

Origins of the Anzac Dawn Ceremony: Spontaneity and Nationhood¹

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Three separate claims to originating the dawn service – a core element of the Australian Anzac Day ritual and sense of Australian national identity – circulate persistently in contemporary Australian culture. This article offers a critical comparative analysis of these claims, examining in particular the complex interactions between official and lay narratives as part of regional and state identity politics, conventions establishing validity and worth, and the ways in which these narratives incorporate and enable multiple origins. In the process it becomes clear that multiple narratives of origin are vital to a strong sense of spontaneous national identity.

Key words: Anzac; dawn service; national identity; spontaneity; place; community identity

The first instance of the Anzac dawn service, according to many scholarly sources, occurred in Martin Place, Sydney in 1927 just as Perth 1929 has been long established as the first documented dawn service in Western Australia.² Yet, in April 2004 the ‘Albany ANZAC Day Dawn Service’ was declared ‘the fourth Western Australian Heritage Icon’ by the Western Australian Department of the Premier and Cabinet.³ Conferral of this iconic status was supported by a claim foregrounding Albany as site of the first observance of the dawn ceremony in Australia.⁴ This recognition was also granted in the face of evidence offered at present in Albany – principally an entry in Padre White’s Register of Services – establishing that the first service in Albany took place in 1930 and, further, that it would not have been possible, for a range of reasons, for White to have held an earlier unrecorded service. Along with the Sydney claim, and the remarkably persistent tale of Albany as home to the first dawn service despite

evidence to the contrary, there is a third contender for the honour of first dawn service: namely, Toowoomba, Queensland, 1919.

This article explores how and why these various claims continue to circulate, and how they do so as ‘true’ multiple instances of origin. It traces their complex and ongoing negotiation of national and local histories in terms of local, regional and national identity politics, and offers a brief examination of key conventions shared across the various narratives of origin as each works to establish itself as valid and worthy. It concludes by foregrounding the ways in which the narratives enable and incorporate a multiplicity of origins. This study is not concerned to assess the historical accuracy or ‘truth’ of these claims, or to valorise either ‘lay’ or ‘official’ narratives. Rather, both lay and official narratives are understood as discursive reconstructions of ‘the past’ occurring within what John Frow terms ‘the specific and formative circumstances of the present’.⁵ This article thus does not set out to identify a/the ‘rightful’ singular origin. Indeed, it argues that this multiplicity of origins supports a fundamental sense of Australian national identity as a broadly-experienced spontaneous entity.

A working distinction is drawn here between ‘official’ and ‘lay,’ in which ‘official’ refers to narratives seen to be institutionally legitimated and endorsed, by the State for example, through the work of government departments; or by universities; or through the institutionalised cultural authority of the Australian War Memorial (AWM); and similarly the Australian Broadcasting Commission – authority for these last two conferred by State origins and funding. Given this breadth, ‘official’ can thus present, in an often undifferentiated manner, both professional and lay discourses and narratives as articulated through a specific institution. In addition, these official

sources operate in the culture in differing ways and with varying levels of authority in a given context, just as they have varying motivations. These fundamental differences notwithstanding, the category of 'official' is here intended to segregate claims made by institutional sources from those public claims produced 'outside' these institutions by volunteer, amateur individuals and community groups (albeit often with the assistance of government funding and/or in response to government heritage agendas), and the popular media.⁶

Two of the three claims examined here circulate as both official and lay narratives. This is not surprising; 'amateur' narratives have long 'preceded and paralleled' official discourses.⁷ The lay case for Sydney 1927 is put forward by William G. Jenkins, President of the Association of Third Australian Infantry Battalions, in his 2002 manuscript *The Dawn Service*, a copy of which resides in the AWM collection. Albany's long-standing claim to originating the dawn service variously as early as 1918, 1923 and 1929 is presented in a plethora of local materials, many of which have been produced from the late 1980s onwards, including articles in newsletters and local newspapers, and locally-produced handouts circulated through the Albany Tourist Bureau, Local Studies Collection and the Princess Royal Fortress Museum in Albany. The Toowoomba claim, as published by the community-managed Toowoomba Education Centre in Queensland in explicit response to 'the revival of interest in Anzac Day and the 1992 Heritage Week theme of *Military Heritage*', appears in a booklet titled *Some Toowoomba and Darling Downs Anzacs*.⁸ Under the heading 'Origins of the Dawn Service and Other Interesting Anzac Facts,' appears 'A Claim for a Toowoomba First by Bernie O'Shea'. O'Shea's 'belief is that Toowoomba had the first [Dawn] service' in 1919 thanks to Captain George Harrington who, according

to O'Shae, landed at Gallipoli on 25 April, 1915 and was later evacuated home to Australia on 12 December 1915.⁹ This claim is reproduced, virtually verbatim, in Di Burke's *Anzac Day: Traditions, Facts and Folklore*, published in 2003 by the Anzac Day Commemoration Committee of Queensland, enabling the narrative to circulate more widely.

