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Introduction

ON THE EVENING of May 8, 1929, police were called to a disturbance at the premises of the Adult Deaf and Dumb Society of New South Wales in Sydney. Deaf people were protesting the dismissal of welfare officer Herbert Hersee, the Society's most senior employee. During the course of the evening, the police were obliged to call for reinforcements in their efforts to quell the unusual gathering. The next day, the event was reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald* as a "demonstration" and an "angry meeting."

This event was one of many expressions of discontent and attempts to challenge the established deaf welfare organizations in Australia during the late 1920s and 30s. During this period, deaf Australians, like deaf people in a number of other countries, challenged the "charity" model of most of the schools and service organizations that served them, and they took significant steps toward autonomy and citizenship. The gains they made were temporary, however, and they disappeared during the war years and post-war period. Not until later in the twentieth century did deaf adults again assert their right to more representation and autonomy in their social and political organizations. The efforts of the earlier wave of activists in the first part of the twentieth century had been largely forgotten by then; however, these attempts to "manage their own affairs" were a significant expression of deaf people's aspirations. They reflected similar aspirations in other minorities within Australia and also paralleled deaf people's activities in other Western countries.

During this period, deaf people were very active, both in establishing new organizations that served their needs and in resisting the controls imposed on them by some of the older organizations. These efforts reflected some of the broader social movements of the time and demonstrated parallels with other Australian minority groups, such as Aborigines and women, in their articulation of themselves as citizens,

their search for advancement and equal rights, and their challenges to a charity model of service provision. Deaf communities became the sites of power struggles between some hearing administrators and a growing number of deaf people and hearing supporters who wished to have more control over their institutions and more equality with hearing people—aspirations that they often described as “managing their own affairs.”

Many of the people involved were charismatic and ambitious individuals, some of whom had migrated to Australia from Britain or Ireland, bringing with them well-developed beliefs about how Deaf communities should be organized, and in some cases, unrealized personal ambitions that impacted their activities in Australia. Inevitably, many of the personalities and ideologies clashed, and the organizations they established were affected by these clashes.

The International Context

The historical development of Deaf communities and their sign languages is emerging in increasing detail around the world.¹ The work of historians has shown that by the close of the nineteenth century, when this study begins, education for deaf children was well established in Europe, North America, Australia, and many other regions. Deaf communities using signed languages were clearly defined and active in many countries. During the final few decades of the nineteenth century, growing numbers of deaf individuals had significant roles in forming community groups and national organizations, and establishing, administering, and teaching in schools for deaf children. However, these developments were being countered in many countries by a swing toward methods of educating deaf children that focused on teaching oral communication to the exclusion of signed languages, sharply reducing the numbers of deaf teachers in classrooms; and encouraging the spread of eugenic beliefs that sometimes mitigated against Deaf communities and deaf intermarriage.²

Most modern studies of Deaf history focus on deaf people’s agency and creativity in seeking community, developing and nurturing signed languages, and forming identities and cultural worldviews that value deaf people and their contributions to the world—a theoretical framework that is now referred to as *Deaf gain*.³ This has often run counter to wider social attitudes and has necessitated attempts to explain that deafness is not necessarily the tragedy that many believe it to be. As

early as 1779, a deaf Frenchman, Pierre Desloges, felt obliged to write, "Nature has not been as cruel to us as is commonly assumed."⁴ This was an early and succinct statement of one of the central values of Deaf communities, which have consistently rejected pity on account of their deafness, although they will claim it for those deaf people who are isolated, stigmatized, and language-less. This lack of self-pity has not always sat comfortably with the attitudes of hearing benefactors, who have frequently been motivated by pity, and who have regularly relied on evoking the sympathy of supporters.

