The role of special edition editorials in forging and maintaining links between newspapers and the communities they serve

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Abstract
Successful newspapers manage to carve out a niche for themselves with the communities they seek to represent, often appealing to what they perceive as the particular needs and interests of prospective readers. This is particularly evident in the case of newspapers in rural and regional communities that are in the early stages of development. This paper looks at the development of newspapers in two emerging communities, the Northern Territory and Tasmania’s north-west coast, during the late nineteenth century and explores how they use editorials to build and maintain their relationship with readers, both in their set-up period and during milestone events in their history.

Keywords: editorials, relationship-building, Tasmanian newspapers, Northern Territory newspapers

INTRODUCTION
Nineteenth-century Australia has a strong history of newspaper development, as the research of scholars like Kirkpatrick (2000, 2011) and Cryle (1990) attests. Throughout the various colonies newspapers regularly commenced – and in some cases just as quickly closed. Others, however, managed to flourish and grow with the communities they represented. The reason why some newspapers succeeded while others failed cannot be attributed to one factor, and must be analysed on a case-by-case-basis – a task which is well beyond the remit of this paper (for further reading on the economics of newspapers, see the prolific writings of Robert Picard). However, one thing becomes clear very early when looking at the histories of the successful newspapers: they succeeded because they were able to connect with the people of the communities they sought to represent. Equally, they were able to adapt to the changing needs and interests of these communities. This they achieved in a number of ways, including staving off competition when it emerged (by proving that their product was better or more relevant, by absorbing the competition, or by merging with any rivals to make a stronger newspaper with a broader subscriber base).

This is particularly evident in the two case studies which are the focus of this particular paper. During the late nineteenth century, Darwin, now the largest population centre in the Northern Territory, and the settlement around Burnie on Tasmania’s north-west coast were pioneer communities. Darwin had been established in 1869 by George Woodroffe Goyder, South Australia’s Surveyor General of Lands (Flinders Ranges Research, n.d.). Originally part of New South Wales, in 1863 the Northern Territory was granted to South Australia by a proclamation signed by Queen Victoria and in 1911 responsibility was taken over by the Commonwealth Government. (NT Parliament, n.d.). Self government was granted to the territory on July 1, 1978 (NT Parliament, n.d.). Darwin’s development was inspired by the desire of South Australian pastoralists to gain more land – a push which began in 1858 (Flinders Ranges Research, n.d.). In the early days Darwin’s population was small. According to Census data, there were 407 people living there in 1881, 872 in 1891, and 864 in 1901. By 1911, the population had increased to 3271. Early census data did not include Indigenous people (National Archives of Australia, n.d.).

Likewise, Tasmania, known as Van Diemen’s Land to 1855, had once been a part of New South Wales, before being granted self government in 1856 (Townshley, 1956). Initially the focus had been on the major centres at Port Dalrymple (now Launceston), in the north, and Hobart Town (now Hobart), in the south.
Tasmania’s north-west coast was relatively sparsely populated during the late nineteenth century, although it had been first explored early in the century. Its economic development began with the establishment of the Van Diemen's Land Company in 1824 (Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service, n.d.). In 1826, the company was granted the equivalent of 1000 square kilometres of land at Circular Head on the far north-west coast to provide wool for British textile mills. In the 1840s the main population centre on the coast, Emu Bay, was renamed Burnie, in recognition of the contribution of one of the directors of the Van Diemen's Land Company (Tasmanian Communities Online, n.d.).

During the late nineteenth century, the region was provided with an economic boost in the form of major west coast mineral discoveries, including silver and lead at Mt Zeehan in 1885, gold and copper at Mt Lyell in 1886, tin at Renison Bell in 1890, copper, lead and zinc at Rosebery in 1893–1894 and silver at Mt Lyell in 1893 (Education Department, Tasmania, n.d.). These discoveries, and the development of the VDL Company and other agricultural enterprises, led to the establishment of a number of population centres on the north-west and west coasts. In 1891 the population of the north-west district, of which Burnie was a key hub, was 27,515 (HCCDA, n.d.). By the 1901 census, the population had grown to 34,059 HCCDA, n.d.; Australian Bureau of Statistics, n.d).