These recent narratives have currency within the broader context of a sustained renewal of popular support in Australia for the Anzac tradition following a brief decline in the 1960s and early 1970s.¹⁰ This current engagement is manifest in consistently strong attendances at dawn services and Anzac Day marches across Australia and beyond, in the growing interest in battlefield tours and pilgrimages to Gallipoli and other sites, and in the building of new community memorials.¹¹ In particular, the dawn service has continued to attract significant numbers of participants and mainstream media attention.¹² As Ken Inglis describes it, the dawn service is a spontaneously-created ritual 'with powerful appeal to Australian imaginations'.¹³ Indeed, this 'simple but extremely symbolically charged moment of spontaneous affirmation' was quickly embraced across Australia and is for many 'the core of Anzac Day' which, according to the findings of the 1999 'Australians and the Past' survey, stands out as the principal official anniversary, as 'the only special day with any significant national meaning'.¹⁴

The politics of origin

The claims examined here are active as both official and lay narratives in ways that highlight the interactions between state and lay ownership of the dawn service as part of a layered regional and national politics, aspects of which are variously enabled, if

not called into play, by the discourses of heritage and tourism. At a time when, as some have argued, 'structurally and spiritually, the nation has less substance than ever before', heritage and tourism provide the possibility for recognition of cultural capital and identities on a scale beyond local and national registers.¹⁵ The lay claims can be understood as responses and contributions to the growth of community interest in Anzac Day, as demonstrated above in the Toowoomba claim, and as an expression of, or call to, local pride (in line with broader heritage motivations). They also encode a recent impetus to stake or re-stake regional/local claims in order to establish distinctive local and regional identities and to thus benefit from current and future tourism flows. The Albany and Toowoomba reclamation or invention of their claims to the original dawn services within a heritage and tourism framework – for example, in 2001 Albany hosted a week long (21-28 April) 'Federation Festival – Albany and Albany Anzac Day' featuring a nationally televised Anzac Day Dawn Service – is a clear indication of an ongoing regional (re)appropriation of the dawn service to this end.¹⁶ These lay narratives and, perhaps in particular, the official claims occur also as part of a separate ongoing regional and state politics. Selection of the Albany dawn service as the fourth Western Australian Icon could certainly be read as a 'consolation prize' given that the Icon program is part of the 175th anniversary of Western Australia, which privileges the settlement of Perth in 1829 as the birth of Western Australia rather than the earlier settlement at Albany in 1826. This recognition of Albany's claim is thus on one level part of a larger struggle over origins (just as the cultural weight of the Anzac tradition limits the possibilities for the April icon). In addition, recognising Albany's claim to originating the dawn service by extension allows Western Australia in general to assert, at least locally, a significant place in this national tradition.

Assertions of primacy involve an implicit rejection of prior claims if not an outright repudiation. The Icon program endorsement of the Albany claim, for example, presents an explicit rebuff in which the term ‘conjecture’ is central:

Although there is some conjecture regarding the first observance of the dawn ceremony in Australia, a Church of England clergyman, Reverend Arthur Ernest White is believed to have held the first religious dawn service in Albany.¹⁷

The justification of the Albany dawn ceremony as the fourth heritage icon thus neatly sidelines evidence supporting other claims. This phrasing also positions Albany’s claim as somehow more valid: after all, the Albany claim is ‘believed’ (one presumes by the local community, though this is not clearly stated). On the other hand, Albany is acknowledged specifically in the Icon material as the originating site of the first ‘religious’ ceremony, just as the AWM website – quoted on the Department of Veterans Affairs website in June 2004 – refers to the Sydney ceremony as the first ‘official’ service.¹⁸

The use of ‘conjecture’ and the silence in relation to other claims seems to discount all others; yet the specification of ‘religious’ or ‘official’ implicitly acknowledges other firsts. Claims for Albany as ‘religious’ and for Sydney as ‘official’ first services in this sense are both viable (but not necessarily equal). The emphasis on ‘religious’ ceremony constructs the Albany instance as an innovation if not an improvement, as different from those ‘non-religious’ ceremonies that preceded it. The justification offered in the Icon material cited above links ‘conjecture’ directly to the dawn

‘ceremony’ as opposed to ‘service.’ Taken together, these claims also signal the existence of more than one tradition, namely a civil and a religious tradition. Fittingly perhaps, given that these are official state sources, the qualifiers ‘religious’ and ‘official’ mark an ongoing nationalistic appropriation of the dawn ritual. As Graham Seal points out, the dawn ceremony emerged out of a grassroots ‘need for an element of Anzac Day that avoided the formalities, the imperial and religious rhetoric, the pomp and ceremony’.¹⁹ However, as Seal also notes, the ‘relative spontaneous innovation of the dawn ceremony in the late 1920s’ was ‘quickly appropriated by the Christian religious elements of the observance through the use of the term “service”, thus enacting the ‘ongoing interaction between the formal and the informal’, between grassroots or personal interests and those of the nation-state.’²⁰ At the same time, this claim may be merely asserting that this was the first service in *Albany*, just as White’s church register notation ‘First Dawn Service held in Australia’ may well refer to the first service *he* had held in Australia.²¹

While the above official challenge to prior claims is ambiguous, there is at the same time lay resistance to official narratives. Correspondence from 1999 held in the Albany Local Studies Collection includes an expression of annoyance with Inglis’ alleged ‘sneering reference to the “legend” of Canon White’ and an attempt to redress this by means of sending documentation to the board of the Australian Dictionary of Biography.²² Less directly, each of the three lay claims examined here, by emphasising the role, indeed the primacy, of ‘belief’ implicitly rejects documentary or material evidence (which underpins scholarly claims) as final authority. For example, Joan Bartlett, local Albany historian, calls as evidence the fact that White ‘during his lifetime ... never refuted the claim that he was the founder of the Dawn Service’.²³

White's alleged passive acceptance of the role of founder, and the implicit belief that he would have recorded an objection if this was not the case, carries greater weight than historical evidence pointing to earlier Dawn Services (held, as noted above, not only in the Eastern States, but also in Perth).²⁴

Most importantly perhaps, these various local claims encode a form of ownership. This suggests a further aspect of the politics of origin: staking a claim to having initiated the dawn service is not just about forging a place in the history of this tradition but is also about a role in its future. Though the Albany narrative to date would seem to have a wider appeal and influence than the Toowoomba claim, each claim harbours for the local community possibilities for later involvement in the re-invention of the tradition.²⁵ There is a clear link between these claims and the future 'life' of Anzac Day, the dawn ceremony/service and the meanings they privilege. Irrespective of outcome in terms of official recognition or tourism benefits, these claims are a powerful means of ongoing lay participation in the overall Anzac tradition, just as they have a role to play in the construction of distinctive local and regional community identities.