Even when deaf people's impetus to come together is approved by others, tensions have often developed between deaf people who desire to build communities and establish institutions and those hearing people who wish to do it for them. Owen Wrigley has suggested that these tensions should be the real focus of Deaf history. He poses the question, "Isn't Deaf history really about the small land wars at the margins of society and self-identity, exactly where the Hearing administrations of the Deaf through these institutions don't quite succeed in controlling or suppressing Deafness?"⁵

Many of the events explored in this book are the "small land wars" that emerged in the Australian Deaf community in the early twentieth century, and they find parallels in other countries' Deaf community histories.

Great Britain

British institutions for deaf people were particularly influential in colonial Australia. Most early European immigrants to Australia were British or Irish, including deaf people and those who knew and worked with them. British varieties of sign language formed the origins of Australian Sign Language (with a minority developing Irish-Australian Sign Language), and British educational and social institutions for deaf people were imported to Australia virtually intact during the nineteenth century.⁶ British philosophies of social and charitable service provision also informed the attitudes and culture of the developing colonial society in Australia.

Deaf adults in Britain had begun to gather for social activities and religious worship from the 1820s onwards, usually led by hearing people with evangelical or education connections. Over the next few decades, these gatherings evolved into charitable organizations variously called *missions*, *institutes*, *benevolent societies*, or *associations*, many of them set

up by the Institution for Providing Employment, Relief, and Religious Instruction for the Deaf and Dumb. The missions held regular religious services and became centers for the social lives and leisure activities of deaf people around the country. Each mission usually had a leader who was known as a *missioner*. Most of these missioners were hearing, but some were deaf. The missioner's role was to "provide care and welfare for the deaf people in their areas, which included finding work and apprenticeships They also acted as advocates and advisors to deaf people . . . as well as providing interpreting between sign language and spoken language for deaf and hearing people."⁷ Missioners could become quite powerful within their local Deaf communities and could entrench dependency among deaf people. According to Paddy Ladd, the missioner " . . . facilitated and controlled Deaf people's access to the society which surrounded them, but was also the gatekeeper for that society's representatives."⁸ Ladd has described the power struggles that sometimes ensued between deaf members and missioners.

These missions, with their close connections to the established Protestant churches, were the model for early Australian Deaf societies, and the role of missioner or superintendent was also imported to Australian organizations. Britain and Australia both differed from the more secular organizations for adult deaf people that were developing in the United States.

The late nineteenth century also saw the establishment and consolidation of national organizations for deaf people in some countries, reflecting the growth of Deaf communities that made it possible for them to meet and debate issues on a national level. In the United States, the National Association of the Deaf was formed in 1880, with one of the reasons for its formation being the desire of deaf people to "attain the ability to intelligently administer [their] affairs."⁹ The British Deaf and Dumb Association began in 1890 for similar reasons, although usually hearing people held the leadership roles.¹⁰

Transnational relationships between Deaf communities also began to develop during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Deaf people in Europe and North America traveled more frequently across the Atlantic, with the explicit purpose of gathering with other deaf people.¹¹ International congresses and gatherings were held with increasing regularity, such as the International Congress of the Deaf and Dumb in Paris in 1889 and the World's Congress of the Deaf in Chicago in 1893 (an offshoot of the World's Fair), and drew enthusiastic crowds. Such meetings provided opportunities for deaf people to observe and

discuss how those in other environments dealt with their common experiences, how different kinds of education systems worked, and how Deaf communities fostered the growth of signed languages. These gatherings also provided forums for deaf people to debate and respond to the issues that affected their lives.

