EPILOGUE

VICTORIA, FEDERATION, AND BEYOND

Henry Heylyn Hayter concluded his first *Victorian Year Book* with these words:

> The careful student of its [the *Year Book's*] pages will, I feel assured, find therein ample indication, that in spite of a few blots which point to the conclusion that here, as elsewhere, the social system is not without its imperfections, the evidences of active progress and present prosperity are such as are rarely to be found recorded in the statistical annals of so young a country.

After another hundred years the question inevitably arises: What do the statistical annals demonstrate in 1973 in a country no longer quite so young? The answer is not simple: it is for the historian to take the basic facts here recorded and elicit a demonstrable interpretation from them. This centenary *Year Book* will end on a more modest note : to point to important developments which will enable Victoria's past to be considered in full perspective. Development—the concept around which this book has been planned—will now appear in the context of a much longer time span. This book has not been content to begin merely in 1873: its treatment has deliberately begun with the foundation of settlement in 1834. For this reason it has encompassed Hayter's work and if it proves necessary to modify his assessments, the more facile wisdom of hindsight will not denigrate them.

Before the gold discoveries two events significantly pointed to the young community's assessment of itself. The first was the request for political self-determination, and when this was parried by the Colonial Office with the offer of an elected seat on the New South Wales Executive Council, the settlers showed a mordant sense of humour in electing Earl Grey, the Colonial Secretary in London, as their representative. The second was the vocal and successful opposition to receiving convicts. Those ticket-of-leave men who came to the District were looked on askance. Both reactions suggest a community which had strong feelings about being loyal and, at the same time, free and set on planning its own destiny.

Representative government was, in fact, granted a matter of months before the discovery of gold, and the latter event undoubtedly proved the overriding catalyst in the history of Victoria. The social and economic consequences which gradually unfolded from it are recorded elsewhere; but as demographic facts are the basis of statistical annals, the variety of nations and social classes represented on the goldfields is worth noting. Many of

these people returned home either richer or poorer, but the event of the discoveries in itself put Victoria " on the map ". And it was this which brought such numbers of talented men (there was a scarcity of women in the early days) to the Colony, much to the benefit of succeeding generations. The contributions made by settlers from the British Isles—who constituted by far the largest part of the population—are past numbering. Lowland Scots had already brought capital for the pastoral industry; English merchants were to supplement this in building a wider economy; the Irish Bar sent men of distinction who would play a prominent part in establishing Victoria's legal and political framework; and each group brought religious and social traditions whose effects were to be pervasive and profound, and which would determine much of the Colony's subsequent social fabric. The arrivals from Britain were supplemented by those from other countries: a Polish count exploring eastern Victoria ; a Swiss and a French family pioneering the wine industry and bringing its products wide acclaim ; two Germans, founding the study of Victoria's flora and geophysics, respectively ; later, two Canadians pioneering irrigation in the arid north-west ; the list could go on. The total effect was to produce a closely knit cultural life which was linked to that of Britain and, to a lesser extent, of the rest of Europe. This culture was alive to the intellectual movements of the nineteenth century ; and concrete expression of it was given in the foundation of a University, a Public Library, a Royal Society, and a National Gallery, all within a decade of the discovery of gold.

This was the " active progress and present prosperity " of which Hayter wrote in 1873 ; it was to grow immensely over the next twenty years as the first generation of native-born Victorians came to expand the economy with the help of British capital. " Marvellous Melbourne " indeed grew to be a city of dignity and substance which proudly displayed her achievements in her public buildings, homes, and the International Exhibition of 1880. The growth which reached its apogee in the late 1880s was based on rural and urban prosperity, including speculation in land and shares. When the financial crisis in the early 1890s was compounded by drought and failing markets, the Colony suffered a blow from which it never really recovered until the end of the Second World War, if outward recovery is to be judged by the relative comparisons of building and immigration.

The years in between gave rise to social trends whose effects have finally emerged in the present generation—the first born since the end of the Second World War and that which views the State's history from the vantage point of the present.

The misery and hardship caused by the economic recession of the 1890s was the worst in Victoria's history; it contributed to the emigration which by 1902 made Sydney, not Melbourne, the most populous capital city in Australia. Yet in this same decade it was Victoria which provided the political spark and momentum towards the Federation of the Australian Colonies, partly as a result of political leadership and partly as an attempt to alleviate the Colony's plight by looking to the wider opportunities which Federation was considered to confer. Its very achievement, however, raised political and economic themes, variations on which have been and still are the subject of constant debate, while the location of the Commonwealth Parliament and all of the Commonwealth Departments in Melbourne

from 1901 until 1927 contributed to Melbourne's special standing in Australia. Victoria's development, like that of the other States, has been shaped by her geographical location and her own social fabric ; to reconcile these factors with the aims of Federation has not been easy, especially as Australia came to be more significant in international affairs.

It is a truism to point to the Anzacs at Gallipoli in 1915 as the first manifestation of Australia as a nation, or to the call for American assistance in 1942 as the first official acknowledgment of Australia's Pacific bearings ; the effects of these national developments on Victoria were subtle and less than clear.

