

**'Feats of Fancy' and 'Marvels of Muscle':
A Social History of Swimming in Late Colonial Melbourne**

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Table of Contents

Abstract		iv
Declaration		v
Acknowledgements		vi
List of Acronyms		vii
Chapter One		
Historical Perspectives on Swimming: An Overview		
1.1	Introduction	1
1.2	Australian Sporting Culture	2
1.3	International Aquatic Research	6
1.4	Australian Aquatic Research	10
1.5	Research on Swimming in Melbourne	20
1.6	Newspapers as Primary Sources	24
1.7	Methodology	27
1.8	Conclusions	31
Chapter Two		
The Characteristics of Swimming and Bathing in Early Melbourne		
2.1	Introduction	33
2.2	Health, Sanitation and Morality: The Need for Public Baths	33
2.3	The Early Years: Yarra Baths and Bathing	36
2.4	Port Phillip's Sea Baths and the English Tradition	39
2.5	An 'Urban Beach': The Establishment of the Melbourne City Baths	49
2.6	Early Competitions and Clubs	51
2.7	Conclusions	60
Chapter Three		
'Panderings to a Sensation Loving Public': The Role of Carnival in Popularising Swimming		
3.1	Introduction	63
3.2	The Historical Development of Spectator Sport	64
3.3	Selling Sport: Swimming in the Print Media	69
3.4	Sport as Carnival and Theatre	71
3.5	Ladies' Day and Carnival	78
3.6	Novelties, Fancy Dress and Farcical Events	80
3.7	Trick Swimming, Diving and Plunge Events	87
3.8	Water Polo	94
3.9	Specialty Competitive Races and Events	102
3.10	The Increasing Emphasis on Competitive Racing	104
3.11	Conclusions	106

Chapter Four**‘This Truly Noble Art’: Lifesaving, Resuscitation and Swimming in Melbourne State Schools**

4.1	Introduction	110
4.2	Early Swimming and Lifesaving Education	111
4.3	Lifesaving Clubs and Competitions	116
4.4	Youth Swimming Prior to the Schools Movement	122
4.5	The Inauguration of Swimming in Melbourne State Schools	130
4.6	The Consolidation of Swimming in Melbourne State Schools	135
4.7	Conclusions	147

Chapter Five**‘A Question of Propriety’? The Rise of Female Participation in Swimming in Melbourne**

5.1	Introduction	150
5.2	Existing Attitudes Toward Swimming for Women	152
5.3	The Feminine Role at Colonial Swimming Carnivals	156
5.4	Barriers to Participation and Inclusion	164
5.5	‘Not a Swimming Animal’: Building a Case for Women’s Carnivals	171
5.6	The Brighton Ladies’ Carnivals: A Case Study	177
5.7	Further Developments in Women’s Swimming	190
5.8	Conclusions	193

Chapter Six**‘A Spirit of Emulation’: Governing Competitive Swimming in Melbourne**

6.1	Introduction	197
6.2	The Reflected Importance of Amateurism	198
6.3	The Development of Clubs and Competitions	207
6.4	Inconsistencies in Rules and Regulations	215
6.5	Poor Attention to Regional Clubs	220
6.6	Financial Problems	224
6.7	The Unacceptable Standard of Competitive Swimming	230
6.8	Conclusions	239

Chapter Seven

Conclusions	242
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Bibliography	252
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Abstract

The history of competitive swimming in nineteenth century Australia has been relatively well documented, with several publications dedicated to the social, cultural and statistical dimensions of the sport. However, little academic attention has been directed toward the manner in which swimming was promoted to the public, and the cultural influences surrounding this endorsement. In order to address such a deficiency, this thesis examines how the activity of swimming was represented in the Melbourne press at the end of the nineteenth century. Through a systematic analysis of selected metropolitan, suburban, sporting and specialist newspapers, a number of factors are identified as integral to the development of competitive swimming in Melbourne specifically, and in the colony of Victoria more generally. Key aspects include the existence of a popular carnival culture, the introduction of swimming in schools, the rise of female participation and the inauguration of a colonial governing body for competitive swimming. The varying press representations of these issues are examined thematically, and the socio-cultural reasons for trends in coverage are explored. It is suggested that the popularity of swimming in colonial Melbourne was influenced by the social, humanitarian and health benefits that the sport provided, and that these factors were reinforced by coverage provided in nineteenth century newspapers. In short, as well as promoting swimming to the public, the local press played an important role in providing social commentary on swimming carnivals, critiquing the sport's administration and lobbying for improvements. This research therefore draws attention to the interactive role of newspaper columnists in not only promoting, but also in sometimes hindering, the growth of Australian aquatic sport. In highlighting the character and influence of the press, greater understandings of the socio-cultural processes that underpinned the development of competitive swimming in late colonial Melbourne are achieved.

Declaration

I, Rachel Winterton, declare that the PhD thesis entitled “‘Feats of Fancy” and “Marvels of Muscle”: A Social History of Swimming in Late Colonial Melbourne’ is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Signature:

Date:

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List of Acronyms

ASU	Amateur Swimming Union of Australia
FINA	Fédération Internationale de Natation
NSS	National Swimming Society (England)
NSWAAA	New South Wales Amateur Athletic Association
NSWASA	New South Wales Amateur Swimming Association
NZASA	New Zealand Amateur Swimming Association
QASA	Queensland Amateur Swimming Association
RHS	Royal Humane Society
SAASA	South Australian Amateur Swimming Association
SAGB	Swimming Association of Great Britain
SSSA	State Schools Swimming Association (Victoria)
SSSC	State Schools Swimming Committee (Victoria)
TASA	Tasmanian Amateur Swimming Association
VAAA	Victorian Amateur Athletic Association
VASA	Victorian Amateur Swimming Association
VSA	Victorian Swimming Association

Chapter One

Historical Perspectives on Swimming: An Overview

1.1 Introduction

Douglas Booth has noted in his seminal work on Australian beach culture that, ‘No other country is so beach-bound’.¹ In light of this revelation, it is therefore unsurprising that sporting and recreational activities of an aquatic nature have always been popular in Australian society. Swimming is but one example, and its iconic position in Australian culture has resulted in a great deal of research on the activity in a variety of locations, across a number of different time periods and from a number of perspectives. However, the lengthy history of the sport and the diversity of locations in which it was conducted have ensured that the historical documentation of swimming in Australia is not, nor will ever be, complete. Therefore, there is a need for a sustained contribution to the national history of the sport by exploring neglected areas of enquiry, and by examining the sport from alternate perspectives.

In line with such an observation, this thesis examines the development and characteristics of swimming in Melbourne, Victoria, by means of a systematic analysis of press coverage on swimming between 1893 and 1900.² The starting point for this research denotes the inauguration of the colonial governing body for competitive swimming, the Victorian Swimming Association (VSA),³ which precipitated an era of growth and change for the sport. Therefore, this thesis seeks to identify factors that influenced the continued development of the competitive sport in Melbourne, and in Victoria more generally.⁴ Furthermore, it will also explore the role of the press in promoting swimming, the representation of swimming in nineteenth

¹ Douglas Booth, *Australian Beach Cultures: The History of Sun, Sand and Surf*, Frank Cass, London, 2001, p. 3.

² In nineteenth century Australia, Melbourne was the major city of the colony of Victoria.

³ John McDonald, *The First 100: A Century of Swimming in Victoria*, Swimming Victoria, Melbourne, 1993, p. 4. The VSA underwent a name change in 1894/95 (see McDonald, *The First 100*, p. 7), and became the Victorian Amateur Swimming Association (VASA). For the purposes of this thesis, the acronym VASA will be used to refer to the association in a general manner, unless specifically referring to the period where the association was still operating as the VSA. However, it is pertinent to note that the VSA and the VASA are in fact the same organisation, and these terms were often used interchangeably in the period under examination.

⁴ While the thesis will examine various aspects of swimming in Melbourne, both recreational and competitive, these aspects will be assessed for their impact on the development of competitive swimming in Victoria more generally.

century press coverage, and the reasons underlining this representation. The necessity of such a study is reinforced upon undertaking a systematic review of the literature concerning aquatic sport in Australia.

This preliminary chapter evaluates the existing literature on aquatic sport, both in Australia and internationally, to the conclusion of the nineteenth century. The observations that will be gleaned from such a review are intended to both position the thesis against research that has already been completed, and to contextualise the findings that will arise from this investigation. The chapter opens with a brief summary of the construction of Australian sporting culture, before reviewing the existing literature in regard to international aquatics. The remainder of the chapter is devoted to the evaluation of the various forms of Australian aquatic research, inclusive of generalist literature and academic work. From this point, the various sources that deal specifically with swimming in Melbourne are highlighted, and their significance to the field is evaluated. The chapter concludes with an evaluation of the validity of using newspapers as primary source material, and an outline of the proposed methodology. Reviewing the literature in this manner establishes a clear deficiency in regard to the existing research on swimming in nineteenth century Melbourne, and a concerted lack of primary source material with which to examine it. In consideration of these findings, this chapter also provides a strong justification for both the scope and methodology of this thesis.

1.2 Australian Sporting Culture

The pervasiveness of sport in Australian society, and its role in defining and shaping the nation, is now widely acknowledged. This notion dates back to the nineteenth century, where the successes of the Australian cricket team against the ‘motherland’ played a significant role in establishing a distinct brand of nationalism.⁵ Rob Hess and Matthew Nicholson assert that Australia has long had a reputation as a sporting nation, and that this reputation has contributed to a sense of national identity.⁶ In their view, since the white settlement of Australia in 1788 as a penal colony, the sporting

⁵ Richard Cashman, *Sport in the National Imagination: Australian Sport in the Federation Decades*, Walla Walla Press, Sydney, 2002, p. 24.

⁶ Rob Hess and Matthew Nicholson, ‘Australia’, in David Levinson and Karen Christensen (eds), *Berkshire Encyclopedia of World Sport*, vol. 1, Berkshire Publishing Group, Great Barrington, 2005, p. 123.

preferences of British immigrants have moulded the cultural practices of sport in Australia.⁷ The playing of games from the ‘home country’ was originally an indicator of the desire for normalcy in a foreign land, and symbolised that British civilisation and culture could survive on Australian soil.⁸

However, over time this English sporting culture evolved to become inimitably Australian. In his seminal work on Australian sporting history, Richard Cashman establishes that the definitive era in the development of an Australian sporting culture occurred from 1850 to 1914, and he nominates a number of reasons for the unique evolution and popularity of this culture.⁹ He asserts that sport was prominent in English society in the period where Australia was undergoing structural growth, and consequently central locations in cities were developed into sporting facilities. The gold rush era of the 1850s helped to finance numerous and often palatial sporting facilities, and made sport accessible for most of the white Australian population.¹⁰

The original foundation of Australian sporting culture was based on a combination of imported English traditions, and thus English ideologies such as Muscular Christianity and amateurism were embraced. The former promoted the development of moral character through participation in organised sport, exemplified in qualities such as sportsmanship and discipline, and also incorporated the notions of national pride and duty.¹¹ Amateurism, on the other hand, was founded on the principle of participating in sport for the love of the activity, and not for financial incentives.¹² Other aspects of Australian sporting culture, which were seen to be more identifiably Australian, included egalitarianism, mateship and fair-mindedness.¹³ Additionally, Cashman suggests that because of Australia’s colonial heritage, sporting heroes and

⁷ Hess and Nicholson, ‘Australia’, p. 123.

⁸ Cashman, *Sport in the National Imagination*, p. 19.

⁹ Richard Cashman, *Paradise of Sport: The Rise of Organised Sport in Australia*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 1995, p. vi.

¹⁰ Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, p. 205.

¹¹ Wray Vamplew, ‘Muscular Christianity’, in Wray Vamplew, Katharine Moore, John O’Hara, Richard Cashman and Ian Jobling (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian Sport* (Revised Second Edition), Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1997, p. 297.

¹² R. J. Paddick, ‘Amateurism’, in Wray Vamplew, Katharine Moore, John O’Hara, Richard Cashman and Ian Jobling (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian Sport* (Revised Second Edition), Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1997, p. 13.

¹³ Geoff Lawrence and David Rowe, ‘Nationalism’, in Wray Vamplew, Katharine Moore, John O’Hara, Richard Cashman and Ian Jobling (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian Sport* (Revised Second Edition), Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1997, p. 299.

heroines who have bettered the English in any sporting contest have always been lionised.¹⁴ This led to the linkage of nationalistic pride to sporting success on the world stage, and the continued glorification of Australian athletes.

However, the most significant factor in the development of a particular sporting culture was the role of sport in constructing communities. In a new country, there was no pre-existing framework to unite individuals from different religions, social classes and suburbs. Sport essentially acted as ‘social cement’, and this role in particular initiated a sporting culture quite dissimilar to that from which it had evolved.¹⁵ The traditional English sports were adapted to the alternate social, economic and physical environment of Australia, and new games and traditions eventuated.¹⁶ In response to this early emphasis on sport in Australian culture, Booth and Colin Tatz suggest that sport has ‘become our common language, our common and connecting denominator ... the metaphor for life’s experiences’.¹⁷ However, they also pose a valid question, asking if there is ‘enough substance in sport – as an idea, an ideal, a set of actions, as a distinct culture – to claim that it both connects and unites’.¹⁸

The idea of a distinctive national sporting culture has been widely explored in Australian academic sporting literature. More than two decades ago, Brian Stoddart noted that sport was ‘an integral part of the Australian social fabric’ and in his view, sport played ‘a significant role in constructing that fabric’.¹⁹ This assumption that sport is an important social institution raises certain questions about the role sport plays in the construction of Australian society. Indeed, Stoddart’s suggestion that an appreciation of sport’s social role was lacking, and his assertion that sport had ‘been eulogised rather than criticised’,²⁰ was a challenge to both commentators and future historians of sport.

¹⁴ Richard Cashman, ‘The Australian Way of Sport’, in Wray Vamplew, Katharine Moore, John O’Hara, Richard Cashman and Ian Jobling (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian Sport* (Revised Second Edition), Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1997, p. 47.

¹⁵ Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, pp. 205-206.

¹⁶ Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, p. 36.

¹⁷ Douglas Booth and Colin Tatz, *One-Eyed: A View of Australian Sport*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 2000, pp. 2-3.

¹⁸ Booth and Tatz, *One-Eyed*, p. 3.

¹⁹ Brian Stoddart, *Saturday Afternoon Fever: Sport in the Australian Culture*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1986, p. 13.

²⁰ Stoddart, *Saturday Afternoon Fever*, p. 5.

It is not surprising, then, that this notion of a uniquely obsessive sporting culture has been subsequently addressed by historians. A decade after Stoddart made his claims, Daryl Adair and Wray Vamplew posited the view that Australian sporting culture was not simply self-explanatory, but ‘part myth, part reality’.²¹ In particular, they focus on the premise that it is a combination of ideas, values and myths that have shaped Australian sporting culture.²² Other commentators such as Booth and Tatz, in their critical appraisal of Australian sport, suggest that egalitarianism and the ‘fair-go’ principle are the perceived key foundations of national sporting identity.²³ However, Adair and Vamplew suggest that Australian societal distinctions have traditionally been replicated and reinforced through sport, arguing that the nation ‘has never possessed an egalitarian sporting culture’ and that this myth is an invented sporting tradition.²⁴

Thus, historians agree that sport plays an integral role in Australian culture, which is attested to the social, cultural and nationalistic significance sport has assumed in the national culture. There is also a consensus that Australian sporting culture is unique, but this belief has focused primarily on the positive contribution that sport has made to the Australian nation. The ideas, values, traditions and myths that contribute to Australian sporting culture have remained largely unchallenged. In line with such an assertion, the contribution of certain sports to the construction of Australian sporting culture must be questioned. Similarly, certain sports should also be assessed in regard to their role in propagating, or disproving, some of the social, cultural and nationalistic myths that have given rise to the notion of a distinctive national sporting culture. This is particularly necessary in the case of swimming, given its early origins in Australia. However, before the existing literature on swimming in Australia can be explored, the relevant international literature must first be evaluated for its contribution to knowledge.

²¹ Daryl Adair and Wray Vamplew, *Sport in Australian History*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1997, p. 6.

²² Adair and Vamplew, *Sport in Australian History*, p. xiii.

²³ Booth and Tatz, *One-Eyed*, p. 4.

²⁴ Adair and Vamplew, *Sport in Australian History*, p. 139.

1.3 International Aquatic Research

In contemporary society, the sport of swimming exists as a highly standardised, competitive and professional sport. It has existed under the administration of a world body, the Fédération Internationale de Natation (FINA) since 1908, which also governs other aquatic disciplines such as water polo, diving, open water and synchronised swimming.²⁵ While competitive swimming was a relatively new phenomenon in Australian culture, it has a rich history in other parts of the world, which contributed to its appeal. According to the various encyclopaedic entries on the activity, competitive swimming has its origins as a recreational practice that originated in ancient times. Thierry Terret has established that references to swimming have been located in ancient hieroglyphics, drawings, paintings and books.²⁶ Ian Jobling also asserts that the early significance of the sport has been documented by ancient Greek historians such as Herodotus, Thucydides and Pausanias, with the latter recording that the Greek god Dionysus had swimming races staged in his honour.²⁷

A number of generalist swimming publications, which have primarily emanated from Britain, have successfully documented the cultural significance of swimming in both the ancient and modern world. A key reference related to swimming in the ancient world, Nicholas Orme's *Early British Swimming, 55BC-AD1719*, establishes that swimming was 'a common accomplishment ... part of the prowess of a hero, but widely used by lesser men'.²⁸ Orme's publication looks essentially at the history of British swimming, but also at its origins; that is, the aquatic activities of the Romans, the Anglo-Saxons and the Vikings, as well as the period of the Middle Ages. The work examines the motives of the inhabitants of these civilisations to swim, and general attitudes toward the pastime. In another publication that examines swimming in the ancient world, Charles Sprawson states that for the ancient Greeks, 'water possessed magical, mysterious, and often sinister qualities'.²⁹ The contention of

²⁵ Gerhard Lewin, *Swimming*, Sportverlag, Berlin, 1979, p. 26.

²⁶ Thierry Terret, 'Swimming', in David Levinson and Karen Christensen (eds), *Berkshire Encyclopedia of World Sport*, vol. 4, Berkshire Publishing Group, Great Barrington, 2005, p. 1573.

²⁷ Ian Jobling, 'Speed Swimming', in David Levinson and Karen Christensen (eds), *Encyclopedia of World Sport: From Ancient Times to the Present*, vol. 3, ABC-CLIO, Santa Barbara, 1996, p. 993.

²⁸ Nicholas Orme, *Early British Swimming, 55BC-AD1719, with the First Swimming Treatise in English, 1595*, University of Exeter, Exeter, 1983, p. 18.

²⁹ Charles Sprawson, *Haunts of the Black Masseur: The Swimmer as Hero*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2000, p. 53.

Sprawson's publication, apart from its historical allusions, is that swimming has held existential and psychological significance for different civilisations, hence its popularity as a recreational pursuit. He relates that the medium of water had the power to cause the common man to fall in love with his reflection, or even to turn him into a hermaphrodite.³⁰

Given its cultural significance, Sprawson also believes that residents of ancient Rome inherited their love for the aquatic medium from the Greek civilisation,³¹ and enjoyed the use of up to 800 bathing establishments.³² A great number of narratives from the ancient world link the practice of swimming with religious rites, but it is important to acknowledge that in these instances, swimming was suggestive of bathing or immersion, and not the practice of advancing through the water.³³ Certainly, it was not indicative of competition. Very little is known about swimming contests in the ancient world, but Gerhard Lewin claims that in ancient Greece, swimming races were 'the exception rather than the rule'.³⁴ Indeed, swimming was not included in the ancient Olympic Games, despite the role it played in the physical training of young Greeks for the military.³⁵

Sprawson argues that after the fall of Rome and with the subsequent rise of Christianity, swimming and bathing lost its universal appeal. He states that water became somewhat stigmatised, as 'instead of something "clear, light, of high value, desirable", its effects came to be regarded as detrimental to health, its influence devilish rather than divine. It began to be thought of as a breeding ground for rats, a source of plague and disease'.³⁶ This view was compounded by the rise of Christianity in Europe, and the ritual of swimming and bathing was reportedly not fully revived until the beginning of the nineteenth century.³⁷ However, Pat Besford's *Encyclopaedia of Swimming* states that the Japanese had an early history of

³⁰ Sprawson, *Haunts of the Black Masseur*, p. 53.

³¹ Sprawson, *Haunts of the Black Masseur*, p. 58.

³² Sprawson, *Haunts of the Black Masseur*, p. 46.

³³ D. A. Armbruster, R. H. Allen and H. S. Billingsley, *Swimming and Diving* (Fifth Edition), Kaye and Ward, London, 1970, p. 1.

³⁴ Lewin, *Swimming*, p. 23.

³⁵ Lewin, *Swimming*, p. 23.

³⁶ Sprawson, *Haunts of the Black Masseur*, p. 67.

³⁷ Sprawson, *Haunts of the Black Masseur*, p. 69.

competitive swimming, with formal races taking place as early as 36BC.³⁸ Besford also suggests that Japan was the first country to organise swimming on a national level, with an imperial edict approved in 1603 that enforced compulsory swimming in schools.³⁹

Publications and manuals on the art of swimming began to appear from the sixteenth century. The first, a book by the German Nicolas Wynman in 1538,⁴⁰ was followed by an instructional manual by Englishman Everard Digby in 1587.⁴¹ While the literature would suggest that modern competitive swimming has its origins in Japan, the status of Japan as a 'closed country' ensured that the early development of organised competitive swimming has largely been attributed to the English.⁴² Developments in competitive swimming in England took place from the mid nineteenth century, with swimming baths opened in Liverpool in 1828, and by 1837 London had six pools being used for competitive racing.⁴³ The first swimming organisation, the National Swimming Society (NSS) was formed in London in 1837, and the first official national swimming association was founded in England in 1869.⁴⁴ There have been a considerable number of journal articles and book chapters published on recreational and hygienic bathing in other parts of the world, and on competitive swimming as a later aspect of this,⁴⁵ but the majority of background literature relevant for this thesis stems from Britain.

Given the early significance of competitive swimming in Britain, a number of nineteenth century publications outline the sport's development in considerable detail.

³⁸ Pat Besford, *Encyclopaedia of Swimming* (Second Edition), Robert Hale and Company, London, 1976, p. 114.

³⁹ Besford, *Encyclopaedia of Swimming*, p. 114.

⁴⁰ Terret, 'Swimming', p. 1573.

⁴¹ Jobling, 'Speed Swimming', p. 993.

⁴² Besford, *Encyclopaedia of Swimming*, p. 114.

⁴³ Jobling, 'Speed Swimming', p. 994.

⁴⁴ Besford, *Encyclopaedia of Swimming*, p. 114.

⁴⁵ See R. S. Kossuth, 'Dangerous Waters: Victorian Decorum, Swimmer Safety and the Establishment of Public Bathing Facilities in London (Canada)', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 22, no. 5, September 2005, pp. 796-815; Ken Cruikshank and N. B. Bouchier, 'Dirty Spaces: Environment, the State, and Recreational Swimming in Hamilton Harbour, 1870-1946', *Sport History Review*, vol. 29, no. 1, May 1998, pp. 59-76; and Thierry Terret, 'Hygienization: Civic Baths and Body Cleanliness in Late Nineteenth Century France', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 10, no. 3, December 1993, pp. 396-408 and 'Educative Pools: Water, School and Space in Twentieth-Century France', in Patricia Vertinsky and John Bale (eds), *Sites of Sport: Space, Place, Experience*, Routledge, London, 2004, pp. 39-56.

A notable example of this is Archibald Sinclair and William Henry's 1894 publication, which deals primarily with the practice of learning to swim in Britain. However, it also contains some valuable contextual information on the conduct of nineteenth century swimming competitions.⁴⁶ Additionally, this nineteenth century developmental era in British competitive and recreational swimming has been researched by a number of eminent twentieth century academic historians. Claire Parker's doctoral thesis explores the social history of British swimming, examining the role of urbanisation in transforming swimming from a recreational activity to a modern competitive sport.⁴⁷ This material is complemented by the later work of Christopher Love. In his thesis, subsequently published as a book, Love studies the social origins of the emergence of swimming in England, and its subsequent expansion, through thematic case studies that examine issues such as gender, class, education and the life-saving movement.⁴⁸ While both authors approach the sport of swimming from slightly different perspectives, these in-depth studies both make reference to the impact swimming had on British society, and consequently how societal attitudes had considerable implications for the initial growth of the sport.

Other academic historians have also looked at aspects of competitive swimming in nineteenth century Britain. The subject of professionalism has received some attention, with Terret and Win Hayes both publishing articles on this topic.⁴⁹ However, both Parker and Love allude to the fact that little has been written about swimming in Britain, and both cite a reference to Tony Mason and Richard Holt's *Sport in Britain*, which claimed that 'not enough work has been done on the subject'.⁵⁰ Given that Britain is widely acknowledged as the birthplace of 'modern' competitive swimming, this statement does not bode well for the academic history of

⁴⁶ Archibald Sinclair and William Henry, *Swimming* (Second Edition), Longmans, London, 1894.

⁴⁷ Claire Parker, 'An Urban Historical Perspective: Swimming, A Recreational and Competitive Pursuit 1840 to 1914', Doctoral thesis, Department of Sport Studies, University of Stirling, 2003. See also Claire Parker, 'Improving the "Condition" of the People: The Health of Britain and the Provision of Public Baths 1840-1870', *Sports Historian*, vol. 20, no. 2, November 2000, pp. 24-42, and Claire Parker, 'The Rise of Competitive Swimming 1840 to 1878', *Sports Historian*, vol. 21, no. 2, November 2001, pp. 58-72.

⁴⁸ Christopher Love, *A Social History of Swimming in England, 1800-1918: Splashing in the Serpentine*, Routledge, London, 2008.

⁴⁹ See Thierry Terret, 'Professional Swimming in England before the Rise of Amateurism, 1837-75', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 12, no. 1, April 1995, pp. 18-32, and Win Hayes, 'The Professional Swimmer 1860-1880s', *Sports Historian*, vol. 22, no. 2, November 2002, pp. 119-148. Terret has also published a number of articles and book chapters on the development of recreational swimming in France, however the vast majority of these publications are in French.

⁵⁰ Mason, cited in Love, *A Social History of Swimming in England*, p. 563.

swimming in other parts of the world. As previously stated, the heat of the antipodean climate has ensured that sporting and recreational activities of an aquatic nature have always been prevalent in Australian society. However, given the established importance of competitive swimming in building national pride and independence, the literature available on this topic is sparse.

1.4 Australian Aquatic Research

Cashman has noted that that Australia's greatest success in world sport has been achieved in the area of aquatics, most notably swimming.⁵¹ This is particularly significant given that swimming diffused largely from British origins, but was adapted within Australia to suit the more conducive environment.⁵² Consequently, Australia became one of the more successful nations when competitive swimming boomed at the end of the nineteenth century.⁵³ In the colonial period in Australia, swimming was a major contributor to establishing a particular brand of nationalism. This fostering of nationalism through sporting activity was already well in hand, with the victory of the Australian cricket team over England in 1882 said to have fostered Australianness and staved off 'colonial inferiority'.⁵⁴

The success of Australian swimmers, in what was a traditionally English sport, played a significant role in developing a brand of national identity. Although perhaps not feted to the same extent as the country's cricketers, certain Australian swimmers at the turn of the nineteenth century were also worthy representatives of ideal nationhood and identity. Aquatic champions such as Dick Cavill, Barney Kieran and Frank Beaurepaire achieved significant recognition for the new nation on the world stage, while perpetuating the character qualities that would come to represent the ideal Australian. John Ramsland, in his biographical piece on Kieran, identifies some of these traits as goodness, honesty, modesty, courage and manliness.⁵⁵ However,

⁵¹ Cashman, 'The Australian Way of Sport', p. 48.

⁵² Cashman, *Sport in the National Imagination*, p. 185.

⁵³ Cashman, 'The Australian Way of Sport', p. 48.

⁵⁴ Lawrence and Rowe, 'Nationalism', p. 300.

⁵⁵ John Ramsland, 'Barney Kieran, the Legendary "Sobraon Boy": From the Mean Streets to "Champion of the World"', *Sport in History*, vol. 27, no. 2, June 2007, p. 256. For additional information on the swimmers listed, see relevant entries in Wray Vamplew, Katharine Moore, John O'Hara, Richard Cashman and Ian Jobling (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian Sport* (Revised Second Edition), Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1997.

Cashman has suggested that despite the influence of swimming in Australian sporting culture, very little research has been completed on the activity.⁵⁶

A possible explanation for the lack of attention paid to documenting the history of swimming, as suggested by Hess and Parker, is the ambiguity of the term 'swimming'. While most sports are undertaken in typical locations and according to defined standards, swimming can be recreational or highly competitive, divided by gender or age and be undertaken in standardised pools, rivers or oceans. This, in turn, has resulted in a reticence by historians to examine its many facets in a cumulative work.⁵⁷ However, certain aspects of swimming have been well researched. Like the bush, the beach has traditionally been romanticised in nationalist art and literature and acknowledged as an integral part of national culture. Therefore, the field of aquatic research in Australia is primarily addressed from the perspective of beaches and ocean bathing. A number of books have been published by eminent historians outlining the history of Australian beach culture and the surf lifesaving movement.

The seminal work in this area, Booth's *Australian Beach Cultures*, examines the influence of the sub-cultures of surfers, surf bathers and surf lifesavers on the development of a uniquely Australian beach culture.⁵⁸ He indicates that beach culture is comprised of a number of images, symbols, artefacts and words that portray an image of the typical Australian. The more visible features of this culture include informal language, minimal dress, bodies at ease with and accustomed to the outdoors, respect for the dangers of the surf and sun, and the various individuals that personify these values, such as lifesavers and surfers.⁵⁹ Another recent anthology further expands on Booth's work, examining the different aspects of beach cultures, albeit in a more contemporary fashion.⁶⁰

In terms of romanticised literature on beach culture, Geoffrey Dutton's *Sun, Sea, Surf and Sand* demonstrates the position of the beach in the Australian imagination

⁵⁶ Cashman, *Sport in the National Imagination*, p. 173.