The Heritage Icons project clearly does more than 'acknowledge' and 'celebrate' the current and presumed here-to-stay Albany ANZAC Day Dawn Service. Icon status also helps to promote and further entrench the event locally if not more widely in the state. Following the announcement, Albany's role was highlighted on the Australian Broadcasting Commission's 720 Perth Afternoon Show, and The Albany City Council and Returned Servicemen's League (RSL) sub-branch have since drawn on this standing in justifications for funding, explicitly referring to 'icon status' and

predicting wider recognition of this status, along with increased tourism to the area.²⁶ Local reportage of Anzac Day 2006 made explicit reference to the 'iconic Dawn Service' as a signifier of importance.²⁷ Even if the extent is difficult to measure, this official acknowledgement of Albany's claim is likely to have played a part in the emergence of increasingly forthright statements in the local media. For example, an article published in 2006 in the *Albany Advertiser* refers unequivocally to the Albany service as 'Australia's original Dawn Service' and as 'Australia's inaugural Dawn Service'.²⁸ Elsewhere the hype has been extended in descriptions of Albany as the 'Anzac capital,' deployed, interestingly, in attempts to resist AWM moves to acquire Anzac artefacts from Albany.²⁹

Icon status is thus a means by which a specific object or practice is vested with what, in the Icon program criteria, is described as 'historic, aesthetic, scientific and social/spiritual values [of importance] for past, present and future generations'.³⁰ It is also an official intervention in the ongoing debate over origins, indicating one aspect of the complex interaction between lay and official history. Interaction of this sort is central to the vitality of the Anzac tradition and myth: the multiple origins are part of 'the persistent potency of Anzac' as Seal describes it, enacting the 'ongoing ability of the myth to link the grassroots and the national, the past, the present and the future'.³¹

The lay narratives, as expressions of local grassroots knowledges and 'beliefs', articulated in the broader framework of community pride, heritage and tourism are in practice more than oppositional, reactive or derivative. The official claims draw on and in some ways incorporate local claims. As Noyes and Abraham point out, the formation of convincing national memory is underpinned by 'preexisting local

performances'.³² In turn, official recognition reinforces local claims while deploying them more widely in the interests of regional, state and national politics.

Conventions of worth

In contrast to the official versions offered by the Icon program and the AWM however, the lay sources do not use the explicit descriptors 'religious' or 'official' as distinguishing elements.³³ Even so, each instance furnishes a particular claim to being special, to being not only unique but also uniquely relevant. Albany's claim rests upon its standing as the site of the departure of the first and second Anzac convoys and thus its (emotive) standing as 'the last sight of land our troops saw of Australia'.³⁴ In addition, irrespective of the local inconsistencies and inaccuracies in dates and details, Albany's claim to being the home of the first dawn service is based on a rich sequential set of local services which encompass much of the Anzac drama. Padre White is alleged to have blessed the Anzac convoy before it sailed; according to one source, this service was conducted 'before embarkation at four in the morning'.³⁵ Some local sources have him, incorrectly, departing in 1914 with the first convoy and returning in 1918 when he is said to have performed, 24 on February 1918, 'a Requiem Eucharist for the Battle Dead' after which 'he and some of the congregation climbed to the summit of Mt Clarence' where they watched a boatman cast a wreath in King George Sound.³⁶

The Martin Place ceremony in Sydney is presented in both official and lay versions as the result of a fateful meeting between returned soldiers and a nameless old woman – the only woman in these narratives. As described by Jenkins, 'five roisterers' homeward-bound in the early hours of the morning after The Australian Legion of

Ex-Service Club's Annual General Meeting, 'always followed by a dinner or smoko – a rather hectic function which included the imbibing of several quarts of the amber fluid which had to be taken in with them,' met with 'an elderly woman holding a bunch of flowers'. When the men were asked 'to explain why they had walked down that way instead of going straight to Central Station with the others, they had no idea'. As the elderly woman moved closer to the Cenotaph in Martin Place:

she tripped on some uneven paving and dropped the flowers. The men ceased their singing and began to help the woman and gathered the flowers. They then stood awkwardly around as she went forward and placed the bouquet in position. She then knelt in prayer and one by one the five roisterers bent their knees and joined her in silent prayer.³⁷

This event allegedly prompted the decision to 'organise an official Anzac Day Dawn Service at the Cenotaph, Martin Place each Anzac Day, timed to commence at 04.30 hours'.³⁸

On a much simpler scale, the Toowoomba ceremony, as described above by O'Shae, is suggested to have resulted from a veteran paying his respects to fallen comrades in a tour of 'all graves and memorials of men killed in action', which thereafter became an annual event featuring a bugler to 'sound the last post and reveille'. According to O'Shea:

At 4am on Anzac morning 1919, George Harrington, Bill Lightbody and others visited all known graves and memorials of men killed in action in World War I ... The men placed a flower

on the headstones. Afterwards, they toasted their mates with a rum. In 1920 and 1921, Anzac morning followed a similar pattern starting at 4am but they adjourned to Picnic Point and toasted their mates until the first rays of dawn appeared in the east. They then had a bugler sound the last post and reveille. There is still a piper who turns up on Anzac Day who remembers sounding the lament as a cadet in the early '20's.³⁹

In each instance the broader narratives supporting these claims to originating the first Anzac dawn service, though generally not supported, and in many cases contradicted by documentary evidence, are advanced as significantly grounded in 'true,' often 'personally remembered' events and 'real' sites.