Darwin and Burnie had a number of features in common. Both were relatively isolated from their capital cities (in those days, the Northern Territory was still a constituency of South Australia, while the towns on Tasmania’s rugged north-west and west coasts were a considerable distance from Hobart and Launceston, the two major population centres in Tasmania). Both Darwin and Burnie were also similar in a number of other respects. The future success of their respective economies would be inextricably linked to the development of the mining and agricultural industries. Secondly, they were both relatively isolated from the major population centres with which they were connected in terms of cross country travel (rail, horse and carriage). Yet, they had the capacity to establish trading links with other colonies by virtue of their accessibility by sea and through the development of rail links. All of these topics (and in the case of Darwin, its independence from South Australia) provided fodder for an emerging newspaper industry, particularly one that saw an opportunity to establish a foothold in these emerging economies.

Newspapers and Regionalism
Before discussing the role of editorials in developing and maintaining a link with the community they seek to serve, it is important to discuss the concept of regionalism and its place in forming a sense of identity, even parochialism. The concept of regionalism is well-known to political scientists and geographers, predating its emergence as a political and social movement in the 1890s (Gilbert, 1960, as cited in Tanner, 1990). While regionalism has become a politicised or emotionally charged term (McDonald, 1972; Tanner, 1990), it is nonetheless useful from both a political and geographical perspective. Geographers tend to differentiate between ‘natural’ and ‘functional’ regions. The early tendency was to divide regions into ‘natural regions’ (Tanner, 1990, p. 31), which showed a ‘… certain unity of configuration, climate and vegetation’ (Herbertson, 1905, p. 158), more recently, researchers have divided land into ‘functional regions’ that recognise a ‘community of interest’. According to Morgan (1939): ‘The idea of human activity and its results has become inseparable from the idea of a region’ (p. 77).

Political scientists use regionalism to help explain the organisation of space for political and administrative purposes. However, the reality is that the drawing of boundaries ‘is not necessarily a straightforward exercise in either cartography or political science’ (Tanner, 1990, p. 32). Some regions – including those that have developed in Tasmania – are due to a combination of factors, historical, political and administrative. As Soja points out, such regions owe their existence to: ‘… the community forming tendencies of geographical proximity, functional interdependence and a homogeneity of attitudes and values’ (Soja,
success or failure was directly linked to their ability to understand the needs and interests of the community they sought to represent and their ability to provide a strong voice on behalf of those people. While this link is often reflected in the day-to-day reporting of issues, particularly those that have a direct impact on the well-being of the community, such as the provision of infrastructure by local, state and federal tiers of government, the real building blocks for the relationship can be found in the language of editorials that provide a direct connection between the owners and managers of the newspaper and their readers.

The Role and Impact of Editorials

Newspaper editorials, or leaders as they are often called, serve a particular function within newspapers. Unlike the news reports, which are supposed to be balanced and fair, the editorial is considered the voice of the newspaper. It is the editorial through which the newspaper can have its say on a particular issue and allow its own ideological beliefs to emerge (see Sinclair, 1995). As Van Dijk (1996) points out: ‘For those people who read them, they help to make up their minds about the events of the world, even if by critical opposition against them’. This view is further developed by Connor (1996): ‘Good editorials are considered some of the best examples of persuasive writing in all countries; they set standards for written persuasion’ (p. 144, as cited in Ansari & Babaii, 2004). In modern newspapers the responsibility for writing editorials tends to be shared amongst senior writers. However, on early newspapers they were usually written by the editor, who was often also the publisher.

One of the primary functions of editorials is to engage, and retain, readers. For start-up publications, this was often a difficult task, particularly for newspapers seeking to set-up in frontier towns. Not only did they often struggle against competitors, but the population base was frequently small, and the literacy levels were low.

In Australia, the hard copy distribution of newspapers is influenced both by geography and the community of interest that helps define its readers. The former was particularly the case in the early years when distribution of newspapers was contained by a range of factors, including the ability to deliver copies to readers, often by horse or coach. Consequently, much of the newspaper’s potential influence was highly localised. This helps to explain why many developing towns could boast their own newspaper or newspapers. However, their success or failure was directly linked to their ability to understand the needs and interests of the community they sought to represent and their ability to provide a strong voice on behalf of those people. While this link is often reflected in the day-to-day reporting of issues, particularly those that have a direct impact on the well-being of the community, such as the provision of infrastructure by local, state and federal tiers of government, the real building blocks for the relationship can be found in the language of editorials that provide a direct connection between the owners and managers of the newspaper and their readers.