From the late nineteenth century onwards, many Deaf organizations began producing their own newspapers, which were distributed widely. These newspapers helped to bring together national Deaf communities, and many were also sent to Deaf communities in other countries, increasing deaf people's awareness of each other and making it more possible for them to influence each other.¹² British and American deaf newspapers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were usually available in Australian Deaf missions and societies, and often included news from Australia. Newspapers facilitated further transnational contact between deaf individuals and groups, such as letter-writing. One letter-writing group, the Cosmopolitan Correspondence Club, was initiated in Australia and included deaf people in France, Scotland, Wales, Canada, and the United States.¹³

The Australian Background

Australia was colonized by the British in 1788 and was initially a penal colony. Little is known about the position of deaf people in Aboriginal societies prior to European arrival, although linguists report that signed communication has always been used within some Aboriginal language groups for specific purposes, such as communicating during mourning periods or while hunting.¹⁴

A number of deaf people were included in the convict transports to Australia, beginning with Elizabeth Steel. She was sentenced in London's Old Bailey in October 1787 to seven years transportation, for stealing a watch while engaged in prostitution. Her trial had proceeded, however, only after a special session "to enquire whether she stood mute wilfully and of malice, or by the visitation of God."¹⁵ Once the jury was satisfied that she was actually deaf, she was tried and convicted, and arrived at Sydney Cove on the *Lady Juliana* in June 1790. From there, she was taken to Norfolk Island, where she served out her sentence. She returned to Sydney at the expiration of her sentence in 1794, but died soon afterwards.¹⁶ Other deaf convicts were John Fitzgerald, who arrived in 1819, and James Smith, who arrived in 1827. Both of these men had interpreters at their trials at the Old Bailey, so they were sign

language users.¹⁷ They would each have been alone within a rough frontier community, negotiating barracks, chain gangs, pleas for leniency, and eventual freedom within the new colony.

Other British deaf people came to Australia as free settlers. An example was John Carmichael, who arrived in Sydney from Scotland in October 1825. He was a twenty-one-year-old engraver.¹⁸ The fact that he was “deaf and dumb” was remarked on in newspaper references to his work and by government officials who commissioned work from him.¹⁹ His use of English in some of his surviving correspondence with the colonial secretary also exhibits mistakes typical of a moderately educated deaf person.²⁰ Carmichael completed a wide range of engraving work during his career in New South Wales, including maps, charts, stamps, and illustrations for tourist guides. He self-published a collection of six engravings (from his own drawings) in 1829, *Select Views of Sydney, New South Wales*. He was considered by the postmaster general to be “the most competent engraver in Sydney.”²¹

Carmichael had attended the Edinburgh Institute for the Deaf and Dumb as a child and was a fluent signer. Fellow students have left accounts of him entertaining his schoolmates with signed stories about cock fighting and horse racing, describing him as “proud of being . . . great in our eyes” when he came to school with new stories to sign.²² Carmichael displayed considerable independence and assertiveness in maintaining his career as an artist and engraver. He died in 1857.

Henry Hallett was a small child when he arrived in Adelaide on the *Africaine* in 1836.²³ He would have been similar to many other deaf children who came to Australia with their families who were seeking a new life. Hallett’s story is known to Deaf people today largely because he was the first of many generations of Deaf Halletts, some of whom still live in Adelaide. Henry’s father John was part owner of the *Africaine* and became a successful pastoralist in South Australia.²⁴

The Beginnings of Education

Some deaf children in colonial Australia, such as Henry Hallett, were sent back to Britain for their education. Others had to wait until the first schools began to appear in the major population centers. The first two schools for the deaf were both established by British deaf men. Thomas Pattison was born in Scotland in 1805 and attended the Edinburgh Institute for the Deaf and Dumb at the same time as John Carmichael. Pattison spent some years at his former school as a monitor and also worked as a coach painter; he was secretary and treasurer

of the Edinburgh Deaf and Dumb Benevolent Society for 23 years. He emigrated to Sydney in 1858 to join his brother there.²⁵

Pattison soon met the Lentz family, which had three adult deaf daughters, and through them became aware of other deaf children in Sydney. Some unsuccessful attempts had previously been made to establish classes for deaf children by an English migrant named Sherrington Gilder, but Pattison was to meet with more success.²⁶ With support from the Lentz family, he began classes for deaf children in Sydney on October 22, 1860, the first in Australia. These classes soon evolved into a small school, with deaf children slowly trickling in from around the colony. Pattison was principal of the school, with two of the hearing Lentz daughters working as assistant teachers. This would not have been unusual in the British education system, which was Pattison's model. There were many deaf teachers in Britain, including some who