⁵⁷ Rob Hess and Claire Parker, 'Against the Tide: New Work on Australasian Aquatic Cultures', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 26, no. 14, November 2009, p. 2061.

⁵⁸ Booth, *Australian Beach Cultures*.

⁵⁹ Booth, *Australian Beach Cultures*, p. 3.

⁶⁰ James Skinner, Keith Gilbert and Allan Edwards (eds), *Some Like it Hot: The Beach as a Cultural Dimension*, Meyer & Meyer Sport, Oxford, 2003.

through various representations of art and literature.⁶¹ Alternatively, Leone Huntsman's *Sand in Our Souls* provides a detailed historical analysis of the way in which the beach has been incorporated into Australian culture, though this work focuses largely on Sydney beaches.⁶² More specifically, Huntsman examines the development of a uniquely Australian beach culture, which has been further expanded on and analysed by a number of historians. The publication of these two works by Oxford University and Melbourne University Press respectively is significant of a new trend, whereby university publishers are giving credence to academic work in the broad field of sports studies. Surf lifesaving has also attracted considerable academic attention. A recent addition to the field, Ed Jaggard's anthology *Between the Flags*, celebrates the centenary of surf lifesaving in Australia and its impact on the nation's society and culture.⁶³ Additionally, historians such as Sean Brawley and Jaggard have researched the histories of iconic surf lifesaving clubs, particularly in New South Wales and Western Australia.⁶⁴ Perusal of the prominent academic journals of the discipline yields a plethora of articles by eminent historians such as Booth, Brawley and Jaggard.⁶⁵

The beach, therefore, has been well documented in respect to its impact on the development of Australian popular and nationalist culture. Furthermore, various activities arising from the development of this beach culture, such as surfing and surf lifesaving, have been thoroughly researched. One aspect of beach culture that has endeared it to researchers is its initial role in developing the culture of the new nation, particularly in the years following Federation. Surf lifesaving in particular has been

⁶¹ Geoffrey Dutton, *Sun, Sea, Surf and Sand: The Myth of the Beach*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1985.

⁶² Leone Huntsman, *Sand in Our Souls: The Beach in Australian History*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 2001.

⁶³ Ed Jaggard (ed.), *Between the Flags: One Hundred Summers of Australian Surf Lifesaving*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2006.

⁶⁴ For examples, see Sean Brawley, *Beach Beyond: A History of the Palm Beach Surf Club, 1921-1996*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 1996; Sean Brawley, *The Bondi Lifesaver: A History of an Australian Icon*, ABC Books, Sydney, 2007; Sean Brawley, *Vigilant and Victorious: A Community History of the Collaroy Surf Life Saving Club, 1911-1995*, Collaroy Surf Life Saving Club, Collaroy, 1995; and Ed Jaggard, *The Premier Club: Cottesloe Surf Life Saving Club's First Seventy-Five Years*, Cottesloe Surf Lifesaving Club, Cottesloe, 1984.

⁶⁵ For a comprehensive list of publications by these authors, see Hess and Parker, *Against the Tide*, pp. 2065-2068. A forum incorporating the methodological views of all three authors in researching surf-lifesaving has also been compiled. See M. G. Phillips, Ed Jaggard and Douglas Booth, 'Forum: Analysing Disputes in Sport History: The Surf-Lifesaving Debate', *Journal of Sport History*, vol. 29, no. 1, Spring 2002, pp. 1-40.

lauded for its contribution to nationhood;⁶⁶ yet it has already been suggested in this chapter that competitive swimming has also contributed to Australian nation-making in a similar way. In much the same way that competitive swimming in England stemmed from the establishment of public baths, competitive swimming in Australia can be considered a product of the restrictive beach culture that existed in the late nineteenth century. In both cases, the research conducted so far is not extensive. This is particularly unusual in the Australian context, considering the success the nation has experienced in competitive swimming events from the late nineteenth century.⁶⁷

In regard to the history of swimming in nineteenth century Australia, there are some general texts available which shed some light on the developmental aspects of the sport. Given the origins of competitive swimming as a seaside activity, some information on the early baths and pools where competitions originated can be gleaned from general texts and anthologies on seaside bathing. The two seminal works on recreational bathing in Australia, namely Lana Wells' *Sunny Memories: Australians at the Seaside* and Andrea Inglis' *Beside the Seaside*, shed some light on the types of facilities available in the late nineteenth century.⁶⁸ However, neither work places much emphasis on the development of competitive swimming from beach bathing, with each author choosing to focus on the social customs surrounding the activity. In terms of the scientific practice of bathing itself, and in a similar vein to the English treatises on bathing practices, a number of swimming manuals were published in the nineteenth century looking at swimming techniques. These manuals, while largely instructional, do allude to some basic history of swimming and bathing, and the places in which it was practiced.⁶⁹ Other more modern instructional

⁶⁶ See Sean Brawley, 'Our Life-Savers: The Royal Life Saving Society and the Origins of Surf Lifesaving in Federation Sydney', in Richard Cashman, John O'Hara and Andrew Honey (eds), *Sport, Federation, Nation*, Walla Walla Press, Sydney, 2001, p. 139.

⁶⁷ Since the advent of the Olympic Games in 1896, Australian swimmers have won 176 summer Olympic medals (58 gold, 57 silver and 61 bronze). Contrasted against the total medals won across all sports (444 total medals: 135 gold, 141 silver and 168 bronze), Australian swimmers have accounted for just under half the total medal count. These statistics are available at Australian Sports Commission, 'Australian Olympic Information', http://www.ausport.gov.au/information/finding_sport_information/topic/olympic_games/australian_results, accessed 20 December 2009.

⁶⁸ Lana Wells, *Sunny Memories: Australians at the Seaside*, Greenhouse Publications, Richmond, 1982; and Andrea Inglis, *Beside the Seaside: Victorian Resorts in the Nineteenth Century*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1999.

⁶⁹ See Charles Steedman, *Manual of Swimming: Including Bathing, Plunging, Diving, Floating, Scientific Swimming, Training, Drowning and Rescuing*, Henry Tolman Dwight, Melbourne, 1867; and D. W. Jobson, *A Hand-Book for Bathers*, E. Thomas, Melbourne, 1866.

swimming manuals, such as Cecil Colwin's works, contain anecdotal information on the history of the sport from a competitive and scientific perspective.⁷⁰

In terms of generalist swimming history, some of the anthologies available on sporting history devote some space to the sport. The *Oxford Companion to Australian Sport*, the main encyclopaedic reference to the history of Australian sport, contains an anecdotal section on the origins of competitive swimming, but its main concern is with biographical information.⁷¹ Booth's chapter in *Sport in Australia*, while addressing some basic early history of swimming, is written largely in the same vein as *Australian Beach Cultures*, and focuses primarily on bodily display.⁷² Some of the other seminal works in regard to Australian sporting history, such as the Cashman publications, also outline some of the key dates and milestones in Australian swimming history.⁷³ However, the main issue with the aquatic material in these anthologies is that they all provide similar anecdotal information. The literature on competitive swimming in Australia is largely reliant on the commissioned histories available, which celebrate major milestones of the sport's history.

The historiography of competitive swimming in Australia has been greatly enhanced by the recent celebration of the sport's centenary. The Amateur Swimming Union of Australia (ASU), the original national governing body for competitive swimming, was inaugurated in 1909,⁷⁴ and its centenary was commemorated in 2009 by the publication of a national history of competitive swimming. Murray Phillips' *Swimming Australia: One Hundred Years* is a comprehensive historical account of the development of competitive swimming, examining the establishment and growth of the national governing body, the various venues in which the sport has taken place, the evolution of the swimming strokes and the feats of Australia's swimmers. While a

⁷⁰ See C. M. Colwin, *Breakthrough Swimming*, Human Kinetics, Champaign, 2002, and *Swimming into the 21st Century*, Human Kinetics, Champaign, 1992. While these texts are American, they devote a considerable amount of coverage to the Australian sport.

⁷¹ See Reet Howell, Max Howell and Peter Horton, 'Swimming', in Wray Vamplew, Katharine Moore, John O'Hara, Richard Cashman and Ian Jobling (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian Sport* (Revised Second Edition), Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1997, pp. 416-419.

⁷² Douglas Booth, 'Swimming, Surfing and Surf-Lifesaving', in Wray Vamplew and Brian Stoddart (eds), *Sport in Australia: A Social History*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1994, pp. 231-254.

⁷³ See Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, pp. 50-51 and Cashman, *Sport in the National Imagination*, pp. 172-186.

⁷⁴ McDonald, *The First 100*, p. 17.

considerable portion of the publication is dedicated to the expansion of competitive swimming in the colonial period, and the socio-cultural factors underpinning this period, the sheer scope of the publication leaves little room for further exploration of these topics.⁷⁵ However, the contextual emphasis of Phillips' book is a welcome addition to the literature available on Australian swimming, especially when contrasted against an earlier commemorative publication celebrating 90 years of Australian swimming. This publication, in much the same vein as the generalist literature available, focused solely on results, times and records of Australian swimmers at international level.⁷⁶

For further contextual information regarding the sport, the histories of the separate state associations must be considered. The majority of these books have been published to celebrate the centenary histories of the sport in their various states. However, three of these publications - John McDonald's *The First 100* (Victoria), Alan Clarkson's *Lanes of Gold* (New South Wales) and John Daly's *The Splendid Journey* (South Australia) – were each commissioned by the respective state swimming associations.⁷⁷ Phillips, author of the commissioned national history of competitive swimming mentioned previously, has identified a number of issues in regard to these commissioned histories in a review essay. For example, he states that 'commissioning bodies usually pose questions relating to the past that they wish to be pursued'.⁷⁸ The perceived ramifications of this view are that some form of 'cultural editing' may occur, through dictation of appropriate topics and anticipated audience, in order to gloss over some undesirable periods or events in the association's history.⁷⁹ However, Phillips does acknowledge that history as a discipline is never completely objective,⁸⁰ indicating that no form of history is ever free from cultural editing.

⁷⁵ M. G. Phillips, *Swimming Australia: One Hundred Years*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2008.

⁷⁶ *Australian Swimming: Celebrating 90 Years*, Australian Swimming Incorporated, Sydney, 1999.

⁷⁷ McDonald, *The First 100*; Alan Clarkson, *Lanes of Gold: 100 Years of the NSW Amateur Swimming Association*, Lester Townsend Publishers, Sydney, 1990 and J. A. Daly, *The Splendid Journey: A Centenary History of Amateur Swimming in South Australia*, South Australian Amateur Swimming Association, Adelaide, 1998.

⁷⁸ M. G. Phillips, 'Public Sports History, History and Social Memory: (Re)presenting Swimming in Australia', *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 15, no. 1, November 1998, p. 95.

⁷⁹ Phillips, 'Public Sports History, History and Social Memory', p. 95.

⁸⁰ Phillips, 'Public Sports History, History and Social Memory', p. 95.

In terms of the content of the three histories, Phillips establishes some common themes that are allocated differing levels of emphasis. Statistical information such as winners, trophies, records and times are all accorded considerable emphasis in all three histories, as are the achievements of various administrators. However, it is noted by Phillips that in most cases this information is not contextualised.⁸¹ In terms of contextualisation of achievements and developments, Phillips' review essay paints *The Splendid Journey* in a more positive light than the other publications. Stated, but not discussed, is the authorship of the three publications: Daly is a sport historian, and both McDonald and Clarkson are sport journalists.⁸² While Phillips acknowledges that sport historians have no particular claim on writing public histories,⁸³ his positive review of the Daly publication would suggest that they are methodologically better equipped to do so. *The Splendid Journey* is significantly less anecdotal, and devotes considerable space to an analysis of contextual developments that took place in the sport's early years. Alternatively, the Clarkson and McDonald publications are much more readable to the average audience, but provide only a superficial glimpse into the history of the sport.

Other histories of the non-commissioned variety, however, yield most of the same inadequacies in terms of contextual content. Tim Barrett's history of competitive swimming in Queensland is sketchy on the early history of general swimming competitions, but contains very detailed analysis of the development of women's carnivals.⁸⁴ Like its equivalents, it spends most of its time detailing dates, winners and administrative developments. In lieu of Phillips' comments on the objective independence of such works, it should be stated that Barrett is a previous president of the Queensland Swimming Association, which could potentially influence his representation of administrative developments. An earlier version of *The First 100*, the Victorian Amateur Swimming Association (VASA) history, was published by H. E. Belfrage, who also acted as president of this association for a brief period.⁸⁵ Similarly, the existing Tasmanian history was produced by the Tasmanian Amateur

⁸¹ Phillips, 'Public Sports History, History and Social Memory', p. 98.

⁸² Phillips, 'Public Sports History, History and Social Memory', p. 94.

⁸³ Phillips, 'Public Sports History, History and Social Memory', p. 94.

⁸⁴ Tim Barrett, *The First 100 Years: A History of the Queensland Swimming Association, 1898-1998*, Swimming Queensland, Capalaba, 2006.

⁸⁵ H. E. Belfrage, *Victorian Amateur Swimming Association: Brief History, 1893-1968*, self-published, Melbourne, 1969.

Swimming Association (TASA), which raises some questions in terms of objectivity.⁸⁶ However, this question of neutrality is moot when looking at the composition of the publication - of 32 pages, 28 of these are dedicated to competition results. This suggests that the association histories may be less interested in the context of development, than the results yielded.

In order to glean any detailed information on swimming in Melbourne, it is the Victorian histories that must be consulted.⁸⁷ Within *The First 100*, Phillips identifies a number of issues with contextual content that, although not unique to this publication, impinge on its contribution to social memory. He highlights in his review an emphasis on administrative figures without providing the appropriate social and historical of administrative developments,⁸⁸ the omission of swimming in rural communities, a failure to pinpoint the importance of amateurism and little explanation of the cultural history of women's swimming.⁸⁹ One key point raised by Phillips in regard to this thesis is the failure of *The First 100* to address the concept of swimming venues as cultural sites.⁹⁰ The other existing Victorian history, Belfrage's 1969 publication, is essentially an earlier version of *The First 100*, but is more generous in regard to how much text is devoted to early socio-cultural developments. However, both publications are reliant on biography and tend to eulogise key figures in the development of Victorian swimming, in terms of their sporting achievements. In summary, the histories of Victorian swimming emphasise champion swimmers, administrators and championship results. While these are the more tangible representations of the organisation's successes, little space is given over to the wider development of events that produced these results.

In terms of the existing academic literature which examines the history of competitive swimming in Australia, there is a decided bias toward certain locations. To date, little

⁸⁶ Tasmanian Amateur Swimming Association, *75 Years of Swimming in Tasmania: Produced for the 75th Annual Meeting and Dinner of the TASA*, Tasmanian Amateur Swimming Association, Hobart, 1985.

⁸⁷ While the objective of this thesis is to examine the development and characteristics of swimming in Melbourne, the majority of literature focusing on swimming in this period focuses more broadly on Victoria. However, the status of Melbourne as the major city of the colony ensures that the majority of information gleaned from the literature is referring to Melbourne-based aquatic activity.

⁸⁸ Phillips, 'Public Sports History, History and Social Memory', p. 98.

⁸⁹ Phillips, 'Public Sports History, History and Social Memory', p. 99.

⁹⁰ Phillips, 'Public Sports History, History and Social Memory', p. 99.

academic research has been completed on competitive swimming in Victoria, and therefore on Melbourne more specifically.⁹¹ This is in contrast to states such as New South Wales, where over the last three decades, a number of doctoral and honours level theses have examined certain aspects of the sport in some detail. An early, and notable, example of this is Veronica Raszeja's work on the history of women's swimming in Sydney, which analyses the social implications behind the development of women's swimming.⁹² In doing so, she creates a history which transcends the existing published works that focus on representations of times, results and trophies. Three other theses have also highlighted aspects of the competitive sport in New South Wales. Jean Allan's doctoral thesis documents the social history of Sydney swimming in regard to ocean baths and bathing, and her work touches briefly on competitive swimming.⁹³ Alternatively, Seth Richardson's research examines the development of swimming in Sydney in terms of the amateur/professional dichotomy, but in keeping with the biographical nature of Australian swimming historiography, he focuses largely on the Cavill family and their achievements.⁹⁴ Finally, Gary Osmond's thesis, while focusing primarily on the cultural contributions of Pacific Islander aquatic athletes to Australian swimming historiography, covers the minutiae of New South Wales swimming in considerable detail.⁹⁵

Articles in prominent sporting historical journals also shed some light on the dominance of Sydney and New South Wales in the documentation of Australian aquatic activity. While multiple articles profess to explore the history of competitive

⁹¹ For the only existing academic work completed on Victorian competitive swimming, see Rachel Winterton, 'For "Duty and Pleasure": The Development of Competitive Swimming in Victoria, 1900-1908', Honours thesis, School of Human Movement, Recreation and Performance, Victoria University, 2005. Excerpts from this thesis were subsequently published as Rachel Winterton, 'The Kieran Legacy: The Development of Competitive Swimming in Victoria, 1900-1908', in Rob Hess (ed.), *Making Histories, Making Memories: The Construction of Australian Sporting Identities*, Australian Society for Sports History, Melbourne, 2006, pp. 23-38.

⁹² Veronica Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion: The Rise of Women's Competitive Swimming in Sydney to 1912*, Australian Society for Sports History, Campbelltown, 1992.

⁹³ Jean Allan, 'The Natatorial Art: A Social History of Swimming in Sydney to the Outbreak of the Second World War', Doctoral thesis, Department of History, University of Sydney, 2004.

⁹⁴ Seth Richardson, 'An Aquatic Divide and Conquer: The Amateur Professional Divide in the Development of Competitive Swimming in Sydney, 1880-1905', Graduate Diploma of Arts (History) thesis, University of New South Wales, 2006.

⁹⁵ F. G. Osmond, 'Nimble Savages: Myth, Race, Social Memory and Australian Aquatic Sport', Doctoral thesis, University of Queensland, 2006.

swimming in Australia, in reality their focus is essentially on Sydney.⁹⁶ In conjunction with the large volume of research undertaken on competitive swimming in Sydney, study has also been directed towards the cultural history of ocean baths in New South Wales, examining aspects such as gender segregation, community benefits and technological developments.⁹⁷ In short, these articles, coupled with the available theses on swimming in Australia, reinforce the dominance of Sydney-based literature as representative of national history, and pinpoint the lack of research completed thus far on the development of competitive swimming in Melbourne.

Biography is another form of literature that reinforces the predominance of New South Wales swimmers in Australian swimming historiography, both as stand-alone publications and in academic journals. This clearly reflects the higher level of success that New South Wales swimmers have experienced nationally and internationally. In terms of biography, prominent swimmers of the period under examination have been eulogised in the multi-faceted *Oxford Companion to Australian Sport* publication.⁹⁸ Successful swimmers such as Annette Kellerman,⁹⁹ the Cavill family, Freddie Lane, ‘Barney’ Kieran (New South Wales) and Frank Beaurepaire (Victoria) are represented in this publication, with their respective backgrounds and achievements itemised. Of these swimmers, Kellerman, Kieran and the Cavill family, all from New South Wales, have been the subjects of separate publications or articles, along with Cecil Healy, a prominent twentieth century Olympian.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ See William Longworth, ‘Swimming in Australia’, *Etruscan*, vol. 9, no. 2, September 1959, and Richard Light and Tracy Rockwell, ‘The Cultural Origins of Competitive Swimming in Australia’, *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 22, no. 1, November 2005, pp. 21-37.

⁹⁷ Marie-Louise McDermott, ‘Changing Visions of Baths and Bathers: Desegregating Ocean Baths in Wollongong, Kiama and Gerrigong’, *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 22, no. 1, November 2005, pp. 1-19, and Marie-Louise McDermott, ‘Leisure, Tourism, Sustainability and the Ocean Baths of New South Wales’, *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 26, no. 14, November 2009, pp. 2069-2085. McDermott has also developed a website in conjunction with the NSW Heritage Office that further details the uses of ocean baths in New South Wales. See Marie-Louise McDermott, ‘New South Wales Ocean Baths’, <http://www.nswoceanbaths.info>, accessed 30 March 2007.

⁹⁸ Vamplew, Moore, O’Hara, Cashman and Jobling (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian Sport*.

⁹⁹ It has been noted that Annette Kellerman’s surname is occasionally spelt as ‘Kellermann’ in some publications when referring to the same person (for example, see Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, p. 87, and Hess and Parker, ‘Against the Tide’, p. 2062).

¹⁰⁰ For Kieran, see L. H. Fromholtz, *The Sobraon Wonder: A Biography of B.B Kieran*, L. H. Fromholtz, Wagga Wagga, 1991; Ramsland, ‘Barney Kieran, the Legendary “Sobraon Boy”’ pp. 241-259, and Gerald Walsh, *Born of the Sun: Seven Young Australian Lives*, Pandanus, Canberra, 2006. For Kellerman, see Emily Gibson, *The Original Million Dollar Mermaid: The Annette Kellerman Story*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2005, and John Lucas, ‘Making A Statement: Annette Kellerman Advances the Worlds of Swimming, Diving and Entertainment’, *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 14, no. 2, May 1998, pp. 25-35. For Healy, see Grant Rodwell and John Ramsland, ‘Cecil Healy: A Soldier of the

Frank Beaurepaire remains the only Victorian swimmer to be eulogised in biographical format, and it is suggested that this is perhaps due to his business accomplishments rather than his swimming prowess. Nonetheless, Graham Lomas' biography on Beaurepaire allocates a considerable amount of space on his swimming achievements, which provides some insight into the status of swimming in Melbourne. While Lomas focuses primarily on his overseas swimming performances in a somewhat anecdotal fashion, some information can be gleaned as to the financial problems VASA faced in their early years, the characteristics of championship carnivals and the status of the sport in the Melbourne schools.¹⁰¹

This biography as an example raises the point that while these works are obviously focused on the careers of these individuals, some insight is given into the nature of the events in which they participated. Osmond laments the lack of biography and autobiography in regard to early Australian swimmers, and emphasises autobiography in particular. He suggests that autobiography would yield memories and anecdotes that cannot be researched by historians, and that these would provide directions for future research.¹⁰² Osmond also identifies the role of biography and autobiography in establishing social memory, which 'ascribes value to the myriad of ways that history is received, experienced and understood'.¹⁰³ While it is acknowledged that the majority of Victorian swimmers did not experience enough success to warrant their immortalisation in biography, this is one more area in which the history of New South Wales swimming predominates. Additionally, the contextual detail that memories and personal anecdotes can provide would be invaluable in reconstructing a social history of the sport.

1.5 Research on Swimming in Melbourne

As has been previously demonstrated, the existing general literature available in regard to competitive swimming in Melbourne is scant in nature, and focuses heavily

Surf', *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 16, no. 2, May 2000, pp. 3-16. For the Cavill family, see Gary Osmond, 'Forgetting Charlie and Tums Cavill: Social Memory and Australian Swimming History' *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol. 33, no. 1, March 2009, p. 103.

¹⁰¹ Graham Lomas, *The Will to Win: The Story of Sir Frank Beaurepaire*, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1960.

¹⁰² Gary Osmond, 'Shimmering Waters: Swimming, Autobiography and Social Memory', *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 20, no. 1, November 2003, p. 66.

¹⁰³ Osmond, 'Shimmering Waters', p. 63.

on statistical information and the careers of prominent swimmers. As noted by Phillips, little contextual information is included in the available resources, and as a result little is known about the developments that led to the achievements that have been recorded. To locate existing contextual information on swimming in Melbourne, or more explicitly on the nature of carnivals and competitions in general, the few specific Victorian club and facility histories that exist must be examined.

Swimming clubs in Melbourne originated in 1876, but the documentation on these organisations is largely non-existent due primarily to the discontinuous nature of these clubs. According to Swimming Victoria, the current state governing body, only one Melbourne and two regional Victorian swimming clubs that were inaugurated prior to 1900 are still in existence.¹⁰⁴ Of these clubs, only one club is deemed to have maintained a continuous affiliation with the state governing body since their inauguration, which highlights the transient nature of the sport in Victoria.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, there are few Melbourne-based swimming clubs that would have occasion to publish some form of centenary history, as very few have reached this historical milestone.

To date, there are two centenary swimming club histories that have been published, but their content falls outside the period of examination. Gerard O'Donnell's *Fog on the Dive: 100 Years of the Surrey Park Swimming Club* competently details the early years of the club, which was established in 1904.¹⁰⁶ A key strength of this publication is its attention to the social history of the swimming club, particularly in its founding years. The other centenary history available, Albert Smith and Rosemary Cullinan's *From the Creek to the Dome: Lilydale Swimming Club, 1903-2003*, also alludes to the importance of social factors in promoting swimming clubs and competitive swimming in its early years.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ This figure was obtained by cross referencing the list of currently affiliated swimming clubs in Victoria (Swimming Victoria, 'Clubs List', <http://www.swimmingvictoria.org.au>, accessed 20 February 2007) against the list of past and present swimming clubs in Victoria and their affiliation dates (McDonald, *The First 100*, pp. 196-202).

¹⁰⁵ McDonald, *The First 100*, pp. 196-202. Continuous affiliation excludes clubs who have disbanded and then reformed under the same name in subsequent years.

¹⁰⁶ Gerard O'Donnell, *Fog on the Dive: 100 Years of the Surrey Park Swimming Club*, Surrey Park Swimming Club, Box Hill, 2004.

¹⁰⁷ Albert Smith and Rosemary Cullinan, *From the Creek to the Dome: Lilydale Swimming Club, 1903-2003*, Lilydale Swimming and Lifesaving Club, Lilydale, 2003.

In regard to other club publications, the earliest source available is the souvenir history of the Melbourne Swimming Club, which was established in 1894.¹⁰⁸ Published for the club's 25th anniversary in 1919, it contains a very brief outline of how the club was inaugurated and the various competitions it sponsored. However, there is no elaboration on the events included at these competitions, or any social history provided. Two histories focusing on the development of competitive swimming clubs in country Victoria are available, yet both of these focus on the post World War One (WW1) period.¹⁰⁹ A major downfall of all of the above club histories is that they are all written by individuals involved with the clubs, either as parents, volunteers or administrators, which establishes a certain bias in terms of historical analysis.

In terms of the facilities at which competitive swimming took place in Melbourne, any general literature on these have been addressed from the perspective of public bathing rather than from the viewpoint of competitive swimming. The premier work in this category, Gillian Upton's *Splash!*, looks at the history of the St Kilda beach and baths and touches very briefly on swimming carnivals as an integral part of beach culture.¹¹⁰ Shirley Joy's history of the Sandringham sea baths covers the various carnivals these baths hosted only briefly, and she prefers to focus on the historical aspects of the buildings and the social stigma of public bathing in these years.¹¹¹ While swimming competitions in some form are referred to in all of these publications, they fail to analyse the importance of these events to the development of the competitive sport, or even to the longevity of the bathing establishments these carnivals were hosted at. This is also observed in regard to the academic articles examining bathing facilities in Melbourne, which deal exclusively with the hygienic aspect of the bathing ritual.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Melbourne Swimming Club, *Melbourne Swimming Club: Season 1918-1919 Souvenir Containing a Brief History of the Club, List of Office Bearers, Statistics of Championships, &c. from 1894 to 1919, also Report and Balance Sheet 1918-1919, Rules and Bye-Laws of the Club*, Melbourne the Club; Edward Foster, Melbourne, 1919.

¹⁰⁹ See Merrill Scriven, *Swimming in Kerang*, M. Scriven, Kerang, 2003, and Val Campbell, *History of Bendigo East Swimming Club and Progress Committee*, V. Campbell, Golden Square, 1992.

¹¹⁰ Gillian Upton, *Splash! St Kilda Beach and Baths*, City of Port Phillip, St Kilda, 2001.

¹¹¹ S. M. Joy, *The Sandringham Sea Baths, 1886-1919*, S. M. Joy, Sandringham, 2000.

¹¹² See Jennifer Bailey, 'Cleansing the Great Unwashed: Melbourne City Baths', *Victorian Historical Journal*, vol. 63, nos 2-3, October 1992, pp. 141-153, Jim Davidson, 'The Gallop Towards the Sea', *Eureka Street*, vol. 6, no. 1, January/February 1996, pp. 34-37, and Edel Wignell, 'From Hygiene to

A number of academics have studied the development of sporting culture in Melbourne. Cashman and Tom Hickie have successfully compared Melbourne sporting culture to that of Sydney, studying the development of these respective cultures throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century.¹¹³ They make the point that aquatic recreations were more attractive to Sydneysiders due to the numerous beaches, bays and rivers.¹¹⁴ This may partly explain the greater success of New South Wales in aquatic competitions, and therefore the increased prevalence of historical records. However, the key contention of the article is that Melbourne has a distinctive sporting culture, which emanates from the love of its inhabitants for spectator sport.¹¹⁵ Academics such as Maggie Indian have further examined the reasons behind the perceived importance of sporting activity in Melbourne, and her thesis is that sport in the nineteenth century played a large role in establishing social position and identity,¹¹⁶ and was therefore important in the formation of communities.

Given this, it is unsurprising that local town histories spanning the time period in question allude to swimming carnivals and competitions within their sporting sections. Bayside suburbs such as St Kilda, Port Melbourne and South Melbourne were home to some of the earliest ocean baths in Melbourne, and it is in these locations where swimming carnivals flourished. It is in the chronicles of these suburbs that some of the more valuable anecdotal material is located, especially in regard to swimming competitions. Details such as characteristics of competition patronage and pricing, advertising and issues of propriety are alluded to in these publications, which lend some contextual scope to the subject at hand.¹¹⁷

Recreation: The Changes in Public Baths Over 150 Years', *This Australia*, vol. 4, no. 1, Summer 1984/1985, pp. 60-64.

¹¹³ Richard Cashman and Tom Hickie, 'The Divergent Sporting Cultures of Sydney and Melbourne', *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 7, no. 1, November 1990, pp. 26-46.

¹¹⁴ Cashman and Hickie, 'The Divergent Sporting Cultures of Sydney and Melbourne', p. 31.

¹¹⁵ Cashman and Hickie, 'The Divergent Sporting Cultures of Sydney and Melbourne', p. 26.