As John Frow has observed, an important function of memory is its evocation of immediacy just as an event embedded in a storyteller's life can be passed on as experience.⁴⁰ Experience, in the lay narratives examined here, has greater authority than documentary evidence. Importantly, narrative truth 'is judged by its verisimilitude rather than its verifiability'.⁴¹ Each narrative is constrained by this need for verisimilitude, in part achieved by reference to specific (though, as indicated throughout this discussion, often erroneous) dates. As the above excerpts indicate, the narratives privilege spiritual and symbolic appeal. Albany is constructed as having a close connection to the spirit of Anzac in terms of both the local landscape as last sight/site of Australia for the Anzacs, and in relation to Padre White's battlefront connections, later actions and local presence. The (also suspiciously folkloric) Sydney 'founding saga' lends an air of mystique and inevitability to the event.⁴² The

Toowoomba narrative emphasises the quotidian gesture of a returned serviceman dealing with the loss of numerous comrades, emotively enacted in the local cemetery.

At the same time, each narrative presents a naturalised (and naturalising) human element along with key links to a larger Anzac narrative. Specifically, each claim depends for its credibility on named local, authorised originators. This emphasis on individuals is a feature of the larger Anzac tradition. News reports of Anzac Days, for instance, are very much about personalising the experience. As Hermann Bausinger points out, while identifying a specific person does not prove ‘historical veracity,’ it does have the effect of confirming the truth of the narrative, just as it makes it memorable.⁴³ Padre White, Captain Harrington and the five named ‘roisterers’ – as discrete individuals who have undertaken deeds important to the community – can be ‘known’ by the present community as one of ‘us.’ They provide a link between community members in the present, facilitating the imagined community famously argued by Benedict Anderson as central to the emergence of large non face-to-face communities such as nations.⁴⁴ Though these narratives are at pains to name the individuals responsible, their individuality is of less importance than their representative expression of ‘universal,’ ‘Australian’ feelings and reactions. In these narratives, past (mythic) events are made not only memorable but also understandable on an emotional level, enabling a strong sense of nation.⁴⁵

As the preceding discussion indicates, place is a fundamental element of worth in each narrative, and is privileged over chronology.⁴⁶ Graeme Davison has argued that the key to understanding the power of myths ‘lies in the intelligible connection they establish between personal experience and public events’.⁴⁷ These narratives

highlight the connection between myth and place as fundamental to this personal/public experience. The 'Australians and the Past' survey, confirms the importance of place as the 'second most important medium for historical narratives'.⁴⁸

This assertion is borne out by individual responses such as:

I get a buzz out of visiting places where an important event has taken place ... For example I was down in Albany. That was where the Anzacs first sailed from. There's a memorial on the hill there. When I go there I get a strong connection. I can see all those ships in the harbour and for many of those blokes it was the last time they saw home.⁴⁹

This particular response is a powerful example of the ways in which local narratives shape contemporary experience. The importance of this event (indeed its promulgation as 'event') and of Albany as a place where one can 'experience' this past is very much a product of local lay narratives.⁵⁰ The links established in these narratives between the Anzac tradition and myth and specific places in Australia serve to bring the Anzac tradition and experience 'home' in ways which position local places as part of the national register, just as they extend the representative territory of 'the nation,' thus sustaining a wide-reaching emplaced cultural memory of the dawn service, if not embodied connections.

The persistence of the Albany, Toowoomba and Sydney claims is the product of a range of conventions – symbolic resonances, named individuals, emotional/embodyed ties to place – mobilised in the service of producing a 'believable' claim able to

override 'mere' material evidence. While the external organisers of the week-long 'Federation Festival – Albany and Albany Anzac Day' mentioned above explicitly and forcefully rebut Albany's claim to having initiated the first dawn service, they nevertheless recognise Albany as 'the birth place of ANZAC.'⁵¹ Similarly, in an ABC story in 2008, a local representative of the 'Albany Historical Collection' responded to the proposition that 'we now know that Padre White was not the Father of the Anzac Dawn service, as has been claimed' by pointing out that it 'matters little in the scheme of things. Whether it was the first, whether it wasn't, what he has done is create something special.'⁵² While these claims can be understood as driven by a politics of competitive local/regional identity, this does not, however, fully encompass the work these claims perform in the maintenance of a strong and ongoing sense of nationhood. In order to gain this deeper understanding it is necessary to examine the claims collectively, as fundamentally interrelated narratives.

Parallel origins

At the same time as establishing a specific origin, each lay narrative acknowledges other lay claims, often by means of verbatim extracts. O'Shea acknowledges three alternative origins for the dawn service: the '7th Lighthorse' which returned to 'Western Australia when the rest of the A.I.F went to France' and who, according to 'word of mouth, rather than unit history' are said to have 'held a dawn service on 25th April, 1916;' the Albany 1923 claim, which he notes also 'has some support;' and 'a Victorian claim that an Army Barracks held a dawn service in 1923' which is 'supported by Victorian patriots.' No attempt is made to discount these other claims: they are merely stated and then followed by the description of the Toowoomba ceremony reproduced above. His article ends, however, with a clear position: 'This

[Toowoomba 1919] I believe to be the first dawn service in Australia'.⁵³ According to Burke, 'credit ... is divided between Reverend Arthur Ernest White of Albany, WA [1923] and Captain George Harrington of Toowoomba, Queensland [1919]'.⁵⁴ Neither version is privileged – both are offered without comment in almost word-for-word excerpts of the claims as they appear elsewhere.

