

FOUNDATION DAY ADDRESS

TUESDAY 18 SEPTEMBER 2018

PAST PRESIDENT LEGATEE BRYCE PHILLIPS

Legacy is now close to its 95th Anniversary of formation. Forty-five years ago in his excellent history “Legacy – the First 50 Years” Mark Lyons observed that “As Legacy enters its second half century it faces a profound dilemma. With the prospect of Australia becoming involved in another major war an unlikely one, Legacy has a difficult choice. It can seek to perpetuate its main achievement, the provision by volunteers of assistance to widows and children, but only at the cost of abandoning its original principle of association that of active service in time of war.

Alternatively, it can hold true to that principle, come to care exclusively for old ladies and eventually fade away.”

Lyons reflected that minority resistance to change within Legacy, given its loose democratic structure, made change difficult. He observed that those who argued unsuccessfully for change were probably right and I quote “a later history may well conclude that Legacy made an important choice in its fiftieth year. Because of that choice it is unlikely that it will be a history of Legacy’s second half century – and – the opinion that “Legacy faces its second half century, confident in its past, uncertain of its future but determined to get on with the job at hand.

Let’s go back to Legacy’s genesis.

It’s now nearly 100 years since the armistice which ended WWI. Australia’s contribution to that conflict was remarkable. From a population of less than 5 million in 1914, volunteer forces of 415,000 (mostly men) was raised of which 330,000 served overseas – 60,000 died, 150,000 were described as wounded and I would suggest the other 120,000 were variably ‘war affected’.

The social, physical damage of war weighed heavily on the men and our community. Commencing in November 1914 with the sailing of the 1st contingent a continuous sea transport system saw constant additions to the battlefields of the Middle East and then Europe. From the outset our contingents suffered losses – indeed 140 men are recorded as dying en route to Egypt on the first sailing, pneumonia and meningitis were extraordinarily lethal before antibiotics.

During the war, troops were regularly repatriated when unable or incapable of continuous service – that is severely physically wounded, afflicted with illnesses eg. trench fever, trench foot and shell shock, V.D. T.B. etc.

From June 1915 – November 1918 about 75,000 such casualties were returned in addition 18,000 came home on “change of both or discipline”.

In the period in 1915 – August 1917 the problems of returned soldiers and their dependents were handled by State War Service Committees using patriotic funds gathered from the community.

The Federal Government was unprepared for the size and nature of wars affects at home – both in terms of the duration of the conflict and the horrendous losses on the Western Front in 1916 and 1917.

In 1916 – 4 AIF Divisions suffered 28,000 casualties in the first Somme Battle and Fromelles.

In 1917 – 5 AIF Division suffered 38,000 casualties in 3rd Ypres battles, 7,000 at Messines and 10,000 at Bullencourt battles.

The RSL was established in 1916 and the Repatriation Department in April 1918.

The Repatriation Department was founded on 4 main principles:

- (i) To secure the re-establishment of returned soldiers in the industrial life of the Community.
- (ii) To sustain these veterans' until an opportunity for such re-establishment was assured.
- (iii) To provide for the Dependents of Soldiers who died on active service, as well as the Dependents of Soldiers who on account of injuries sustained were unable to provide for those formerly Dependent on them.
- (iv) To provide medical treatment for returned soldiers who were suffering from disabilities caused or aggravated by war service. This body was unique in the world in 1918.

When the AIF was disbanded in 1921 the Repatriation Department had total responsibility for Veterans thereafter.

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At the end of WWI the return to Australia of the 167,000 in Europe and the Middle East took place between November 1918 and November 1919.

Most soldiers were discharged from service within 3 months of arrival home.

The impact on Repatriation Services was challenging.

The Community attitude to the war had soured considerably in 1916 and 1917 with two conscription referendums – designed to make up the losses in Europe – failing to gain support.

The Australian official war history reports that by 1920. "The problems of after treatment of men returned damaged were brought into higher relief by loss of the great purpose and incentive that had sustained the nation as well as the armies". "No spiritual or economic impetus had replaced it. Community attitudes to the soldier or vice versa had begun to change. They saw the returned man as a competitor in the struggle for existence and hero worship was replaced by critical suspicion. The returned man was aware that he must be prepared to fight to ensure that the acts passed in justice to him were interpreted in the spirit and intention of the Parliament and people at the time of their enactment."

Amendments to the Repatriation Act in 1921 enlarged the growing for pension eligibility and a Royal Commission in 1924 was held into assessment of service disabilities.

- In this unsettled environment the RSL was very active in support of Veterans though not all returned men were happy with the results of the league's efforts.
- It was in 1923 that Sir John Gellibrand (1872 – 1945) established the Remembrance Club in Hobart.