Thomas Pattison.
Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children, Australia.

established and led new schools for the deaf, such as Matthew Burns.²⁷ However, Pattison's career in the school he began was not to be a long one—he was dismissed by the school's board of management in 1866 for reasons that remain unclear.²⁸

Pattison's school, later known as the New South Wales Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind, began education for deaf children in Australia, and it was a significant beginning in other ways too. He used the British "combined method" in this school, communicating with his pupils through British signs and fingerspelling. Pattison's school, together with the school begun soon afterwards in Melbourne, established British signing dialects as the prototype of the sign language that was to develop in Australia. These schools also established manual communication as the method of instruction in Australian schools for the deaf. Even though oralist influences soon began appearing in individual classes and teachers, Australian schools for deaf children had a long signing tradition that was not seriously challenged until after World War II.

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

Pattison's school was Australia's first by only three weeks. Another deaf man, Frederick John Rose, opened a similar school in Melbourne in November 1860. Rose's career lasted longer, and his life is better documented.²⁹ He was born in Oxford in 1831 and attended the Old Kent Road Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb in London. He emigrated to Melbourne in 1852 with his brother, part of the huge influx of migrants who came in search of gold in the 1850s.

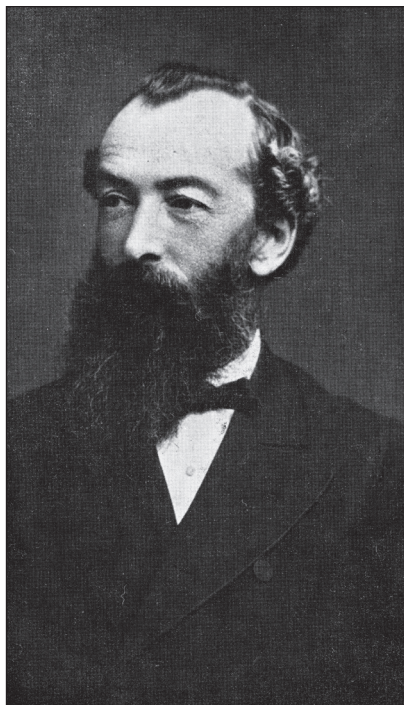
In February 1859, some correspondence in the Melbourne newspaper *The Argus* led to Rose discovering a new calling. Two letters in the newspaper signed by "G" and "Widow" claimed that more than 50 deaf and dumb children were living in Victoria, with no educational provision for them. The writer appealed for the establishment of some form of schooling for her deaf daughter, otherwise she would be "put to the peril and danger of a sea voyage to get her educated in Old England, but should such an institution arise here, I would enrol myself a life subscriber."³⁰ This letter-writer was Sarah Lewis, and she was referring to her eight-year-old stepdaughter Lucy. Rose replied to these letters a few days later, writing,

I would beg to state that I am deaf and dumb, and have received a good education in the asylum in the Old Kent-road, London, where I was for five and a half years; and, knowing the great necessity that exists for the instruction of the deaf and dumb, who, unless some little knowledge be imparted to them, cannot tell good from evil, I should feel most happy to further the views of your correspondents in establishing an asylum for the instruction of those who may be unfortunately deaf and dumb; or, if one were established, I should have no objection to render any assistance in my power in the way of instruction for a fair remuneration.³¹

Following this, Rose made contact with Lewis, advertised for other interested parents of deaf children, and made plans for the establishment of a school. He and his new wife, Elizabeth Manning Telfer (also deaf), opened the school in their rented home in Prahran, Melbourne, on November 12, 1860, just three weeks after Thomas Pattison had opened his in Sydney. The school was called the Victorian Deaf and Dumb Institution.³²