Similarly, a striking difference between Jenkins' version and the official Sydney version as published, for example, on the AWM website, is Jenkins' acknowledgement of the Albany and Toowoomba claims; moreover, they are acknowledged as preceding the Sydney service. Jenkins' narrative justifies Sydney as representative through its emphasis on the everyday experience of returned soldiers, yet at the same time its recognition of the Albany service undermines this primacy. *Remember: Traditions Made in Australia*, published in 1995 by the National Support Group of the 55/53 Australian Infantry Battalion, also offers two articles – 'The Dawn Parade began out West' and 'The Dawn Service Anzac Day Sydney' – side-by-side in newspaper-style columns. In the first article, Albany is acknowledged simply as 'The first dawn service.' The second article concentrates on the origins of the Sydney service.⁵⁵

The earlier Albany materials do not tend to recognise other claims. However, the more recent *Anzac Day Dawn Service* booklet opens with an acknowledgement of the work of Brisbane's Anzac Day Commemoration Committee, in particular the work of Canon Garland, in 'bringing members of every mainstream Christian denomination to agree to a service in which all could share'.⁵⁶ In this telling, 'two great clergymen, Canon Garland and Padre White' are credited with the 'vision to lay the foundation

for a ceremony that epitomises what is for many people the one, true Australia Day'. A list of various 'services' held in 1915 is provided, followed by an argument in support of White's service as original:

Whether or not he was aware of Canon Garland's initiative is uncertain. Arthur White might well have seen a copy of the *Church Chronicle*, the national church newspaper, in which a report of the work of the Commemoration Committee may have appeared. What is known is that when Padre White was appointed Rector of Albany in September, 1929, he decided to mark the following ANZAC day by celebrating a Dawn Eucharist.⁵⁷

The booklet notes that there have been many conflicting accounts, as does Jenkins in his 2001 manuscript, and attributes these 'misunderstandings' to the 'difficulties encountered when attempting to define the term "Dawn Service"'.⁵⁸ Of particular interest here, however, is the absence of a 'winning' claim.⁵⁹ The lay narratives actively promote acceptance of other origins, moving beyond competition for the right to be the 'first,' and in the process undermining/devaluing the notion of a singular origin.

This inclusiveness is not extended to the official claims. The Toowoomba narrative does not mention Sydney 1927 or Perth 1929, and the Albany versions generally ignore but occasionally cite and then discount these claims. At the same time, the official histories as promoted by the AWM and the Icons project, for example, refer

without hesitation to a single origin. It is tempting to read the official versions as exclusive, monoglossic, and essentially concerned with the ordering and containment of the past (seen as necessary to a cohesive national identity). Similarly, the lay claims appear inclusive, heteroglossic, and open to the possibility at least of multiple parallel histories rather than a singular origin. The inclusiveness established, however, is of a limited kind in that the narratives include other instances of the 'same' event. Alternative responses to Gallipoli and the 'grassroots' need for an informal ritual, whether already lost or thwarted or yet to emerge, are not part of this dawn service narrative tradition.⁶⁰ In these narratives difference lies in the details and in the circumstances, not in intent, approach or meaning.

Spontaneous origins, ensuing (national) traditions

Jenkins asserts that the Sydney 1927 ceremony is original rather than derivative by virtue of a contemporaneous lack of knowledge of other claims: 'at the time and not until years later, nothing was known of this [Albany's dawn service, which Jenkins presents as having taken place in 1916, and again in 1924] in other states and [it] certainly had no bearing on the birth of the Sydney Anzac Day Dawn Service'.⁶¹ With no planning or forethought at all, and without prior knowledge of other services, the Sydney event exists as a spontaneous, independent outcome of the 'Australian' experience of war leading 'naturally' to a new tradition. Similarly, both the Toowoomba and Albany events are presented as small-scale, independent and personal responses to Gallipoli symbolically enacted in, if not triggered by, specific local places. The dawn service is thus confirmed as a unified and unifying expression of *spontaneous*, even instinctual, recognition of the Anzac spirit and the 'beginning of a true Australian national identity'.⁶²

A tribute to ‘old comrades’ by World War II Veteran Peter Ryan published in the 25 April 2006 online edition of the *Australian* exemplifies this characterisation. Ryan describes Anzac Day as ‘the only annual occasion that truly rallies and expresses the spontaneous core of Australia’s national spirit’. He continues:

Only a deep-felt sentiment could draw all those thousands from warm beds to stand and shiver in the darkness before the dawn service. [...] Every year, on April 25, Australians can observe the instinctual and unprompted drawing together of a nation.⁶³

Dawn services are planned events. Indeed, they are increasingly staged events.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, in the narratives examined here the emphasis remains on ‘instinct’ and ‘spontaneity,’ on the ‘natural’ expression of solidarity extended to mean *national* solidarity. The lay claims as multiple instances of spontaneous origin support the belief that ‘we’ are all ‘the same’ and that this tradition is truly of ‘the people.’ The several ‘independent’ claims confirm that the sameness precedes the service; that is, the original services at least are constructed as the product of an essential sameness rather than a source of sameness.