¹¹⁶ Maggie Indian, 'Formalisation of Urban Leisure: Melbourne 1880-1900', in Richard Cashman and Michael McKernan (eds), *Sport, Money, Morality and the Media*, New South Wales University Press, Kensington, 1981, p. 272. For a more in-depth analysis, see M. O. Indian, 'Leisure in City and Suburb: Melbourne 1880-1900', Doctoral thesis, Australian National University, 1980.

¹¹⁷ See Michael Cannon, *Old Melbourne Town: Before the Gold Rush*, Loch Haven, Main Ridge, 1991; J. B. Cooper, *The History of St Kilda: From its First Settlement as a City and After* (volumes 1 and 2), Printers Proprietary, Melbourne, 1931; Susan Priestley, *South Melbourne: A History*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1995, and Nancy U'Ren and Noel Turnbull, *A History of Port Melbourne*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1983. While there are a number of histories available on bayside suburbs, the aforementioned have been identified as particularly valuable in researching aquatic activities during the late colonial period.

Despite the early inception of swimming and bathing in Melbourne, swimming competitions are not considered in detail in the majority of Melbourne generalist histories. The *Encyclopedia of Melbourne*, the most recent compendium of Melbourne's history, alludes to swimming only very briefly in the section on sporting culture, but there are dedicated sections on beaches, baths and bathing, and swimming and diving.¹¹⁸ However, the information contained in these sections is extremely anecdotal in nature, and contributes nothing new to the discipline. The major issue with the literature reviewed thus far is that there is very little primary source material to draw on, in order to further contextualise some of this anecdotal information.

1.6 Newspapers as Primary Sources

The lack of primary source material in Victorian swimming historiography is a major barrier to researching the early years of the sport in Melbourne. A plethora of documents, trophies, interviews and accounts in regard to swimming in New South Wales exist, and as a result of this numerous studies of the sport have been successfully completed. This is in stark contrast to the Victorian state governing body, Swimming Victoria, who allegedly hold no archival evidence from the early period under examination. Therefore, in order to conduct a thorough review of the social and contextual factors underpinning the development of competitive swimming in late nineteenth century Melbourne, newspapers will be utilised as the major primary source for this thesis. It is acknowledged that there are some difficulties in using this form of material, in terms of the reliability and validity of the content, but these deficiencies are far outweighed by their value.

Newspapers have been well utilised by sport historians in researching aspects of sporting history. However, they have also been identified as a problematic source of information. Peter Beck observes that sport historians are inclined to use press coverage to the exclusion of other primary sources, which produces a less credible

¹¹⁸ See Rob Hess, Caroline Symons and Dennis Hemphill, 'Sporting Culture', in Andrew Brown-May and Shurlee Swain (eds), *Encyclopedia of Melbourne*, Cambridge University Press, Port Melbourne, 2005, pp. 678-680; Weston Bate, 'Beaches', in Andrew Brown-May and Shurlee Swain (eds), *Encyclopedia of Melbourne*, Cambridge University Press, Port Melbourne, 2005, p. 65; Andrew Brown-May, 'Baths and Bathing', in Andrew Brown-May and Shurlee Swain (eds), *Encyclopedia of Melbourne*, Cambridge University Press, Port Melbourne, 2005, p. 62; and Caroline Symons, 'Swimming and Diving', in Andrew Brown-May and Shurlee Swain (eds), *Encyclopedia of Melbourne*, Cambridge University Press, Port Melbourne, 2005, p. 704.

history.¹¹⁹ While this might imply some laziness in regard to primary source research, Matthew Taylor acknowledges that shortages of primary source material has in turn forced sport historians to rely on print media as the most valuable primary resource,¹²⁰ which is the case in this study. The problem with newspapers as primary sources, as identified by Jeffrey Hill, is that they are commonly regarded as ‘a source of plain fact’.¹²¹ Yet, the press itself is by no means a neutral agency, and Hill suggests newspaper reporters are often communicating certain ideologies within their material.¹²²

Print media coverage of sport in this period took many different forms, such as match reports, meeting summaries, interviews and gossip columns. All of these forms of reporting, however, represent different voices and narrative styles, contain aspects of storytelling and are not without fictive elements.¹²³ Chris Gratton and Ian Jones support this view, advocating that within newspaper reports, the possibility of distortion and inaccuracy is unlimited. Witnesses can misreport incidents, and journalists can embellish certain aspects to make a story more newsworthy.¹²⁴ This exaggeration of events is an important issue to note in regard to newspapers as reliable sources, as newspaper reports are rarely written as historical accounts, and the authors of this material therefore have little obligation to record the facts in a neutral fashion. As well as being subject to reporter interpretation, the facts may be manipulated in order to appeal to an intended audience, and indirectly this intended audience may also influence the manner in which the facts are reported.¹²⁵ Booth suggests that within newspaper texts, reporters write for specific cultures, regions, genders and social classes.¹²⁶ This in turn supports Ian Hodder’s view that newspaper texts need to be considered as artefacts produced under specific conditions.¹²⁷

¹¹⁹ Beck, cited in Jeffrey Hill, ‘Anecdotal Evidence: Sport, the Newspaper Press, and History’, in M. G. Phillips (ed.), *Deconstructing Sport History: A Postmodern Analysis*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2006, p. 118.

¹²⁰ Taylor, cited in Hill, ‘Anecdotal Evidence’, p. 119.

¹²¹ Hill, ‘Anecdotal Evidence’, p. 118.

¹²² Hill, ‘Anecdotal Evidence’, p. 122.

¹²³ Hill, ‘Anecdotal Evidence’, p. 122.

¹²⁴ Chris Gratton and Ian Jones, *Research Methods for Sport Studies*, Routledge, London, 2004, p. 171.

¹²⁵ Gratton and Jones, *Research Methods for Sport Studies*, p. 171.

¹²⁶ Douglas Booth, *The Field: Truth and Fiction in Sport History*, Routledge, New York, 2005, p. 90.

¹²⁷ Ian Hodder, ‘The Interpretation of Documents and Material Culture’, in N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Second Edition), SAGE Publications, Thousand Oaks, 2000, p. 704.

While the above discussion would indicate that the use of newspapers as primary sources is problematic, the reality is that press reports have become a ‘staple source’ in researching the history of sport, and perhaps are the foundation of the discipline of sport history generally.¹²⁸ However, it is important to note that these sources, like all primary sources, present a possible history, not the definitive history. In line with the deconstructionist view of sport history, as explained by Booth, the intentions of the authors of text sources need to be ascertained, as these dictate how the source was constructed.¹²⁹ Therefore, in order to effectively utilise newspapers as a primary source, it needs to be realised that there is no absolute truth to the events presented; only the meaning imposed on them by reporters. The use of newspapers as the predominant source in constructing a history on this topic (from a deconstructionist view) will effectively result in a history of meanings imposed on swimming carnivals by the press, and the aspects that they emphasise.

As long as their limitations are considered, newspapers can be a valuable resource in researching sport historiography, especially if they are interrogated correctly.¹³⁰ The print media were instrumental in the dissemination of sporting activities in the late nineteenth century,¹³¹ and given this it is impractical to discount their effectiveness as a resource. The limited primary source and archival material available to researchers in regard to early swimming in Melbourne is scarce, and this effectively leaves newspapers as the major source with which to construct a history of swimming in Melbourne. The validity of using newspapers as a primary source to investigate swimming in late colonial Melbourne is supported by the considerable amount of press coverage the sport received.

Previous research conducted on the representation of competitive swimming in Melbourne newspapers indicates a dedicated press following.¹³² Robin Grow, in his article on nineteenth century football, establishes the three prominent types of press in

¹²⁸ Hill, ‘Anecdotal Evidence’, p. 118.

¹²⁹ Douglas Booth, ‘Sport Historians: What Do We Do? How Do We Do It?’, in M. G. Phillips (ed.), *Deconstructing Sport History: A Postmodern Analysis*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2006, p. 34.

¹³⁰ Booth, *The Field*, p. 94.

¹³¹ Hill, ‘Anecdotal Evidence’, p. 121.

¹³² See Winterton, ‘For “Duty and Pleasure”’.

this period: metropolitan, local/suburban and specialist sporting newspapers.¹³³ It should be noted that swimming competitions, in the early twentieth century, received considerable coverage in all of the above categories of newspapers.¹³⁴ This coverage was indicative of results, records and times; detailed carnival reports and editorial columns. As Raszeja noted in respect to the development of swimming in Sydney during this period;

The press - both sporting and popular - in the spirit of 'new journalism' anxious to sell the people news 'of the people', were responsive to the public interest in this new spectator sport. Swimming events were reported, world records recorded, likely developments speculated on.¹³⁵

Therefore, given the apparent popularity of swimming competitions in the print media of the period, it is evident that these text sources must be interrogated. In line with the views of Booth, Hill and Phillips, it cannot be assumed that analysis of these sources will provide an accurate picture of the nature of swimming carnivals in Melbourne in this period. Rather, the analysis of content contained in these sources can be construed as the dominant ideologies of the press in terms of the representation of these events. In doing so, it can be ascertained which social and cultural elements of swimming were prevalent, and how they were reinforced and promoted to their audiences. Rather than looking at competitive swimming from the perspective of the commissioned histories, which reflects the agenda of the various national and state associations, this thesis will examine the development of swimming in Melbourne in accordance with the agenda of the press.

1.7 Methodology

Gratton and Jones state that 'understanding human activity requires analysis of both its development over time, and the environment and context within which the activity occurs'.¹³⁶ In examining the customs and cultures that evolved with the development of swimming in Melbourne, a qualitative content analysis of newspaper articles and reports on swimming carnivals between 1893 and 1900 has been undertaken. Gratton

¹³³ See Robin Grow, 'Nineteenth Century Football and the Melbourne Press', *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 3, no. 1, November 1986, pp. 23-37.

¹³⁴ Winterton, "'For Duty and Pleasure'". This coverage was limited almost solely to the annual swim season. As a seasonal sport, coverage outside this period was virtually non-existent.

¹³⁵ Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*, p. 40.

¹³⁶ Gratton and Jones, *Research Methods for Sport Studies*, p. 97.

and Jones define content analysis as ‘determining the presence, meanings and the relationships of certain words or concepts within the text’.¹³⁷ In order to establish a set of concepts relevant to the subject under analysis, Gratton and Jones suggest the development of a set of categories into which data can be placed in order to develop a theory.¹³⁸ For this study, these data categories were developed from aspects of swimming carnivals that are emphasised in newspaper coverage. Aspects such as prominence, space and context were also considered, in line with Gratton and Jones’ content analysis framework.¹³⁹

The categories developed are intended to identify a set of factors and issues that were highlighted in press coverage as being influential to the development of competitive swimming in Melbourne, and in Victoria more generally. These concepts are measured in terms of the quantity and the quality of coverage, and the context within which they are reported.¹⁴⁰ In measuring the relative worth of these factors and issues within competitive swimming by means of the press response, their impact on the development of competitive swimming in Melbourne in this period can be assessed. However, as an inductive study, where data is analysed to develop a theory or explanation, this evidence is also used to develop a theory on how swimming was situated in the views of the Melbourne public.¹⁴¹ In developing such a theory, the data has then been placed into a number of pre-existing theoretical frameworks relevant to the concepts identified within the study, such as the importance and relevance of nineteenth century newspapers to sport,¹⁴² the development of women’s swimming in this period,¹⁴³ and the evolution of sport as a ‘nation-building’ exercise.¹⁴⁴

A number of Melbourne metropolitan, sporting, specialist and suburban newspapers were consulted from October 1893 through to April 1900, and press clippings referencing swimming in Melbourne, both recreational and competitive, were

¹³⁷ Gratton and Jones, *Research Methods for Sport Studies*, p. 167.

¹³⁸ Gratton and Jones, *Research Methods for Sport Studies*, p. 167.

¹³⁹ Gratton and Jones, *Research Methods for Sport Studies*, p. 170.

¹⁴⁰ These guidelines for conceptual frameworks are taken from Gratton and Jones, *Research Methods for Sport Studies*, p. 76.

¹⁴¹ Gratton and Jones, *Research Methods for Sport Studies*, p. 27.

¹⁴² Grow, ‘Nineteenth Century Football and the Melbourne Press’, pp. 23-37.

¹⁴³ Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*.

¹⁴⁴ The notion of sport as nation building has been advocated by a number of sport historians. For one such example, see Cashman, ‘The Australian Way of Sport’, pp. 47-48.

obtained from these. As previously stated, earlier research on competitive swimming in Melbourne has dictated that the swimming season took place between December and early April, with very little (if any) coverage outside of this period.¹⁴⁵ In line with this observation, a ‘slice’ approach is employed in regard to the data collection from newspaper material, where only the months of January-April, and October-December were examined for each year. This approach alludes to the periodisation of historical analysis, and involves the examination of distinct periods of history. This, in most cases, leads to a thematic rather than chronological construction.¹⁴⁶ Therefore, it is important to note that this thesis does not represent a complete chronological history of the sport within the years examined. Rather, it identifies common themes within the press coverage, and examines them in a chronological manner. This approach allowed for a greater number and range of newspapers to be examined.

In regard to data analysis, two daily newspapers, five weekly metropolitan, two weekly sporting and three weekly suburban newspapers were examined during the swimming season. However, to ensure that no coverage was missed outside the designated data collection period, one weekly sporting newspaper was examined for each week of the year. When coverage was found in the weekly sporting newspaper outside of the swimming season, it was then checked against the other newspapers examined.¹⁴⁷ To further complement this, two regional Victorian newspapers were consulted sporadically, in the event that a specific regional event occurred that impacted upon events taking place in Melbourne.¹⁴⁸ By combining these newspapers with the small quota of primary source material available, the process of

¹⁴⁵ Winterton, ‘For “Duty and Pleasure”’, p. 14.

¹⁴⁶ For examples of this method, see Matthew Healy, ‘Hard Sell: Australian Football in Sydney’, Master of Arts thesis, School of Human Movement, Recreation and Performance, Victoria University, 2002; or John Molony, *The Penguin Bicentennial History of Australia: The Story of 200 Years*, Viking, Ringwood, 1987.

¹⁴⁷ The newspapers examined were the *Age*, *Argus*, *Leader*, *Australasian*, *Weekly Times*, *Table Talk*, *Melbourne Punch*, *Sportsman*, (examined weekly throughout the year) *Sporting Judge*, *Brighton Leader*, *South Melbourne Record*, and the *St Kilda Advertiser*.

¹⁴⁸ The two newspapers examined were the *Ballarat Star* and the *Geelong Advertiser*. This thesis focuses primarily upon the development of competitive swimming from the perspective of the VSA/VASA. Given that regional Victorian clubs constituted only a small portion of the VASA activities, and the regional events gained significant coverage in the Melbourne metropolitan press under the VASA/VSA banner, it was decided to limit data to that of the Melbourne newspapers. This is primarily to ensure that the data remained manageable.

‘triangulation’, a method of factual cross-checking, which combines and investigates a range of primary source material, can thus be satisfied.¹⁴⁹

Triangulation aims to produce an accurate and objective representation of the findings of the study through combining different theories, research methods and/or materials.¹⁵⁰ This thesis will utilise source triangulation, as defined by M. Q. Patton, which suggests that differing forms of source data will be tested for different points of view and consistency.¹⁵¹ However, as he suggests, consistency is not necessarily a desired finding. Inconsistencies in results can be significant, and do not necessarily ‘weaken’ results.¹⁵² Rather, they establish areas for further research, and pose questions as to when and why these inconsistencies evolve.¹⁵³ In using newspaper results as source data, it is expected that while there may be minor differences noted in terms of statistical and factual content, triangulation of these against other sources might expose the promotional agenda of the press. This will, as Patton suggests, pose some interesting questions as to why certain factors are emphasised.

In terms of structure, the second chapter of this thesis provides a general, chronological overview of Melbourne aquatic culture from the settlement of the city in 1835, through to the inauguration of the colonial governing body for competitive swimming in Victoria in October 1893. From this point, the chapters are presented thematically, and reflect the primary themes identified within press coverage as being significant to the development of competitive swimming in Melbourne. The third chapter focuses on the value of the prevalent carnival culture within Melbourne swimming competitions, and the role of the press in promoting this aspect of swimming. The fourth chapter links the evolution of swimming in the Melbourne state schools to the growth of youth competitive swimming, and how the involvement

¹⁴⁹ Triangulation has been successfully employed by a number of historians. In terms of its application to sport history projects, see Robert Pascoe, *The Winter Game: Over 100 Years of Australian Football*, Mandarin, Port Melbourne, 1996 and Healy, ‘Hard Sell’, pp. 3-4. For a more thorough interpretation of triangulation, see Gratton and Jones, *Research Methods for Sport Studies*, p. 108, or V. J. Janesick, ‘The Dance of Qualitative Research Design’, in N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, SAGE Publications, Thousand Oaks, 1994, pp. 214-215.

¹⁵⁰ David Silverman, *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analyzing Talk, Text and Interaction* (Third Edition), SAGE Publications, London, 2006, p. 291.

¹⁵¹ M. Q. Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (Third Edition), SAGE Publications, California, 2002, p. 559.

¹⁵² Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, p. 556.

¹⁵³ Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, p. 560.

of the press acted as a catalyst. The evolution of women's swimming in Melbourne as represented in press coverage is investigated in chapter five, while the press assessments of the newly coined VSA are examined in chapter six. To conclude, chapter seven provides a brief, concise summary of the role and agenda of the nineteenth century press in reporting the characteristics of swimming in Melbourne, and the impact of this upon the development of competitive swimming in Victoria.

1.8 Conclusions

As demonstrated by the above review of the literature, there is a considerable dearth of knowledge in regard to competitive swimming in Melbourne. Additionally, there is little contextual information available that examines the role of swimming in a wider, societal context. This is in stark comparison to Sydney and New South Wales, where a number of studies have been undertaken examining different aspects of aquatic culture. These studies have successfully placed the role of competitive and recreational swimming into a wider context. Given Melbourne's early history of aquatic activity, and the lack of research regarding this, there is considerable scope for a study on swimming in Melbourne and its place in sporting life particularly and society more generally.

This study is intended to be unique in the respect that it will examine the development of competitive swimming in Melbourne from an alternate perspective. Rather than constructing a history based on records, trophies, champions and times, this thesis presents the development of competitive swimming as a social construction of the nineteenth century press. It has already been acknowledged in this chapter by various authors that the press is not a neutral agency, and therefore it is prudent to examine the manner in which swimming was represented, and why this was the case. If press coverage is interpreted as a reflection of what the public were interested in reading about, as the literature would suggest, then this thesis also provides a window into which themes and aspects were valued in swimming by the public, and subsequently which cultural and social values were prominent in this period. This allows the development of the competitive sport to be contextualised against events in wider society, as well as providing an interpretative picture of the class, gender and cultural interactions that underpinned the sport's development.

It is also important to note that there has been very little academic level research on swimming in this country. A number of honours level theses have been completed on various aspects of Australian aquatic history, and a small number of journal articles published, but to date no doctoral research has been completed that focuses solely on competitive swimming in Australia. As a result of this, there is limited ongoing research in this area. This is in comparison to countries such as France, England and Canada, which have been the subject of numerous contextual studies by accomplished academics in the area of aquatics. In reference to this, the existing scholarly research regarding competitive swimming in Melbourne is virtually non-existent, which suggests that there is considerable scope for academic work in this area.

Significantly, this investigation will also fill a considerable gap in the literature available on Victorian competitive swimming by addressing the contextual developments that occurred within competitive swimming in Melbourne, from the inauguration of the colonial association to the close of the nineteenth century. The available literature focuses largely on times and records, with special homage paid to Australian and international champions. A contextual study, such as this, yields some insight as to which aspects of swimming were valued by the Melbourne public, as well as uncovering findings that may be applicable to a national history of the sport.

Chapter Two

The Characteristics of Swimming and Bathing in Early Melbourne

2.1 Introduction

In order to understand the cultural relevance of swimming in Melbourne during the late nineteenth century, and to contextualise some of the developments that occurred within the sport upon the establishment of the VSA, it is important to consider the characteristics and evolution of the sport prior to this event. From the settlement of Melbourne in 1835, swimming was commonly referred to as bathing, and was an activity that was undertaken for health and hygienic reasons. However, due to government and middle class concerns with the bodily display associated with the bathing ritual, the early years of bathing in Melbourne were characterised by a constant struggle to establish suitable places for all classes to bathe that were hidden from public view, affordable, accessible and clean. It was only once these objectives were achieved that the transition could be made from hygiene to recreation, or from bathing to competitive swimming.

This chapter explores the transition from bathing to competitive swimming in nineteenth century Melbourne, and the underlying cultural factors that contributed to this shift. The development of competitive swimming in Melbourne was precipitated by a waning emphasis on the use of public baths for sanitation and hygienic purposes, in response to the establishment of a clean and reliable water supply to private homes to cater for this need. However, it was also underpinned by a number of other factors. The evolution of a particular seaside carnival culture, the establishment of standardised baths, the promotion of sea bathing as beneficial to health and the moral benefits associated with competitive sport for children were significant contributors to the development of competitive swimming. In this chapter, the interaction between these various factors will be examined, in order to explore the cultural significance of swimming in nineteenth century Melbourne.

2.2 Health, Sanitation and Morality: The Need for Public Baths

The ritual of bathing, from which the sport of swimming would evolve, was initially a British custom by principle and as Melbourne was founded on the banks of the Yarra

River, it was natural that its residents would take up bathing both as a necessity and as a pastime. However, the desire of Melburnians to bathe was also intensified by the physical conditions in which they were forced to live. Jennifer Bailey stresses that the passion of early Melburnians for bathing stemmed from a need for relief from the ‘heat, dust and discomfort’ of the city. The city in its early years was dirty, disease was common, and bathing was a necessary way to rid the body of the grime accumulated as part of city life. As Bailey explains:

In summer, it [Melbourne] was enveloped in thick clouds of dust, raised from the unpaved streets by horses and cattle, and blown through the town by hot northerly winds ... In winter, the town was mired in mud, a closely-clinging amalgam of black volcanic soil, human and animal urine and excrement, and the floods of water which rushed through the streets after every cloudburst ... in a town with no piped water and no underground sewers, there was little that anyone could do about it.¹⁵⁴

However, in Melbourne’s early years, public bathing was problematic for a number of reasons. It has been noted that Australian swimmers and bathers have continually endured regulations intended to protect their morals, rather than their safety,¹⁵⁵ and in early Melbourne this was certainly the case. Richard Light and Tracy Rockwell state that in nineteenth century Australia, bathing was a matter of government concern, due to the associated display of the naked or near-naked form.¹⁵⁶ The Victorian middle class concerns with public morality and control suggested public bathing was ‘an affront to their Victorian sensibilities’,¹⁵⁷ which has also been noted on studies examining public bathing in England, France and Canada.¹⁵⁸ In Australia, however, this concern was coupled with the perceived likelihood that the colony’s convict inhabitants would produce a morally deficient population.¹⁵⁹

Due to the instant popularity of the bathing ritual and its threat to public morality, sanctions on the bathing practice in Melbourne were soon imposed, and local authorities saw that they could control public bathing by placing restrictions on how

¹⁵⁴ Bailey, ‘Cleansing the Great Unwashed’, p. 141.

¹⁵⁵ T. C. Arnold, ‘Sport in Colonial Australia, 1788-1850’, Doctoral thesis, Department of Human Movement Studies, University of Queensland, 1979, p. 149.

¹⁵⁶ Light and Rockwell, ‘The Cultural Origins of Competitive Swimming’, p. 21.

¹⁵⁷ Light and Rockwell, ‘The Cultural Origins of Competitive Swimming’, p. 23.

¹⁵⁸ See Love, *A Social History of Swimming in England*, pp. 20-21, Kossuth, ‘Dangerous Waters’, p. 799, and Terret, ‘Hygienization: Civic Baths and Body Cleanliness’, p. 398.

¹⁵⁹ J. Stratton, cited in Light and Rockwell, ‘The Cultural Origins of Competitive Swimming’, p. 22.

and when it could be practiced.¹⁶⁰ Municipal by-laws forbade bathing in the Yarra between the hours of six o'clock in the morning and eight in the evening, and in any public areas,¹⁶¹ which virtually eradicated any hope Melburnians had of bathing safely within the confines of the law. Another of the by-laws set down in early Melbourne also stipulated that bathing was banned in the portion of the Yarra from which the town's drinking water was drawn.¹⁶²

While ensuring a degree of public propriety, the restrictions on public bathing posed a threat to public hygiene. This was problematic in Melbourne, given the dirtiness of the city, and the lack of clean running water. The Victorian middle classes loathed the improper behaviour associated with the bathing ritual, but their moral stance was somewhat weakened by their fear of disease. Infectious disease was linked with poor hygiene and indicative of moral decline, and the opinion of doctors and sanitary reformers was that regular bathing was associated with personal morality and decency. It was thought that immorality infected the air in the same way as miasma, and the two were perceived as being closely connected.¹⁶³

However, accessing clean water for most Melburnians was a complicated process. The beaches were not easily accessible to inner city dwellers, and bathing in the Yarra was virtually forbidden. In order to address the problem, a water cart system delivered water from the Yarra to the homes of residents between 1839 and 1841 for an 'exorbitant' price. Most Melburnians were forced to rely on this system, and as a result, often bathed only once a week.¹⁶⁴ Bailey suggests that the high cost of water and the widespread restrictions on bathing initiated the need for a place where people could bathe, both during daylight hours and shielded from public view.¹⁶⁵ By this time, the issue of public bathing was being scrutinised by both businessmen and local councils.¹⁶⁶ Newspaper editorials continually objected to the bathing laws then in place, and suggested that floating baths should be established for male and female

¹⁶⁰ Light and Rockwell, 'The Cultural Origins of Competitive Swimming', p. 21.

¹⁶¹ Bailey, 'Cleansing the Great Unwashed', p. 142.

¹⁶² J. W. C. Cumes, *Their Chastity Was Not Too Rigid: Leisure Times in Early Australia*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1979, p. 296.

¹⁶³ Bailey, 'Cleansing the Great Unwashed', p. 143.

¹⁶⁴ Bailey, 'Cleansing the Great Unwashed', p. 142.

¹⁶⁵ Bailey, 'Cleansing the Great Unwashed', p. 142.

¹⁶⁶ Wells, *Sunny Memories*, p. 77.

use.¹⁶⁷ In 1842, a C. J. Dennys called for the establishment of public baths, stating that ‘in a hot climate and during the prevalence of Illness in the Town it cannot be disputed but that an Establishment of this nature would be a signal public benefit’.¹⁶⁸ It was evident that despite the moral implications of the activity, people needed to bathe for hygienic reasons. However, as Wells states, ‘it was easier to build fences in the water than attempt to restructure Victorian morals’.¹⁶⁹

2.3 The Early Years: Yarra Baths and Bathing

In the 1840s and early 1850s a number of entrepreneurs in Melbourne attempted, with varying degrees of success, to erect floating baths on the Yarra. These attempts were a necessary response to the 1844 city by-laws that prohibited daytime bathing within the town boundary, and in view of public areas.¹⁷⁰ However, the local authorities were still not fully receptive to the idea of the public bathing in the river. In 1842, C. J. Dennys had applied for a licence to erect hot and cold-water baths on the Yarra’s northern banks, but his application was denied by the superintendent of the Port Phillip District, Charles La Trobe. A year later, a J. Holmer submitted a proposal for the construction of a 30ft (9.1m) by 20ft (6.1m) floating bath, which La Trobe referred to the town council. However, this application was also denied, with the council strongly opposed to humans bathing at or near the source of Melbourne’s drinking water.¹⁷¹

The first known river baths to have opened in Melbourne were the Melbourne Swimming Baths owned by Mr Riddle, and established in 1844. It was reported that on opening day, ‘several hundred of the inhabitants took advantage of the spirited proprietor’s liberality’, as the baths combined ‘a perpetual flow of water with privacy and comfort’.¹⁷² The cost to bathe was 6d per day in the respectable portion of the baths, and entrance to the working men’s section cost 3d. Season passes were also available, with £1 charged to the middle and upper classes and 12s for the working class. The town council banned bathing in all other parts of the Yarra from March

¹⁶⁷ Arnold, ‘Sport in Colonial Australia’, p. 169.

¹⁶⁸ Priestley, *South Melbourne*, p. 36.

¹⁶⁹ Wells, *Sunny Memories*, p. 77.

¹⁷⁰ Brown-May, ‘Baths and Bathing’, p. 62.

¹⁷¹ Cannon, *Old Melbourne Town*, p. 223.

¹⁷² *Port Phillip Patriot*, 29 January 1844, cited in James Grant and Geoffrey Serle, *The Melbourne Scene: 1803-1956*, Hale & Iremonger, Neutral Bay, 1978, p. 55.

1844, but despite this by-law, Riddle's baths were relatively unprofitable and closed in 1847.¹⁷³

Soon after the closure of the Riddle baths, Dr J. F. Palmer developed his floating baths in the Yarra,¹⁷⁴ and in the late 1840s, an N. L. Kentish announced his plans for the establishment of his Victoria Baths, to be situated west of the Yarra Falls. Despite his promotion of the 'invaluable art of swimming', this proposal was never fully executed.¹⁷⁵ Like most of the entrepreneurs erecting public baths in this period, Kentish's proposal was motivated largely by the prospect of financial gain. Lacking the personal funds to erect the baths, he enrolled over 100 subscribers, and used this money to build private baths. The town council approved his proposal, and building commenced. However, financing continued to be an issue for Kentish, and in January 1850 his builders took possession of the building until they were paid. The money was not forthcoming, and the unfinished baths mysteriously burned down soon after.¹⁷⁶

However, while the Kentish debacle was unfolding, a Victoria Baths was opened on the Yarra in 1849, providing private baths hidden from public view. These baths were slightly more affordable than the Riddle baths, with bathers charged 2s for admission. Alternatively, bathers could pay the annual fee of 15s, which included the use of private, swimming and shower baths. Servants and working people were admitted for half-price, and lessons were available for those who could not swim.¹⁷⁷ Women were also admitted to these public bathing establishments, but were restricted to only a minimal number of hours for bathing. At one establishment on the Yarra in 1850, women were only permitted to bathe between ten and twelve o'clock in the morning, with the wife of the baths proprietor presiding to ensure both privacy and propriety.¹⁷⁸ Additionally, women were expected to bathe in up to ten metres of fabric, to ensure

¹⁷³ Cannon, *Old Melbourne Town*, p. 224.