According to Soja (1971), such territorial organisation of space is important, as it ‘… both expresses and helps to maintain the integrity of the group’ (p. 20). These factors all help to explain the role of newspapers in linking in with and then promoting and representing the rights and interests of people who are drawn together by virtue of their residing within a particular area and/or depending on identified industry sectors for much of its economic wealth, for example mining or agriculture. For example, newspaper circulation has been recognised as one of the primary determinants of regional homogeneity (Dickinson, 1964). According to Park (1929), newspaper circulation data can:

Delimit with exceptional accuracy the limits of the local trade area, and to measure at the same time the extent and degree of dependence of the suburbs upon the metropolis and of the metropolis upon the larger region which it dominates (p. 62).

In many respects, the growth of such regions is fostered by the development and maintenance of ‘territorial loyalties’ (Paddison, 1977, p. 50). As Tanner (1990) argues:

People have been conditioned to think of themselves as members of different units – their city or town, electorate, region, state and country. Depending on the circumstances they will identify themselves accordingly, for example, as a Hobartian, Tasmanian or Australian depending on whether they are intrastate, interstate or overseas (p. 34).
pages, with the majority appearing only two or three times per week. Also, they were expensive relative to today’s prices. *The Northern Territory Times*, for example, sold for sixpence in 1873, whereas the Tasmanian-based *Wellington Times and Mining and Agricultural Gazette* sold for 1½d when launched in 1890, although the price of its successor was later reduced to one penny. The financial imperatives that drove the newspaper publishers during this period were reflected in the fact that the first page was devoted to advertising. Editorial content did not appear until page two. Given that this was well before the so-called ‘Rivers of Gold’ from advertising revenue made successful Australian newspapers highly profitable, it is not surprising that the early proprietors used their editorials to not only discuss important contemporary issues, but as a means to remind readers of the need for their ongoing support – a strategy highlighted by the following case studies.

**Case study 1: The Advocate (Burnie, Tasmania)**

The Advocate newspaper first appeared on October 1, 1890 under the title *The Wellington Times and Mining and Agricultural Gazette*. It was founded by Robert Harris and his sons, Robert Day Harris and Charles James Harris (Cyclopedia of Tasmania, 1900). The Harris family had some prior experience of journalism, having worked on and/or owned newspapers in Launceston, Victoria and New Zealand (Tanner, 1990). The launch of the newspaper began a family dynasty which lasted for 100 years and five generations, only ending in 2003 when Rural Press Ltd, then controlled by John B. Fairfax, successfully launched a takeover bid for the company. It was not, however, the first newspaper to be published on the north-west coast. Miller (1953) identifies a number of other provincial papers that either preceded or existed in competition with the *Wellington Times* and its successors, including: the *Devon Herald*, Latrobe (1877–1889); the *North-West Post*, Devonport (1887–1916); the *North-West Chronicle*, Latrobe (1887–1916); the *North Coast Standard*, Latrobe (1890–1894); *Coastal News and North Western Advertiser*, Ulverstone (1890–1893); and *Circular Head Chronicle*, Stanley (1906). Most were short-lived, with just two – *The Advocate* and the *Circular Head Chronicle* – surviving to the present.

The inaugural title of the *Wellington Times* is important in the context of this paper. Wellington referred to the then electoral district which embraced a number of towns, including Wynyard, Emu Bay (Burnie), Stanley and Waratah. The use of ‘agricultural’ and ‘mining’ was a clear acknowledgement of the two primary industries upon which the region depended for its economic growth. The scope of the new enterprise was outlined in its first editorial on October, 1, 1890:

> No large section of people can long afford to be without a newspaper. It is the one thing above all others by which to make known the various needs of a community, and without its aid no district has much chance of securing proper consideration for its various claims. Unless the natural resources and fertile nature of the soil, the healthfulness of the climate, and its wonderful mineral deposits are properly set forth and advocated, the portion of the north-west coast we have decided to represent would be at a disadvantage, as compared with the others possessing the much-needed advocate and, beyond comparison, inferior in all other respects. (‘Editorial’, 1890c, p. 2)