At the same time, establishing the existence of a tradition deriving from the originary event is crucial to each narrative (each one, after all, is a ‘birth’). Bartlett, for example, disparages the Sydney and Perth claims precisely as ‘two isolated incidents of a reported Dawn Service’.⁶⁵ Each lay claim offers an original event from which others immediately flowed and continue to flow. Jenkins’ narrative includes a lengthy

history of subsequent ceremonies in Martin Place, each one clearly part of a tradition begun with the fateful meeting at the cenotaph. Albany's dawn service is also foregrounded as a consistent tradition following from an 'original' instance. The 2006 dawn service featured the casting of a wreath in the ocean, thus reinforcing a clear line to Albany's first service in which a wreath was also thrown.⁶⁶ O'Shae's version also explicitly refers to derivations:

I attended a dawn service in Hobart on Anzac Day in 1962 and was thanked by the Celebration Committee for the Toowoomba Dawn Service as they had celebrated it that morning. (An almost identical service to that held in Toowoomba.) When visiting members of the 2/27 Battalion in Adelaide in 1975 they were of the opinion that the Anzac Service came from Toowoomba.⁶⁷

A direct and unbroken line is important to a sense of ongoing community, just as the connections between the claims are themselves a significant element of a sense of broader community. The belief that people all over Australia were and continue to be inspired to undertake the same symbolic act as handed down year after year is itself an important factor in the sense of community and nation so central to Anzac Day. Though offering three origins, these conventional claims support an understanding of the ceremony at dawn as a singular entity: *essentially* dawn services across Australia (and beyond), wherever and whenever they might have originated, are all the same. Seeking 'the first' ceremony, or more accurately the 'original' event or events, assumes and encodes this sameness, just as nominating an originator positions all

those that follow as part of the same, singular line (whether or not that line is ‘official’ or ‘religious’). Multiple origins co-existing side-by-side means there can be no ‘first;’ so the tradition emerges from a cluster of spontaneous dawn services, some of which resonate with the national memory more powerfully at this time than others. These claims thus reinforce the dawn ceremony as an authentic and representative – because they are spontaneous and multiple – Australia-wide national tradition.

In the face of these competing yet parallel claims, the dawn service cannot be relegated to the ‘known’ just as it cannot be relegated to a fixed past. Each of the claims demonstrates a degree of malleability within an overall stable representation. This malleability is reflected in the changeable details, hierarchies of claims and shifting alignments. Stability is achieved via the representation of a consistent essential importance attached to the event, along with the containment of difference.

Harry Harootunian notes that

one of the principal purposes of national history and its reliance on narrative form was to not only flatten out time, literally reducing temporality to a timeless space, but also to remove all of those sediments from different pasts that if engaged in the present would prevent a closure of the future.⁶⁸

Taken together, these narratives ‘flatten out time’ through an emphasis on symbolic and place-based origins, just as their incorporations of each other neutralises the potential for meaningful difference. It is reasonable, after all, to imagine the existence of numerous claims, extant or potential, yet to achieve wide recognition. Less easy to imagine, however, is the recognition of claims that do not conform to the conventions

outlined here. Acknowledgement of 'other' origins in the lay narratives signals a deep local and ongoing engagement with the dawn service as important (in some ways ahistorical) event, while authorising this history for 'the people,' and positioning it as 'of the people.' Ultimately, these claims strengthen the sense of spontaneous nation and do not challenge but rather reinforce the sense of overarching national identity. Central to this is the pervasive multiple emphases on 'belief', culturally privileged, and in these narratives reinforced, as highly personal, as embodied, as fundamentally participatory. An attempt to arrive at a definitive claim for a specific 'true' origin runs counter to this participatory construction of a believable sense of national identity.

I would like to thank the anonymous referees for the depth of their engagement with this article and in particular for helping me to clarify my categorisation of the claims examined here. I also thank them for suggesting valuable primary sources.

¹ I am grateful for a Curtin University of Technology ‘Women in Research Seeding Grant’ in support of this research.

² See, for example, K S Inglis, *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape*, Miegunyah Press, 1998; G Seal, *Inventing Anzac: The Digger and National Mythology*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 2004.

³ The Western Australian Heritage Icons project saw the announcement of 12 icons, one for each month of the year. Department of the Premier and Cabinet, The Constitutional Centre of Western Australia, ‘Heritage Icons: April—Albany ANZAC Day Dawn Service’, <<http://www.ccentre.wa.gov.au/index.cfm?event=heritageIconsApril>>, accessed December 2008.

⁴ This is not the first time that Albany’s claim to having originated the dawn service has been officially recognised and broadcast. In 2000, the AWM website nominated Albany as site of the ‘First Anzac Day Dawn Service’ on the 25th of April 1923. In the absence of any reference to other dawn services, Albany was thus clearly acknowledged by the foremost national repository of Australian military history and heritage, as originating this significant aspect of the Anzac tradition. In 2003, in alignment with the current scholarly literature, the AWM site no longer acknowledged Albany as site of the first dawn service.

⁵ J Frow, ‘Toute la memoire du monde: Repetition and Forgetting’ in *Time and Commodity Culture: Essays in Cultural Theory and Postmodernity*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1997, p 234.

⁶ While this research focuses on publicly made and circulated lay claims it is not to suggest that the wealth of more personal, private testimony concerning the origins of the dawn service are not of importance.

⁷ T Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, p3.

⁸ Toowoomba Education Centre, ‘About Us’, 2003, <<http://www.tec.qld.edu.au/aboutus.htm>> , accessed June 2006; J Clements, ‘Note from the Author’ in J Black (ed), *Some Toowoomba and Darling Downs Anzacs*, Toowoomba Education Centre, Queensland. Italics in original.