¹⁷⁴ Priestley, *South Melbourne*, p. 35.

¹⁷⁵ Brown-May, 'Baths and Bathing', p. 62.

¹⁷⁶ Cannon, *Old Melbourne Town*, pp. 224-225.

¹⁷⁷ Bailey, 'Cleansing the Great Unwashed', p. 142. Given the shared name, it is impossible to determine whether these baths were one and the same. However, differing prices and a slightly different time frame suggests that they were two separate establishments.

¹⁷⁸ Priestley, *South Melbourne*, p. 36.

propriety.¹⁷⁹ This trend changed only marginally in later years, and the main obstacle to efficient swimming for women remained these cumbersome bathing costumes.

Despite the apparent need that existed for bathing establishments, the Yarra baths were, for a number of reasons, largely unprofitable. Primarily, the baths were an attempt by the middle classes to restore morality to the pursuit of personal hygiene, in the hope that this would reform the lower classes. However, the working classes, as Parker states in the English context, ‘were more directly affected by urban squalor, disease and poor health than their wealthier neighbours’, and ‘time and money were scarce resources, spent on the struggle for survival’.¹⁸⁰ The purported benefits of bathing did not fall into this category of survival, and no amount of doctrine from the middle classes could change the fact that the majority of working class citizens could not afford to enter the Yarra bathhouses. Another possible reason for the unprofitability of the various Yarra bathing establishments was the appalling condition of the water. By approximately 1850, the dumping of human and noxious wastes into the Yarra over a number of years had contaminated the city water supply, increasing the perceived threat of infection and disease.¹⁸¹ However, the fear of disease due to inadequate hygiene clearly outweighed the threat of disease from the water itself. Despite the state of the Yarra water, river baths existed in Melbourne until 1859 and it was reported that by this time the river water was little more than raw sewerage.¹⁸²

As a result of the poor bathing conditions on the Yarra, Melburnians were again faced with the problem of having nowhere to bathe - except now it was not just Victorian morals that prevented their immersion. The state of the Yarra water meant that most citizens would not have bathed in the river even if baths had existed, and the law had permitted it. The increased emphasis on bathing due to the threat of disease had intensified due to the state of the water, and frequent bathing in clean water was recommended in order to ‘remove unhealthy impurities, and to promote comfort, cleanliness, and decency’.¹⁸³ However, this problem was somewhat alleviated by the

¹⁷⁹ Wells, *Sunny Memories*, p. 77.

¹⁸⁰ Parker, ‘Improving the “Condition” of the People’, pp. 25-26.

¹⁸¹ Bailey, ‘Cleansing the Great Unwashed’, pp. 142-143.

¹⁸² Priestley, *South Melbourne*, p. 36.

¹⁸³ *Argus*, cited in Bailey, ‘Cleansing the Great Unwashed’, p. 143.

emergence of sea bathing establishments along the shores of Port Phillip Bay from the 1850s. While Port Phillip Bay had always been a popular site for bathing despite the laws that forbade it, the advent of sea baths along its shores further intensified the appeal of bathing in this location, as there was nowhere suitable for such a purpose in the inner city. The popularity of these sea baths with the Melbourne public was further increased by the widespread doctrines emerging from England, which promoted the health and hygienic benefits of sea bathing in the face of increasing disease.

2.4 Port Phillip's Sea Baths and the English Tradition

Jim Davidson suggests that the pilgrimage of Melburnians to the city's beaches in this period was a form of 'social revolt ... a bathing revolution by the new generation'.¹⁸⁴ However, in a similar vein to the bathing restrictions that had existed on the Yarra, swimming on the Port Phillip Bay beaches was banned during daylight hours for reasons of morality. Law-abiding bathers, therefore, had no option other than to conform and utilise the enclosed sea baths that became prevalent from the 1850s in Melbourne. These sea baths rapidly became popular, as their existence addressed many of the public issues that were associated with seaside bathing, and bathing in general. As Upton explains, they 'offered protection from sharks and other "big fish", there were life-guards, swimming instructors and attendants on hand and they addressed the pressing question of modesty'.¹⁸⁵ However, the popularity of these baths also signalled the beginning of a specific seaside culture in Melbourne. This culture, based upon the English seaside resort traditions and the prominent theories on the curative powers of seawater, ensured that bathing and swimming flourished as a recreational pursuit.

Inglis claims that the initial development of the Australian seaside experience was a product of the culture surrounding the first seaside resorts in England. The establishment of England's coastal towns as resorts, and their subsequent popularity, was a response to the prevalent attitudes surrounding the curative powers of saltwater.¹⁸⁶ Upton states that the attractiveness of sea bathing itself can also be

¹⁸⁴ Davidson, 'The Gallop Towards the Sea', p. 36.

¹⁸⁵ Upton, *Splash!* p. 5.

¹⁸⁶ Inglis, *Beside the Seaside*, p. 25.

attributed to English tradition as well as the popularity of mineral spas in Europe in the late seventeenth and eighteenth century. When British royalty endorsed sea bathing in the late 1800s, the aristocracy took up the practice and it eventually became accessible to the lower classes also.¹⁸⁷

Upton also asserts that part of the appeal of sea bathing was its endorsement as beneficial to health. Influential British doctors promoted seawater as having ‘curative’ powers, whether it was consumed or bathed in. It was promoted as a relaxant and stimulant, a cure for diseases of the glands and for the skin. Bathing was prescribed as medicine, in certain amounts and in different ways.¹⁸⁸ In eighteenth century Britain, individuals were plunged head-first daily into breaking waves by a ‘dipper’ of the same sex in order to stimulate the nervous system, supposedly resulting in the revival and strengthening of the mind and body.¹⁸⁹ Given that Melburnians were still increasingly obsessed with the threat of disease, and medical opinions suggested the seaside could combat this, seaside bathing appeared attractive to all members of the population. The contamination of the Yarra River left no option for the hygienically (and morally) conscious, who were reliant on the bathing ritual.

In addition to these views, Davidson states that the untamed nature of the sea was also seen as an escape from the other undesirable influences of urban civilisation.¹⁹⁰ Thus, seaside vacationing soon became fashionable in Melbourne and its surrounds, and this was confirmed when the first governor of Victoria, Superintendent La Trobe, purchased a small cottage at Queenscliff for use in his holidays.¹⁹¹ This was largely due to ocean locations being marketed, also in the English tradition, as seaside resorts. Beaches around the bay set out to emulate their English counterparts, with pavilions, piers and promenades all erected to serve this purpose.¹⁹² It was widely acknowledged that the more closely a resort could emulate the character and appearance of its English counterparts, the more socially exclusive it became.¹⁹³ From 1840, the

¹⁸⁷ Upton, *Splash!*, pp. 5-6.

¹⁸⁸ Upton, *Splash!*, pp. 5-6.

¹⁸⁹ Lena Lencek and Gideon Bosker, *The Beach: The History of Paradise on Earth*, Pimlico, London, 1999, p. 71.

¹⁹⁰ Davidson, ‘The Gallop Towards the Sea’, p. 34.

¹⁹¹ Inglis, *Beside the Seaside*, p. 3.

¹⁹² Inglis, *Beside the Seaside*, p. 22.

¹⁹³ Inglis, *Beside the Seaside*, p. 25.

Melbourne township of Sandridge was promoting itself as a resort,¹⁹⁴ and St Kilda was also popular, with summer homes in the vicinity booked months in advance.¹⁹⁵ Melbourne residents who were financially able and had sufficient leisure time flocked to the seaside in great numbers, whether for the day or for a well earned vacation.¹⁹⁶

Where some sought respite from the dirtiness of the city and some to avoid disease, a great number also flocked to the shores to be amongst fine society and to establish or confirm their own social status. Inglis explains that appearing at the more fashionable seaside resorts promoted acceptance in the appropriate social circles, and allowed the demonstration of ‘gentility’.¹⁹⁷ However, with the establishment of a rail line to St Kilda in 1857, the seaside became accessible to a greater and less cultured population.¹⁹⁸ Despite the cost and inconvenience, working people could now become frequent patrons of the baths and they flocked to the seaside on holidays. James Walvin explains that the English working classes, upon the advent of train lines to the seaside, ‘were able to emulate their social betters and hastily gulp the sea air, paddle in the sea and enjoy the panorama of seaside entertainments’.¹⁹⁹

However, Walvin also notes that as English working class seaside visits increased, the social elite fled to remoter spots.²⁰⁰ This trend was also observed amongst Melbourne society, who began to spend their holidays at remote beaches such as Sorrento, Lorne and Rye as the Melbourne inner city beaches became more popular. These more distant resorts now became the venues for ‘performance of a variety of upper and middle class rituals and observances which affirmed class distinction and social status’.²⁰¹ Resort activities such as promenading and the taking of seaside air on a resort’s piers and jetties, were seen as opportunities for acceptable exercise and social display.²⁰² Being seen in the appropriate location in suitable attire, mingling with prominent social groups and establishing new class relationships were the objectives

¹⁹⁴ Inglis, *Beside the Seaside*, p. 6.

¹⁹⁵ Aspinall, cited in Inglis, *Beside the Seaside*, p. 10.

¹⁹⁶ Inglis, *Beside the Seaside*, p. 10.

¹⁹⁷ Inglis, *Beside the Seaside*, p. 72.

¹⁹⁸ Upton, *Splash!*, p. 12.

¹⁹⁹ James Walvin, *Beside the Seaside: A Social History of the Popular Seaside Holiday*, Allen Lane, London, 1978, p. 89.

²⁰⁰ Walvin, *Beside the Seaside*, p. 89.

²⁰¹ Inglis, *Beside the Seaside*, p. 23.

²⁰² Davidson, ‘The Gallop Toward the Sea’, p. 34.

of this activity. Activities such as picnicking were popular with the upper classes, and Inglis has also established that concerts, theatricals and music and dancing were suitable activities for the 'discerning visitor'.²⁰³

Another popular characteristic of English seaside resorts that was emulated on Melbourne's shores, and was largely a product of increased working class patronage, was the carnival tradition. Walvin states that at English seaside resorts the atmosphere of carnival reigned, with musicians, acrobats and magicians all integrated into the seaside experience. While these types of entertainments were not unique to this environment, they were particularly concentrated in this location.²⁰⁴ For those of English descent, the frivolities associated with Australian seaside life were particularly appreciated, as they provided both amusement and familiarity.²⁰⁵ By the 1860s, Melbourne beaches such as St Kilda were considered as seaside resorts, where this culture of frivolity prevailed. According to Walvin, the various types of amusements provided a 'climate of entertainment' and the resort towns that hosted these were considered 'monuments to pleasure'.²⁰⁶ However, with these resorts now accessible to the working classes also, promenade bands, 'nigger minstrel shows' and music halls eclipsed the traditionally upper class amusements such as theatre.²⁰⁷ These new forms of entertainment that began to evolve were indicative of the change in class emphasis on the seaside holiday, as the genteel activities that had amused upper class patronage were not well received by the working classes, who were seeking pleasure rather than self-improvement.²⁰⁸

Given the early popularity of these seaside holidays, and the need for the preservation of public modesty, public baths were soon erected to cater for those holidaymakers who wished to bathe safely and within the confines of the law. Early bath operators rapidly saw that a captive and responsive audience existed for bathing establishments, with the British doctrines on sea bathing the most effective form of advertising they could hope for. It also can be considered that the establishment of baths along the seaside was another attempt to contain the moral issues that bathing presented.

²⁰³ Inglis, *Beside the Seaside*, p. 31.

²⁰⁴ Walvin, *Beside the Seaside*, p. 86.

²⁰⁵ Inglis, *Beside the Seaside*, p. 29.

²⁰⁶ Walvin, *Beside the Seaside*, p. 86.

²⁰⁷ Inglis, *Beside the Seaside*, pp. 27-28.

²⁰⁸ Inglis, *Beside the Seaside*, p. 92.

From the 1850s in England, traditional bathing practices once more faced considerable opposition, despite the purported health benefits of the activity. John Travis, in his study of seaside bathing practices in England, states that the reasons for this renewed concern were partly related to societal attitudes and partly due to the change in emphasis on sea bathing.²⁰⁹ For the middle classes, bathing was still a threat to public prudery and respectability, and certain members of the middle classes were of the opinion that bringing public attention to this by means of opposition would enhance their social status'.²¹⁰ Travis states that while the issue of public bodily display had always been present, it had previously been outweighed by the benefits bathing offered in terms of maintaining hygiene and respectability, particularly within the working classes.²¹¹

However, Travis also suggests that the renewed attack on the bathing practices was prompted by a change in attitudes toward bathing, and the diminished emphasis on bathing in maintaining personal cleanliness due to urban developments. When bathing had existed as an experience that needed to be endured for the sake of health, bathers had kept their immersion time to a minimum. As aquatic activity became popular in the middle of the nineteenth century, and the seaside culture evolved, bathers began to actually wade and swim about in the water for prolonged periods in a state of undress.²¹² It appears that bathing was tolerated by moral reformers only as long as it was an ordeal for the participant, upon which participating in the activity was indicative of strong moral character. Enjoyment of the activity, however, was not considered morally acceptable.

The public and private baths that were established along the shores of Port Phillip Bay were a necessary response to the developing seaside culture. St Kilda was the home of numerous aquatic developments in the early 1850s, with a Mrs Ford (1853) and Captain Kenney (1854) both erecting bathing establishments.²¹³ Kenney's baths were perhaps the most novel in the country at the time, as they were situated within an

²⁰⁹ John Travis, 'Continuity and Change in English Sea-Bathing, 1730-1900: A Case of Swimming with the Tide', in Stephen Fisher (ed.), *Recreation and the Sea*, University of Exeter Press, Exeter, 1997, p. 15.

²¹⁰ Travis, 'Continuity and Change in English Sea-Bathing', p. 15.

²¹¹ Travis, 'Continuity and Change in English Sea-Bathing', p. 16.

²¹² Travis, 'Continuity and Change in English Sea-Bathing', p. 16.

²¹³ Bate, 'Beaches', p. 65.

unseaworthy Scandinavian whaler titled the *Nancy*, which was beached on the north side of St Kilda pier. The bathing ship had originally been placed south of St Kilda pier, but after a number of weeks the council ordered that the *Nancy* be relocated to the north side of the pier, costing Kenney no small amount of money.²¹⁴

Kenney also ran women's baths in conjunction with his bathing ship at St Kilda, and Mrs Kenney and the Misses Kenney supervised these baths.²¹⁵ In order to attract Melbourne women to the Kenney baths, a special deal was offered where women paid 10d to receive a rail ticket from Melbourne to St Kilda, entry to the baths, and rental of bathing attire and a towel. For an additional fee, swimming lessons were offered by Harriet Elphinstone Dick in later years.²¹⁶ As Marion Stell relates, Dick was an English lady swimmer, well known in Australia for her swimming feats, the most notable being her six mile swim in the English sea. Upon relocating to Melbourne, she spent two seasons at St Kilda giving exhibitions of fancy swimming, and taught over 300 women to swim at the Victoria Ladies' Baths. In April 1878, Lady Bowen, the wife of the governor of Victoria, presented Dick with a gold bracelet in recognition of her efforts in promoting swimming to women.²¹⁷

The Kenney baths did so well at St Kilda that the Hegarty brothers also later established baths on the St Kilda shoreline. Further competition for the Kenney and Hegarty baths arose from the findings of an 1856 Select Committee of the Legislative Council of Victoria, which recommended a Sea Bathing Company at St Kilda. The baths operated by the Company opened in 1860, boasting a gymnasium, a 284 metre swimming enclosure and 95 dressing cubicles for the use of male patrons only. Like most of the baths at this time, the objective of the operator was to create profit; with the Company stating it could 'reasonably expect to net three hundred pounds a year'.²¹⁸ From the 1860s, men and women had access to five bathing establishments at St Kilda alone, and later on five more were established between St Kilda and Port Melbourne.²¹⁹

²¹⁴ Wells, *Sunny Memories*, p. 80.

²¹⁵ Wells, *Sunny Memories*, p. 80.

²¹⁶ Wells, *Sunny Memories*, p. 80.

²¹⁷ Stell, *Half the Race*, p. 6.

²¹⁸ Wells, *Sunny Memories*, p. 80.

²¹⁹ Upton, *Splash!* p. 5.

A cholera scare in Melbourne in the mid 1860s further increased the popularity of seaside bathing,²²⁰ and numerous bayside baths in other suburbs were erected, with Sandridge opening in 1858, Brighton Beach in 1863, and Middle Brighton in 1881.²²¹ However, the filth of the Yarra was to impact on the popularity of the Sandridge baths in later years, as their proximity to the mouth of the Yarra led to the water becoming somewhat tainted.²²² Stubbs, the owner of the Emerald Hill baths, constructed new men's baths in 1884,²²³ and these baths were renamed the Tramway baths in 1890. At this location, sea bathing was offered at the cost of 1d for boys, and 3d for men.²²⁴

The perceived importance of cost and profitability of public baths in these years cannot be underestimated. In the nineteenth century, the medical opinions of doctors that appeared in medical journals, periodicals and guidebooks were effective marketing tools for the seaside.²²⁵ An 1893 *Weekly Times* report mused in reference to the various bathing establishments: 'If they could bring the sea nearer the centre of population, or take the population nearer to the sea, their takings would be immensely increased'.²²⁶ In 1865, hundreds of posters were placed around Melbourne, asking the question 'Where is Sam?'. 'Sam' was soon revealed as the new proprietor of Hegarty's Baths at St Kilda, with the posters an advertisement for the venue.²²⁷ This advertising was necessary, as Upton has noted that the sea baths were 'St Kilda's first and most enduring industry'.²²⁸ With up to five sea baths existing at St Kilda, the proprietors were forced to compete with one another for clientele, compiling package deals that were inclusive of train fare, bath entry and hire of a towel.²²⁹

These deals were likely to have been instrumental in increasing working class patronage at these establishments, in that these patrons now had a greater capacity to afford to enter the baths, rather than simply pottering around on the sand. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the avariciousness of bath proprietors may also have

²²⁰ Wignell, 'From Hygiene to Recreation', p. 62.

²²¹ Brown-May, 'Baths and Bathing', p. 62.

²²² 'The Bathing Season', *Weekly Times*, 16 December 1893, p. 6.

²²³ Priestley, *South Melbourne*, p. 199.

²²⁴ Priestley, *South Melbourne*, p. 200.

²²⁵ Inglis, *Beside the Seaside*, p. ix.

²²⁶ 'The Bathing Season', *Weekly Times*, 16 December 1893, p. 6.

²²⁷ Davidson, 'The Gallop Toward the Sea', p. 36.

²²⁸ Upton, *Splash!*, p. 5.

²²⁹ Upton, *Splash!*, p. 5.

had some impact on the engineering of social change in regard to mixed sex bathing. Some were tempted to turn a blind eye to any mixed bathing infringements within their baths, as enforcing them would have reduced their clientele, and therefore their potential profits.²³⁰ In addition to battling each other, baths proprietors also had to contend with council regulations. By 1865, the St Kilda Borough Council was complaining of inadequate screening of the baths from public view, and of the unacceptable conduct of patrons within the baths. In an effort to combat this, council workers began to place warning notices in the vicinity of St Kilda bathing establishments cautioning bathers against inappropriate behaviour. These notices were not well received by baths proprietors, as they felt that the advice would dissuade patrons from bathing altogether.²³¹

The opinion of popular moral reformers was that a woman's place was within the home, and thus the practice of bathing would have severely compromised her social position.²³² Despite this popular view, women, although marginalised, were not completely excluded from the bathing experience. As the baths became more popular, women and men were allotted certain swimming hours. Women did not receive as many hours as male bathers, and were generally restricted to one or two days mid-week. However, this was by no means representative of demand.²³³ Women's bathing at St Kilda was decidedly popular, and in 1873, it was reported that 26,000 baths were taken at the St Kilda Ladies' Sea baths.²³⁴ By 1881, ladies could bathe at either of two specific ladies baths operated by Captain Kenney, or at the ladies' section of the St Kilda Sea Bathing Company baths. Female patronage was welcomed by baths proprietors,²³⁵ who undoubtedly saw women as a market to further increase their profits.

In 1889, Stubbs enlarged the ladies' baths at South Melbourne to cater for the masses visiting the beaches. Female bathing had always been prominent at South Melbourne, largely due to the diligence of Mrs Stubbs, manager of the ladies' baths. A competent

²³⁰ Paul Higgins and Ken Berryman, *Bayside Reflections: Port Phillip Bay on Film, Part Two: The Top End*, Screensound, Canberra, 2002.

²³¹ Cooper, *The History of St Kilda*, p. 177.

²³² Travis, 'Continuity and Change in English Sea-Bathing', p. 15.

²³³ Stell, *Half the Race*, p. 5.

²³⁴ Upton, *Splash!*, p. 5.

²³⁵ Cooper, *The History of St Kilda*, p. 178.

swimmer herself, she engaged a prominent lady swimmer of the period, Annie Holmes, to give lessons at the baths. In order to generate interest, an aquatic exhibition was given by Holmes herself along with several appropriately attired males from the men's swimming club.²³⁶

However, regardless of class or gender, St Kilda and its surrounds were a lengthy trip from the confines of the town. To get to the southern suburbs for 'a dip in the briny' was '... fully half a day's undertaking and an expensive one, and by the time the bather got home through the heat and terrible dust of old Melbourne he felt no benefit from his efforts'.²³⁷ For a resident of Collingwood in the early 1890s, a trip to the St Kilda baths on the tram would occupy up to three hours of the day. A working class citizen wishing to bathe at the end of a day would be fortunate to leave his home by seven o'clock, and would arrive at the baths in the dark. The appearance of the baths by gaslight was less than appealing, and therefore discouraging to a considerable proportion of the population.²³⁸ Despite the numerous baths that had emerged along the Melbourne shorelines, and the improved transport that served these establishments, they were still not readily accessible to the entire population.

While the *Weekly Times* admitted that the charges for both travel and admittance to the baths were reasonable, they were still 'above the reach of the working man and even of the man of moderate income'.²³⁹ Therefore, the unfortunates who could not afford entry to the baths were forced to defy the laws and bathe in the open ocean, often risking their safety and a hefty fine. A report in the *Age* in 1894 stated that baths proprietors and local residents were complaining to the police about the number of boys swimming in public, but in one particular case the charges were withdrawn after the judge declared that 'it was a disgusting thing that there were no public baths in Victoria ... where people could bathe free of charge'.²⁴⁰

In response to the lack of affordable bathing space in which to practice swimming, and the increasing popularity of the bathing ritual, drownings became more prevalent.

²³⁶ Priestley, *South Melbourne*, pp. 199-200.

²³⁷ 'The Bathing Season', *Weekly Times*, 16 December 1893, p. 6.

²³⁸ 'The Bathing Season', *Weekly Times*, 16 December 1893, p. 6.

²³⁹ 'The Bathing Season', *Weekly Times*, 16 December 1893, p. 6.

²⁴⁰ 'Bathing on the Beach', *Age*, 15 January 1894, p. 7.

Charles Steedman lamented in his 1867 publication that ‘It is too sad a fact that many deaths from drowning happen annually through ignorance of the art of swimming’.²⁴¹

As he suggested:

The stereotyped verdict of ‘found drowned’ which one so often comes across in the daily papers, should in a large number of instances be changed into ‘death caused by a most important feature in the physical education of the victim having been completely ignored, namely, the “art of swimming”’.²⁴²

The general view was that swimming was a ‘duty’ each individual owed to both themselves and the remainder of the population.²⁴³ Accordingly, the English Royal Life Saving Society promoted the need for swimming lessons, as being able to swim meant the ability to save a person from drowning. This was perceived as the primary objective of the activity, and competitive swimming was later promoted only in the context of this aim. It was thought that the speed and endurance that competitive racing could build would assist in reaching a drowning swimmer more quickly.²⁴⁴

However, it was difficult for the less privileged portion of the population to master the art of swimming. The working classes, as in the days of Yarra bathing, were expected to know how to swim and to bathe regularly in order to maintain appropriate hygiene, but they were restricted to bathing either in darkness or flouting the law and bathing in broad daylight. Therefore it can be assumed that drowning was more prevalent amongst the lower and working classes, as a result of their inability to afford the fee and the leisure time to practice their swimming at the baths. To cater for the requirements of the working class in terms of distance and cost, a need existed for public baths that were situated in the inner city, but as a *Weekly Times* writer declared, ‘The waters of the Yarra, to put it mildly, could not tempt anyone in search of cleanliness’.²⁴⁵ The establishment of the Melbourne City Baths in 1860, which was relatively central for inner city dwellers and catered for different classes in regard to cost, alleviated some of the pressure on the lower classes to maintain a hygienic regime. Ironically, it was in this decade that the hygienic emphasis on swimming and

²⁴¹ Steedman, *Manual of Swimming*, p. 43.

²⁴² Steedman, *Manual of Swimming*, p. 44.

²⁴³ Steedman, *Manual of Swimming*, p. 46.

²⁴⁴ Colwin, *Swimming Into the 21st Century*, p. 188.

²⁴⁵ ‘The Bathing Season’, *Weekly Times*, 16 December 1893, p. 6.

bathing would be drastically reduced, and the bathing ritual would take on additional meaning.

2.5 An ‘Urban Beach’: The Establishment of the Melbourne City Baths

The establishment of the Melbourne City Baths was precipitated by the passing of the 1846 Baths and Washhouses Act in England, which effectively paved the way for indoor swimming pools to be established.²⁴⁶ This act was a permissive piece of legislation that allowed local councils the option of establishing public baths and washhouses.²⁴⁷ It was 1853 before a Baths and Washhouses Company was established in Melbourne, and by this time some private bathing establishments had been erected in the city, but these catered only for the wealthier Melburnians.²⁴⁸ Consequently, the less affluent Melburnians had begun to tire of the lengthy trip to St Kilda and its surrounds to fulfil their basic bathing requirements, and it was evident that inner city public baths were required.

A further cause for the establishment of public baths in inner Melbourne emerged in 1856, with Thomas Rawlinson recommending patronage of baths by the working class as necessary to counteract the undesirable influence of hotels.²⁴⁹ In Rawlinson’s view, moral and sanitary reforms were closely linked, with dirt linked with crime and sanitation with virtue.²⁵⁰ The churches also supported the cause of bathing, as it was thought that after bathing on a Saturday night, church attendance on a Sunday morning was more likely.²⁵¹ Additionally, Keith Dunstan suggests that in the nineteenth century drink was perceived as ‘the cause of all evil’, and it was thought that if the influence of alcohol could be negated, crime and other undesirable behaviour would cease.²⁵² This theory was somewhat misguided, as two baths operating in St Kilda from the 1850s gained licences to sell liquor to patrons, and as noted by the mayor of St Kilda in 1877, ‘there was more liquor drunk in each of these bathing establishments than in any two hotels in St Kilda’.²⁵³

²⁴⁶ Janet Smith, *Liquid Assets: The Lidos and Open Air Swimming Pools of Britain*, English Heritage, London, 2005, p. 11.

²⁴⁷ Parker, ‘Improving the “Condition” of the People’, p. 24.

²⁴⁸ Bailey, ‘Cleansing the Great Unwashed’, p. 143.

²⁴⁹ Brown-May, ‘Baths and Bathing’, p. 62.

²⁵⁰ Bailey, ‘Cleansing the Great Unwashed’, p. 143.

²⁵¹ Wignell, ‘From Hygiene to Recreation’, p. 62.

²⁵² Keith Dunstan, *Wowsers*, Cassell, North Melbourne, 1968, p. 34.

²⁵³ Cooper, *The History of St Kilda*, p. 178.

However, while many saw that public inner city baths had long been necessary, a suitable water supply for these baths had not been accessible. With the inauguration of the Yan Yean water supply in 1858, the Melbourne City Council passed a motion to establish public baths and washhouses, paving the way for the establishment of the Melbourne City Baths. The Melbourne City Baths were opened with great fanfare on 9 January 1860, and eight first class baths and sixteen second class slipper baths for men and women were offered, as well as a swimming bath and a family bathroom. From Monday to Saturday, the baths were open from 7.00 am until 9.00 pm and from 8.00 am until 11.00 am on Sundays.²⁵⁴

Despite the popularity of these baths, which were apparently the fulfilment of a ‘long felt want’, there were supposedly no other public or private attempts to establish others in the inner city.²⁵⁵ It was felt by many that there should have been public baths established in suburbs north of the Yarra upon the inception of the Yan Yean supply. The *Weekly Times* suggested that while Melbourne ‘ought to have been a modern Rome’ in terms of bathing establishments, the only options available were the City Baths, or the less than palatable Yarra.²⁵⁶ Bailey has established that from the 1860s onwards, the baths were leased to private operators, and as a result the condition deteriorated over the next twenty years. The perceived lack of concern by the council can be attributed to the improved cleanliness of the city itself. By the 1880s, the streets of Melbourne were paved and drainage systems in place. Bathrooms existed in most new homes, and Melburnians were not as reliant on public baths to maintain their hygiene.²⁵⁷ Another explanation is provided by Parker, who states that the initial reasoning behind the establishment of public baths in England was to provide facilities for the working classes, but the profits from the provision of these facilities were insufficient to maintain them.²⁵⁸ It is probable that this explanation also applies to the demise of the various river baths in Melbourne during the 1840s.

The Yan Yean supply was now able to supply water to the homes of those who could afford it, and in 1867, the champion swimmer Charles Steedman lamented that ‘sea

²⁵⁴ Bailey, ‘Cleansing the Great Unwashed’, pp. 144-145.

²⁵⁵ ‘The Bathing Season’, *Weekly Times*, 16 December 1893, p. 6.

²⁵⁶ ‘The Bathing Season’, *Weekly Times*, 16 December 1893, p. 6.

²⁵⁷ Bailey, ‘Cleansing the Great Unwashed’, p. 146.