Pending the historian's appraisal of the inter-war period it is worth drawing together some of the threads which came to be woven into the pattern of the last fifty years. The period of the 1920s and 1930s is important, being marked by two psychological traumas : the effects of the First World War and those of the depression. Yet if the full understanding of the period is still shrouded in some mists of uncertainty, this is because to historians it is too recent to yield a faithful perspective, while to the younger generation it has, at least until recently, appeared remote and irrelevant.

The First World War had both a unifying and divisive effect on Victoria. It was unifying in so far as, like the rest of Australia, Victoria was made to feel spiritually part of what Federation had sought to express in constitutional terms ; divisive because for many years the effects of the conscription controversy lingered and the State's male population tended to be divided into "returned men" and others. "Returned men" (that is, from the war) received substantial employment preferences and sought to express the comradeship experienced under the adversity of war in such associations as the Returned Servicemen's League, Legacy, and Toc H. General Sir John Monash, Victoria's most eminent personage at the time, symbolised these values.

The decade immediately following the war was one of guarded optimism, based on moderate prosperity together with the expectation of rural expansion and industrial growth. In the late 1920s the State's value of production from secondary industry for the first time exceeded that from primary industry. Then the shadows of the depression fell on every section of the community.

The farmers were severely affected by low prices, but of all those who became unemployed, the city people were perhaps the hardest hit. Unemployment shattered the self-respect of those affected and civic morale sagged. Men felt that these things should not be, but only gradually came to look to government rather than to voluntary action as a corrective to the economic and social ills of the time. However, the unsettled political conditions of those years were not propitious, even though the Premiers' Plan, for all the turbulent reactions it raised, gave some sense of national direction. When the Country Party gained and held the balance of power in Victoria for many years after 1935, there were developments in marketing, irrigation, roads, and rural settlement, although at the expense (in retrospect) of metropolitan public services and education.

However, these two decades saw glimmerings of achievements, many of which found fulfilment much later : planned immigration ; metropolitan

planning ; voluntary bodies to help the physically and mentally handicapped ; cancer and virological work ; the building of the new Royal Melbourne Hospital ; the appointment of a salaried Vice-Chancellor to modernise the administration of the University of Melbourne ; the construction of a new interstate passenger train ; the growth of modern journalism under Sir Keith Murdoch, as well as his patronage of the arts, leading to the imported 1938 art exhibition ; vigorous seasons of music with overseas and returned local performers ; the formation of the National Theatre movement ; and the quiet preparation of artists who were to become notable.

The effects of the depression gradually waned and economic confidence began to return by the mid-1930s. The absence of strong political leadership was counterbalanced by the presence of some industrial leaders who had an almost prophetic vision of Victoria's and Australia's potential. Essington Lewis, W. S. Robinson, and others in Melbourne sowed and nurtured the seeds of much of Australia's later development in steel, non-ferrous metals, paper, and—just in time for the outbreak of war—the local aircraft industry. These men shared a vision of a greatly stengthened Australia fulfilling her role as a dominion in the British Empire.

Perhaps at the time none of these achievements and aspirations appeared significant, but when viewed in retrospect, they are seen as significant preparatory endeavours. The Second World War was to act as a catalyst for these endeavours and to bring many of them to fruition after the war—a fulfilment denied to those who had experienced only the 1920s and 1930s.

By the end of the 1940s Victoria was able to plan reconstruction and economic expansion, which in the case of the Victorian Railways was appropriately named Operation Phoenix.

In the 1950s the Commonwealth's migration programme became the basis of very rapid industrial growth which (with some vicissitudes) continued into the 1960s. By the end of that decade migration began to wane, but the demographic effects of this were to some extent balanced by the children of the post-war families who now began to form families of their own. By 1970 the general interest in the community had begun to change from economic development as such to a wider consideration of social requirements not only for economic growth but for what came to be described as the " quality of life ". Thus the first stage of the Arts Centre was completed in 1968. Education began to loom large. Already in the 1960s social demands required two new universities and by the end of the decade the financial claims of every type of education became a matter of public concern, including the planning of a fourth university. Social and medical services, transport planning, land use, and the general husbanding of natural resources became electoral themes of political significance, just as tariffs and the power of the Legislative Council had been a hundred years earlier.

Two economic events stood out behind this changing emphasis: the discovery of oil and natural gas offshore in Bass Strait and the increasingly uncertain markets for Victoria's rural industries. At the beginning of the 1970s the ultimate effects of these events could not yet be discerned.

Thus, although economic expansion may recently have become some-

what more muted, the long term development has been clearly established in the preceding chapters. The first post-war generation is now applying its mind to the affairs of the State ; the general social outlook has changed here as elsewhere; the cultural life of the State has been enriched by the imposition of migration on an established social fabric; and Victoria, as indeed Austalia, is aware of a shrinking world as a result of advances in transport and communications. These latter emphasise the differences from the Victoria of Hayter's day ; the involvement of the community in wider cultural movements emphasises the similarities. How far Victoria in its 130 years has matched other countries " in active progress and present prosperity " is a matter to be judged from other annals as well as from the preceding chapters.