⁹ B O’Shae, ‘A Claim for a Toowoomba First’ in J. Black (ed), *Some Toowoomba and Darling Downs Anzacs*, Toowoomba Education Centre, Queensland, 1992, pp. 45-46. While Captain George Harrington, born Toowoomba 1895, did indeed serve at Gallipoli from April 25 to October 25, 1915, he in fact returned to Australia on the transport *Wahehe* arriving sometime in June 1919. See Harrington George Robert, Service Number-Captain/49, National Archives of Australia, Series number B2455, Series accession number B2455/1, Barcode 4420574.

¹⁰ See, in particular, Inglis, *Sacred Places*; and Alistair Thompson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994.

¹¹ See Inglis, *Sacred Places*; Thompson, *Anzac Memories*; and also Alan Seymour & Richard Nile, ‘Foreword’ in A Seymour & R Nile (eds), *Anzac: Meaning, Memory and Myth*, Sir Robert Centre for Australian Studies, London, 1998.

¹² See G Davison, ‘The Habit of Commemoration and the Revival of Anzac Day’, *Australian Cultural History*, vol 22, p 80. While he notes steady numbers at dawn services he also offers a salutary caution concerning the reliability of numbers reported in newspaper articles.

¹³ Inglis, *Sacred Places*, p 330.

¹⁴ Seal, *Inventing Anzac*, p 136; Paula Hamilton & Paul Ashton, ‘At Home with the Past: Initial Findings from the Survey’, *Australian Cultural History*, vol 23, p 26.

¹⁵ Peter Cochrane & David Goodman, ‘The Great Australian Journey: Cultural Logic and Nationalism in the Postmodern Era’ in T Bennett, P Buckridge, D Carter & C Mercer (eds) , *Celebrating the Nation: A Critical Study of Australia’s Bicentenary*, Allen and Unwin, St. Leonards, p 175.

¹⁶ The external management team that coordinated the festival produced a retrospective report specifically evaluating the festival in terms of attendance and tourism benefits, and making recommendations concerning future events. This report claims that the event was ‘an outstanding success’ with an aggregate attendance—calculated from ticket sales and the distribution of numbered programs—of over 80, 000 people. See Jay McDaniell, *Final Report: Federation Festival Albany and Albany Anzac Day 2001*, City of Albany, 2001.

¹⁷ Dept. Premier and Cabinet, ‘Heritage Icons’.

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- ¹⁸ Australian War Memorial, 'The ANZAC Day tradition,' http://www.awm.gov.au/commemoration/anzac/anzac_tradition.asp, accessed December 2008.
- ¹⁹ Seal, *Inventing*, p 136.
- ²⁰ Seal, *Inventing*, p 116, 122 & 136.
- ²¹ In 2002, The Princess Royal Fortress Centre for Local Military History and Heritage in Albany included a static display known as The Padre White National Memorial and Education Centre. Underneath a sign proclaiming 'THE FIRST DAWN SERVICE' was a photocopy of a page from a Register of Services which included the following handwritten entry: 'April 25 Anzac Day 30 congregants.' A note in the same writing in the right hand memoranda column read: 'Procession to memorial wreath laid collection for soldiers [sic] fund. First Dawn Service held in Australia.' The year of this entry is offered as 1929; however, because White took up his post in Albany in the September of 1929, it must have been at least 1930 when this service occurred. Maintaining the date as 1929 maintains Albany as a contender for at least the first dawn service in Western Australia. The notation of 'First Dawn Service held in Australia' is also cited by Dept. Premier and Cabinet, 'Heritage Icons'.
- ²² Revd J P Haldane-Stevenson, unpublished letter, Canon Arthur White and Dawn Service File, Local Studies Collection, Albany Local Library.
- ²³ Joan Bartlett, *Anzac Day Dawn Service: 25th April, Albany Western Australia*, no publisher or place of publication, available Albany Tourist Bureau, 2001.
- ²⁴ Whether or not such a claim was, or indeed could have been made during his lifetime is moot.
- ²⁵ For a discussion of the way this event is mobilized in Albany, see R Mayes, 'Localising National Identity: Albany's Anzacs', *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol 79, pp. 15-27.
- ²⁶ Tod Johnson 'The First ANZAC Day Dawn Service' ABC Perth, 2004, <<http://www.abc.net.au/perth/stories/s1093745.htm>> accessed June 2006.
- ²⁷ 'Big Crowds Mark Anzac Day' *The Weekender*, April 27, 2006 p 7; K Matts, 'Anzac Proceeds After Funds Crisis', *The Weekender*, March 16, 2004 p 3.
- ²⁸ Samantha Beech, 'Anzac Tradition Stronger Than Ever', *Albany Advertiser*, April 27 2006, p 1.
- ²⁹ See 'Veterans Angered by Plan to Remove WWI Icon', *The Weekender*, April 13 2006, p 1.
- ³⁰ The National Trust (WA), 'Western Australian Heritage Icons 2004 Connecting a Community: Fact Sheet', <<http://www.ntwa.com.au/icons/facts.html>> accessed December 2008. The Heritage Icons project, however, claims to recognise this intrinsic value.
- ³¹ Seal, *Inventing Anzac*, p 155.
- ³² D Noyes & R D Abrahams, 'From Calendar Custom to National Memory: European Commonplaces' in D BenAmos & L Weissberg (eds), *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity*, 1999, p79.
- ³³ Though the Albany service is explicitly described in National Support Group of the 55/53 Australian Infantry Battalion, *Remember: Traditions Made in Australia*, Sydney, 1995, as organized by 'Rev White' and the Sydney service is attributed to five ex-servicemen and described in Jenkins' account as witnessed by an anonymous police constable, there is no 'religious' or 'official' qualifier explicitly attached to these services.
- ³⁴ 'The Princess Royal Fortress: The Padre White National Memorial', Information Sheet, no date, available Albany Tourist Bureau, 2001.
- ³⁵ 'Our First Dawn Parade', newspaper article, no date, Local Studies Collection, Albany Public Library.
- ³⁶ This is not possible: according to White's service record he enlisted in May 1916 and was discharged in January 1918. See Arthur Ernest White, Sern Capt/Chaplain, National Archives of Australia, Series number B2455, Series accession number B2455/1, Barcode 1846339; Bartlett, *Anzac Day*; 'Our First Dawn Parade'.
- ³⁷ W G Jenkins, 'The Dawn Service', 2001, unpublished manuscript, AWM call number Nq 940.460994J52. pp. 2-3.
- ³⁸ Jenkins, 'The Dawn Service', p 3.
- ³⁹ O'Shae, 'A Claim for a Toowoomba First', p 46.
- ⁴⁰ Frow, 'Toute la memoire du monde', p 223.
- ⁴¹ J Bruner, 'The Narrative Construction of Reality', *Critical Enquiry*, vol 18, p 13.
- ⁴² Inglis, *Sacred Places*, p 330.
- ⁴³ Hermann Bausinger, *Folk Culture in a World of Technology*, E Dettmer (trans), Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1961, p 36.
- ⁴⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. ed, Verso, London.
- ⁴⁵ For the importance of this, see Kate Darian-Smith & P Hamilton, 'Introduction' in K Darian-Smith & P Hamilton (eds), *Memory and History in Twentieth-Century Australia*, Oxford UP, Melbourne, p 2.

