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# A VERY AUSTRALIAN FRIENDLY SOCIETY

by Melvin Williams

Friendly societies or mutual benefit societies providing health and insurance came into being in Great Britain in the seventeenth century usually being based around some "community of interest" group. They were brought to Australia in the 1840's and 50's. Often they were sponsored by temperance societies, national groups or lodges such as the Independent Order of Rechabites, the Hibernian Society or the Order of Odd-fellows.

But one society in addition to the usual benefits was to have a very different role - a political role. The Australian Natives' Association was composed of native-born Australians. The original concerns which led to the formation were two. First and most prominent was the feeling among a growing number of Australian-born citizens that a new direction was needed for their native country - away from a mirror reflection of British ways to an Australian identity. Secondly there was concern over the lack of educational facilities which placed native Australians at a disadvantage and in an inferior position.

The association was formed in Victoria in 1871 at an historic meeting in Grimwade's Hotel, Melbourne, and took the name Australian Natives' Association a few months later. It subsequently spread to all States and even to New Zealand. Its membership was mainly drawn from the Goldfields, Ballarat and Bendigo and in Queensland, Charters Towers and Gympie. From the beginning two subjects were taboo - religion and party-politics - probably because of the many Church / State issues of the time. Even with the development of the party system later (eg. the Labor party in the 1890's) they kept an across the board membership. Distance, State differences and State rivalries were to prove their main difficulties. By 1881 ANA had a membership of 430 rising to 19000 by 1901.

It is interesting to see the issues that "real

Australians" felt strongly about at different times and promoted with such vigour in their own newspapers such as *The Australian* and in magazines such as *The Bulletin*. Right from its inception ANA took a strong stand on matters of national importance. Before the turn of the century these included Federation of the colonies, women's suffrage, one man-one vote, the concept of a minimum wage, and in Queensland the Kanaka cause. Both local Branches and State groups functioned with a great deal of independence.

The beginning of a stronger political role was undoubtedly the result of decisions taken at the 1885 Annual Conference at Sandhurst (Bendigo), followed up by an International Conference in 1890 in Melbourne. In 1893 another important event happened - a Federation League was formed in every Australian State and New Zealand to push politicians into action on the matter. A small group of talented men who had become associated with the movement were to become very influential in the movement for Federation and Australian political history.

However there were many other activities of a non-political nature whereby ANA became well-known. These included literary and cultural activities, scholarships for ordinary people, sponsorship of carnivals and racing events. It was an influence in the commencement of Australian Football. After 1901 other causes were taken up such as national defence, the establishment of an Australian Navy, a citizen military force, the policy of restricted immigration soon to be known as the White Australia policy, water conservation, afforestation schemes, unification of the railway gauges and the establishment of a national Australia Day on January 26th. Since its hey-day of political influence in the pre WW II period many of its causes have been taken up by others. With the coming of the National Health Act in 1953 and

government moves in the welfare area its national significance has declined, but it, until recently, was a strong force as a beneficial society embracing Health Insurance and Investment services in Victoria, and continued to sponsor eisteddfods, sporting activities, literary competitions etc. It recently amalgamated in Victoria with the Manchester Unity OFS.

Each State could add its own points of ANA activity. I mention two. In New South Wales in the field of medical benefits ANA always had to contend with the usual Sydney Melbourne rivalry and the varying State laws and the difficulty of transfer of benefits. Federation boosted ANA membership in NSW but the implacable opposition of the British Medical Association was never overcome. The BMA of course represented "old" interests whereas the ANA represented pure Australian interests. Several attempts to find agreement on medical benefits were made over the years but without success. At a special such conference in Sydney in 1912 the President refused to recognise them as a Medical Benefit Society. ANA was successively branded as "a rebel organisation", and "anti-British", and as "nothing good came out of Victoria". Thus ANA frustrated in the medical benefits field embarked on life insurance instead but membership fell away and it lost its strength in that State.

In Queensland in 1936 the "Made in Australia" focus again came to life. The trigger for this was pineapples and the protection of pineapple growers from imports. The same debate re-emerged again in 1991. Today while not strong there are six branches of ANA operating in Queensland with the Brisbane branch at Nundah.

From the above overview of this interesting and remarkable group I want to enlarge on four subjects of particular numismatic interest:- Federation, Decimal Currency, Australia Day and The Exhibitions.

