

REMARKS OF DEAN WILLS AO
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD, FAIRFAX
AGE 150TH BIRTHDAY
LAUNCH OF *REFLECTIONS*
FEDERATION SQUARE, MELBOURNE
AUGUST 10 2004

**PREMIER BRACKS, MINISTERS, MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT,
MICHAEL GAWENDA, STAFF AND EXTENDED FAMILY OF THE
AGE, OUR DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, AND FRIENDS:**

THIS IS A GREAT OCCASION.

**THE HISTORY OF THE AGE IS AT ONE WITH THE HISTORY OF
VICTORIA.**

**AND THANKS TO THIS WONDERFUL BOOK, THE STORIES OF A
GREAT STATE AND THE GREAT NEWSPAPER THAT HAS
CHRONICLED ITS PROGRESS ARE UNITED FOR ALL TO ENJOY
AND STUDY AND TREASURE.**

**1854 WAS ONE OF THE MOST EXTRAORDINARY YEARS IN THE
HISTORY OF THIS STATE.**

**IT IS THE YEAR MANY OF THE INSTITUTIONS THAT MAKE
MELBOURNE WHAT IT IS TODAY WERE FOUNDED. THESE
INCLUDED:**

- TWO GREAT PUBLIC ‘TREASURE HOUSES’, THE STATE LIBRARY AND THE MELBOURNE MUSEUM
- THE MCG, OUR GREAT SPORTING STADIUM AND HOME OF THE 1956 OLYMPICS
- THE VICTORIAN RAILWAYS, WHICH MARKED THE START OF THE ERA OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT
- THE MELBOURNE CITY MISSION, ONE OF OUR EARLIEST WELFARE BODIES
- MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY, WHOSE FOUNDATION STONE WAS LAID THAT YEAR, AND
- THE UPRISING ON THE BALLARAT GOLDFIELDS – CULMINATING IN THE EUREKA STOCKADE – WHICH LEFT AN IMPORTANT LEGACY.

AND IN THE MIDDLE OF ALL THIS ACTIVITY, *THE AGE* WAS LAUNCHED ON OCTOBER 17 OF THAT YEAR...FITTINGLY, AT THE OPENING OF THE MELBOURNE EXHIBITION, THE FIRST EXHIBITION HELD IN AUSTRALIA, ON THE SITE OF WHAT IS THE FORMER ROYAL MINT IN WILLIAM STREET.

GEOFFREY BLAINEY’S EXCELLENT NARRATIVE RECOUNTS THAT ON THAT DAY, OCTOBER 17, 1854, THE GOVERNOR, SIR CHARLES HOTHAM, “WAS PRESENTED WITH THE FIRST EDITION OF A BRAND NEW NEWSPAPER, HURRIEDLY PUBLISHED THAT MORNING”

– SOME THINGS NEVER CHANGE –

– “AND – FOR HIS BENEFIT – ‘PRINTED IN GOLD AND TASTEFULLY MOUNTED.’ IT WAS CALLED THE AGE.” IT COST SIXPENCE.

THE FIRST EDITION OF *THE AGE* REPORTED THAT TWO POLICEMEN HAD DISAPPEARED. WE ARE STILL LOOKING FOR THEM AND IT JUST GOES TO SHOW YOU THAT MADE THE NEWS IN 1854 IS NOT THAT DIFFERENT TODAY.

OTHER HISTORIC POINTS OF INTEREST FROM THE SAME YEAR:

- COBB AND CO EXTENDED ITS COACH SERVICE FROM MELBOURNE TO THE CENTRAL VICTORIAN GOLDFIELDS**
- THE FIRST ELECTRIC TELEGRAPH LINE OPENED IN AUSTRALIA, BETWEEN MELBOURNE AND WILLIAMSTOWN.**

- **THE CRINOLINE WAS INTRODUCED**

***THE AGE* IS OLDER THAN AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL. I CANNOT CLAIM HIM AS AN ANCESTOR, BUT A TOM WILLS WAS ONE OF THE FOUNDERS OF AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL. IN 1857, HE DEvised THE GAME WITH HIS COUSIN, H C A HARRISON, W J HAMMERSLEY AND J B THOMPSON. THEY WANTED A WINTER GAME TO KEEP CRICKETERS FIT DURING THE OFF SEASON.**

AND *THE AGE* IS OLDER THAN THE MELBOURNE FOOTBALL CLUB, WHICH WAS FOUNDED ON AUGUST 7 1858 -- THE YEAR OF THE CODE'S FIRST RECORDED MATCH BETWEEN SCOTCH COLLEGE AND MELBOURNE GRAMMAR.