Its general objects were to:

- (i) Guard the interests of ex-soldiers
- (ii) To provide meaning of reviving old Comradeship and Esprit de Corps
- (iii) To establish contact between members in business with a view to mutual helpfulness.

In Melbourne Gellibrand was in contact with Stan Savige and, as a consequence, Savige discussed the formation of a similar club with old 6 Division comrades over a lunch in August 1923.

The result was Melbourne Legacy Club's official inauguration at ANZAC House on 25 September 1923.

Claude Blatchford in "The Story of Melbourne Legacy" attributes the "Legacy" naming of the Club to the Foundation Treasurer Legatee F.P. Selleck. The first President was Lt. Col. H.E. Cohen and Stan Savige joined the general committee.

Over the next 3 years Melbourne Legacy evolved a Club committee structure to address the Remembrance Club aims with the slogan "Mutual Helpfulness". Weekly working luncheons were held at ANZAC House. One of the original committees, which continues to this day, was "Comradeship".

Of this early phase Claude Blatchford observed "the idea of undertaking work amongst children of deceased soldiers had not influenced the minds of the founders of Legacy."

However it was a period of continuing development as employment searching and business reciprocity became less important in the mid 1920's.

By this time the Club was functioning through many committees – reporting to the Board of Management. In addition to Comradeship, there was Unemployment, Public Affairs, Problem Cases and Entertainments.

It was in October 1925, in response to the suggestion of Legatee Frank Doolan that the Club established a Vocation Endowment scheme. To facilitate this new activity the "Deceased Soldier's Children's Welfare Committee" was formed.

Junior Legacy Club activities commenced in July 1926 with a Literary and Debating class and a Gymnasium class involving 142 boys. The first boys camp at Stan Savige's Somers property was held in January 1927. Forty-five Junior Legatee girls were first gathered together for gymnasium activities at the YWCA in April 1927.

In 1927/28 Melbourne Legacy made a central contribution to promoting the case for a Shrine of Remembrance. The rules of The Club at that period read under Rule 2(L) "To support the plan for the erection of the Shrine of Remembrance on the Domain as Victoria's War Memorial".

Legacy's public and private promotion of and fund raising for the Shrine was recognised with the appointment of Legatee Kemsley to the National War Memorial Committee. The club continued Annual Fund raising for the Shrine construction in following years and has had continuous connection to the present day with a representative on the Board of Trustees of the Shrine. Melbourne Legacy Children's Service before ANZAC day reflects our continuing connection and commitment.

In 1928/9 the economic disaster of the great depression confronted Legacy with a sudden extreme workload on its Employment Committee and its Distress and Problems Committee. In a 12 month period the eight Legatee members of each Committee carried the burden of 650 cases of stressed ex-servicemen and families and despite this workload were also able to find employment for another 367 – one Legatee placed 47 dependants of deceased soldiers in employment. In addition through the Deceased Soldiers Children's Welfare Committee 52 children were placed in "positions with good prospects".

It is not surprising that in the following year the Employment Committee ceased to function when no Legatee could be found with time for the job. However 95 J.L.'s were placed in jobs via the Deceased Soldiers Children's Welfare Committee.

The Club then became more settled in focussing on the support of the needs of children. In 1930 Legatee advisors to individual Junior Legatees began and jobs were found for 74 boys and 59 girls. The individual advisor scheme became a pillar of Legacy support for dependants thereafter.

By the mid 1930's Legacy extended the age limit for educational support from 14 to 16 years, reflecting societal change in basic educational expectations.

Support for widows was increased as ex-servicemen were dying from non-war causes leaving young children and widows with little or no government assistance. However during the latter part of the 30's Legacy saw its main role as getting Juniors a good job.

By 1936 Legacy was beginning to contemplate its future. JL's were maturing, widows and Legatees were ageing. It had community acceptance and its relationship with other ESO's and government were in good shape. Twenty Legacy Clubs were established in all states and inter-club co-ordination had evolving through a Central-Liaison Committee in 1929, to Co-ordinating Council (LCC) in 1937 with LCC housed in Melbourne.

However the challenges of Club autonomy, collective activity and procedural activity, evident from the 1920's, are still with us today.

World War II created new challenges.

In 1939 the 2nd AIF was created and volunteers, including Legatees and J/L's enlisted. Overseas service commenced in 1940 in the middle east and casualties began.

The Legatee workforce was put to the task of support. The shortfall in Legatee numbers in our Club was real, coped with by joining with like ESO's.