²⁵⁸ Parker, ‘Improving the “Condition” of the People’, p. 35.

bathing has materially decreased in the neighbourhood of Melbourne since the bringing in to each house of the waters of the Yan Yean'.²⁵⁹ However, despite Steedman's dire proclamation, sea bathing did not suffer for patronage. Steedman believed that healthful benefits could be derived from seawater, which could not be obtained from fresh water alone,²⁶⁰ and the Melbourne public shared this view. Most Melburnians still subscribed to the English view that sea bathing was imperative in maintaining good health, and the middle classes still maintained that seawater was particularly invigorating for the working class.²⁶¹

Therefore, as well as for the initial hygienic reasons, the working class continued to patronise the sea baths as they became more accessible, affordable and entertaining. Walvin, in his study of seaside culture, suggests that the beach offered amusement for all social classes, while still maintaining through styles of clothing and activity a class divide for those who desired it.²⁶² This recreational focus was compounded by the continued development of the seaside carnival atmosphere, replicating popular English traditions. With the emphasis of sea bathing no longer solely on cleanliness, public baths and beaches were now patronised for recreational as well as for health reasons, and it was then that they became sites for swimming races and carnivals.²⁶³

2.6 Early Competitions and Clubs

Light and Rockwell state that the government's early attempts to control bathing and swimming played a definitive role in the development of competitive swimming in Australia, which later evolved into a form of spectator sport and popular entertainment.²⁶⁴ From settlement in Sydney in 1788, bathing enclosures were constructed on the harbourside,²⁶⁵ and swimming became so popular by 1834 that it was proclaimed the 'favourite recreation in Sydney'.²⁶⁶ The establishment of enclosed baths in response to the public need to bathe had created fixed lengths for competition, therefore standardising distances for races.²⁶⁷ As stated earlier,

²⁵⁹ Steedman, *Manual of Swimming*, p. 11.

²⁶⁰ Steedman, *Manual of Swimming*, p. 11.

²⁶¹ Steedman, *Manual of Swimming*, p. 12.

²⁶² Walvin, *Beside the Seaside*, p. 84.

²⁶³ Brown-May, 'Baths and Bathing', p. 63.

²⁶⁴ Light and Rockwell, 'The Cultural Origins of Competitive Swimming', p. 22.

²⁶⁵ Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, p. 18.

²⁶⁶ *Sydney Gazette*, 18 February 1834, cited in Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*, p. 34.

²⁶⁷ Light and Rockwell, 'The Cultural Origins of Competitive Swimming', p. 26.

competency and speed in swimming became more valued as the number of accidental drownings increased, and competitive races were the preferred way to refine these skills.

Australia's first official swimming competition was documented as being held at the Gentlemen's Baths at Woolloomooloo Bay in Sydney in 1846, though it is likely that they were held much earlier than this.²⁶⁸ Swimming competitions in Melbourne commonly took place as a Saturday afternoon leisure activity during the summer months of the year, and have been documented as early as 1858, though it is highly probable that the first competition took place much earlier. In this year, a contest took place over 100 yards at the St Kilda baths, between the newly emigrated Charles Steedman, of England, and the New South Wales champion, Joseph Bennett.²⁶⁹ Steedman has traditionally been acknowledged as 'swimming's first internationalist',²⁷⁰ and, as the reigning English champion swimmer, he was instrumental in promoting competitive swimming in Melbourne from his arrival in 1854.²⁷¹ Another notable contest took place in 1861, when the 200 yard event titled the 'Champion's Cup of Victoria' took place for the not inconsiderable reward of £30. The event was won by Joseph Bennett, who defeated the Victorian champion Stevens.²⁷²

Once swimming became standardised in this manner, and both formal and informal races began to be held regularly in baths along the Melbourne shoreline, it was perhaps natural that the frivolities associated with the Melbourne seaside experience would be incorporated into the sport. Swimming competitions became a popular sporting and social event, and baths proprietors inevitably saw that promoting these events could be a potential source of revenue. By incorporating aspects of the popular carnival culture that Melburnians enjoyed at the seaside into swimming competitions, proprietors could offer an experience above and beyond a regular day at the beach or the baths. It was essentially the incorporation of this frivolity that saw swimming

²⁶⁸ Howell, Howell and Horton, 'Swimming', p. 416.

²⁶⁹ Cashman, *Sport in the National Imagination*, p. 175.

²⁷⁰ Colwin, *Breakthrough Swimming*, p. 198.

²⁷¹ Colwin, *Breakthrough Swimming*, pp. 198-199. Apart from bringing England's superior experience of competitive swimming to Australia, Steedman also published the world's first text on competitive swimming in Melbourne in 1867, which was later published in London

²⁷² Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, p. 50.

racers, or matches as they were sometimes called, develop into swimming carnivals. The term ‘carnival’ can be specifically defined as ‘festivities and public merrymaking’,²⁷³ and in regard to swimming competitions, the ‘carnival’ aspect of their description was derived from the novelty aspects associated with, and scheduled around, the more serious competitive events. As Rockwell states, the ‘carnival’ trend was also inherited from England, and was an attempt by aquatic ‘entrepreneurs’ to increase profits and to promote the art of swimming.²⁷⁴

It is not certain when exactly the carnival culture evolved, but the carnival atmosphere at Melbourne competitions was well established by the 1860s. In these years, thousands cheered ‘scantly clad competitors’ at Kenney’s summer carnivals, and witnessed the famed poet ‘Orion’ Horne perform trick swimming in the nude.²⁷⁵ The program for one such carnival in 1860 consisted of seven events, with novelty events such as the duck hunt commanding numerous competitors and a silver mounted riding whip as a prize. The swimming was confined to amateurs, and given the support for amateurism, this led to the declaration that ‘the entries were better filled than before, and on the whole the races better contested’.²⁷⁶

Amateurism was another strong English tradition, which had considerable impact on how competitive swimming developed in Australia. By the late nineteenth century in Australia, amateurism and competitive swimming were closely linked. Phillips states that in swimming, amateurism ‘emerged as the dominant ethos to combat what was perceived as the detrimental effects of professionalism on the character-building qualities of sporting participation’.²⁷⁷ In the period where swimming was developing as a competitive sport, the amateur movement was gaining in ascendancy throughout the world. Juxtaposed against this movement were the widely maligned professional organisations, which represented the undertaking of sport for financial reward. One of the greatest promoters of the amateur ethos in this period was Pierre de Coubertin,

²⁷³ ‘Carnival’, in Anne Godfrey-Smith, Janet Hadley-Williams, Joan Hughes, Shirley Purchase and W. S. Ramson (eds), *The Australian Reference Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 1991, p. 126.

²⁷⁴ Tracy Rockwell, *Water Warriors: Chronicle of Australian Water Polo*, Pegasus, Edgecliff, 2008, p. 22.

²⁷⁵ Bate, ‘Beaches’, pp. 65-66.

²⁷⁶ *Argus*, 2 April 1860, cited in Grant and Serle, *The Melbourne Scene*, pp. 112-113.

²⁷⁷ Phillips, *Swimming Australia*, p. 18.

founder of the Olympic movement, who was preaching the advantages of amateurism as early as 1894.²⁷⁸

While the official definition of an amateur has changed somewhat over time, an ‘amateur’ was defined by the Victorian Amateur Athletic Association (VAAA) in the 1890s as:

one who has never competed for money prize, staked bet, or declared wager, or has not knowingly and without protest competed with or against a professional for a prize of any description or for public exhibition, or who has never taught, pursued or assisted in the practice of any athletic exercise as a means of livelihood or for pecuniary gain.²⁷⁹

Any link between money and sport was seen as a breach of the amateur ideal, as the pressure to win for the sake of financial gain was seen to compromise the principle of sportsmanship.²⁸⁰ Sportsmanship was a key principle of another English ideology, ‘Muscular Christianity’, which promoted the development of moral character through the character traits that sport was intended to promote, such as nationalistic pride, team spirit and duty.²⁸¹ As Cashman suggests, amateurism and Muscular Christianity, coupled with the similar ideologies of athleticism and social Darwinism, dictated the view that sport could be character building, while providing discipline and balanced recreation.²⁸²

However, the development and promotion of amateurism in Australia resulted in considerable class division and conflict.²⁸³ As Phillips states, while amateurism was based on the ‘middle class concerns about the corrupting influence of money on the moral values implicit in athletic pursuits’, it effectively provided ‘an artificial, socially constructed and discriminatory barrier’.²⁸⁴ In defining this in the English context, David Young has established that amateurism originated in nineteenth century England as an elitist ideology that sought to exclude the working class from athletic competition.²⁸⁵ Originally men of all classes competed together, but

²⁷⁸ Daly, *The Splendid Journey*, p. 22.

²⁷⁹ Paddick, ‘Amateurism’, p. 13.

²⁸⁰ Paddick, ‘Amateurism’, p. 13.

²⁸¹ Vamplew, ‘Muscular Christianity’, p. 297.

²⁸² Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, p. 54.

²⁸³ Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, p. 54.

²⁸⁴ M. G. Phillips, *From Sidelines to Centre Field: A History of Sports Coaching in Australia*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2000, p. 16.

²⁸⁵ D. C. Young, *The Olympic Myth of Greek Amateur Athletics*, Ares, Chicago, 1984, p. 15.

eventually the upper classes became resentful of competing against the lower classes. This dislike was intensified when contests were lost to working men, and as Young states, a gentleman ‘lost more than the race ... he lost his identity. His life’s premise disappeared; namely, that he was *innately superior* to the working man in all ways, even without equivalent training’.²⁸⁶ By excluding the working classes, these feelings of insecurity and threats to gentlemanly manhood could be eliminated, and the best way to do this was to eliminate the notion of profit from sport. No working class man could spare the time to train and to compete against gentlemen, who had no such working obligations, without financial compensation.²⁸⁷

Cashman has established that in Australia, the middle class in particular were strong subscribers to the class definition that amateurism provided. The existing convict heritage and cultural uncertainty, coupled with an increased potential for social mobility due to a more flexible social structure than the English model, ensured that a system that would clearly demarcate the classes was required.²⁸⁸ Amateurism provided this opportunity, while putting to an end the undesirable practice of taking money for competing in sporting activity. Therefore, swimming carnivals that were conducted in an amateur fashion were given ‘a tag of respectability’,²⁸⁹ and made a strong statement to the public in terms of the class status of the sport, the people that participated in it and the people that attended these competitions.

As the entertainment quotient rose and popularity of swimming carnivals increased, a distinct swimming carnival culture developed. As Rockwell states, the early aquatic carnivals in Australia consisted of ‘a blend of festival, celebration, parade and cavalcade undertaken in the water’.²⁹⁰ While the Victorian middle class objected to certain aspects of aquatic activity, their love for ‘spectacle and entertainment’ saw swimming competitions expand to include novelty and exhibition events as well as the more competitive races.²⁹¹ Events such as obstacle races, egg and spoon races, fancy costume events and military races proved popular, and other diversions such as brass bands were also enjoyed by the paying spectators. It can be suggested that the

²⁸⁶ Young, *The Olympic Myth*, pp. 17-18.

²⁸⁷ Young, *The Olympic Myth*, pp. 21-22.

²⁸⁸ Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, p. 70.

²⁸⁹ Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, p. 55.

²⁹⁰ Rockwell, *Water Warriors*, p. 22.

²⁹¹ Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*, p. 39.

swimming carnivals were a form of middle and upper class reclamation of appropriate seaside culture, which they felt had been sullied by the working class invasion. By enclosing the activity inside baths, and offering appropriate cultural diversions, some form of class divide was maintained at the seaside.

Again, the working class were largely excluded from swimming carnivals due to their inability to swim adequately, the cost of spectating, the fees for entering events and the growing preference for amateurism. J. B. Cooper, in his 1931 history of St Kilda, clarifies that at Captain Kenney's carnivals, the entry fee was between 3s and 5s.²⁹² Visitors to Kenney's wrote numerous letters of complaint to Melbourne newspapers, protesting about the price of admission to the carnivals.²⁹³ Despite the entry fee, 700-800 spectators would commonly attend these events; but it was primarily the gentry that patronised Melbourne carnivals.²⁹⁴ Belfrage states that entry fees to events in the late nineteenth century were more expensive in relation to weekly earnings than they are now, and existed on a 'sliding scale' according to the distance swum. Where a 50 yard race cost 1s to enter, an 880 yard race cost 5s.²⁹⁵ Therefore, in much the same way as the seaside resort culture itself, the swimming carnival became a place to be observed and to demonstrate or affirm social status.

While the practice of bathing could be morally contentious, the sporting aspect of swimming and bathing was beyond reproach, due to the moral education sport was thought to provide. An *Argus* writer proclaimed in 1860 that 'it is gratifying to see such a goodly array of clean limbed and "proper" lads sporting "in the briny"'. In fact most Victorian boys excel in out-door exercises and make the most of a climate so well adapted for the development of "muscular Christianity".²⁹⁶ This English based ideology, prominent in Australian society by the late 1860s, was based on the premise that organised sport imbued its participants with moral character and nationalistic duty through sportsmanship, team spirit and obedience to the rules.²⁹⁷

²⁹² Cooper, *The History of St Kilda*, p. 164.

²⁹³ Cooper, *The History of St Kilda*, pp. 164-165.

²⁹⁴ Cooper, *The History of St Kilda*, p. 164.

²⁹⁵ Belfrage, *Victorian Amateur Swimming Association*, no pagination.

²⁹⁶ *Argus*, 2 April 1860, cited in Grant and Serle, *The Melbourne Scene*, pp. 112-113.

²⁹⁷ Vamplew, 'Muscular Christianity', p. 297.

The dedicated public interest in swimming carnivals, and the income generated from these events, allowed for the further growth of the sport of swimming by funding the employment of bath proprietors, carnival organisers and swimming teachers.²⁹⁸ Another key factor in the development of a definitive carnival culture was the evolution of swimming clubs. The early swimming carnivals promoted the sport of swimming as highly attractive to the Melbourne public, and while the earlier carnivals were for entertainment rather than competition, the proceedings were soon adapted as a model for inter-club events.²⁹⁹

Parker states that in the English context, the formation of swimming clubs was another indication of the shift of swimming from a recreational activity to a 'modern', competitive sport.³⁰⁰ In Melbourne, the Victoria Swimming Club was established in 1867, but lasted only a number of years.³⁰¹ The South Melbourne club was also one of the earlier clubs to be established, forming at the Emerald Hill baths on 15 November 1876 and surviving until 1901. The club staged their first carnival on 3 March 1877, and the occasion featured a thirteen-event program. The main event was the 880 yard 'Grand Champion Race', won by W. McIndoe from five other entrants. However, the program also consisted of a handicap steeplechase and a 50 yard race for swimmers aged 40 and over. At this inaugural meeting, women were not admitted and consequently the bathing costumes were scant in nature. The competing men were unhappy with the exclusion of women, as the consensus was that the presence of women would encourage greater performance, and so it was announced that women would be admitted in future. Some amendments to the men's costumes were required as a result, and it was ruled that competition attire would be 'football costume - minus boots and socks'.³⁰² This issue of nudity in racing had first presented itself in the 1850s, where disputes arose between baths' committees and race competitors. The committees were in favour of competitors donning bathing drawers, but numerous competitors refused to take part in races unless they could compete nude.³⁰³

²⁹⁸ Light and Rockwell, 'The Cultural Origins of Competitive Swimming', p. 30.

²⁹⁹ Light and Rockwell, 'The Cultural Origins of Competitive Swimming', p. 30.

³⁰⁰ Parker, 'The Rise of Competitive Swimming 1840 to 1878', p. 58.

³⁰¹ McDonald, *The First 100*, p.5.

³⁰² McDonald, *The First 100*, p. 2.

³⁰³ Cooper, *The History of St Kilda*, p. 164.

Parker confirms that most English swimming clubs in this era were transient organisations, and this was also the case in Melbourne. The continued existence of a club was reliant on good organisation and funding, and a generous patron was invaluable in this regard. Club members often patronised other sporting clubs, and swimming clubs also needed to compete with these. Parker states that the biggest, and perhaps only source of revenue for swimming clubs was the annual swimming competition, or carnival.³⁰⁴ A well-publicised carnival could draw thousands of spectators, who would pay a handsome entry fee for both quality competitive racing and amusing novelty events. In the bathing season, which generally ran from November to April, it was the custom to have at least one carnival hosted every weekend, with most taking place on the Saturday afternoon half-holiday instituted for most urban workers from the 1880s.³⁰⁵ Some of the more prestigious and well-financed swimming clubs might host multiple carnivals throughout the season, but most clubs were restricted to only one carnival per season.

With the establishment of multiple swimming clubs, regular competitions were being held at a number of Victorian baths and pools by 1883, with the South Melbourne, St Kilda and Western swimming clubs hosting these events.³⁰⁶ Carnivals were also occasionally staged by proprietors to mark the opening of a new bathing establishment. The Sandringham baths opened to the public on 9 November, 1886, with a number of swimming and novelty contests arranged. Among the 250 spectators present were many ladies, and the prizes were numerous if not valuable. Competitive swimming events such as the maiden race (open to any swimmer who had never won an advertised race), the boys' race and the President's Cup took place, but it was the novelty Barrel Roll event which drew the most entries. Other events included the steeplechase, best display of rescuing and resuscitation and best display of aquatic manoeuvres.³⁰⁷ These safety and life-saving demonstrations addressed the growing concern with water safety, with a captive audience present. The promotion of swimming in terms of encouraging water safety was a key reason for the continued

³⁰⁴ Parker, 'The Rise of Competitive Swimming', p. 68.

³⁰⁵ Wray Vamplew and Daryl Adair, 'Sport and Leisure', in Graeme Davison, John Hirst and Stuart MacIntyre (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian History* (Revised Edition), Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 2001, p. 608.

³⁰⁶ Light and Rockwell, 'The Cultural Origins of Competitive Swimming', p. 31.

³⁰⁷ Joy, *The Sandringham Sea Baths*, p. 4.

popularity of competitive swimming, as this objective meant that it was marketed to all ages, classes and genders within society.

Another factor assisting the increasing popularity of swimming carnivals in these years was the provision of swimming in schools. In late 1874, an editorial in the *Record* promoted the development of such a program, and the benefits of swimming for young people. In the season of 1880-1881, the headmaster of the Albert Park School initiated such a program for the boys of his school, where older boys taught the younger ones. Edward Stubbs, the owner of the Emerald Hill baths in these years, allowed these boys a discounted monthly entry fee of 1s.³⁰⁸ Holding school swimming matches was seen to encourage mastery of the skill of swimming, and undoubtedly early promoters of the sport also realised that the future of the sport was dependent on its popularity with children.³⁰⁹ The Sandridge School held swimming championships as early as 1881,³¹⁰ and upon the establishment of the Middle Park baths in 1890, the headmaster at the Middle Park School capitalised on their proximity and arranged swimming lessons for both boys and girls at the baths.³¹¹ With the sport of swimming exposed to a wider audience, the swimming clubs that had emerged in the late nineteenth century were able to accommodate these younger swimmers, and boys' and youth races were common at club carnivals.

Eventually, the growth and development of the competitive sport in Melbourne was consolidated by the establishment of a colonial governing body for competitive swimming. The VSA was inaugurated in October 1893, and was formed primarily to ensure consistency in dealing with administrative matters common to existing swimming clubs. A meeting held on 5 October 1893 between delegates from four Melbourne based swimming clubs (Middle Park, Port Melbourne, South Melbourne and St Kilda) voted for the formation of the association, and drew up a formal constitution and rules.³¹² From this point, most swimming carnivals staged in Melbourne were held under the patronage of the VSA, and this ensured a rotating roster of swimming carnivals in Melbourne and regional areas between November

³⁰⁸ Priestley, *South Melbourne*, p. 199.

³⁰⁹ Colwin, *Swimming Into the 21st Century*, p. 188.

³¹⁰ U'Ren and Turnbull, *A History of Port Melbourne*, p. 120.

³¹¹ Priestley, *South Melbourne*, p. 200.

³¹² Belfrage, *Victorian Amateur Swimming Association*, no pagination.

and April each year. Significantly, the development of the VSA also initiated a series of administrative practices, initiatives and decisions that would further impact on the growth, development and provision of the competitive sport. The remainder of this thesis will examine some of these factors in additional detail.

2.7 Conclusions

From the mid nineteenth century, Melburnians were subject to a number of prohibitions on public bathing in both the Yarra River and on public beaches, which prevented them from bathing and swimming freely in the early days of the colony. The middle class Victorian moral concerns that initiated these restrictions were soon juxtaposed against the theories of medical experts and sanitary reformers, who believed that personal cleanliness was indicative of moral character. Paradoxically, the public bathing practice was pronounced as immoral, but failing to maintain an acceptable standard of personal hygiene was also a sign of poor moral character. It was this paradox that led to the establishment of public baths in Melbourne's Yarra River, an initiative that was meant to cater for the masses. However, the poor condition of the Yarra water meant that Melburnians were forced to seek other venues to fulfil their moral obligations. The establishment of public baths on Port Phillip Bay contributed to the developing seaside carnival culture, but these facilities were too far from the inner city and too expensive for the working classes who needed them the most, despite the supposed health benefits of seawater. By the time the Melbourne City Baths were established, the city itself was much more sanitary, and the piping of water to private homes in subsequent years eliminated much of the demand on public baths to maintain public hygiene.

With the emphasis of bathing no longer solely on hygienic maintenance, the increased number of public baths along the shoreline and the establishment of seaside suburbs as resorts, a shift occurred where these baths were utilised for recreational purposes. Competition between bath proprietors for patronage reduced the cost of bathing for the working classes, and coupled with public transport developments ensured that the baths were now accessible to a greater number of Melburnians. The popularity of seaside bathing in Melbourne can be attributed to the development of a particular seaside culture. This culture, while inclusive of the demand for cleanliness, health and hygiene, also incorporated the English seaside characteristic of social exhibitionism

and class demonstration. By appearing at the appropriate seaside locations, moving in the correct social circles and partaking in appropriate amusements, a person's social class and position could be established or affirmed. The incorporation of popular entertainment into this seaside culture signalled the increasing patronage of the seaside by the working class, prompting a shift in emphasis from hygiene to recreation.

This recreational focus, and the standardised dimensions that baths provided, paved way for the development of competitive swimming. It was inevitable that the seaside carnival culture would be linked with these competitive races, given their location, and the swimming carnival tradition evolved in response to this. It can be said that these early swimming carnivals were the institution within which competitive swimming developed. Under the guise of popular entertainment, the skill of swimming was promoted as a means of maintaining health and saving life. This inevitably led to the development of swimming competitions, as the doctrines of health and hygiene were overtaken by the new culture of recreation and entertainment.

This chapter has identified some of the cultural aspects that underpinned the evolution of bathing to swimming, and examined the early development of recreational and competitive swimming in Melbourne prior to the establishment of the colonial governing body for the sport. In doing so, a number of factors have been identified which were particularly significant to the development of competitive swimming. The developing carnival culture and the continued promotion of health and hygiene were instrumental in building the profile of the sport prior to the inauguration of the VSA. Based on this, it can be said that the development of competitive swimming was largely a response to the changing emphasis of certain cultural factors. Therefore, it is expected that these cultural factors may also dictate how the sport evolved upon the inauguration of the VSA in October 1893, who acted as the colonial governing body for swimming in Victoria.

An analysis of press coverage relating to swimming from the establishment of the VSA suggests that some of the initial factors for participation and spectatorship remained highly relevant, such as the notion of carnival, the concept of amateurism

and the emphasis on school swimming. However, other factors that were initially prevalent, such as the emphasis on hygiene and cleanliness, were less emphasised in the period under examination. Subsequently, new factors rose to prominence within the development of the competitive sport, namely the development of women's swimming and the increasing emphasis on lifesaving, and these were underpinned by events that were occurring in wider society. The following chapters of this thesis explore the advancement of these factors upon the establishment of the VSA, which were identified in press coverage as being either beneficial or detrimental to the development of the competitive sport. By doing so, the relative impact of these factors on the development of swimming in Melbourne, and therefore in Victoria, can be assessed.

Chapter Three:
‘Panderings to a Sensation Loving Public’:
The Role of Carnival in Popularising Swimming

3.1 Introduction

In consideration of the novelty and spectacle inherent in nineteenth century Australian competitive swimming, Osmond states that ‘the shift in emphasis from professional, entertainment-based dimensions of swimming to amateur, modern sport has led to the waning of its history’.³¹³ Swimming and bathing in colonial Melbourne was popularised by the development of a prevalent seaside carnival culture, and as the previous chapter has detailed, this culture was inclusive of the spectacle, novelty and popular entertainment enacted along the Melbourne shorelines. The evolution of competitive swimming in this environment inevitably ensured that aspects of this carnival culture would be incorporated into swimming competitions, in order to attract spectators and therefore profit for the various clubs and entrepreneurs that hosted them.

While the inauguration of the VSA in October 1893 signalled a definite shift toward a preference for amateur sport, the fact remained that the association and its clubs were reliant on public support in the form of attendance at their carnivals, and most especially the entry fee they paid to attend. From this perspective, the ‘carnival’ and novelty aspect of swimming competitions were a highly effective marketing tool in the fledgling years of the association, and this is particularly evident when examining how swimming was promoted in nineteenth century press coverage. In line with such a view, this chapter explores the press representation of the elements of carnival and novelty present in swimming competitions from 1893 to 1900, and how these were juxtaposed against the competitive swimming events. The cultural relevance of these novelties is explored, and the relative importance of the provision of carnival assessed against the developing preference of competitive sport.

³¹³ Osmond, ‘Forgetting Charlie and Tums Cavill’, p. 103.

3.2 The Historical Development of Spectator Sport

Spectator sport, while already an established practice in Australian society, developed considerably in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Adair notes that in this period, sport in general experienced considerable administrative improvements in terms of organisation, competition, publicity and facilities, all of which contributed to the rise of spectatorship. These factors, coupled with growing publicity and the associated importance of competition, saw irregular sporting events become ‘ritual spectacles’ by the late nineteenth century.³¹⁴ It has been noted that of all the Australian cities in the late nineteenth century, Melbourne had a particular dedication to spectator sports, for a number of reasons. Geography was a major factor, as most of the city’s sporting venues were accessible by public transport.³¹⁵ The early development of suburban communities around the central city hub allowed for the evolution of suburban clubs, with which residents could identify.³¹⁶ Local sporting grounds and competitions created meeting places, and social opportunities,³¹⁷ and the introduction of the eight-hour working day also increased the amount of time available for leisure.³¹⁸

Karl Raitz has stated that people attend sporting events as spectators for gratification, which is achieved through the provision of events, and by interaction with ‘site elements’,³¹⁹ such as location, novelties, and entertainment. This suggests that the practice of sports spectating was a personally tailored experience. June Senyard has established that the tradition of sports spectating was consolidated in Melbourne in the 1870s and 1880s, suggesting that in a time of changing economic, political and technological circumstances, the viewing of sport offered ‘alternate avenues of expression’.³²⁰ It is proposed that in the 1880s, as part of the long economic boom, a ‘cult of consumerism’ was widely practiced in Melbourne society. The increase in wealth in this period led to the inevitable practice of increased consumption, which was not only manifested in the purchase and enjoyment of material goods, but also of

³¹⁴ Daryl Adair, ‘Two Dots in the Distance: Professional Sculling as a Mass Spectacle in New South Wales, 1876-1907’, *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 9, no. 1, November 1992, p. 52.

³¹⁵ Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, p. 42.

³¹⁶ Cashman and Hickie, ‘The Divergent Sporting Cultures of Sydney and Melbourne’, p. 43.

³¹⁷ Indian, ‘Formalisation of Urban Leisure’, p. 273.

³¹⁸ June Senyard, ‘Marvellous Melbourne, Consumerism and the Rise of Sports Spectating’, in Matthew Nicholson (ed.), *Fanfare: Spectator Culture and Australian Rules Football*, Australian Society for Sports History, Melbourne, 2005, pp. 27-28.

³¹⁹ K. B. Raitz, ‘The Theater of Sport: A Landscape Perspective’, in K. B. Raitz (ed.), *The Theater of Sport*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1995, p. 21.

³²⁰ Senyard, ‘Marvellous Melbourne’, p. 26.

activities and experiences. Rather than the previous ideals of discipline and self-denial linked with proper Christian behaviour, the societal trend was now that the individual should 'seek pleasure in the expression in emotion in a controlled way, to enjoy the self-determination of the emotional experience that lifted consumption from the unrestrained self indulgence associated with the deadly sins'.³²¹ Thus, spectator events were incorporated into a new consumerist ethic.

Attendance at sporting competitions was also intended to convey something about the individual. Indian states that the population increase and economic boom of the 1880s was followed by several years of economic depression in the early 1890s.³²² As the affluent sought to increase their fortunes through buying and selling land, banks put up their interest rates and cut their overdrafts. As a result of this, there were more homes available than there was money to purchase them, and consequently prices fell, with the market collapsing soon after. As British investors began to pull their money out of Melbourne, and the government put a stop on public works, land companies also began to fail.³²³ This led to mass unemployment, with thousands of labourers and builders now unemployed and hungry.³²⁴

However, the industrial and technological expansion that took place in the prosperous period had led to the developments of a highly rigid and regulated social life, where sports that were codified, controlled and staged regularly became increasingly popular.³²⁵ In effect, they were social rituals that played an important role in urban life, and in consolidating one's place in society. Indian also suggests that from the 1890s, while Melbourne was recovering from its depression, participation and spectating in sporting activity provided a 'process for establishing social position'.³²⁶ Being seen at certain events defined a person's position in Melbourne society, and in turn provided a form of social definition.

³²¹ Campbell, cited in Senyard, 'Marvellous Melbourne', p. 28.

³²² Indian, 'Formalisation of Urban Leisure', p. 272.

³²³ Donald Horne, *The Australian People: Biography of A Nation*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1972, p. 124.

³²⁴ Geoffrey Blainey, *A History of Victoria*, Cambridge University Press, Port Melbourne, 2006, p. 141.

³²⁵ Indian, 'Formalisation of Urban Leisure', p. 272.

³²⁶ Indian, 'Formalisation of Urban Leisure', p. 284.

