper.
4. The men of this war have been engaged in operations for a period much longer than we experienced in the last war. The type of warfare has been entirely different, yet the sterling qualities of the men of last war are obtainable in this generation, who fought and are fighting in this war. Their accomplishments as soldiers have been at least equal to we of last war. Their confidence in themselves and their natural reluctance to be guided by those of the previous generation, devoid of their own particular experiences, is as natural and strong as was the case of the men of the first AIF. Their intense belief in themselves, based on the solid ground of great achievements, has engendered the same independent point of view as that developed by the men of last war. If this were not so, we would discard the point of view that the advance of a nation is dependent upon the qualities of each generation in turn.
5. When Legacy was formed in 1923 by the men of the last war, the majority of them were under 30 years of age. The foundation and development of Legacy, which was so successfully accomplished, was determined by the enthusiasm and ability to produce virile action and outlook in young men. The latter, particularly during the 22 years of the life of Legacy, has been carried on by men of middle age, whose ages today range from 47 to over 65. I think that an examination would prove a majority of our members are of an age nearer to 60 than 50. It would be interesting for members to compare photographs of the early Conferences with those of the last couple of years. They would then see that the natural course of life asserts itself by the grey hairs, bald heads and protruding stomachs.
6. It is in the natural course of things for a man to consider he is as good in his old age as he was in his youth, but the weight of evidence in the volume of production of his efforts is against the truth of this point of view.
7. The problem of the future as affecting the Legacy Club is, whether it will continue as a mighty influence in the development of this country, or whether it will die with the passing of its members who served in the last war. There is no other choice, and no other hard fact to be considered. The future of Legacy is dependent upon the enrolment of the same sterling type of fellow from this war as was obtained from the last one. Legacy has created a machine by the painful process of trial and error, which runs smoothly in the execution of turning ideals into material achievements for the good of the country.

I believe it is reasonable to assume that the end of the war is in sight yet, after nearly six years of war, the vast majority of our members come under the category of the ‘Old and the Bold’ with a very small percentage of the men of this war, whose virility is equal to our members between the years 1923-30.

The fact that these men will serve as you fellows did is unassailable, yet we are in the parlous position of having so few as members of our Club. There is no doubt whatever that the self sacrificing outlook and determination of the men of this war. The evidence of this is that today the Unit Associations of men of this ware are stronger and much further advanced than was the case in a similar period of the last war. They are actively engaged with a great deal of sincerity in service through their own organisations.

1. From my experiences, as a result of being a soldier in both wars with a reasonable attitude of mind covering the qualities of both generations, I am convinced that Legacy stands at the cross roads when its future will determined. It is natural for the past generation, without the experiences of the present generation in their war, to fail to see the importance of active action required now, and not in six months time. The solemn fact remains that the men of this war will not accept patronage and direction in full from the men of the last war. They will, however, turn to them for advice and, in all sincerity, they will endeavour to follow in their footsteps.

The problem facing the members of Legacy today is to determine what they will do. Will they continue to believe that the complete direction of Legacy, as applicable to the men of this war, shall be in their hands, or will they recognise the facts of life and acknowledge the worth of these new men and their independent thought and action, which will not permit them to tack on behind the older generation. There is only one answer, which is the answer of the ages, and that is the new generation will solve its own problems by its own experiences and its own ability. Failure to build up Legacy with these men, together with failure of present members to guide them into the channels of service, will bring about complete independence of action on their part which will result in Legacy being a great institution in history, covering but a small span of the development of Australia.

The alternative is the development of numerous institutions manned by the men of this war finding their way through the fog of trial and error, which was our experience in the development of Legacy. The weight of these new organisations will then naturally be weaker because of their necessity to obtain experience, rather than a virile forward move on the part of Legacy leaders to shift control to this generation with its best men in turn at the helm.

Kind regards

Yours sincerely,

SGS