## FEDERATION

Almost from the beginning Federation became the great ideal of the ANA. Its desire

was to see Australia as ONE NATION and not a collection of colonies competing against each other. The 1500 members of ANA in 1885 were in cold numbers a small group facing a daunting task. No organisation worked so hard to expand its cause with speakers being sent around Australia. Its own motto was ADVANCE AUSTRALIA, not a new one as we know from Trade Tokens with this inscription. In 1888 Alfred Deakin prepared a paper which Walter Murdoch described as "printed and treated much as a manifesto". But ten years later men like Deakin, Turner, Purves, Wise, Peacock, Hume-Cook and other ANA crusaders still battled to move the editors of the leading newspapers. The tide began to turn after Alfred Deakin's speech at the Bendigo conference in 1898. A draft Australian constitution was drawn up much of which became the Federal constitution. He concluded his speech with one of the many slogans of the times

"Shoulder to shoulder standing like a wall  
Each for the country, God for us all."

In Melbourne the Argus had been friendly but now became positive, and the conservative The Age changed its tune. In Victoria at least the battle was won. The strength of the comparatively small movement is seen by ANA members who rose to political prominence. These included Edmund Barton, the first Commonwealth Prime Minister, Alfred Deakin his successor, J.H. Scullin, Lord Bruce and even Sir Robert Menzies. Not surprising is their belief that native-born Australians should be eligible for the highest civil positions. This was achieved when Sir Isaac Isaacs became the first Australian-born Governor General of Australia in 1931.

Medalets advocating Federation, the Australian Commonwealth, One Flag, One People, One Destiny, appeared rapidly in 1898-99, many of them made by Stokes. (See Carlisle 1898/1,2 1899/1.2.5.7 and perhaps O2 and T2). While none are specifically ANA they can be said to be ANA inspired.

There is a Branch medalet, details as follows:

1901 22mm Obverse THE AUSTRALIAN COMMONWEALTH.

Reverse AUSTRALIAN NATIVES' ASSN. GEELONG BRANCH No 55 / TO COMMEMORATE/THE INAUGURATION OF THE/AUSTRALIAN/COMMONWEALTH/JAN.I. 1901. Bronze gilded.

### **DECIMAL COINAGE**

Older numismatists will remember something of the debate and controversy leading up to the introduction of Decimal Coinage in 1966. The main interest however was not in the decimal system so much, rather in the basic unit, whether pound, dollar or royal.

With Federation behind them ANA movers and shakers took up other concerns. At the 1902 Annual Conference at Ballarat members of the Hawthorn Branch successfully moved that the Conference recommend to the Commonwealth Government the adoption of the Decimal System of Coinage. The reply was a non-committal "making enquiries". But it was reported at the Daylesford Conference in 1903 "that the Commonwealth Government had appointed a select committee and that it had affirmed the principle of Decimal Coinage". Apparently thinking the battle had been won no further action was taken. The select committee must have had a change of heart for by 1910 Australia had the British system of L.S.D. coinage. Fifty years later as discussions started again on the wisdom of decimalisation there must have been some members of the Chelsea Branch with long memories. They moved at the 1961 Daylesford Conference for the adoption of decimal currency with the dollar as base unit!

### **AUSTRALIA DAY**

On January 26th 1788 the European settlement of Australia began with Captain Arthur Phillip raising the flag at Sydney Cove.

Since 1885 ANA has strongly held to the idea of Australia Day as a national holiday on that date. Before Federation it was seen as one way to rally support for people "to think

Australian". Originally it was referred to as Foundation Day, then ANA Day, Anniversary Day or Pioneer Day. There were flickers of interest on the part of those who mattered but ANA made little headway. In the mid 1920's the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration began including Australia Day in its Federal Award prescriptions. Unfortunately the influence of those favouring a long weekend approach dominated. It was not until 1935 that the ANA finally succeeded in having the name accepted in the full national sense. They have had to wait till 1991 to see it officially observed on the 26th rather than on the nearest Monday. For many years the ANA Metropolitan Committee organised the social function attended by representatives of both Federal and State Parliaments. In 1946 the Federal Government moved to create the Australia Day Celebration Committee, later known as the Australia Day Council to be responsible for the observance and activities of the day. Then in 1979 Prime Minister Fraser instituted a new National Day Committee to take over this function. Special Australia Day stamps have been printed from 1978. The name of the ANA is preserved in some Racing programmes held in Victoria and South Australia on Australia Day. This is a legacy of the ANA Handicap Race run since 1891.

I have been unable to discover any medals/medalets specifically for Australia Day perhaps because the name only became official after 1935, nor any medallic reference to the earlier names with the exception of an award medal issued in 1901 (see end of article). This would indicate that there are other award medals particularly for sports and competitions held on this day. This tradition incidentally is confirmed by a medal issued by The Australia Day Council. The Obverse reads ONE NATION/ONE FUTURE/For Achievement in Sport. Presented by The Australia Day Council. The reverse is blank for awardee inscription. But many of the ANA badges and pendants produced by jewellers would have been worn on ANA Day in Victoria.

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These were made in silver and gold usually in filigree patterns as depicted in advertisements in ANA publications. Makers included Newmans in Melbourne, Kelsalls in Ballarat and W.Kerr in Sydney. Les Carlisle in his book (A/12) depicts a silver badge with

Obverse: Australian Natives' Association, and in filigree a coat -of-arms with kangaroo and emu. Reverse blank, which he dates in the 1880's.