In 1941 the war with Japan brought conflict to our own shores. In addition to the volunteer AIF, by contrast with World War I our military responses involved compulsory military service with the AMF. This latter service was limited to the Australian continent and dependencies – that included New Guinea and other Mandated territories.

As a consequence many conscripts served overseas and many volunteers did not leave our shores.

From a population of about 7 million in 1939, 993,000 were enlisted, of which 550,000 served in a theatre of war and 27,000 died on active service. Significantly from 1944 onwards progressive discharges from the services lead to a less serious post war manpower issue than occurred after 1919. Community support for the war effort was widespread.

In 1939 the Legacy response began with a paper prepared by Stan Savige. It's main points were:

- (i) Legatees would give a lead in matters of public importance and be available for any service requested by government or other authorities.
- (ii) Encouraged eligible juniors to enlist or support the war effort
- (iii) Extend Legacy activities to Dependants equal to those dependants 1914 – 18
- (iv) Admit to membership those who saw active service in the present war.

Although this paper was endorsed in early 1940 there was debate over the need for an overseas component in defining active service.

In 1942 Melbourne Club decided not to accept any new members who had not served in the current war. Slow recruitment of World War II veterans followed with a slight decline in active Club membership.

Social changes and more jobs during the war lead to juniors leaving formal education earlier, but by 1944 most Legacy Clubs were reporting increasing Junior Legatee membership.

In the post war period 1945-1950 the member of Legacy Clubs increased from 20 in 1939 to 40. In Victoria we went from 7 – 12.

Although the casualties were less than in WWI, the high incidence of tropical diseases preceded post war deaths in many and Legacy support was readily and rapidly available to dependants.

However rules surrounding Legatee membership eligibility and overseas service were hotly debated and difficult to change – as were criteria for eligibility for Legacy benefits.

Concerns existing in the capacity to cope with increasing enrolments of dependants were finally settled in 1952 when a detailed document on geographic confines for areas of and dates for operational service was adopted.

Back in 1942 Melbourne Club took responsibility for all of Eastern Victoria in areas without Legacy cover. The groups of Melbourne Club emerged from this decision. Stan Savige was responsible for their significant post war development. Western Victorian areas were covered by existing regional clubs – from which further clubs emerged.

Fund raising by Melbourne Club to meet the increasing request for assistance was a challenge, though money was found when needed. We had depended on generous donations and bequests until Legatee Rob Allison introduce Badge Day in 1958 and Melbourne's Torch Society became a valuable supporter base for bequestors and donors.

By the early 1950's, as Junior Legatee children were proceeding to maturity, Melbourne Legacy considered its further role in relation to widows as other Junior Legatee children were proceeding with support to maturity. In 1955 older widows (i.e. greater than 50 years of age) began to meet at Legacy House and it was decided to form a senior widows club. Within 2 years this club had 1,400 members and about 600 met monthly. By 1961 2,800 widows were meeting in 3 groups. From this beginning; widows clubs followed the decentralisation of Melbourne Club with the Branch and Group structure. Other Legacy Clubs followed this initiative.

From its 5th decade on war the annual statistics of the Coordinating council mark the changing pattern of Legacy Service.

In 1961 there were: 4,500 active Legatees
 36,000 widows (213 WWI)
 26,000 children (17,500 less than 16 years)

In 1973 5,900 active Legatees
 84,000 widows (half WWI and half WWII)
 30,000 children (14,000 less than 16 years)

In 2011 106,600 widows
 530 children
 1,300 Dependents with Disabilities

In 2018 4,100 Active Legatees
 58,000 widows
 2,000 other Dependents

As the 20th century ended with World War II, Widows and Dependents ageing and Legatees also ageing considerations have occurred regarding Legacy's mission, relevance and structure. Direct military conflicts have involved the ADF in Korea, Malaya, Borneo, Vietnam, Timor, the Middle East and Afghanistan. Peace keeping service casualties on the period 1953 – 2010 include 77 deaths in service.

Social Service and support structures in the current era are different and the place of Legacy in this area requires continuing address and review.

The past 30 years have seen considerable change in the composition of the Legatee Community and our club organisation with:

- (1) Alterations of eligibility criteria for Legatee membership and those we serve
- (2) With changing social interactions
- (3) With increasing government regulation of not for profit organisations
- (4) With differing expectations of younger people

In 1973 when Mark Lyons expressed an “either/or “approach to the future of Legacy. He was not able to foresee a flexibility and adaptability which has emerged / despite the internal challenges of structure and function.

Legacy has demonstrated a continuing capacity to adapt and accommodate in the service of those we have served.

The future is in our hands.