From a marketing or promotional perspective, this editorial is a clever document. It appeals to the various economic interests within the geographic region it aspires to represent. Use of the word ‘advocate’ and the phrase ‘by which to make known the various needs of the community’ are emotive and designed to engender support for its enterprise. In the same editorial, however, it admits that it needs to make a profit to continue its work on behalf of the region:

> We do not pretend that our object is a purely philanthropical one. Our aims are very largely those which actuate all businessmen in their enterprises; all agricultural men in their endeavours to grow two blades of grass where but one grew before; all mining men in their search after the precious metals; and, without
exception, all such men are public benefactors. At the same time, while we hope to make our business profitable, it will be our endeavour, in every legitimate way, to advance the material progress of the district in which we have cast our lot. (‘Editorial’, 1890a, p. 2)

This title lasted just 7 years, before it was changed in 1897 to The Emu Bay Times and North West and West Coast Advocate. While the new title was something of a mouthful, it reflected the wider geographic region the newspaper aspired to represent. It also sought to eliminate any confusion which use of the term ‘Wellington’ carried with it, both with the New Zealand city of the same name, and the local electoral district with which it was no longer associated.

Thus one of the drivers for the name change was identity. In this case, it was primarily geographic. Leaving aside the confusion over the link between the title and the New Zealand city of Wellington, it is clear that the owners of the newspaper were seeking to establish a stronger link between the masthead and the primary circulation area in which the newspaper appeared. However, at the same time, the proprietors clearly did not want the new title to constrain its appeal, as the following extract from the inaugural Emu Bay Times editorial, published on November 2, 1897, suggests:

Of course it goes without saying that the paper has changed only in the matters mentioned, and that so far as its purview is concerned, it remains unaltered, except in the enlargement of scope. Our subscribers and readers in the Wellington province and to the east and south west of Emu Bay may therefore rest assured that our oversight of their interests and advocacy of their rights will be as consistent as heretofore. And that with the continued and increased support we intend to deserve at their hands, the greater opportunities afforded by our additional space will enable us to render them still more energetic and effective service. (‘Editorial’, 1897, p. 2)

Gone also from the title and even the content of the editorial were the words ‘mining’ and ‘agricultural’. While these changes were not explained editorially, other than via the reassurances in the above extract, the reality is that the population was growing, with people employed in a range of sectors outside of mining and agriculture, and while the latter two still underpinned the economic health of the region, their continued inclusion in the masthead may have appeared delimiting, particularly in the eyes of new arrivals to the district.

As with the first editorial in 1890, the newspaper again highlighted the fact that it was a commercial venture, but that its profitability and desire to serve the public interest were linked:

The newspaper, to give a return for the capital invested in bringing it out, must have a sound reason for its existence. This reason must be seen, felt, and admitted, by those on whose behalf it assumes to speak. Either they must recognise that it is a power for good, or it goes under; and when, instead of going under, it goes on from strength to strength, we say that it has justified its existence. The private profit has been found in the public good, and the public good has assured the private profit. This is the satisfactory position of which the enlargement of our paper today gives gratifying evidence. (‘Editorial’, 1897, p. 2)

Underpinning this editorial is a not so subtle reminder that the relationship between the newspaper and its readers contains obligations on both sides. On the part of the newspaper that obligation involves serving the public interest by providing a range of stimulating content (in this case, served by an increase in the size of the newspaper and the variety of stories offered). On the part of the readers, the obligation very clearly is to ensure that they support the newspaper, by taking out subscriptions and paying them when due.