Although Rose also worked under a committee of hearing men, he seems to have fared much better than Pattison and had a long and well-regarded career at the school, as both principal teacher and superintendent. His teaching was favorably mentioned in a number of government inspections of the school. He not only taught the pupils, but also trained many of the teaching staff, including several deaf teachers. Some of these deaf teachers were recruited from Europe, such as Miss Frances Lorigan, who had been educated at the Claremont Deaf and Dumb Institution in Dublin before being appointed in 1864.³³ Other deaf teachers were recruited from among the students and became pupil teachers, in accordance with common practice in all schools at that time. David Piper was an example of such a pupil-teacher.³⁴

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



Frederick John Rose.
Deaf Children Australia.

Although F. J. Rose was commemorated for many years in the Victorian Deaf community with an annual “Rose Day,” after the 1930s, he shared the fate of Pattison in joining the largely forgotten generations of deaf teachers, whose contributions were lost for a time and are only recently being rediscovered. Like Jean Massieu, Laurent Clerc, John Creasy, George Banton, and countless others, their work was overshadowed and marginalized by the professionalization of teaching and the ascendancy of oralism.³⁵ In this respect, Australian Deaf history falls neatly into line with that of other countries in the western world.

Several other schools for the deaf were established around Australia during the late nineteenth century. The schools interacted with each other and the Deaf communities in a variety of ways. When the New South Wales Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind and the Victorian Deaf and Dumb Institution (VDDI) became well established, deaf children from further afield were sent to them, including some children from other states that did not yet have schools for the deaf. For

example, a number of Tasmanian and South Australian deaf children went to VDDI in Melbourne, and some Queensland deaf children were sent to the New South Wales Institution. When the South Australian Institution for the Blind and Deaf and Dumb opened in 1874, some of their teaching staff were recruited from VDDI, most notably Samuel Johnson, who became principal of the South Australian Institution in 1885.³⁶ VDDI also provided the first staff for the Western Australian Deaf and Dumb Institution when it opened in 1896. Prior to this, many deaf children from Perth had been sent to the South Australian school.

The Queensland Blind, Deaf and Dumb Institution opened in 1893. Its first teachers, Miss Sharp and Thomas R. Semmens, were also recruited from VDDI. Most of the Queensland deaf children who had been traveling to Sydney for their education subsequently transferred to the Queensland Blind, Deaf and Dumb Institution, as had happened with Western Australian children returning to Perth from the South Australian Institution for the Blind and Deaf and Dumb. The Tasmanian Blind, Deaf and Dumb Institution opened in 1901.

These schools precipitated much movement among deaf children and those who worked with them, and the results of that may be evident in modern dialects of Australian Sign Language (Auslan). Pattison, like Carmichael, would have brought a northern (or Scottish) dialect of British Sign Language with him and used it in his work with deaf school children and other deaf associates in Sydney. Rose would have used a southern, or English, dialect and would not only have introduced it to his pupils, but also passed it on to the many teachers he trained. Although other deaf adults from varying parts of Britain and Ireland also migrated to different Australian cities and brought with them their dialects or sign systems, there are today two dominant dialects of Auslan—northern and southern—so the deaf students who moved around likely brought the signs they had learned with them.³⁷

The Catholic Church also established schools for deaf children, beginning with Rosary Convent at Waratah near Newcastle in 1875.³⁸ Two other Catholic schools—St. Gabriel's School for Deaf Boys at Castle Hill in Sydney and St. Mary's School for the Deaf at Portsea near Melbourne—were established in the twentieth century. These schools were begun by Dominican nuns and Christian Brothers from "parent" schools in Ireland. One of the first teachers at the Waratah school was an Irish deaf nun, Sister Gabriel Hogan. Irish Sign Language was used as the medium of instruction and socialization in these schools until the 1950s, evolving into Australian-Irish Sign Language (AISL) and creating

a language minority within the Australian Deaf community.³⁹ Graduates of these schools continued to use AISL among themselves and with their families, although they also learned the British-influenced Auslan and used that for their interactions with the broader Deaf community.⁴⁰

Despite the efforts put into the establishment and development of these schools, education for deaf children did not become compulsory until the early decades of the twentieth century, after lengthy advocacy by the schools, Deaf societies, and Deaf communities.⁴¹ All of the schools described above (apart from the Catholic schools) later came under the control of their respective state governments and were the major education centers for deaf children in those states until the middle of the twentieth century.