As the above discussion indicates, the trend of spectating was not diminished with the advent of economic depression in Melbourne. Conversely, people began to actively seek distractions from their financial problems, and this in turn encouraged greater enthusiasm for spectator sport.³²⁷ This popularity of spectating was reflected in a number of different sports in Melbourne. The major horse-racing event, the Melbourne Cup, prospered in the 1890s despite the reduction in prize money (from £10,000 in 1890 to £3,000 in 1894),³²⁸ which was an inevitable result of the economic depression. Attendances in this decade ranged from 60,000 in 1894, through to 95,000 in 1896.³²⁹

Cycling was a major drawcard, and Victoria was considered to be the most advanced colony in this sport due to the general affluence of its society, the mild climate and flat landscape.³³⁰ The annual Austral Wheel Race, after the introduction of monetary prizes, became second only to the Melbourne Cup in terms of its prestige and social attraction.³³¹ In 1897, 35,000 spectators attended the day session of the Australian Natives Association Wheel Race, with a further 45,000 attending the evening session.³³² In what was said to be the highest ever attendance at an Australian Rules football match at that time, 32,595 spectators attended a Carlton/South Melbourne Australian Rules football match in 1890.³³³ Cricket was also popular, with 27,000 spectators attending an 1891-92 intercolonial match at the MCG.³³⁴

However, while the sport itself was popular, Adair suggests it was the spectacle of these events that was irresistible to spectators. While inevitably some of the spectacle was provided by the uncertain nature of sporting competition itself, spectators were attracted to sporting events simply because they were established forms of mass entertainment. In this context, the provision of musical entertainment, side shows and

³²⁷ Alf Batchelder, *Pavilions in the Park: A History of the Melbourne Cricket Club and its Ground*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 2005, p. 265.

³²⁸ Maurice Cavanough, *The Melbourne Cup 1861-2000*, Crown Content, Melbourne, 2001, p. 70.

³²⁹ Cavanough, *The Melbourne Cup*, pp. 71-95. Attendances are provided for each year.

³³⁰ Fitzpatrick, cited in Paul Farren, 'The Cycle Industry in the Australian Colonies During the 1880s: Perspectives from a Collector and Restorer', in C. S. Simpson (ed.), *Scorchers, Ramblers and Rovers: Australasian Cycling Histories*, Australian Society for Sports History, Melbourne, 2006, p. 47.

³³¹ Geraldine McFarlane, 'Cycling in the 1880s: A Focus on George Thorne', in C. S. Simpson (ed.), *Scorchers, Ramblers and Rovers: Australasian Cycling Histories*, Australian Society for Sports History, Melbourne, 2006, p. 27.

³³² Batchelder, *Pavilions in the Park*, p. 294.

³³³ Batchelder, *Pavilions in the Park*, p. 265.

³³⁴ Batchelder, *Pavilions in the Park*, p. 267.

food stalls at sporting events fostered a carnival type atmosphere, which spectators were attracted to.³³⁵ Logically, the application of this carnival atmosphere to swimming competitions was merely an extension of the seaside culture already in existence at Melbourne foreshores, where a culture of entertainment and frivolity prevailed, and would theoretically attract numerous spectators.

From the very beginning, swimming had its obstacles as a spectator sport. Apart from the fact that it was a considerably new competitive sport, swimming as an event was relatively expensive to attend. In the 1890s, the common gate fee for attending swimming competitions was 1s, while to attend a football match the price was only 6d.³³⁶ Admission to the cycle sports at St Kilda was free on Saturdays,³³⁷ and 1s could buy the luxury of a covered seat at a Test cricket match in Sydney.³³⁸ While the entry fee for aquatic events would not have been a deterrent to the upper classes, it was a considerable cut of a working man's wage in the 1890s. In a time of economic hardship in Melbourne, with wage cuts commonplace, some labouring men and their families relied on a mere 15s 6d per week to live.³³⁹

One other major barrier to spectatorship for the working classes was its status as an amateur sport. Cashman states that the first sports to assume prominence in Australia in the nineteenth century were professional, where betting on the result was common and expected. The exclusion of this practice from swimming as amateurism came into prominence meant that there was little financial incentive for gamblers to take an interest in swimming contests. As the previous chapter has demonstrated, amateur sport became more heavily emphasised toward the conclusion of the twentieth century, and was established largely as a response to the perceived evils of professional sport.³⁴⁰ Richard Waterhouse suggests that the popular spectator sports in the late nineteenth century (football, horse racing, cricket, bicycling and sculling)

³³⁵ Adair, 'Two Dots in the Distance', p. 55.

³³⁶ Senyard, 'Marvellous Melbourne', p. 36.

³³⁷ Rob Hess, 'A Mania for Bicycles: The Impact of Cycling on Australian Rules Football', *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 14, no. 2, May 1998, p. 12.

³³⁸ Denman, cited in Rob Lynch, 'A Symbolic Patch of Grass: Crowd Disorder and Regulation on the Sydney Cricket Ground Hill', in John O'Hara (ed.), *Crowd Violence in Australian Sport*, Australian Society for Sports History, Campbelltown, 1992, p. 16.

³³⁹ *Age*, 15 March 1893, cited in Graeme Davison, *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne* (Second Edition), Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 2004, p. 267.

³⁴⁰ Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, p. 43.

were attractive for two primary reasons: their link with gambling, or because international success in the sport had invoked a sense of colonial pride.³⁴¹ While competitive swimming in Melbourne did provide a great deal of entertainment through the provision of the ‘carnival aspect’, which Waterhouse has failed to consider in his assessment, competitive swimming in Melbourne from the establishment of the VSA in 1893 offered neither an active gambling circle, nor any world champion swimmers.

While this may initially have been detrimental, in time it became a highly beneficial marketing tool, as swimming became increasingly acceptable with the rise of the amateur movement. The same sports that had been popular because of their link with gambling became irreparably tarnished,³⁴² with issues such as race fixing and unrealistic handicapping rendering these sports unpalatable to spectators.³⁴³ As John O’Hara has noted, the urban middle classes were largely responsible for this trend. Gambling and betting were frowned upon by the church, and so the middle classes also took up the crusade against these immoral activities, with the hope that they could also influence the working classes to abstain from such behaviour.³⁴⁴ Ken Cruikshank and N. B. Bouchier have noted in their study on Canadian amateur swimming in this period that:

Club rules prescribed appropriate behaviour for swimmers and spectators alike, proscribing gaming, gambling, intemperance and other ‘ungentlemanly’ conduct. Swimming thus acquired respectability as a ‘socially clean’ and beneficial sport ... (while) middle class organisers sought to confirm their social hegemony by defining the characteristics of middle-class respectability.³⁴⁵

This reputation of swimming as a clean and acceptable sport was also applicable in Melbourne, and was an integral angle of promotion to potential spectators. Given the propensity of available and entertaining spectator sport in Melbourne, fringe sports such as swimming needed to be promoted to the public, who were for the most part

³⁴¹ Richard Waterhouse, *Private Pleasures, Public Leisure: A History of Australian Popular Culture Since 1788*, Longman, South Melbourne, 1995, p. 74.

³⁴² Waterhouse, *Private Pleasures*, p. 80.

³⁴³ Handicap races were popular in nineteenth century swimming, as they provided opportunities for slower swimmers, were exciting for spectators and undoubtedly provided odds for spectators to bet on the outcome of races. All swimmers were allocated a handicap time, with the slower swimmers starting first and the faster swimmers forced to chase them down. See Colwin, *Breakthrough Swimming*, p. 191.

³⁴⁴ John O’Hara, *A Mug’s Game: A History of Gaming and Betting in Australia*, New South Wales University Press, Kensington, 1988, p. 91.

³⁴⁵ Cruikshank and Bouchier, ‘Dirty Spaces’, p. 640.

unfamiliar with the sport, and this was achieved to some extent through press coverage in the newspapers of the period.

3.3 Selling Sport: Swimming in the Print Media

As a relatively new organised activity, in comparison to some of the already established forms of spectator sport, competitive swimming would have been somewhat enigmatic to the uneducated public. Michael Oriard, in his study of American football and the popular press, indicates that it was the daily press who taught the public ‘how to interpret the game’,³⁴⁶ and this also appears to have been the case with swimming. Oriard has established that narrative resides in sport, and the meaning within this activity is ‘interpreted’ by the press.³⁴⁷ In regard to nineteenth century competitive swimming, there was an initial concerted effort to promote and critique the sportive aspect, but the entertaining elements, such as the novelty and comical events, were highlighted. While this could be construed as marginalising the sport, this statement is in line with Oriard’s contention that there is no dominant discourse in the media, and a range of possibilities must be generated for the audience to interpret.³⁴⁸ From this perspective, it is possible that it was actually the press that initially assigned meaning to the competitive aspect of swimming carnivals.

It is evident that newspapers were instrumental in promoting competitive swimming in nineteenth century Melbourne. Grow suggests that the development of print technology in this era ensured that newspapers were relatively affordable, and could print images as well as entire stories dedicated to sporting heroes.³⁴⁹ The press in Melbourne were no doubt mindful that reporting on sport attracted readership, and therefore sports writing assumed greater significance. Specific sport writers dedicated columns to detailed analysis and narratives on these activities, allocating meaning to these regular sporting events.³⁵⁰ This meaning alludes to the social, cultural and sporting aspects of the activity spectators and readers identified with,³⁵¹ and while

³⁴⁶ Oriard, cited in Senyard, ‘Marvellous Melbourne’, p. 26.

³⁴⁷ Michael Oriard, *Reading Football: How the Popular Press Created an American Spectacle*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1993, p. 11.

³⁴⁸ Oriard, *Reading Football*, p. 17.

³⁴⁹ Robin Grow, ‘The Victorian Football Association in Control, 1877-1896’, in Rob Hess and Bob Stewart (eds), *More Than A Game: An Unauthorised History of Australian Rules Football*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1998, p. 80.

³⁵⁰ Senyard, ‘Marvellous Melbourne’, p. 26.

³⁵¹ Oriard, *Reading Football*, p. 20.

newspapers positioned the public to understand their reports from a ‘specific point of view’³⁵², this meaning resided not only in the text but also in the interplay between the text and the reader.³⁵³

Additionally, representation in particular newspapers could often legitimise the activity in some way. The fact that swimming was regularly featured in the ‘politically and socially conservative’³⁵⁴ newspaper *Melbourne Punch* in this era indicates that swimming was not altogether socially unacceptable. This, coupled with the metropolitan press’s firm stance against professionalism in sport during the late nineteenth century,³⁵⁵ assisted in the promotion of swimming as an attractive sport to patronise. As sport in general became spectator driven, and the future of competitive swimming was essentially reliant on the continued financial support of the public, ‘spectators became a constituency whose desires had to be accommodated’.³⁵⁶

In terms of most sports, and certainly in swimming, the press acted as the voice of the spectator. As Senyard observes, the payment of an entry fee by spectators implied that they were ‘entitled to a spectacle’,³⁵⁷ and it appears that the press had the deciding say on whether this obligation had been fulfilled. A successful carnival, in their view, was one that had a high attendance and that women had attended, and one that provided exciting and entertaining novelties for the amusement of these spectators. Crowd size was commonly acknowledged, in most cases before reporting on the day’s events. Any convenience that catered for the spectators was applauded, while anything that detracted from spectator enjoyment was relentlessly criticised. Improvements were continually suggested that, inevitably, would benefit the experience of the paying spectator.

The importance of the provision of spectacle at nineteenth century swimming competitions was reflected in the items and events that were provided to cater for the entertainment of the spectator. Some of these novelty events were, as suggested, reminiscent of those found at seaside carnivals in the period, and as a result

³⁵² Hill, ‘Anecdotal Evidence’, p. 117.

³⁵³ Oriard, *Reading Football*, p. 13.

³⁵⁴ Senyard, ‘Marvellous Melbourne’, p. 29.

³⁵⁵ Grow, ‘Nineteenth Century Football and the Melbourne Press’, p. 33.

³⁵⁶ Oriard, cited in Senyard, ‘Marvellous Melbourne’, p. 26.

³⁵⁷ Senyard, ‘Marvellous Melbourne’, p. 31.

swimming competitions were commonly alluded to as swimming ‘carnivals’ by the press. The promotion of these competitions as ‘carnivals’, and the constant promotion of these novelty events in press coverage, were attempts to promote the sport as popular entertainment, and therefore to draw spectators through the gate.

3.4 Sport as Carnival and Theatre

The most widely acknowledged historical concept of carnival is attributed to the twentieth century Russian intellectual, Mikhail Bakhtin, who derived his theories on carnival through examining the sixteenth century novels of Rabelais. Bakhtin describes carnival as a popular festivity that evolved over many years and underwent considerable development in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, stating that carnival is ‘far from being a simple phenomenon with only one meaning’.³⁵⁸ Bakhtin writes of carnival as ‘frequent periods of unrestrained merrymaking in which people liberated themselves from the conventions of day-to-day life and turned the world “upside down”’.³⁵⁹ In line with these circumstances, Bakhtin’s view is that through the ritual of carnival, ‘people were temporarily liberated from the burdens of the social order in which they were embedded’.³⁶⁰

In medieval society, carnival traditionally signified the suspension of hierarchy, privilege and norms, and everybody was considered equal during the carnival period. Bakhtin also proposes that during carnival proceedings ‘a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession and age’,³⁶¹ and this lack of demarcation of rank and privilege created a unique form of interaction that would have been impossible in everyday life.³⁶² Carnival, according to Bakhtin, was ‘all-inclusive’, and ‘is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people’.³⁶³ In terms of physical amusement, games ‘drew the

³⁵⁸ M. M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1984, p. 218.

³⁵⁹ Bakhtin, cited in Rob Lynch and A. J. Veal, *Australian Leisure* (Third Edition), Pearson Education, Frenchs Forest, 2006, p. 11.

³⁶⁰ Bakhtin, cited in Lynch and Veal, *Australian Leisure*, p. 11.

³⁶¹ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 10.

³⁶² Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 10.

³⁶³ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 7.

players out of the bounds of everyday life, liberated them from usual laws and regulation, and replaced established conventions by other lighter conventionalities'.³⁶⁴

In today's terminology, carnival can be adequately and simply defined as 'festivities and public merrymaking'.³⁶⁵ In a sporting sense, this is manifested in modern spectator sport as 'an abandonment to hedonistic excesses, and the psycho-social joissance of eating, drinking, singing, joking, swearing, wearing of stylised attire and costumes, engaging in elaborate social interplay, enjoying sexual activity ...'.³⁶⁶ As Tim Crabbe and Stephen Wagg also state, carnival imagery is also commonly used as a marketing tool. In their view, carnival is indicative of 'ethnic diversity', 'social integration' and 'spontaneous amity' in an approved social setting.³⁶⁷ While this certainly addresses the aspect of inclusiveness that Bakhtin describes, the reality is that most sporting events include 'an air of prohibition' that directly contrasts with Bakhtinian definitions, such as the bans on flares, large banners and excessive drunken behaviour.³⁶⁸ While there are some marked differences, the characteristics of the modern sporting 'carnival' are somewhat in line with Bakhtin's views on social deviance. Sporting events were, and remain an established arena for levels of social deviance that in everyday life would be improper. Within these events, these sorts of behaviours are not only tolerated, but also expected.

This traditional association between sport and carnival has led to its secondary definition as 'a series of sporting events'.³⁶⁹ This demonstrates the traditional symbolic link between carnival and sporting competition in Australia, in multiple sports. As with swimming, different sports have dubbed their sporting events 'carnivals' and this terminology has endured the test of time.³⁷⁰ Upon superficial

³⁶⁴ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 25.

³⁶⁵ 'Carnival', in Frederick Ludowyk and Bruce Moore (eds), *The Australian Oxford Paperback Dictionary* (Fourth Edition), Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 2006, p. 119.

³⁶⁶ Richard Giulianotti, 'Football and the Politics of Carnival: An Ethnographic Study of Scottish Fans in Sweden', *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, vol. 30, 1995, p. 194.

³⁶⁷ Tim Crabbe and Stephen Wagg, "'A Carnival of Cricket?'" The Cricket World Cup, "Race" and the Politics of Carnival', *Culture, Sport, Society*, vol. 3, no. 2, Summer 2000, p. 71.

³⁶⁸ Crabbe and Wagg, "'A Carnival of Cricket?'" , p. 72.

³⁶⁹ 'Carnival', p. 119.

³⁷⁰ Apart from swimming, some of the Australian sports that have employed the term 'carnival' to describe their competitive events include Australian Rules football, cycling, surf lifesaving and athletics. See Rob Hess, 'A Football Federation? The Australasian Football Council and the Jubilee Carnival of Australian Rules Football', in Richard Cashman, John O'Hara and Andrew Honey (eds), *Sport, Federation, Nation*, Walla Walla Press, Sydney, 2001, pp. 97-117, Hess, 'A Mania for

examination of these guidelines, however, the ‘carnival’ element of nineteenth century swimming competitions bears very little resemblance to Bakhtin’s definition.

While swimming carnivals were, as is evidenced by the press coverage, enjoyable events, it is doubtful that they were as liberating and all-inclusive as Bakhtin would suggest. Swimming carnivals seem to have been an enjoyable afternoon’s entertainment, but the notion that they were ‘unrestrained’ is questionable. Additionally, where Bakhtin suggests that the concept of carnival diminishes the social order, the emphasis on amateurism at swimming carnivals further reinforced the upper class dominance of the sport. While sport in Australia by the 1890s had become much more egalitarian, there was still a great demarcation between the upper and middle classes. Members of different social classes sought to maintain social distance from each other, and once they intermingled within the sporting environment, members of the upper classes were expected to assume authoritarian roles.³⁷¹ Presidents and patrons of sporting clubs and organisations were represented by the upper classes, in effect sponsoring sport for their social inferiors, but participating in their own exclusive sports to further reaffirm their elite social status.³⁷²

The nature of swimming carnivals as closed events, where entry was charged and the events enclosed from public view, also contrasts with Bakhtin’s ideal of carnival as a large scale, open activity that took over the city. Accessibility of all classes to swimming carnivals was unlikely, given the entry charges, and therefore remained out of the reach of the working classes. The matter of entry charges also contradicts the notion that participating in and spectating at swimming carnivals was a classless activity. While Raszeja suggests that the wide appeal of swimming carnivals for spectators was the sport’s accessibility to all classes,³⁷³ it is unlikely that the lower classes were in a financial position to attend swimming competitions.

Bicycles’, p. 16, Booth, *Australian Beach Cultures*, p. 73 and John Perry, *The Quick and the Dead: Stawell and its Race Through Time*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2002, p. 248.

³⁷¹ Roberts, cited in J. A. Daly, *Elysian Fields: Sport, Class and Community in Colonial South Australia, 1836-1890*, J. A. Daly, Adelaide, 1982, p. 120.

³⁷² Daly, *Elysian Fields*, p. 120.

³⁷³ Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*, p. 53.

Despite these marked differences, Bakhtin's theories should not be completely discounted when analysing the concept of carnival within swimming competitions, or even other sporting events. A number of researchers have employed Bakhtin's theories to further explain the carnival atmosphere in a sporting context. Booth utilises Bakhtin's discussion of ridicule and laughter to analyse the feminine costumes worn by Sydney male bathers at a protest march in 1907.³⁷⁴ Louis Kutcher, in his work on American sporting events and the carnival element, also notes that spectator sports have long incorporated aspects of Bakhtin's carnival, namely masquerading, merrymaking and rule suspension.³⁷⁵ Masquerading, where individuals could dress in a manner that would normally attract ridicule,³⁷⁶ is manifested in the comical dress of novelty participants at swimming carnivals. Merrymaking was achieved through the practice of cheering competitors and participating in novelty events. In these kinds of novelty and fancy dress events, the suspension of conventional roles, such as men dressing as women, ensured that the 'constraints of dignity and decorum are lifted'.³⁷⁷ Rule suspension, such as women swimming in the presence of men, was also achieved to a small degree.

Bakhtin's promotion of the carnival element as a form of social defiance is also manifested in swimming competitions, albeit to a much lesser degree than his examples would suggest. It has been proposed that the original popularity of seaside bathing stemmed from a desire for social defiance,³⁷⁸ due to the numerous and varied restrictions on the activity that were detailed in the previous chapter. These restrictions applied to all classes, ages and genders, and given this, all Melburnians were united in their confinement to public baths. Swimming carnivals were a muted way to challenge the social circumstances that had confined Melbournians to these venues and, in effect, were a celebration of a necessary recreational activity that had traditionally been frowned upon by middle class society. It circumvented the draconian swimming and bathing by-laws that were in place, challenged gender roles and questioned Victorian morals, by allowing women to compete or spectate.

³⁷⁴ Douglas Booth, 'War off Water: The Australian Surf Lifesaving Association and the Beach', *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 7, no. 2, May 1991, p. 141.

³⁷⁵ Louis Kutcher, 'The American Sport Event as Carnival: An Emergent Norm Approach to Crowd Behaviour', *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 16, no. 4, Spring 1983, p. 38.

³⁷⁶ Kutcher, 'The American Sport Event as Carnival', p. 39.

³⁷⁷ Kutcher, 'The American Sport Event as Carnival', p. 39.

³⁷⁸ Higgins and Berryman, *Bayside Reflections*.

So, while there is a tenuous connection between Bakhtin's definitions of carnival and the nature of nineteenth century swimming competitions, this link was not adequate to explain why these events were termed 'carnivals'. It has already been established that swimming competitions included some spectacles that were similar to those found at the popular Melbourne seaside carnivals, so it is highly probable that the term was originally used as a marketing tool. However, the carnival aspects of swimming competitions were also integral in creating what Peter Mewett refers to as an 'illusion of coherence'.³⁷⁹ This notion of coherence relates to the greater theme of nationalism. As Mewett suggests, people of a nation never all come together for one particular celebration, but there are a number of ways in which myths of a nation can be perpetuated.³⁸⁰ Individuals experience feelings of nationalism through the symbology of specific events.³⁸¹

While it is grandiose to suggest that nationalism was perpetuated on any grand scale within nineteenth century suburban swimming competitions, sport in this period was integral in invoking nationalistic pride. In a nation that was not yet federated, large scale sporting competitions were akin to a national celebration, and this idea of national 'coherence' was largely achieved through sporting competition. As Benedict Anderson proposes, the concept of the nation as an 'imagined community', where a fictional sense of community is created through identification with and belonging to a cause, exists before the establishment of the nation as a tangible entity.³⁸² In late nineteenth century Australia, Cashman has established that sport was 'one form of culture' that contributed to the imagining of Australia prior to Federation. This was achieved not only from a nationalist point of view, but was able to create a sense of belonging amongst smaller, suburban sporting clubs.³⁸³

While the small scale of swimming competitions in Melbourne and the lack of international success in the sport would render this theory somewhat impractical, it is likely that a definite sense of community was achieved. Indian suggests that sport in

³⁷⁹ Peter Mewett, 'Fragments of a Composite Identity: Aspects of Australian Nationalism in a Sports Setting', *Australian Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 10, no. 3, 1999, p. 361.

³⁸⁰ Mewett, 'Fragments of a Composite Identity', p. 361.

³⁸¹ Mewett, 'Fragments of a Composite Identity', p. 357.

³⁸² Benedict Anderson, cited in Cashman, *Sport in the National Imagination*, p. 1.

³⁸³ Cashman, *Sport in the National Imagination*, p. 1.

Melbourne was the most widespread social community activity,³⁸⁴ and after the colony's economic depression of the early 1890s there was a definite need to consolidate local ties.³⁸⁵ In these times, organised spectator activities reputedly assisted in strengthening these community bonds. By attending local competitions or performances, money was being spent in the community rather than being paid to traders and organisations in the city centre.³⁸⁶ It can be said that the carnival aspect of swimming competitions allowed for a greater level of socialisation and unity than could have been achieved through simple sporting competition. Through the prominent symbols associated with carnival (pageantry, light-hearted fun and social interaction), social meaning was invested in these sporting competitions, which was a major attraction of these events. However, the more important aspect of carnival in terms of social meaning is its relationship with the notion of sport as theatre.

Kuntz has stated that sporting competitions are closely related to theatre, in that sport is also 'a purposeful, directed, structured activity (that) is enhanced with props and performed with the end of providing a gratifying experience for participants and spectators alike'.³⁸⁷ According to Don Morrow, the carnival concept that was attributed to nineteenth century sporting events was also linked to this notion of sport as theatre. Through the key aspects of carnival, such as pageantry and celebration, sport could be showcased more effectively in such an environment. Additionally, it gives insight into the cultural and social characteristics of the event, rather than just the sporting performances.³⁸⁸ Carnivals can be referred to as 'cultural performances', as defined by John MacAloon, who suggests that these events are more than just entertainment, and are also an opportunity for a particular culture to 'dramaticise' collective myths.³⁸⁹ As such, carnivals then become commentaries, or critiques, or

³⁸⁴ Indian, 'Formalisation of Urban Leisure', p. 277.

³⁸⁵ Indian, 'Formalisation of Urban Leisure', p. 283.

³⁸⁶ Indian, 'Formalisation of Urban Leisure', p. 284.

³⁸⁷ Kuntz, cited in K. B. Raitz, 'Preface', in K. B. Raitz, *The Theater of Sport*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1995, p. vii.

³⁸⁸ Don Morrow, 'Frozen Festivals: Ceremony and the Carnaval in the Montreal Winter Carnivals, 1883-1889', *Sport History Review*, vol. 27, no. 2, November 1996, p. 173.

³⁸⁹ John MacAloon, 'Introduction: Cultural Performances, Cultural Theory' in John MacAloon (ed.), *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals Toward A Theory of Cultural Performance*, ISHL, Philadelphia, 1984, p. 1.

even celebrations of certain aspects of that culture.³⁹⁰ Some of these collective myths will be discussed later in the chapter.

If it is considered that all sport is theatrical in nature, then swimming was possibly more exaggerated than most, as novelty theatrical events were regularly incorporated into carnival programs. Parker states in her study on British swimming that these novelty aspects of swimming carnivals were necessary to 'hold the paying public's interest against other forms of urban entertainment'.³⁹¹ In the late nineteenth century, the attractions of cinema and theatre became increasingly popular in Australian urban culture. The most prominent attractions were those of musical comedy, circus, pantomime and minstrel shows.³⁹² The inclusion of novelty and theatrical events on swimming carnival programs was an attempt to compete with these forms of entertainment, and was apparently successful. Musical selections were provided at most carnivals by the local band or ensemble alongside all of the other diversionary events.³⁹³ It is improbable, though, to suggest that the incorporation of these forms of events established swimming carnivals as an alternate form of high culture. Rather, swimming carnivals were just another example of mass entertainment that could compete with the already popular cultural pursuits such as theatre.

Indian has established that toward the end of the nineteenth century, the more successful forms of theatre were the local plays and any kind of spectacular entertainment, which encompassed novelties, farcical productions, burlesque and comedy. To this end, public taste in theatre had shifted from the respectable, serious plays to the more light-hearted genres of variety, melodrama and musical theatre.³⁹⁴ While these forms of theatre were certainly less expensive, this was not the sole reason for their popularity. Indian suggests that the Melbourne public enjoyed these entertainments for their novelty value and light-heartedness in a time of social and economic flux:

People could escape their troubles at these shows. They could participate, through laughter, interjections and choruses. And ... audiences formed a

³⁹⁰ Morrow, 'Frozen Festivals', p. 175.

³⁹¹ Parker, 'The Rise of Competitive Swimming', p. 63.

³⁹² Waterhouse, *Private Pleasures*, p. 67.

³⁹³ For an example of this, see 'On the Briny', *St Kilda Advertiser*, 13 December 1893, p. 2, where 'Splendid music was supplied by the favourite Bavarian band'.

³⁹⁴ Indian, 'Leisure in City and Suburb', p. 61.

coherent group, with a similar social background. People welcomed this opportunity for solidarity in a time of uncertainty.³⁹⁵

Given their popularity, these forms of entertainment were incorporated into swimming carnivals to attract paying spectators, and to give them value for their money. Events such as fancy dress, egg and spoon and handbox races were incorporated into carnival programs, along with theatrical productions such as farces. However, these events were not included at all swimming competitions, and it would appear that they were reserved for the bigger and more prestigious events, where ladies and children were expected to attend.

3.5 Ladies' Day and Carnival

In the early years of the association, the carnival aspect of swimming competitions assisted immeasurably in attracting the public to watch the sport. In newspaper advertisements for carnivals, novelty and entertainment events were commonly emphasised, indicating that for the readers, they were the main attraction. The competitive swimming events were referred to only very briefly, as is evidenced by the following advertisement:

A grand ladies day will be held on Saturday ... at Hegarty's Baths, St Kilda. A varied and interesting programme of 16 events has been arranged, including the Ladies Bracelet, for which a large entry has been received. There are also the Melbourne Swimming Club handicap; 300 yds, diving competitions, boys' races, umbrella race, cigar, handbox and fancy costume races, greasy pole and various other comic novelties ... The day's sport will conclude with a polo match between Melbourne and Middle Park swimming clubs. A special prize will be awarded for the most grotesque costume worn during the day. A full military band will play selections during the afternoon.³⁹⁶

The practice of having a band in attendance at sporting events was relatively common, with Hess stating that a local band was present at the first football match held under lights in 1879.³⁹⁷ It is important to note that Ladies' Day events, where women were encouraged to attend, included a greater number of novelties than regular club competitions. It can therefore be suggested that Ladies' Day events actually contributed to the carnival aspect of these swimming competitions. They boosted the

³⁹⁵ Indian, 'Leisure in City and Suburb', p. 65.

³⁹⁶ 'Swimming', *Age*, 30 January 1895, p. 7.

³⁹⁷ Rob Hess, ' "Ladies are Specially Invited": Women in the Culture of Australian Rules Football', in J. A. Mangan and John Nauright (eds), *Sport in Australasian Society: Past and Present*, Frank Cass, London, 2000, p. 120.

attendances considerably, and it was intimated in the press coverage that the novelties were largely for their benefit. Baths were decorated lavishly with coloured bunting,³⁹⁸ and programs were tailored ‘with becoming regard for the tastes of the ladies’, suggesting the inclusion of plenty of amusements of burlesque and comic nature.³⁹⁹ Club events that were not Ladies’ Day events were considerably lighter on the novelties, women were not invited to attend, and there were a greater number of handicap races.⁴⁰⁰ These types of events were seldom referred to as carnivals, and this term appears to have been almost exclusively reserved for the Ladies’ Day events. It is also worth noting that these kinds of events only received minimal coverage in the Melbourne newspapers.