Of course no reader whose eye will scan this morning’s issue will feel that he has made an uphill fight still harder by withholding the assistance he had undertaken to contribute. But if among the noble army of receipt holders there
should be certain disquietude by an inward consciousness of their own shortcomings, let them take heart of grace. Let them be assured that they may yet retrieve all default, and that we stand not only willing but absolutely anxious to blot out all former negligence, to wipe away every evidence of indebtedness, and upon payment well and truly made to make this date of our enlargement the starting point of new and more satisfactory relations. (‘Editorial’, 1897, p. 2)

Thus this editorial of 1,461 words is a call to arms. Not only does it seek to shore up support within its prime circulation area, but also calls on the readers to recognise that the relationship involves rights and obligations on both sides. It admits to the need to make a profit, but in doing so, ties that in with its obligations to provide the readers with a quality product. Despite this, the title lasted just 2 years before another make-over. The new title, introduced on January 4, 1899, was The North Western Advocate and Agricultural and Mining Gazette. Under this title, the newspaper became a daily (on Wednesday, May 31, 1899). However, the title was short-lived, being replaced by the amalgamated masthead The North Western Advocate (Devonport) and The Emu Bay Times (Burnie).

Operating under the motto ‘fair and impartial’, the new masthead was both a throw-back to the past and a sign of the future. The link to the past was the inclusion of ‘Emu Bay Times’ in the title. The acknowledgement of the future was the introduction of the broader phrase ‘North Western’. The link between the past and the future was provided by the inclusion of ‘Advocate’ in the title. Significantly, the first editorial under the new masthead made no mention of ‘Emu Bay Times’, rather, the in-text references were to ‘North Western’ and ‘Advocate’. The use of ‘North-Western’ and ‘Devonport’ and ‘Burnie’, reflected the greater reach of the newspaper and the fact that the region was increasingly being seen as having and needing a united voice, despite the existence of two large and growing population centres in Burnie and Devonport. This is reflected in the wording of the first editorial of the short-lived The North Western Advocate and Agricultural and Mining Gazette on January 4, 1899 which claims that the introduction of a newspaper to a region ‘ineffaceably stamps that locality with the hallmark of progress’. The editorial went on to claim that its arrival ‘therefore, may be taken as an indication of what the future will be’ (‘Editorial’, 1899, p. 2).

As this excerpt reveals, and other portions of the editorial reaffirm, the change of masthead is taken as an opportunity to launch the newspaper as a new entity. Why this is necessary is uncertain. The editorial alludes to ‘a recent political issue’, and of the undesirability of having newspapers act as ‘a political demagogue to domineer over the views of … readers’. It also tells how ‘we come in response to earnest solicitation’, but there is no more direct mention of why the newspaper considered itself a new enterprise. There was certainly no change of ownership to accompany the title. Equally, however, there was no discussion about the legacy of the earlier titles, other than the fact that the newspaper brought with it an ‘already large circle of readers’. The editorial also makes clear that the newspaper sees itself as fulfilling a wide brief:

A newspaper, as a celebrated humorist once observed, ‘is a library, an encyclopaedia, a poem, a history, a dictionary, a time-table, a romance, a guide, a political resume, a bird’s eye view of all the magnanimity and meanness of mankind, and in fact a ground plan of the civilised world!’ The definition, wide as it is, conveys a true interpretation of the function of the public press of today, and in laying it down as our guide, we trust to achieve in a full measure the task set before us. (‘Editorial’, 1899, p. 2)

Significantly, the editorial concludes with a strong statement about the paper’s advocacy role and its links to its readers. It promises that ‘nothing in the future shall be penned in the spirit of presumption, but that in all our acts we shall ever have in view the advancement of the north-western districts on substantial and common-sense lines’. Styling itself simply ‘The Advocate’ provides further reassurance of the role the newspaper intended to play and confirms the paper’s
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intention of maintaining a close link with the community it serves:

We also sincerely thank our numerous subscribers and advertisers for the very liberal patronage they have accorded to ‘The Advocate’ and we feel confident we can assure them that they will never have cause to regret their support. (‘Editorial’, 1899, p. 4)

The change of title on November 13, 1899 followed the decision by Harris and Company the previous year to establish The North Western Advocate, based in Devonport ‘at the invitation of a number of well-known Mersey residents’ (Advocate corporate video, n.d.). The design of the new title was significant in that it highlighted the ‘North Western Advocate’ via a larger font size and bolder typeface, than was the case for ‘The Emu Bay Times’. The two cities that associated with the separate titles (Devonport and Burnie) were in a much smaller font size. This title survived until December 2, 1918 when the title was abbreviated to The Advocate, a name it retains to this day.