The schools played several important roles in the Deaf community during the late nineteenth century, in addition to their primary function of educating young deaf people and preparing them for work and citizenship in the wider community. They all brought together scattered populations of deaf children, were the primary centers for enculturating these children and transmitting sign language, and played key roles in building the social networks that formed the basis of Deaf communities around Australia. Each school had additional unique influences on their local Deaf communities. In Melbourne, deaf school staff such as Rose took leadership roles in the establishment of the Deaf Society in Victoria; in South Australia and Queensland, hearing teachers played key roles in organizing deaf people and beginning the missions; and in Sydney, the school provided a meeting place for the local Deaf community for many years.

The influence of the schools was facilitated by late nineteenth-century social and education systems, which allowed deaf people to take important roles in schools and missions without some of the obstacles that were to arise in the twentieth century—for example, the widely used pupil-teacher system of the nineteenth century was an accessible and culturally appropriate way for deaf people to become teachers.

Establishment of the Missions and Societies

Once the schools were established and the Deaf communities in each state began to coalesce, the demand for organizations and services for adult deaf people emerged. The British missions provided ready models for Australian deaf people, and their expectations and needs were shaped by those of their British counterparts—a meeting place, a center

for religious worship, regular social and sporting activities, and some activities for the “uplift” and continuing education of the community. An implicit function of the missions was also to keep deaf people off the streets and out of undesirable places.⁴²

The histories of the Australian missions and societies are relatively well documented. The Adult Deaf and Dumb Society of Victoria was the first to be established in 1884. (It was originally called the Victorian Society for Promoting the Spiritual and Temporal Welfare of the Deaf and Dumb, and then the Adult Deaf and Dumb Mission from 1886, before changing to the Adult Deaf and Dumb Society of Victoria early in the twentieth century.)⁴³ The people who were active in its establishment included deaf men, such as Rose, brothers John, Adam, and William Muir, Matthew Miller, and David Piper. The British influence on these men was obvious, as Rose and two of the Muir brothers had been educated in England and Scotland. The next state to establish a mission was South Australia in 1891. The superintendent of the South Australian Institution for the Blind and Deaf and Dumb was Samuel Johnson, a hearing Irishman, and he also took a key role in the beginnings of the Mission in that state—the South Australian Adult Deaf and Dumb Mission—as he had in Victoria previously. For many years, he was superintendent of both the school and the mission, but relied on several deaf and hearing men to do most of the work in building up the mission. One of these deaf men was Eugene Salas, who worked under Johnson as missionary from 1892 until his death in 1915.⁴⁴

New South Wales (NSW) did not establish a formal Deaf Society until 1913; however, there were church services and regular meetings for adult deaf people for many years before that, usually associated with the NSW Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind (the school that Pattison had started). Once again, deaf people were very active in these developments. The most prominent was Fletcher Booth, a long-term resident of New South Wales and one of the early pupils at the institution. Booth was an untiring advocate and involved in many different stages of Deaf community development over his long life—from the early years of unofficial gatherings in borrowed spaces, to the beginnings of the Deaf Society, and later as part of the radical breakaway from the society that he had helped to establish.⁴⁵ From 1891 onwards, Booth was given a stipend from the school board to work “for the uplift of the Adult Deaf.”⁴⁶ The NSW Deaf community was supported by Samuel Watson, the superintendent of the institution, and several other hearing men, some of whom had deaf relatives. Watson

helped to secure some additional land adjoining the school site, and a building was constructed there in 1902 for the use of the adult Deaf community.⁴⁷ Although they did not have a Deaf Society, the NSW Deaf community was organized and active by the early twentieth century.