It can also be suggested that this ladies’ carnival aspect enabled swimming to be exposed to a wider audience within press circulation, rather than being restricted to the sporting pages. While reports on swimming were commonly found in this location, they also appear in ‘Gossip’ and ‘Social’ sections in publications such as *Melbourne Punch* and *Table Talk*. Without this element of entertainment, and certainly the provision for ladies, it is unlikely whether these events would have been covered at all. By encouraging women to attend, swimming competitions were further legitimised as an acceptable sporting activity. In his work on Australian Rules football during this period, Hess has observed that status and prestige for the code was achieved through the presence of upper and middle class female spectators.⁴⁰¹ This attendance of upper class women also disproved the minority view that swimming was a morally reprehensible activity due to the display of the near-naked male form, and gave the sport some social respectability. The various reasons that women in particular attended swimming competitions will be examined in a later chapter.

The novelty and theatrical events that were commonly emphasised will now be examined, as it was these events that eventually popularised the more staid

³⁹⁸ ‘Ballarat Swimming Club’, *Ballarat Star*, 5 February 1894, p. 4.

³⁹⁹ ‘Header’, ‘Swimming’, *Leader*, 1 February 1896, p. 19.

⁴⁰⁰ For example, see ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 16 March 1895, p. 499, and ‘Swimming’, *Sporting Judge*, 16 March 1895, p. 4. These reports are dedicated to the Melbourne Swimming Club championship meeting, where attendance was for men only. It is interesting to note that this event was covered in the *Sporting Judge*, which very rarely covered swimming - particularly the Ladies Day events. This consolidates the early notion of the men-only activities as the serious sport, while the Ladies’ Day events were more frivolous.

⁴⁰¹ Hess, “‘Ladies are Specially Invited’”, p. 117.

competitive races. It is important to note that the relative significance and popularity of the following events altered over the time period examined, as one novelty eclipsed another and with the burgeoning presence of the competitive sport.

3.6 Novelties, Fancy Dress and Farcical Events

The events that headlined carnival advertisements and reports in Melbourne newspapers were the theatrical proceedings, as well as the farcical and novelty events, which addressed the Australian love for popular entertainment in these years. The carnival aspect was included purely for entertainment, but also as an inducement so that patrons were in attendance to watch the competitive, club races. As an early carnival report states, it was common for carnival organisers to vary 'the usual dry routine of handicap races',⁴⁰² with a number of these novelty diversions. These amusements included events such as bandbox races, greasy pole competitions, cigar races, umbrella races, obstacle races, tub races and tilting tournaments. While they were classed as the less serious events, the descriptions of these events suggest that a high standard of swimming proficiency was required. Novelty events of this nature appeared to be highly valued on carnival programs, and certain clubs became renowned for their provision of superior novelties at carnivals.⁴⁰³

Novelty, fancy dress and farcical events were described and reported on in great detail in the press. In most cases, newspapers described the nature of the event so that readers could grasp the full hilarity involved. While the conduct of most events was self-explanatory, some required a detailed explanation for the benefit of the uninitiated. The *Sportsman* provided a full synopsis of the bandbox event at the 1895 Melbourne club carnival:

There were fifteen competitors, each supplied with a band-box with a hole sufficiently large to put their heads in. They first entered the water without the boxes, then, when in a line, the white cap was put on and the word 'go' was given. For the first ten yards all went well; after this they went in all directions, fouling each other, some swimming in a circle and returning to where they started under the impression that they were going to the winning-post ...⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰² 'On The Briny', *St Kilda Advertiser*, 13 December 1893, p. 2.

⁴⁰³ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 24 December 1898, p. 1432.

⁴⁰⁴ 'Swimming', *Sportsman*, 5 February 1895, p. 2.

A number of these novelty events were remarkably elaborate. The main attraction at the inaugural Collingwood carnival was the Wild Duck Hunt, where swimmers were required to chase ducks around the baths and capture them for a trophy worth 30s. However, the greasy pole competition was one of the more complex and entertaining novelties. Generally, competitors were simply required to run along a greasy pole, but the Collingwood carnival organisers added an extra twist:

A fine fat young pig was put in a box at the end of a greased pole and a trophy worth one guinea was offered to the artist who could walk along this pole and release the pig so that it might drop into the water. The second prize, consisting of the pig itself, was to be won by the swimmer who could first catch the pig after it got in.⁴⁰⁵

Carnival organisers, in an attempt to keep programs interesting, often instituted new types of novelty events. For example, a clothes race was devised for one carnival, which consisted of competitors swimming 50 yards across the baths in clothes, climbing out and removing their clothes (still attired underneath in approved Association costume!), folding them neatly and swimming back to the starting line with the bundled clothes in hand.⁴⁰⁶ Ideas for new and interesting novelties were often taken from reports on Sydney or Brisbane carnivals, which also made great use of the novelty events. For example, the *Australasian* correspondent in 1897 suggested the adoption of a ‘diving for plates’ event that had been successful in Brisbane.⁴⁰⁷ One unusual event closed the 1897 Collingwood carnival, where swimmers took to the water with Chinese lanterns attached to their heads, with some of these catching fire mid-lap.⁴⁰⁸

Role-play and costumed events also provided a great deal of hilarity. This reflected the popularity of fancy dress and costume in colonial Australia, where costumed balls were a regular occurrence, and another imported English tradition. However, as Anita Callaway observes, while in England these balls had been an aristocratic practice, in nineteenth century Australia it was the ‘seemingly respectable’ middle classes who indulged in costume and fancy dress.⁴⁰⁹ An 1894 Brighton carnival hosted a harlequinade, where a prize was awarded for the best-sustained character in the

⁴⁰⁵ ‘Aquatic Carnival at Collingwood’, *Age*, 18 February 1895, p. 7.

⁴⁰⁶ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 26 December 1896, p. 1271.

⁴⁰⁷ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 2 January 1897, p. 18.

⁴⁰⁸ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 16 January 1897, p. 124.

⁴⁰⁹ Anita Callaway, *Visual Ephemera: Theatrical Art in Nineteenth Century Australia*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2000, p. 86.

water.⁴¹⁰ This tradition was continued at future Brighton carnivals, with clowns and fairy-tale characters such as Little Red Riding Hood being represented, and regarded as highly entertaining.⁴¹¹ Fancy costume races were also a popular event, and another aspect of carnival that was commonly reported on by the press was this fancy-dress element. In conjunction with the fancy dress races, where the winner of the race was awarded first prize, awards were also frequently given for the most ‘grotesque’ costume at carnivals. The term ‘grotesque’ appears to have encompassed any costume that was unrealistic or ridiculous, and these awards were frequently distributed to males dressed as females. These costumes caused great hilarity, and the wearers of these costumes were often depicted in newspaper spreads. Recipients of these awards were gentlemen attired as impractical characters such as the ‘Ballet Girl’, or the ‘Skeleton’.⁴¹²

Events that combined costumed participants and novelty feats were also well received, with an 1896 tilting or jousting tournament in fancy dress costume proving infinitely amusing. This tilting tournament event appeared to have been virtually exclusive to the Brighton carnivals, which was no doubt a selling point for their program. A report in the *Australasian* stated that in this event, ‘Sir Henry Parkes, Britannia, a plantation nigger, sailor, soldier and masher were represented ... Poor Britannia cut an ignominious figure as she fell backward, her false hair, helmet and other paraphernalia floating away, to the delight of the spectators’.⁴¹³ These types of costumed events can be likened to costumed balls, where people could be active and involved participants, and fancy dress allowed them to become somebody who they ‘would rather (or rather not?) be’.⁴¹⁴ Returning to the Bakhtinian theme, these costumed events bear some resemblance to Bakhtin’s carnival, in that fancy dress provided an opportunity for people to behave in uncharacteristic ways.⁴¹⁵ Like the fancy dress ball, the swimming carnival provided a safe place to act out fantasies which would be unacceptable in normal society, such as women dressing as men.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹⁰ ‘Aquatic Carnival at Brighton’, *Age*, 20 February 1894, p. 7.

⁴¹¹ ‘The Brighton Swimming Club’, *Age*, 25 February 1895, p. 3.

⁴¹² ‘Social’ *Melbourne Punch*, 7 February 1895, p. 93.

⁴¹³ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 22 February 1896, p. 353.

⁴¹⁴ Callaway, *Visual Ephemera*, p. 86.

⁴¹⁵ Callaway, *Visual Ephemera*, p. 86.

⁴¹⁶ Callaway, *Visual Ephemera*, p. 88.

Farces were also a popular attraction at nineteenth century swimming carnivals, and commonly mentioned in reports promoting upcoming carnivals. Otherwise known as water comedies, or pantomimes, farces involved costumed participants acting out plays in the water for the amusement of spectators. They were originally instituted to keep spectators interested in the lengthy periods between the competitive races. A Melbourne club carnival in 1895 showcased a play entitled ‘Ducks Bathing’ which was described as a ‘thrilling and blood curdling episode’.⁴¹⁷ Some had a more specific purpose, such as the farce provided at the 1895 Mordialloc carnival. In December of the previous year, Mordialloc residents had put forward a petition to the council requesting that mixed bathing be allowed at the baths during certain hours. This was on the proviso that suitable neck to knee swimming costumes were worn, and was intended to benefit fathers who wished to bathe with their families. Despite the petition being supported by one of the councillors, Cr Benjamin, and the practice already being undertaken at other Australian beaches, the council refused the application.⁴¹⁸

The subsequent Mordialloc carnival boasted a large attendance, fuelled by the mixed bathing prohibition, and Cr Benjamin, the ‘originator’ of this movement, took a leading role in the feature pantomime, aptly titled ‘Mixed Bathing at Mordialloc’.⁴¹⁹ Another carnival at Mordialloc in 1896 boasted several ‘water pantomimes’ on the program, primarily for the benefit of the children present, who witnessed stories about a thief, a policeman, an executioner and a judge.⁴²⁰ In some cases, the pantomimes were based around the various swimmers and clubs, as demonstrated by the song dedicated to the McGee family at the 1896 Brighton carnival.⁴²¹ For the audience, a great deal of amusement was gained from the rough sea conditions that the farces were conducted in, and the problems that the participants had disporting themselves in this environment. At a carnival in 1898, it was reported that ‘the farce “McAnulty’s Wake” kept the audience laughing with the antics and comical dresses of the

⁴¹⁷ ‘The Melbourne Swimming Club’s Meeting’, *Age*, 6 February 1895, p. 7.

⁴¹⁸ ‘Mixed Bathing’, *Weekly Times*, 8 December 1894, p. 19.

⁴¹⁹ ‘Aquatic Carnival at Mordialloc’, *Leader*, 16 February 1895, p. 16.

⁴²⁰ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 8 February 1896, p. 258.

⁴²¹ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 22 February 1896, p. 353.

performers, as also did the unrehearsed portion, the capsizing of one of the boats and foundering of the other boat, with all hands aboard'.⁴²²

While these farces continued to be held across the time period examined, by 1896 press correspondents had begun to complain that they unnecessarily prolonged the carnival proceedings as spectators were often left waiting for the participants to dress and apply makeup. A report from the *Sportsman* in 1896 stated that waiting for farces 'taxed the patience of the audience', but admitted that the performance was 'exceedingly good'.⁴²³ A similar comment was made the following year, where two farces were included on a program. While these novelties were undoubtedly popular, they did prolong carnival programs well past their advertised finishing time. One correspondent suggested in 1896 that 'gala committees try to crowd too much into the programmes'.⁴²⁴ Nonetheless, they continued to take place at most carnivals, suggesting that they were still integral to drawing a crowd.

While the aforementioned events appear frivolous, and in most cases were represented in this way in press coverage, in reality they were multi-faceted. Some of these fancy dress and farcical events were key examples of what MacAloon refers to as 'cultural performances'⁴²⁵ and were an opportunity to reinforce cultural stereotypes and promote myths. One report of a fancy dress event at an 1893 carnival stated that:

... what artists call a 'bit of colour' was given by a number of grotesque costumes which 'caught on' immensely. It is not every day that one can see a number of nigger minstrels in tall hats disposing themselves in the briny, and the spectators enjoyed the circus thoroughly ...⁴²⁶

Osmond has established that these types of nigger minstrel acts were common in Australia from the 1820s, where carnival participants presented 'caricatured versions of non-white peoples' through the use of dark make-up.⁴²⁷ The farcical events also often replicated current racial or political themes. One 1897 farce included characters

⁴²² 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 19 March 1898, p. 634.

⁴²³ 'Swimming', *Sportsman*, 10 March 1896, p. 2.

⁴²⁴ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 22 February 1896, p. 353.

⁴²⁵ MacAloon, 'Introduction: Cultural Performances', p. 1.

⁴²⁶ 'On The Briny', *St Kilda Advertiser*, 13 December 1893, p. 2.

⁴²⁷ Osmond, 'Nimble Savages', p. 169.

such as cannibal kings and tribal men,⁴²⁸ and other farces replicated historical battles or issues, such as skits depicting the ‘grab of the great powers for China’.⁴²⁹ A widely promoted 1899 farce titled ‘The Inventions of Louis de Rougemont’ was based on the adventures of the Englishman Louis de Rougemont in Australia, and his battles with Aboriginal tribes.⁴³⁰ This farce was popular, with the carnival report stating that rough conditions meant that ‘de Rougemont found it impossible to keep upright on the imitation turtle provided for him, and the canoes of natives were both swamped’.⁴³¹ The further re-enactment of racial themes was evident at an 1896 tilting tournament, won by one of Victoria’s most competent competitive swimmers, F. G. Richardson, attired as an ‘inhabitant of early Australia’. In this event, Richardson was reported to have:

vanquished every one of his opponents with such ease and celerity that it was thought he would have little difficulty in overthrowing the young sailor character in the final. After an unusually lengthy bout of 15 minutes, during which time each man had displayed wonderful agility in avoiding the danger that seemed to overhang him at various stages, the judges declared the contest a draw.⁴³²

As well as their entertainment value, such events were, as Osmond states, also seen to promote the projection and perpetuation of racial fear.⁴³³ By the late nineteenth century a form of racial hierarchy had been established in Australian culture, with Aborigines at the bottom of the scale, Pacific Islanders only slightly above, and Caucasians at the top.⁴³⁴ However, Pacific Islanders in particular were subject to conflicting representations. While they were often perceived as ‘head hunters, savages and heathens’, they were also admired for their superior physicality and athletic

⁴²⁸ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 6 February 1897, p. 268.

⁴²⁹ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 12 February 1898, p. 369.

⁴³⁰ De Rougemont was a Londoner originally named Henri Grin, who migrated to Western Australia in 1875 as a valet with the governor of Western Australia. He later made his way to Sydney claiming that en route he had survived an Aboriginal attack at Lacrosse Island. Upon his return to London in 1898, the *Wide World* magazine began a serial titled ‘The Adventures of Louis De Rougemont’, which detailed his supposed experiences living as a castaway among the Aboriginals for 30 years. This was later exposed as a hoax. For further information, see B. G Andrews, ‘de Rougemont, Louis, (1847-1921), in Geoffrey Serle, John Ritchie, Bede Nairn, Douglas Pike and Christopher Cunneen (eds), *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 8, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1981, p. 290.

⁴³¹ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 4 February 1899, p. 245.

⁴³² ‘Header’, ‘Swimming’, *Leader*, 22 February 1896, p. 14.

⁴³³ Osmond, ‘Nimble Savages’, p. 172.

⁴³⁴ Gary Osmond and M. G. Phillips, “‘Look at That Kid Crawling’”: Race, Myth and the “Crawl” Stroke’, *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 37, issue 127, April 2006, p. 53.

skill.⁴³⁵ Aborigines, however, were generally perceived as being ‘savages, easily swayed by impulse, fickle, (and) extravagant in character’.⁴³⁶ Like Pacific Islanders, though, they were seen as a somewhat exotic entity, given that in the late nineteenth century, Aborigines were generally prevented from entering the main centres of population.⁴³⁷ Therefore, while they were feared, they were also highly exotic in nature. By immortalising them in performances, carnival participants were reinforcing the stereotypes of these racial figures as the feared ‘other’, or establishing them as figures to be ridiculed. As Callaway suggests, white Australians were subject to cultural uncertainty, as they could no longer identify with their English ancestors nor with the Australian indigenous population. Fancy dress allowed them to relive traditions from the motherland, or to ridicule the indigenous population.⁴³⁸ The victory of the white Caucasian in farcical aquatic battles, consequently, was re-enacting the popular theory of social Darwinism, and the aforementioned racial hierarchy.

As well as racial themes, fancy dress events were also employed to reinforce social stereotypes. A key example of this is detailed in a report of the 1896 Melbourne Swimming Club carnival, where a race was won by a so-called ‘New Woman’, who:

... was handsomely attired in paper bloomers, a scarlet paper coat with large puffed sleeves, a shirt front, a boxer hat and a Brobdignaglan cigar, all of which melted away and glorified the waves for the remainder of the afternoon.⁴³⁹

The ‘New Woman’ was a largely exaggerated 1890s personification that was symbolic of the growing emancipation of women. Independent women, as Catriona Parratt states, ‘forced reconceptualisation of society’s view of womanhood’ and were promoted as the ‘antithesis of a perfect lady’.⁴⁴⁰ One of the areas in which women were becoming liberated was on the sporting field, and to this end the ‘New Woman’

⁴³⁵ Osmond and Phillips, “‘Look at That Kid Crawling’”, p. 45.

⁴³⁶ Tench, cited in Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880-1939*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, 1997, p. 3.

⁴³⁷ Andrew Markus, *Australian Race Relations, 1788-1993*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1994, pp. 124-125. It should be noted that Victoria was slightly more relaxed on this rule than in other colonies of Australia.

⁴³⁸ Callaway, *Visual Ephemera*, p. 86.

⁴³⁹ ‘The Melbourne Swimming Club’, *Age*, 27 January 1896, p. 3.

⁴⁴⁰ C. M. Parratt, ‘Athletic Womanhood: Exploring Sources for Female Sport in Victorian and Edwardian England’, *Journal of Sport History*, vol. 16, no. 2, Summer 1989, p. 142.

was often promoted as a sporting female, with attributes such as a lean, muscular frame, athletic ability, masculine characteristics and a dislike of anything feminine.⁴⁴¹

Raszeja suggests that images of sporting women were often chosen by caricaturists of the Australian press to exemplify the threat of female emancipation to society, and were seen as symbolic of women's attempts to cross the dividing line. Sport and the 'New Woman' were inextricably linked, as female involvement in competitive sport was seen as an attack on the status quo.⁴⁴² By exaggerating the character of the 'New Woman' for the entertainment of both male and female spectators alike, the concept itself was ridiculed. At a number of carnivals, at least one irreverent gentleman was attired as the 'New Woman', attracting laughter and applause. This was perhaps a subtle reminder to women that competing against men and attempting equality was inappropriate. Yet, as will be demonstrated in a subsequent chapter, males were not averse to the concept of women competing in swimming, as long as participation was undertaken in the correct manner, and for the socially appropriate reasons.

3.7 Trick Swimming, Diving and Plunge Events

Trick swimming, also known as ornamental or scientific swimming, was prevalent on carnival programs very early in Melbourne, and was popular in the period under examination. Performances of trick swimming commonly involved 'parlour-trick' feats such as eating underwater, and the supposedly non-strenuous nature of the activity rendered it a popular choice for women.⁴⁴³ The majority of women involved in swimming in this period were middle or upper class women, as there was limited leisure time for working class women to be involved in amateur swimming.⁴⁴⁴ From the 1870s in England, however, working class women began to access the professional swimming world. As Love indicates, they were usually young, unmarried and often daughters of male swimming professionals, and acted as instructors or performers in ornamental swimming demonstrations.⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴¹ Parratt, 'Athletic Womanhood', p. 153.

⁴⁴² Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*, p. 23.

⁴⁴³ Love, *A Social History of Swimming in England*, p. 26.

⁴⁴⁴ Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*, p. 5.

⁴⁴⁵ Love, *A Social History of Swimming in England*, p. 20.

At Melbourne swimming carnivals, young girls were often featured in exhibitions of fancy swimming organised by professors teaching the art of swimming, who were often the bath proprietors as well.⁴⁴⁶ The notion of the swimming ‘professor’ originated from England, and swimming professors were essentially professional swimmers who operated swimming as a business, which involved the provision of swimming lessons and elaborate swimming races, as well as a large amount of ‘self-publicity’.⁴⁴⁷ However, professional swimmers were often forced to take jobs as bath supervisors in order to fulfil these teaching responsibilities, and to ensure they could complete the requisite amount of training.⁴⁴⁸ Male and female children were often included in fancy swimming exhibitions by bath superintendents, both to attract spectators and to highlight the art of swimming. The pupils of Professor Searle at Geelong provided aquatic entertainments at the Western baths in 1894, where the children provided a series of springboard exhibitions.⁴⁴⁹ At the 1895 Ballarat Carnival, the two young daughters of Professor Beaumont gave ‘water wheel’ and ‘flip flap’ demonstrations for the amusement of the audience.⁴⁵⁰

Professor Beaumont was one prominent professional who frequently used his daughters as part of his aquatic entertainments. From early 1894, the Beaumont family were the main providers of aquatic entertainment in the colony of Victoria. One such performance took place at Hegarty’s Baths, St Kilda, on 6 January 1894, under the management of Mr F. M. Clark.⁴⁵¹ Professor Beaumont and his two daughters provided an open-air exhibition of their swimming and diving capabilities, with the highlight of the afternoon being the Professor’s descent into the water ‘tied up into a sack, which was weighted heavily, and in less than two minutes he appeared on the surface divested of all the clothes he had been wearing when enclosed in the sack except a neat swimming suit’.⁴⁵² The Beaumonts were frequently employed to give demonstrations at major fundraisers, such as the Satchell memorial carnival in 1894, and the Mordialloc protest carnival in 1895. A regional tour was also completed

⁴⁴⁶ See ‘Swimming’, *Argus*, 18 December 1894, p. 7.

⁴⁴⁷ Terret, ‘Professional Swimming in England’, p. 19.

⁴⁴⁸ Parker, ‘The Rise of Competitive Swimming’, p. 62.

⁴⁴⁹ ‘Swimming’, *Argus*, 18 December 1894, p. 7.

⁴⁵⁰ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 19 January 1895, p. 115.

⁴⁵¹ ‘Swimming’, *Argus*, 4 January 1894, p.3.

⁴⁵² ‘Amusements’, *Age*, 6 January 1894, p. 6.

in 1895, with the Beaumonts visiting Ballarat,⁴⁵³ Geelong and Warrnambool.⁴⁵⁴ The exhibitions given by professional swimmers such as Professor Beaumont were often an attempt to promote themselves as swimming teachers, as advertisements of his feats often mentioned his capability to teach swimming.⁴⁵⁵

Alexander Rushall was another gentleman who appeared frequently at carnivals in this era. His performances at the Melbourne club carnivals each year were very similar to those Beaumont undertook, namely attempting to escape from a weighted sack.⁴⁵⁶ At the 1896 Melbourne ladies' day, the services of an entertainer named Herr Holland were enlisted, who gave an exhibition of strength on a raft in the centre of the baths.⁴⁵⁷ The Baron C. A. Neven von Tossan was another regular on the Victorian aquatic entertainment circuit, and the Ballarat Swimming Club enlisted his services for their carnival in February 1895.⁴⁵⁸ In a special performance at Bendigo in 1895, Tossan performed feats such as holding his breath under water for two minutes and 24 seconds, drinking milk, sketching and smoking pipes underwater, and also rendered his performance of escaping from a weighted sack.⁴⁵⁹ Other small-name aquatic performers often had some kind of deformity that contributed to the spectacle. George Tobitt, a Ballarat swimmer, appeared at carnivals exhibiting fancy swimming with only one arm.⁴⁶⁰ Sometimes, amateur competitive swimmers were engaged to demonstrate their skills, which to an uninformed general public were undoubtedly spectacular.

While these trick swimming feats were popular, some of the more risky manoeuvres that had been attempted drew criticism. At the 1895 Upper Yarra Regatta, which was a rowing event rather than a swimming carnival, Professor Beaumont dived from Princes Bridge into the depths of the Yarra River. This feat was unannounced, which the *Australasian* correspondent attributed to a fear of police intervention. While the demonstration may have been well received by the public, the same correspondent

⁴⁵³ 'Amateur Athletics', *Sportsman*, 15 January 1895, p. 4.

⁴⁵⁴ 'Athletic Doings', *Sportsman*, 22 January 1895, p. 2.

⁴⁵⁵ See 'Natation', *Age*, 5 January 1894, p. 7.

⁴⁵⁶ 'Swimming', *Sportsman*, 5 February 1895, p. 2.

⁴⁵⁷ 'Melbourne Swimming Club', *Age*, 25 January 1896, p. 5.

⁴⁵⁸ 'Athletic Doings', *Sportsman*, 22 January 1895, p. 2.

⁴⁵⁹ 'Athletic Doings', *Sportsman*, 5 February 1895, p. 2.

⁴⁶⁰ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 19 January 1895, p. 115.

deemed it an action ‘on the same plane as to idiocy’, and suggested that ‘the sooner such useless panderings to a sensation-loving public are put to a stop to the better’.⁴⁶¹ It would appear the tide was turning, and feats of this nature were seen as blatant profiteering. As the *Australasian* correspondent questioned, ‘Is it lack of pence or lack of sense that leads high divers and swimmers to take such awful risks?’⁴⁶²

The popularity of trick swimming was also assisted, as was the competitive element, by demonstrations given by the visiting Cavill brothers. The Cavill family were Australia’s first swimming family, with Professor Fred Cavill renowned as one of Australia’s greatest aquatic entrepreneurs. In the late nineteenth century, six of his sons (Ernest, Dick, Charles, Syd, Arthur and Percy) were champion swimmers, winning a number of New South Wales, Australasian and world championship titles.⁴⁶³ As the source of Australia’s greatest swimming successes, their presence at both New South Wales and intercolonial carnivals was highly sought after, as their demonstrations ensured a large crowd would attend. In 1896, Charles Cavill was the special attraction at Stubbs’ Baths in South Melbourne, where he performed a number of aquatic tricks. However, the Melbourne swimming public had become more educated and less easily impressed, with press correspondents beginning to cast aspersions on the trick swimming events. One column referring to this event stated nastily that ‘the promoter must think the Victorian public very gullible to advertise “The Monte Christo Sack Feat, by Chas Cavill staying under water five minutes.” As a matter of fact he was under water just 20 seconds’.⁴⁶⁴ Overall, the press correspondents were much more taken with his competitive swimming feats than by his aquatic performances.

Trick swimming was one of the few avenues where Melburnians were exposed to professional swimmers. As previously suggested, professional swimming had not permeated Melbourne the same way it had in colonies such as New South Wales and South Australia, which both had separate leagues for their professional swimmers.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶¹ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 5 January 1895, p. 19.

⁴⁶² ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 5 January 1895, p. 19.

⁴⁶³ V. M. Raszeja, ‘Cavill Family’, in Wray Vamplew, Katharine Moore, John O’Hara, Richard Cashman and Ian Jobling (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian Sport* (Revised Second Edition), Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 1997, p. 92.

⁴⁶⁴ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 9 January 1897, p. 74.

⁴⁶⁵ See Daly, *The Splendid Journey*, p. 10, and Richardson, ‘An Aquatic Divide and Conquer’, p. 72.

Swimmers such as Professor Beaumont sponsored trophies for events on occasion, and gave exhibitions at carnivals, for which they were paid, but in order to compete and win money against other swimmers they were forced to either go to another colony or bring in swimmers from another colony. An early column in *Sportsman* reports on the negotiations between Professor Beaumont and a Queensland swimmer to compete in a ‘staying under water match’, for a wager of £200, where Beaumont was having difficulty securing a Melbourne backer.⁴⁶⁶

High diving events were also popular events at carnivals, and were consistently featured on carnival programs. Often diving was included as part of the fancy swimming demonstrations, but it also existed as a stand-alone, competitive event. The diving events on the program included the fancy diving, the running header and the distance plunge event. Plunging required the competitor to take a dive from a standing start on the side of the baths, and then to float face-down and motionless for 60 seconds, or until out of breath. The objective of the competition was to travel as far as possible underwater using only the dive to gain forward momentum. Competitors were given three attempts, with the best distance taken. This event was popular in that youths and older men could both compete and have an equal chance of winning.⁴⁶⁷

Diving was included on the vast majority of programs, because it had the same attraction as trick swimming, where sensational feats were appealing to spectators. However, the major problem with the competitive diving events was that the method of scoring was entirely subjective, and therefore difficult for spectators to understand. The numerical scoring system was introduced in order to assist in this area, but as in a lot of cases the score did not necessarily reflect the effort, this system was effectively useless.⁴⁶⁸ Columns reporting on results in these events often commented on errors and bias present in the judging. The *Leader* correspondent commented in 1896 that:

This event is perhaps the most difficult a judge has to decide. It is not an infrequent occurrence for the friends of some particular diver to applaud each effort of his so heartily as to infer that no-one else could possibly be awarded first prize, by this means endeavouring to anticipate the judge’s verdict. The

⁴⁶⁶ ‘Professor Beaumont and Diver Innes’, *Sportsman*, 9 April 1894, p. 3.

⁴⁶⁷ Besford, *Encyclopaedia of Swimming*, p. 135.

⁴⁶⁸ McDonald, *The First 100*, p. 111.

result is, that if the recipient of the demonstration fails to secure first place, he thinks an injustice is being done him.⁴⁶⁹

Judging by the frequency of reports bemoaning the injustices done that week in the diving events, this was a common problem. A report on an 1895 competition suggested that in the diving event, the 'best form was undoubtedly shown by C. G. Lynas, but to the general surprise he was not placed first or second'.⁴⁷⁰ To address this problem, in 1896 the Middle Park club introduced a tally record in their official programs, with the intention that 'each spectator can now jot down his own opinion of the points gained during the progress of the competition, and compare totals with the judges' decision'.⁴⁷¹ It is uncertain whether this practice was continued at future events.