In Tasmania today, The Advocate is widely recognised as the voice of the north-west, and to a lesser extent of the west coast. However, there have been battles, including attempts by its Launceston-based rival, The Examiner, and Hobart-based rival, The Mercury, to make inroads into its readership. In fact, it was broadly anticipated that The Advocate would ultimately fall to one of its larger competitors. This did not happen. In 1990, Harris and Co, owners of The Advocate, teamed up with Rural Press to win control of The Examiner, before ultimately agreeing to a takeover bid from Rural Press in 2003. Significantly, however, at neither juncture was a decision made to blend the two newspapers. As discussed elsewhere (Kirkpatrick & Tanner, 2005; Tanner, 1990, 1994, 1995), this could be attributed to the highly parochial nature of Tasmanian politics – a situation which the major newspapers all exploited for commercial reasons. The Advocate and Rural Press correctly realised that from a commercial point of view, there was more to be gained by retaining the separate mastheads than merging them into one paper that would struggle to represent the interests of such a broad region that could not claim to have a single community of interest on local or state-based issues.

Case study 2: Darwin, the Northern Territory

Seventeen years before the first edition of the Wellington Times ran off the presses in Tasmania, residents of Darwin in the Northern Territory received their first newspaper, named The Northern Territory Times. Its launch was announced with little pomp or fanfare. The inaugural editorial touted the newspaper’s appearance as ‘the first ever published on this side of the Australian continent’ (‘Editorial’, 1873, p. 2). The first edition was hastily put together, as the editorial conceded. It consisted of just two pages, a reasonable feat, it argued, given the difficulties faced:

Even as it is, the difficulty of getting out a paper in this remoter settlement, without plenty of time to do it in, has been very great. We have had only five clear days in which to land our machinery, type, &c, and to get everything ready for the issue of this first paper, and that, too, during the hottest period in the year of a tropical climate. (‘Editorial’, 1873, p. 2)

This editorial is quite different to that of the inaugural Wellington Times and Emu Bay Gazette, which discussed the obligations a newspaper had to the community it represented. The Northern Territory Times, on the other hand, made no real plea to the community it was planning to serve. Its only acknowledgement of the task ahead was contained in the following:

… we have the cordial assurance of almost everyone in the place that we are thoroughly welcome, and that every support will be given to us by the public as long as we continue to deserve it. (‘Editorial’, 1873, p. 2)

Ten years after The Northern Territory Times was first published, competition appeared in the form of The North Australian. Unlike the Times, The North Australian’s first editorial, published on June 1, 1883, clearly mapped out its goals:

Our chief aim will be to make the North Australian not only a newspaper, but a
useful guide upon all matters of interest to the Territory, and for this purpose it is our intention to devote the largest portion of this paper to the discussion of matters of common interest, and selections from standard publications upon useful and scientific subjects bearing upon the industries of the community. Our leading articles will deal with all questions of importance to the Territory, such as the laws we live under, and suggested reforms, the progress of local industries, and brief outlines of important political movements in Europe and the colonies. (‘Editorial’, 1883, p. 2)

In an editorial reminiscent of The Wellington Times and Emu Bay Gazette, The North Australian paid particular attention to the Territory’s reliance on the mining and agricultural sectors. However, it went beyond the advocacy role that would be promised by its future Tasmanian counterparts to promise an educational role as well. They promised that they would assist their readers with ‘carefully selected articles from other papers which contain useful hints upon the industries they are engaged in developing’. It promised to provide its ‘country subscribers’ with all the latest information on ‘improvements in mining machinery and new inventions for the treatment of mineral ores’ and for its agricultural readers it held out the promise of ‘valuable information’ on ‘the question of rainfall, suitability of soil for different classes of crops, [and] newest labour saving implements’. However, it also showed that the informational role of newspapers extended beyond technical matters, to include sporting and cultural matters, as well as a column containing news from the other Australian colonies and abroad.

Finally, it sought the engagement of subscribers, calling for ‘Contributions in the form of letters, or essays, upon subjects of interest to the community [which] will be gratefully received, and can either be accompanied by the writer’s name or be contributed anonymously’. It also saw the benefit of expanding its appeal to include readers outside of the main population centres: ‘We will endeavour to obtain reliable correspondence from up-country upon all subjects of interest, and regular reports from the various mining centres will be published whenever obtainable’. This was reminiscent of the strategy to be adopted by the Tasmanian papers.