### THE EXHIBITIONS

The three great principles of the ANA according to J. Hume Cook writing in 1931 were:

- The maintenance of a White Australia
- The made-in-Australia movement
- The broadening of the Commonwealth Constitution

The method for pursuing the second objective was through the staging of Exhibitions. In Melbourne the ANA Metropolitan Committee staged the first of these as a trial in conjunction with the Annual Fete in 1905. Admission was free and 150,000 people attended.

The second Exhibition in 1906 attracted a large number of exhibitors and vice-regal patronage. Newspapers said it was the most creditable display of Australian Arts, Manu-

factures and Products that had ever been held in any part of the Commonwealth. Total attendance was 400,000.

The third Exhibition in 1907 attracted not only the patronage of the Governor-General and all State Governors but also the Federal and State Chambers of Commerce. It was open for six weeks and had an admission charge of Adults 6d, Children 3d. There were 185 exhibitors, mostly of manufactured goods, but in contrast there was a huge display by the Queensland Government occupying 6000 sq. feet and featuring primary products, forestry products and a range of minerals from nearly every operating mine. There were further exhibitions in 1908 and 1909 though the Chamber of Commerce took a bigger hand in the Melbourne Exhibitions. The All-Australia Exhibition, a combined effort of the ANA Metropolitan Committee and the VCC proved to be an outstanding feature of the Centenary Celebrations of the City of Melbourne.

In Sydney too an Exhibition of Australian Manufactures and Products was staged in 1905-06. The aim was to educate people in the worth and value of Australian goods. All types of products, agricultural and mineral as well as manufactured goods were displayed the highlight being the newly invented Sunshine Wheat Harvester. Opening celebrations included a band performance and a 1500 voice choir. At the Grand Final Concert on 17th January the Prime Minister Alfred Deakin paid a glowing tribute to the achievements and public leadership of the ANA.

In Tasmania there had been parochial difficulties for the ANA. Branches at Zeehan and Queenstown had been affiliated with ANA in Victoria and were reluctant to join together in a new Tasmanian Board, but finally agreed. The first Tasmanian ANA Conference was held in Hobart on 10th September 1904. The second Conference at Launceston on April 1906 reported 6 branches affiliated. The Launceston Branch on its own staged an outstanding Exhibition of Australian Industries in 1908. The example of the Eastern States

was followed by ANA in Western Australia where exhibitions were held at Perth, Subiaco and Geraldton.

The medals and medalets associated with these exhibitions are quite hard to find. The list as known to me are:

Car.1905/5 23 mm In silver, copper and bronze-gilded, by Amor. This is the first Melbourne Exhibition.



Car.1905 - 30 mm In aluminium. Similar to the above. Amor on reverse.

Car.1905-6/1 25 mm White metal. This is the Sydney Exhibition.

Car.1906/1 22 mm Silver (and perhaps other metals). The second Melbourne Exhibition.



Car.1907/1 22 mm Bronze-gilded. The third Melbourne Exhibition.

Car.1908/1 31 mm Bronze-gilded. The Launceston Exhibition.

Award medals exist for the Sydney Exhibition. One such is : Obverse: Exhibition of Australian Manufactures and Products.

Reverse inscribed: "F.H.Carter/2nd prize/-Tenor Solo". In gilt silver, 1905/06 26 x 33 mm.

**OTHER MEDALS**

Some ANA Branches had medals specially struck for award to long-serving officers. Those I have viewed or had rubbings sent to me from various collections include:

\* 1901, 30 mm

Obverse: AUSTRALIAN NATIVES' ASSOCIATION enclosing within a circle the Australian Coat-of-Arms.

Reverse A.N.A. Fete/1901/WANDS./SS. No253 FOOTSCRAY/JEAN CORK/ NEWMAN. (all incused). Stg. silver.



\* No date.

Obverse No 11 ITHACA BRANCH in outer circle(blue enamel). ANA on map of Australia (white enamel) enclosed in circle (background gold), clasp at top.

Reverse: blank except maker's name at bottom J KING. MELB.

(Ithaca is a Brisbane Branch).



\* 1920/21, 9ct. gold

Obverse: ANA at top. Map of Australia (white) on blue background in circle surrounded by decoration. At bottom BOARD OF DIRECTORS/1920-21. Clasp at top.

Reverse: Pres. to E.SODEN. Newman 9c Gold.



\* Gilt, 52mm.

Obverse: AUSTRALIAN NATIVES' ASSOCIATION around wreath. ANA in blue on white raised map of Australia. No 283 Willaura Br.



Reverse: Presented to L G BARRETT President 3.8.42/18.6.80.

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