The Queensland Adult Deaf and Dumb Mission began in 1903, after several years of meetings and religious study groups convened by a hearing teacher of the deaf, Thomas Semmens, and an Irish deaf woman, Martha Overend Wilson. Wilson continued to organize the groups on her own after Semmens withdrew due to illness. She was one of the leaders of the group of deaf and hearing people who later met to organize the new Mission, and she continued to play a primary role in the development of the Mission and in later events.⁴⁸ Although other deaf women were active during these years, none had such a prominent or visible role as Wilson. The Queensland Mission, like the one in South Australia, employed a deaf missionary (later superintendent), Samuel Showell.⁴⁹ The Deaf societies of Western Australia and Tasmania were formed in the late 1920s.

Most of the early Deaf societies used the services of local ministers who were sympathetic to deaf people or had deaf relatives, who were former or serving teachers of the deaf, or deaf people themselves. Victoria was the first state to recruit a hearing missionary from Britain—Ernest Abraham, whose far-reaching influence on Australia's Deaf community will be described in later chapters.

Although some deaf people had explicit leadership roles in the new missions and Deaf societies, many more worked for them in other capacities, such as caretakers, domestic staff, and collectors. In an era when such organizations depended almost entirely on public donations or "subscriptions," the role of collector was critical to the Deaf schools and Deaf societies, as well as to almost all other charity organizations. Collectors canvassed specific areas of the state served by their organization, visiting homes and businesses and collecting subscriptions from the public. They were paid a percentage of the amount they collected. It was the money raised by collectors that made possible the payment of teachers' and missionaries' salaries, the purchase of land, and the construction of schools and mission buildings in most Australian states. The majority of collectors for the schools and missions were deaf, and it was usually a sought-after occupation. Because collectors were in regular contact with the area they canvassed, they were the most likely to know the whereabouts of isolated deaf people and families with deaf children. They were often relied upon to help recruit pupils

for the schools and new members for the Deaf societies and missions. Collectors also became the public face of their organizations, and they were expected to be well dressed and of “good character.” Their access to the public sometimes gave them the opportunity to pursue agendas that competed with those of the missions, and this will be described in later chapters.

While the Deaf societies and missions were becoming established, deaf people were also building the infrastructure for other networks, particularly sport. The Victorian Deaf Cricket Club was established in 1881, and other states followed suit. An interstate (or “intercolonial” as it was before 1901) cricket match was first held in Adelaide in 1894 between Victoria and South Australia; another one between New South Wales and Victoria was held in Melbourne the following year, and interstate competitions continued regularly, expanding to include other sports.⁵⁰ These interstate excursions drew other deaf people as well, not just the cricketers, and from the outset, they provided the opportunity for meetings, conferences, and social gatherings.

A small conference held during the 1895 gathering in Melbourne was reported on in several issues of *The British Deaf-Mute* and revealed some of the emerging issues for Australian deaf people.⁵¹ The conference chairman was F. J. Rose, who stressed the need for regular national gatherings in order to “enhance the social sphere, elevation of culture, higher polish and asserted independence” of Australian Deaf communities. Other deaf people addressed the conference on education for the deaf (David Piper of Melbourne), the superiority of deaf collectors over hearing collectors (G. Gibson of Adelaide), the advantages of mutual improvement societies (W. H. Bostock of Adelaide) and “self-development” (Fletcher Booth of Sydney), and the perceived risks of intermarriage among deaf people (Eugene Salas of Adelaide). This last paper reflected the European and American preoccupations with deaf intermarriage at that time and the spread of these eugenic ideas in Australia.⁵² Deaf people seem to have been predominant in the organizing and presentation of this conference, indicating their growing independence and visibility within their organizations.

The Australian Deaf community at the beginning of the twentieth century appeared to be optimistic and energetic—poised to manage their own affairs.