While the newspaper business is by its very nature highly competitive, with rival organisations doing all they can to win readers from their rivals (Picard, 1989), The North Australian played this down, arguing that the ‘general advancement of the Northern Territory’ was more important:

We quite expect to find many difficulties to surmount and battles to fight, but we would like it clearly understood from the start that it is our earnest wish to pull amicably with the N.T. Times for the general advancement of the Northern Territory. A wholesome spirit of rivalry is, in all matters, productive of improvement, and it is in this spirit we publish the present paper, so that any of our subscribers who expect amusement out of unseemly bickering between the two papers are likely to be disappointed. (‘Editorial’, 1883, p. 2)

The North Australian believed that its attempts to break the monopoly hitherto held by The Northern Territory Times would ‘meet with a fair share of public support’. However, just 7 years later, the competitive spirit had dissipated and the two newspapers amalgamated under the title The Northern Territory Times. In a final editorial, The North Australian and Northern Territory Government Gazette announced the rationale for the merger:

Our experience has been pleasant rather than otherwise. We have endeavoured always to do what seemed to be the right thing, and we can thankfully acknowledge the substantial practical endorsement which our conduct has ever received at the hands of a discriminating public. It must not be thought that we offer this note of thanks as a death knell. Our field of labour will still be among those who have stood by us for so long, and in joining hands with our elder contemporary we do so in the firm hope that the modest efforts of ourselves, in combination with our new colleague, will render substantial service to our country and
The changes in ownership of the newspaper, and some of the personalities who were at the helm during its history, including Vaiben Solomon, a Territory businessman who was elected to the South Australian Parliament, briefly becoming premier.

From a reportorial perspective, it records the highs and lows of the Territory’s developments, while avoiding the difficulties newspapers encounter in undertaking their role. It also makes an interesting claim in relation to the inaugural editorial of The Northern Territory Times:

In its first issue the paper announced its determination to avoid personalities and cliqueism and to fairly represent the interests of all classes of the community as far as lay within its power, and throughout the greater part of its career these principles have been adhered to with a fair amount of consistency and success. ('Editorial', 1923, p. 2)

On February 19, 1921, approximately 2 years before The Northern Territory Times celebrated its fiftieth anniversary, a rival newspaper appeared. The new kid on the block was The Northern Standard. It appeared at an interesting time in the Territory’s history, as acknowledged in the inaugural editorial:

We deem it unnecessary to offer any apology for the publication of the Northern Standard, not withstanding that it sees the light of journalistic day at a time when the social and political sky is gloomy, and the industrial horizon is rendered indiscernible and clouded by chronic and artificial obstacles which not only distract but discourage. We offer no apology because the general public has long pronounced it a necessity, we offer no apology because a fearless, impartial and progressive newspaper is the most powerful lever which can be applied towards the vindication of right and the denunciation of wrong – towards the social, material and mental elevation of the people, and the development of our country towards a higher goal of prosperity and freedom. ('Editorial', 1921, p. 2)
This statement reflects the paper’s ownership. It was established by the Northern Australian Workers’ Union. Given this, it is perhaps surprising that The Standard embraced the following ideals:

… to humbly and respectfully follow in the footsteps of the fathers of the press, and as far as possible uphold the ideals of having ‘Sprung from the people,’ and of having ‘Always worked for the people,’ in such ideals there is no place for the gutter snipe scribbler, for the spiteful slanderer, for the Chuzzlewitian parasite whose soullessness is neither ‘from’ the people nor ‘for’ the people. (‘Editorial’, 1921, p. 2)

To ‘follow in the footsteps of the fathers of the press’ would suggest that the newspaper would struggle to balance its union roots with the demands of a more broadly-based community. Not surprisingly, the two newspapers struggled to compete in the Northern Territory’s limited marketplace. However, it was The Standard which appeared to win the day. On Friday, July 1, 1932, The Northern Standard announced that it had acquired The Northern Territory Times and that the two titles would be merged under the one name. It maintained that the merger ‘was born, not in a spirit of acquisitiveness, or a desire to monopolise, but rather was forced owing to the world’s economic crisis’ and suggested that in such a climate there was only ‘sufficient business’ for one paper (p. 2).