THE DAWNING OF *THE AGE* IN MELBOURNE ON OCTOBER 17, 1854, REFLECTED THE HIGH HOPES AND LOFTY IDEALS OF ITS FOUNDERS IN A BURGEONING COLONY BEDAZZLED BY THE DISCOVERY OF GOLD AND PROMISE OF BOUNTIFUL LAND.

THEIR OPTIMISM WAS NOT REALISED BY COMMERCIAL SUCCESS. THAT WAS TO COME LATER UNDER THE DOMINATING INFLUENCE FOR NEARLY 50 YEARS OF DAVID SYME, WHEN *THE AGE* FLOURISHED AS THE PEOPLE'S

NEWSPAPER - DEMOCRATIC IN TEMPER, LIBERAL IN ITS INSTINCTS, RADICAL IN ITS AIMS AND FORTHRIGHT IN EXPRESSING ITS OPINIONS.

ULTIMATELY, THE SYME AND FAIRFAX PUBLISHING ENTERPRISES WERE JOINED, AND OVER A DECADE AGO, FAIRFAX EMERGED IN ITS MODERN CORPORATE IDENTITY AND STRUCTURE.

FAIRFAX HAS STRENGTHENED ITS INVESTMENT IN *THE AGE*, WITH THE SUPERB NEW PRINTING PLANT AT TULLAMARINE. AND A NEW EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, ANDREW JASPAN, WILL FOLLOW IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF MICHAEL GAWENDA AND HIS ILLUSTRIOUS PREDECESSORS.

MICHAEL: YOU HAVE OUR SINCERE THANKS AND APPRECIATION FOR YOUR LEADERSHIP OF THE PAPER AND ITS STAFF.

WE ARE DELIGHTED THAT YOU WILL CONTINUE TO SERVE *THE AGE* IN YOUR NEW CAPACITY AS SENIOR CORRESPONDENT FROM WASHINGTON.

***THE AGE* IS MELBOURNE'S OLDEST DAILY NEWSPAPER.**

ON THE FRONT PAGE OF THE FIRST EDITION OF *THE AGE* WERE THE FOLLOWING WORDS – WHICH TODAY WOULD BE CALLED A “MISSION STATEMENT”:

“THE AGE - A JOURNAL OF POLITICS, COMMERCE AND PHILANTHROPY, DEDICATED TO THE RECORD OF GREAT MOVEMENTS, THE ADVOCACY OF FREE INSTITUTIONS, THE DIFFUSION OF TRUTH, AND THE ADVANCEMENT OF MAN.”

I WANTED TO COME HERE THIS EVENING, IN THE PRESENCE OF SO MANY DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, TO SAY:

WE TODAY REAFFIRM THE FOUNDING GENIUS BEHIND THE AGE.

A 150TH BIRTHDAY IS NOT SIMPLY A RETROSPECTIVE; IT IS A CALL FOR RENEWAL AND REDEDICATION.

TONIGHT, WITH THE LAUNCH OF REFLECTIONS, OUR COMPANY – OUR BOARD, MANAGEMENT AND STAFF – REDEDICATES ITSELF TO *THE AGE* AND ITS ROLE IN VICTORIA AND OUR SOCIETY.

I WANT TO CONGRATULATE STEVE FOLEY, GEOFFREY BLAINY AND RANDOM HOUSE, AND TO THANK ALL OF

**THOSE ASSOCIATED WITH THIS BOOK FOR A SUPERB
ACHIEVEMENT THAT WILL BE TREASURED BY THOUSANDS OF
READERS THROUGHOUT VICTORIA AND THE COUNTRY FOR
YEARS TO COME.**