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- ⁴⁶ The attitude or intention of those making the claim, however, might have been quite different. Jenkins, for example, assures the reader in his cover letter to the Chief Librarian of the National Library that 'it has all been thoroughly researched and should put things straight'.
- ⁴⁷ Davison, 'The Habit of commemoration', p 80.
- ⁴⁸ Hamilton & Ashton, 'At Home with the past', p 14.
- ⁴⁹ Richard White, 'National Days and the National Past in Australia', *Australian Cultural History*, vol 23, p 69.
- ⁵⁰ Mayes, 'Localising National Identity', pp. 15-27.
- ⁵¹ In addition, the report stresses that Albany's standing as 'birth place of ANZAC', and the Albany Dawn Service as an 'ANZAC Icon event', is something that 'must' be developed, 'planned and built over time leading up to major milestones such as 2014 but with mini highlights on the way' McDaniell, *Final Report*. Note also the ambiguous and seemingly interchangeable use of the acronym ANZAC and the broader term 'Anzac' in many of the primary sources examined here. It has been assumed here that these various uses in general connote the larger Anzac myth or legend as opposed to the formation of this specific army corp.
- ⁵² 'The life and myths of Padre White,' ABC South Coast WA, 24 April 2008, <<http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2008/04/24/2226839.htm>>, accessed August 2008.
- ⁵³ O'Shae, 'A Claim for a Toowoomba First', pp. 45- 46.
- ⁵⁴ Di Burke (ed), *Anzac Day: Traditions Facts and Folklore*, Anzac Day Commemoration Committee of Queensland, Queensland, 2000, p 34.
- ⁵⁵ Of course, this presentation of the two articles in which neither is privileged may signify, or be a product of, the highly-charged nature of these claims and the consequences of 'taking sides'.
- ⁵⁶ Bartlett, *Anzac Day Dawn Service*. n.p.
- ⁵⁷ Bartlett, *Anzac Day Dawn Service*. n.p.
- ⁵⁸ Jenkins, 'The Dawn Service'.
- ⁵⁹ Again, this is not likely to be the intention of the individuals making these claims. Jenkins, 'Dawn Service', explains that he produced his article 'because of the number of different versions of the origin of the Dawn Service which have [sic] arisen over the years'. Similarly, Bartlett, *Anzac Day*, draws attention to the existence of numerous claims as an issue.
- ⁶⁰ This does not mean that alternatives will not or can not emerge. See Seal, *Inventing Anzac*, for a discussion of the sunset service at Anzac Cottage, a recent consciously invented tradition.
- ⁶¹ Jenkins, 'The Dawn Service', p 1.
- ⁶² Jeffrey qtd in 'Thousands Gather to Remember Heroes' 2006, <<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,20867,189238873-601,00.html>>, accessed April 2006.
- ⁶³ Peter Ryan, 'Honour Where Due', 2006, <<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,20867,18916253-601,00.html>>, accessed April 2006.
- ⁶⁴ See Peter Wilson, 'Gallipoli Disappears Under a Sea of Plastic Seats', <<http://theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,20867,18920492-601,00.html>>, accessed April 2006. Prefacing the 2006 Gallipoli Dawn Service, for whatever pragmatic reasons, with 'hours of big-screen footage explaining the history of the site alongside interviews with visitors conducted by ABC TV personality Andrew Denton' together with 'plans to build a high-tech "battle simulation center" on the Gallipoli peninsula' indicates the extent of this increasing commodification of Anzac Day as 'staged' tourist attraction.
- ⁶⁵ Bartlett, *Anzac Day Dawn Service* n.p..
- ⁶⁶ Beech, 'Anzac Tradition' p.1.
- ⁶⁷ O'Shae, 'A Claim for a Toowoomba First', p 46.
- ⁶⁸ Harry Harootunian, 'Shadowing History: National Narratives and the Persistence of the Everyday', *Cultural Studies*, Vol 18, p. 188.