The final editorial published by The Northern Territory Times highlights the complex position of the local newspaper and its role as both an advocate and independent arbiter. It points proudly to its role in fighting for ‘the betterment of the territory’, but emphasises its independence as its parting legacy:

The NT Times has always prided itself on its independence, on its freedom from partisanship, on its right to speak without fear or favour. It has spoken boldly for all that it believed to be right and just; it has favoured no one party unduly, it has awarded praise or blame … as justified. It has upheld freedom and loyalty, and justice; it has fought for the

betterment of the Territory. … We hand on that tradition, and that light, to the personnel of the ‘Standard’ and wish them a greater measure of success than was the fortune of the ‘Times’. We pass on the torch; may it blaze still higher, and awaken an added enthusiasm in those who are to carry on the work which we began. (‘Editorial’, 1932, p. 2)

In a separate comment piece, a former editor, Mr Fred Thompson, wrote of early editions of the Times which:

… reveal a courageous, broadminded virile style of journalism embodying a bold effort to advance the best interest of the Northern Territory and the pioneer spirit of those who had set themselves the task of assisting in its development. That the outcome of their combined efforts has not been more successfully apparent is assuredly no fault of those who strove so strenuously and unselfishly to achieve a purpose not even yet accomplished (p. 2).

The Standard stayed in business for another 22 years. During that time it experienced some competition. For example, from June to September 1934 the Communist Party published The Proletarian (James, n.d.). During WWII, it also faced competition from The Army News, which was launched in October 1941. The following year, on February 19, the day Darwin was bombed, The Standard temporarily closed its doors, resuming publication in June 1946, after the war had ended. It closed its doors in 1955, just 3 years after The Northern Territory News was launched. The precise date of its closure is not known. The NLA has copies of newspapers through to February 10, 1955. However that edition contains no farewell editorial. Nor does it indicate that The Standard would be closing.

CONCLUSION
These two case studies reveal how newspapers use editorials to build and maintain relationships with the communities they serve. The editorials use the language of both promise and exhortation
in building a sense of identity for themselves and a sense of obligation in their community of readers.

In both cases, the newspapers sought to establish a foothold in regional outposts which relied heavily on mining and agriculture for their economic development. While The Advocate in its various manifestations was clearly more successful than The Standard and its predecessors, both case studies show how successful newspapers need to develop as the voice of the region or community they represent. While this may create some problems for the newspaper, particularly in communities that possess a diversity of interests, as the success of The Advocate revealed, such advocacy can bring with it longevity. Newspapers that are less successful in this regard are more likely to be subject to takeover or merger activity as the history of The Standard and its predecessors, The Northern Territory Times and The North Australian reveals.

Of particular interest is the fact that The Standard, with its unashamed union heritage, was able to survive in a mainstream media environment. This showed either resilience or the capacity to adapt to the demands of such an environment, particularly following its merger with The Northern Territory Times, given that when they operated in competition they often presented different interpretations of issues facing the Northern Territory. Clearly, the success of both The Advocate and The Standard highlight the importance of relationship building.

In building and maintaining this relationship with their readers, it is clear that editorials have a critical role to play. This paper has looked at the language of editorials published to coincide with critical events in the history of these newspapers to evaluate how newspapers seek to develop and maintain relationships with their readers. While The Advocate tends to assert more simply its relationship to its locality and, as its name implies, its obligation to fight for the region, The Standard tends to emphasise its independence, indicating that any given geographic region comprises multiple communities of interest and this makes the representative role of local media a complex balancing act. While acknowledging their duty to represent their readers and the region/community in which they are situated, both newspapers nonetheless believe the obligations flow both ways. Newspapers are businesses, and will only survive if they continue to be supported by their communities.

In this respect these early newspapers face both difficulties and obligations that are strikingly similar to the newspapers of the early twenty-first century as many newspapers today try to determine new business models which seek to raise revenue while successfully engaging their community of readers. As contemporary newspapers confront today’s challenges, many are seeking to turn themselves into hyperlocal ‘information centers’ (Edmonds, 2007). In many ways such experiments find a strange echo in the promise of the first issue of The Northern Territory Times that they would provide ‘valuable information’ useful for the daily life and business of their local agricultural and mining readers.

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