The continued negative reports on the diving events began to provoke irritation within clubs, as it was seen that these reports were bringing the club carnivals into disrepute. One Middle Park member wrote to the *Australasian* correspondent after one such incident in 1896, protesting against the implication that the diving was unfairly judged at his carnival and stating that 'when several different styles appear in the competition each diver has a following who invariably think their man should win'.⁴⁷² While the *Australasian* correspondent accepted that the judges' intention was to be impartial, he was not convinced that they did not possess some errors in judgement, stating that:

Other gentlemen as capable and as impartial think they did err. Personally, I am prepared to accept their decision as correct. But similar dissatisfaction has occurred recently in other waters and with other judges regarding the fancy diving, and I mentioned the matter in order that attention may be drawn to it and a remedy found. If judges give preference to different styles they should let competitors know what is required of them, but, if possible, it would be much better for the best judges to meet and decide on and make public a few uniform rules which would be adhered to in guiding them to their decisions. At present the matter is so unsatisfactory that I have heard more than one competitor complain that it is useless to enter for any such competition outside his own baths. Surely some remedy is required if it is thought worth while to continue to hold open diving competitions.⁴⁷³

⁴⁶⁹ 'Swimming', *Leader*, 25 January 1896, p. 19.

⁴⁷⁰ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 26 January 1895, p. 163.

⁴⁷¹ 'Swimming', *Leader*, 25 January 1896, p. 19.

⁴⁷² 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 8 February 1896, p. 258.

⁴⁷³ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 8 February 1896, p. 258.

The lack of definitive guidelines in terms of judging the winner continued to hamper diving events. A column in the *Australasian* from 1897 recommended that a statement be circulated, both for the benefit of the divers and for those spectators struggling to understand the event.⁴⁷⁴ From 1897, press correspondents began to express dissatisfaction with the diving events, due to the inconsistencies in judging and the repetitious nature of the events. One correspondent commented that he ‘should like to see some change made from the everlasting standing dives, double jumps, and running headers which figure on every programme, and are contested for by the same three or four youths on occasion’.⁴⁷⁵

Another significant issue press correspondents had with the diving competitions was that they were dangerous, particularly the distance diving events. At an 1896 Brighton carnival, one of the participants had to be pulled from the bottom of the baths and resuscitated. There was some conjecture over the cause of the accident, as a number of correspondents suggested the diver had hit his head, while others suggested he had simply ‘overtaxed his powers underwater’, but all correspondents shared the view that he was lucky to be alive.⁴⁷⁶ The *Australasian* correspondent made a special point of enunciating the danger of the diving contests in future years, calling for the cessation of these particular events and citing some valid domestic and international examples.⁴⁷⁷

While these events still continued to be included on carnival programs, their popularity was eclipsed by a new diving event, which was substituted ‘in lieu of the somewhat monotonous diving competitions’.⁴⁷⁸ By 1897, a popular variation on the diving events that combined elements of trick swimming and novelty had evolved, and was titled ‘Follow the Leader’. This event, the popularity of which was increased significantly by an early demonstration by a visiting Chas Cavill, involved copying a ringleader in plunging off the springboard in various positions, with the manoeuvres growing gradually more difficult.⁴⁷⁹ The initial exhibitions of this proved infinitely amusing, and one correspondent endorsed its suitability for those ‘gala promoters

⁴⁷⁴ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 6 February 1897, p. 268.

⁴⁷⁵ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 6 February 1897, p. 268.

⁴⁷⁶ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 18 January 1896, p. 115.

⁴⁷⁷ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 13 March 1897, p. 515.

⁴⁷⁸ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 30 January 1897, p. 216.

⁴⁷⁹ ‘Swimming’, *Argus*, 4 January 1897, p. 6.

wishing to cater for the public amusement'.⁴⁸⁰ In some cases, diving was included on carnival programs as a sort of spectacular entertainment, with exhibition dives of great depth and distance advertised. However, by 1899, diving contests had begun to be cancelled on carnival programs due to lack of entries.⁴⁸¹ To ensure entertainment value, the swimming events needed to remain interesting and therefore varied in nature. In line with such an objective, the provision of water polo games proved to be a valued diversion at nineteenth century Melbourne swimming carnivals.

3.8 Water Polo

It is thought that water polo was originally known as 'aquatic polo' in England, evolving in the 1860s from activities titled 'Water Derbies', where participants fought for possession of a ball while mounted on wooden barrels.⁴⁸² The sport was originally invented in England as an additional attraction for spectators attending swimming carnivals.⁴⁸³ However, it was also an attraction for the swimmers who competed in these carnivals. Love states that from the 1870s in England, swimmers began to look beyond simple racing, and wanted to partake in other methods of aquatic amusement.⁴⁸⁴ Therefore, water polo became a popular and regular feature of carnival programs, with the added benefit that it catered for older men who were unable to be competitive in the speed swimming events.⁴⁸⁵

As Rockwell suggests, early water polo matches in Australia were also placed on carnival programs primarily for their entertainment value.⁴⁸⁶ Certainly in Melbourne, given the varying conditions of the sea, water polo was initially construed as somewhat farcical in itself. In windy conditions and heavy swell, matches often resembled an aquatic comedy, with a report in 1897 painting a comedic picture of one such match:

... if one of them failed to catch the ball the crest of a heavy wave usually succeeded, and the next minute it might have been seen floating 30 yards or more away, and the players gazing vacantly round them in the hollow of the

⁴⁸⁰ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 16 January 1897, p. 124.

⁴⁸¹ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 28 January 1899, p. 189.

⁴⁸² Rockwell, *Water Warriors*, p. 25.

⁴⁸³ Rockwell, *Water Warriors*, p. 25.

⁴⁸⁴ Love, *A Social History of Swimming in England*, p. 11.

⁴⁸⁵ Love, *A Social History of Swimming in England*, p. 25.

⁴⁸⁶ Rockwell, *Water Warriors*, p. 22.

waters, and wondering where in thunder that ball had got to. It was amusing, but it was not polo.⁴⁸⁷

The official date of the first water polo match in Australia is unknown, but the game was reportedly played from the 1880s in Sydney,⁴⁸⁸ with a *Sydney Morning Herald* report stating that a match was played at a Port Jackson club carnival on 19 February 1881.⁴⁸⁹ It is unknown when water polo in Melbourne commenced, but the 1893 St Kilda Swimming Club carnival report in the *Argus* noted that ‘the proceedings wound up with a football match in the water, which proved very amusing ...’.⁴⁹⁰ This particular game established something of a carnival ritual, which would later become known as water polo. Initially these games were lighthearted in nature, conducted in fancy dress and received extraordinary billing, such as ‘Brighton vs. The World’,⁴⁹¹ but they soon became a much more serious event on the carnival program. Initially swimming clubs would combine forces and compete against each other, but eventually this practice was discontinued as clubs began to field their own teams.

It appears that water polo began to occupy a regular spot on carnival programs from the beginning of the 1894/95 season. Just six weeks after its inception, the Melbourne club had formed a team, playing a combined Middle Park and Middle Brighton team at their first carnival.⁴⁹² This early match was received favourably in press coverage, dubbed both amusing and interesting, with the *Australasian* suggesting that the association institute a championship series for water polo. Their view was that it would not only interest the public, but also ‘disseminate a little of that club rivalry which is the life of sport’.⁴⁹³ The press described the early rules of water polo on numerous occasions as being very similar to those of Australian Rules football, and early match reports praised players for their superior ‘marking’ of the ball.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁸⁷ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 16 January 1897, p. 124.

⁴⁸⁸ Katharine Moore, ‘Water Polo’, in Wray Vamplew, Katharine Moore, John O’Hara, Richard Cashman and Ian Jobling (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian Sport* (Revised Second Edition), Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1997, p. 453.

⁴⁸⁹ Rockwell, *Water Warriors*, p. 30.

⁴⁹⁰ ‘Swimming’, *Argus*, 11 December 1893, p. 6.

⁴⁹¹ ‘Aquatic Carnival at Brighton’, *Age*, 20 February 1894, p. 7.

⁴⁹² ‘Melbourne Swimming Club’, *Argus*, 26 November 1894, p. 7.

⁴⁹³ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 1 December 1894, p. 992.

⁴⁹⁴ ‘The Melbourne Swimming Club’s Meeting’, *Age*, 6 February 1895, p. 7.

Given the English origins of the game, it is uncertain whether these Melbourne games followed the rules of the Swimming Association of Great Britain (SAGB), who had assumed responsibility for the governance of water polo in 1885 and subsequently introduced a set of eleven rules. The rules specified that players had to swim with the ball in their hands or out in front of them, with the ball not allowed to be thrown.⁴⁹⁵ These rules were further revised in 1888, where the width of the goalposts was revised to be eight feet wide and six feet high, and players were required to be swimming when ‘passing or playing the ball’.⁴⁹⁶

The game was referred to as polo in the media from late 1894, with the primary swimming clubs fielding teams, and in most cases it became the concluding event on carnival programs.⁴⁹⁷ In time, it was expected that Melbourne swimming clubs would assemble a water polo team upon their formation. Results of the water polo matches each week were reported on faithfully, with ladder positions appearing in the *Australasian* from early 1896 onward. Such was its popularity that at the commencement of the 1895/96 season the correspondent for the *Australasian* noted:

It seems a pity that our association should not draw up a regular list of fixtures for the polo matches, and establish a premiership on a proper basis, as the public last season were quite beginning to catch on to the points of the game. Matches might have been going on all this month, and would have assisted considerably to bring the club men into condition for the December racing, and have been working up the interest of the public.⁴⁹⁸

It was decided at VASA’s December 1895 meeting that honour caps would be awarded to the 1894/95 premiership team, Melbourne Swimming Club, further signifying their commitment to water polo. Melbourne, at the beginning of the 1895/96 season, was even assessing the viability of entering two water polo teams for that competition.⁴⁹⁹ The importance of water polo in drawing a crowd to swimming carnivals was further reinforced by VASA’s decision to include a polo tournament in their fundraising gala in 1896, promoted by the *Australasian* correspondent as the ‘leading fixture’. His view was that the provision of three games in an afternoon, as

⁴⁹⁵ Rockwell, *Water Warriors*, p. 26.

⁴⁹⁶ Rockwell, *Water Warriors*, p. 27.

⁴⁹⁷ ‘Melbourne Swimming Club’, *Argus*, 16 November, 1894, p. 7.

⁴⁹⁸ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 23 November 1895, p. 987.

⁴⁹⁹ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 14 December 1895, p. 1131.

VASA had planned, would give the public a good chance to understand some of the rules of the game a little better.⁵⁰⁰

While Rockwell states that water polo was often relegated to secondary status on early New South Wales carnival programs, particularly in the face of competitive swimming events offering prize money,⁵⁰¹ it became a favourite with Melbourne carnival spectators. Press coverage of water polo matches began to be more analytical than descriptive, with writers assessing the skill of the teams and providing detailed commentary. In most cases, this commentary was depicted more comprehensively than that of the swimming events. Running commentary was given by some press correspondents in their columns, identifying the proficient players and in some cases explaining certain aspects of the game. By the middle of the 1896 season, the *Leader* correspondent reported that the Middle Park club was in the process of forming a second team, and other rural clubs had expressed some interest in joining the competition.⁵⁰² The standard of the competing teams was relatively similar, resulting in some close competitions, which further increased its appeal. Confirming its popularity, the *Leader* correspondent stated that:

Little doubt seems to be entertained that with the spectators at ‘Ladies’ days or even at ordinary meetings, one of the most popular items on the programme is the water polo match. Under present arrangements, this is always left until the very last thing, and takes place at a time when the greater portion of the audience, after being in the baths all afternoon, are evincing a very natural desire to be on the move homewards. It may therefore be worth the while of the committees of the various clubs to consider the alviaibility [*sic*] of placing it further up on the list.⁵⁰³

The *Australasian* correspondent shared a similar view, stating that the water polo ‘is to me and many others about the most interesting part of the programme, and it always seems a pity it should always be left to the “bitter end” of the programme’.⁵⁰⁴ The problem with this proposition, although a valid one, was that the polo teams were made up primarily of swimmers, who would potentially want to reserve their energy for the racing events.⁵⁰⁵ The progress of the sport was further hindered by the lack of uniform rules, as the *Australasian* correspondent commented in 1896 that the

⁵⁰⁰ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 18 January 1896, p. 115.

⁵⁰¹ Rockwell, *Water Warriors*, p. 19.

⁵⁰² ‘Header’, ‘Swimming’, *Leader*, 8 February 1896, p. 15.

⁵⁰³ ‘Header’, ‘Swimming’, *Leader*, 8 February 1896, p. 15.

⁵⁰⁴ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 25 January 1896, p. 162.

⁵⁰⁵ ‘Header’, ‘Swimming’, *Leader*, 8 February 1896, p. 15.

Victorian rules had not yet been circulated to clubs, which resulted in a number of infringements. The implication was that VASA needed to be more supportive of the water polo movement.⁵⁰⁶

Press coverage of the various polo matches continued to raise negative aspects of the sport, though only for the purpose of improvement. The *Sportsman* noted in 1896 that ‘it would be advisable in future to have the goal-posts about fifteen yards from the end, so as to secure deep water’, after a match at Collingwood was played in shallow water.⁵⁰⁷ However, the game was still in its infancy in some regional areas. The Western club’s 1896 carnival in Geelong was meant to feature an exhibition water polo match, given by assorted members of the city clubs. The Western club, however, were unable to secure a football to use as the game ball, and so the match was abandoned.⁵⁰⁸ It is uncertain which type of football the press correspondent was referring to.

It appears that VASA heeded the suggestions of the various press correspondents, as water polo became increasingly more standardised. At the conclusion of the 1895/96 season, it had been decided that if any player held the ball for longer than 30 seconds, the umpire should award the ball to the other team.⁵⁰⁹ At the commencement of the 1896/97 season, a number of new rules were established, and published in the *Leader*. Some notable observations include the reduction of players in each team from 10 to 9, whose positions were listed as two forwards, two centres, two backs, two rovers and a goal keeper, and marks were not to be given if the ball was thrown less than three yards. The *Leader* also drew attention to the type of ball that was to be used in games, recommending that clubs obtain one early, instead of reverting to the ‘ordinary’ football.⁵¹⁰ Exact specifications for the type of ball that should be used were not given, though the *Australasian* stated that ‘an Association, that is round, football, is used’.⁵¹¹ This is similar to the five-inch India rubber ball that was used in early water polo games in England.⁵¹²

⁵⁰⁶ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 15 February 1896, p. 307.

⁵⁰⁷ ‘Swimming’, *Sportsman*, 3 March 1896, p. 2.

⁵⁰⁸ ‘Header’, ‘Swimming’, *Leader*, 21 March 1896, p. 18.

⁵⁰⁹ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 29 February 1896, p. 401.

⁵¹⁰ ‘Header’, ‘Swimming’, *Leader*, 5 December 1896, p. 18.

⁵¹¹ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 5 December 1896, p. 1114.

⁵¹² Rockwell, *Water Warriors*, p. 26.

The 1896/97 season draw and the general requirements for teams were listed in the *Australasian* in December 1896. Three referees were elected to officiate for the season, and clubs were required to pay an entrance fee of 5s per team, to fund the premiership prize. VASA also recommended the adoption of the water polo cap that was currently being used in the Sydney competition, as it was seen that most of the clubs could afford to have these produced in club colours for approximately 1s per cap. These caps were similar to those used today, covering the head and tying under the chin, with slits through which the ears were placed. A number of new teams were also welcomed at the commencement of this season, with the Middle Park, Melbourne, Brighton, Hobson's Bay, South Melbourne and Collingwood clubs all fielding teams.⁵¹³ Some of these clubs began to take the water polo competition more seriously, with the South Melbourne club instituting practices each morning during the season.⁵¹⁴

The *Australasian* was dedicated to promoting the water polo movement, and in their columns went as far as recommending local clubs that prospective players should join. They also provided a general synopsis of the rules to entice swimmers to take up the game, likening it to another popular team sport in Melbourne:

Polo is so like Victorian football that a knowledge of the game is readily acquired, and though the time is usually limited to seven minutes each way, they are 14 minutes crowded with excitement and exercise. An Association, that is round, football is used, and the swimmers have to throw or punch this through the goals provided at each end. As in football, players can obtain marks, or free throws, by catching the ball at a distance of not less than three yards from the thrower. Teams are only nine men aside, so that it only needs a few swimming friends to get together to form a team. Speed, no doubt, is an advantage, as it is in football, but the speediest men do not necessarily make the best polo players, and want of racing ability need in no way discourage the practice of the game. There is much in good throwing, in catching, in dodging, marking your opponents, and so on.⁵¹⁵

While most clubs fielded teams, they were often unable to assemble the required number of starters and consequently a lot of walkovers were awarded. The *Australasian* correspondent attributed this to the weekend play (and perhaps their clashing with the racing programs), questioning whether the polo contests could be

⁵¹³ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 5 December 1896, p. 1114.

⁵¹⁴ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 19 December 1896, p. 1219.

⁵¹⁵ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 5 December 1896, p. 1114.

held on a regular evening during the week.⁵¹⁶ This innovation was not taken up, however, and the problem continued throughout the season. With the damage already done, the *Australasian* correspondent began to name names, in one column denigrating three prominent Melbourne club members who failed to turn up for their match, declaring that:

It shows such an utter lack of interest by those who are especially looked to to set an example, and the polo competition, already seriously jeopardised by the action of the South Melbourne and other clubs in not sending teams, will be ruined if steps are not at once taken to prevent a recurrence of such incidents.⁵¹⁷

A later incident also resulting in a walkover drew the ire of the *Leader* correspondent, who was usually more reticent in doling out criticism, stating that:

A good match was looked forward to between these clubs, and it is decidedly unfair to patrons of the sport to allow these matches to go by default. Several breaches of faith have occurred this year, and if the association wish the game to take the prominence they spoke of in the early part of the season they should legislate for some penalty to be inflicted, say a fine of 5s. on the club failing to keep their engagement.⁵¹⁸

By the conclusion of the 1896/97 season, the *Australasian* correspondent was thoroughly fed up, stating that ‘the association would, I think, do well to cancel the premiership for the season. The competition ... has become hopelessly muddled up, and the association may as well keep the cost of the (premiership) caps in their own nearly empty coffers’.⁵¹⁹ Clubs continued to give walkovers and there were frequent reports of rule breaches by large numbers of players. It would appear also that the game began to become rougher, and after one particular contest the *Leader* correspondent remarked that ‘a little more patience on the part of some of the players, who forgot they were playing a friendly polo match, might be recommended’.⁵²⁰

Despite these problems, and given the popularity of the game, which was still reportedly rising in 1897, the *Australasian* published the rules to an English game which was being promoted as rivalling the attraction of water polo. Entitled ‘Capture’, the game was trialled in Melbourne and found most exciting by participants and

⁵¹⁶ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 26 December 1896, p. 1271.

⁵¹⁷ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 23 January 1897, p. 172.

⁵¹⁸ ‘Running Header’, ‘Swimming’, *Leader*, 13 March 1897, p. 18.

⁵¹⁹ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 13 March 1897, p. 515.

⁵²⁰ ‘Running Header’, ‘Swimming’, *Leader*, 6 March 1897, p. 19.

onlookers. The game was touted as being less objectionable than water polo, while still ‘adding to the attractions of galas, and affording means of giving outlet to fast swimming, tricky work, diving, catching, and carrying, and handling struggling swimmers in the water’.⁵²¹ However, nothing more of the game was heard of after this, indicating that it was not seen as a selling point.

At the commencement of the 1897/98 season, the *Australasian* correspondent once more implored clubs to turn up with full teams. He attributed the walkovers of last season to the ‘important cricket matches, and the difficulty of getting those who have been racing to turn out at the end of a gala for polo’, and once more put forward his view that the polo matches should be held on a mid-week evening.⁵²² Only five teams entered for the 1897/98 championship, with Brighton electing not to put forward a team.⁵²³ Despite the correspondent’s hopes that this season would be relatively free of team walkovers, Melbourne failed to assemble a team for their first round match, once more prompting some suggestive advice in the following week’s column:

Tempora mutantur. Collingwood last year could hardly raise a polo team at all. Last Saturday they won a match, but Melbourne, with its membership of three figures, cannot raise a team, and have, I understand, virtually withdrawn from the competition. The fault lies with the members, not the committee. If three or four men would practice regularly, others would, no doubt, be found to join in. Why not seek for aid among the less speedy swimmers? It is not the fastest swimmers who make the best polo players ... A team of young swimmers, who will practice throwing, passing, and catching, could soon be evolved from the Melbourne’s ranks, and would, I am sure, do the club no discredit.⁵²⁴

After this first round debacle, the walkovers continued to occur, and interestingly reporting on the water polo matches after this incident was considerably reduced. The *Australasian*, which usually spent considerable time analysing the water polo matches, stopped reporting on it altogether, and turned their attention to the competitive racing. It is uncertain whether the lack of organisation within the water polo matches prompted this shift, or whether the popularity of the competitive swimming actually eclipsed the water polo. By 1900, it was rarely alluded to in press reports, and if it was, it was dubbed an exhibition event.⁵²⁵ This is somewhat

⁵²¹ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 13 February 1897, p. 316.

⁵²² ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 4 December 1897, p. 1225.

⁵²³ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 18 December 1897, p. 1339.

⁵²⁴ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 15 January 1898, p. 131.

⁵²⁵ ‘Swimming’, *Sportsman*, 30 January 1900, p. 3.

consistent with Rockwell's assertion that from late 1897, 'no further water polo events were reported as being conducted by the Victorian ASA until the 1903/04 season'.⁵²⁶

3.9 Specialty Competitive Races and Events

Competitive forms of entertainment, coupled with the ability to cater to a wide audience, were also integral to the success and profitability of swimming carnivals, and therefore the clubs that hosted them. One such attempt to draw in a wider population was the provision of races for 'special' groups, such as military and law enforcement units, footballers and harriers. Races for members of the military were prevalent at country carnivals, with an 1894 Ballarat carnival hosting a special military competition. This particular race was won by the D Company Ballarat Militia, with the Mounted Rifles runners up. A uniform race was also provided, with members of the Ballarat 3rd regiment competing.⁵²⁷ Military competitions were elaborate events, as detailed by the conditions of the 1897 Ballarat military race, which included swimming across the baths, getting out and firing three rounds of a gun, and then swimming back across the baths.⁵²⁸ One specialty event where women had some influence, but did not actively participate was the Ladies' Bracelet event, which appeared on the program at most carnivals in this period. This event commonly attracted a large number of entries. Competitors in the Ladies' Bracelet were men nominated by ladies (often husbands or brothers who were members of the respective club),⁵²⁹ with the prize subscribed for by ladies of the district.⁵³⁰

Certain clubs hosted particular events based on the popularity of certain sports in their locality. This can be likened to the development of trades football in working-class Melbourne suburbs, as outlined by Peter Burke.⁵³¹ An 1894 Geelong carnival hosted a footballers' handicap, for members of the local football teams,⁵³² and Ballarat hosted a harriers' race.⁵³³ Given Mordialloc's proximity to a number of racecourses, they

⁵²⁶ Rockwell, *Water Warriors*, p. 49.

⁵²⁷ 'Swimming', *Leader*, 10 February 1894, p. 16.

⁵²⁸ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 13 February 1897, p. 316.

⁵²⁹ 'Swimming', *Argus*, 25 January 1896, p. 4.

⁵³⁰ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 11 January 1896, p. 67.

⁵³¹ See Peter Burke, 'Trades Football in Melbourne 1896-1909: From Middle-Class Leisure to Working-Class Sport', *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 19, no. 1, November 2002, pp. 1-15.

⁵³² 'Swimming', *Age*, 26 February 1894, p. 3.

⁵³³ 'Ballarat Swimming Club Tournament', *Leader*, 9 February 1895, p. 19.

placed a Licensed Jockey's Race on their program,⁵³⁴ whilst schools races⁵³⁵ and married men's races were often included in carnival programs.⁵³⁶ As competitive swimming began to grow in status, these types of events were more readily embraced as forms of entertainment. An 1896 column suggested the provision of handicap races for Squadron sailors visiting Melbourne as an attractive carnival event.⁵³⁷ In 1898, a 100 yard race for members of the Victorian Police was instituted at the Melbourne club carnival.⁵³⁸ One other popular specialty event, which took place within the swim season, was the inauguration of a Christmas race by the Melbourne club. From 1897 onward, a morning race was held for the inauspicious prize of a Christmas goose.⁵³⁹ This appears to have been a popular event, as it was also adopted by the Middle Park club, where the first prize was a Christmas cake.⁵⁴⁰

In a bid to combine competitive swimming and popular entertainment, VASA introduced the 'Flying Squadron Championship Chariot Race' in 1896, which is now essentially known as a relay. The winner of this event was crowned the champion club of Victoria for the season. Five swimmers from each club swam 80 yards each.⁵⁴¹ Only three clubs competed in this event, namely Melbourne, Middle Park and Geelong, with Middle Park winning and therefore awarded the champion club award for the 1895/96 season.⁵⁴² The incorporation of this event by VASA was a clever demonstration that competitive swimming could be entertaining, in much the same fashion as water polo.

As well as entertainment centred around the baths, swimming clubs often hosted events out of the water. This was primarily due to the quandary of keeping in touch with members during the off-season, as climate prevented year round swimming competitions. Some swimmers were kept occupied with their alternate seasonal sport, such as football. To keep members together throughout the winter, and as a social activity, the Middle Park club instituted a weekly gymnastic class under tuition of a

⁵³⁴ 'Swimming', *Argus*, 11 February 1895, p. 7.

⁵³⁵ 'Ballarat Swimming Club Tournament', *Leader*, 9 February 1895, p. 19.

⁵³⁶ 'Amateur Athletics', *Sportsman*, 22 January 1895, p. 2.

⁵³⁷ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 19 December 1896, p. 1219.

⁵³⁸ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 24 December 1898, p. 1432.

⁵³⁹ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 18 December 1897, p. 1339.

⁵⁴⁰ 'Swimming', *South Melbourne Record*, 25 December 1897, p. 3.

⁵⁴¹ 'Header', 'Swimming', *Leader*, 15 February 1896, p. 19.

⁵⁴² 'Swimming', *Age*, 23 March 1896, p. 3.

Professor B. J. Jack, and a land-based life-saving class. In addition, clubs sometimes held musical and theatrical entertainments throughout the winter.⁵⁴³ VASA also hosted some off-season events, with the aim of raising funds for the association. Some of these events included a theatre night, and a football match between the Middle Park and Melbourne clubs. It was suggested that these clubs in particular boasted a number of senior footballers in their ranks.⁵⁴⁴ Different authors raise the point that footballers in particular were actively involved in swimming clubs. Nancy U'Ren and Noel Turnbull speculate in their local history on Port Melbourne as to whether footballers saw swimming as their major summer pastime, as two founding committee members of the Port Melbourne club were reputedly also champion footballers for their local team.⁵⁴⁵

3.10 The Increasing Emphasis on Competitive Racing

The events and attractions that have been discussed drew spectators to the various carnivals that hosted them, and the number of spectators at a carnival were often emphasised in press coverage. It was acknowledged that the more prestigious the swimming club, the better the spectacular entertainment, meaning that more spectators would attend. It helped also that swimming clubs such as Melbourne had a very prestigious member base, which was also instrumental in drawing a crowd. Some of the more significant carnivals drew crowds of up to 1,500 spectators, though this figure is most likely subject to interpretation by the reporters. Often the numbers would vary between newspapers. For example, the 1895 Melbourne Swimming Club Ladies' Day attracted 'about 2000 spectators' according to *Sportsman*, where *Punch* indicated it was closer to 'about 1500 spectators'.⁵⁴⁶

As carnivals grew increasingly popular due to the novelty programs, press correspondents began to comment favourably on the patronage of these events. After one particularly successful carnival, one correspondent suggested that:

⁵⁴³ 'Header', 'Swimming', *Leader*, 28 March 1896, p. 18.

⁵⁴⁴ 'Header', 'Swimming', *Leader*, 11 April 1896, p. 19.

⁵⁴⁵ U'Ren and Turnbull, *A History of Port Melbourne*, p. 120. These footballers were not named, so these names could not be cross referenced against swimming competition results. However, it is speculated that the Port Melbourne premiership player William (Billy) McGee was an active swimmer. The McGee family were a prominent family in swimming, with a W. J. McGee winning a race at the 1896 Brighton carnival. See 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 22 February 1896, p. 353.

⁵⁴⁶ See 'Swimming', *Sportsman*, 5 February 1895, p. 2, and 'Social', *Melbourne Punch*, 7 February 1895, p. 93.

... if the public patronage grows like this the Melbourne Swimming Club will have to seriously consider the advisability of erecting temporary staging across the bath at the side of the course. More could not well have been accommodated last week. Every available vantage spot, even the roof of the dressing-boxes, was occupied, and the poor timekeeper got pitched into the water from the pressure of those behind him, which rendered his watch useless for the rest of the afternoon.⁵⁴⁷

At the Melbourne Ladies' Day carnival the following year, the same correspondent advised his readers to 'go early and avoid the crush'.⁵⁴⁸

However, by the end of the twentieth century, press correspondents had begun to complain about the length of carnival proceedings. This was blamed primarily on the gaps between the races, but also on the numerous novelty events. The *Melbourne Punch* social correspondent stated in an 1899 column that 'swimming matches in Melbourne are often voted slow',⁵⁴⁹ which was ultimately not the best advertisement for the sport. The ladies' correspondent in the same newspaper had just the week before suggested omitting some of the farcical items, as they were a 'dreary spectacle', and suggested that if ladies were to be attracted to swimming matches, the swimming program should be more extended and there needed to be less time in between events. She held cycling up as a shining example, where the intervals between races were kept short, so that ladies were not forced to sit and spectate for the five hours that swimming carnivals sometimes took.⁵⁵⁰ Similarly, an *Australasian* report also commented on the delay swimmers created by being tardy to their events, and suggested that 'cyclists and foot-runners have learnt the lesson, and there are no such delays, so aggravating to the public, at their meetings'.⁵⁵¹

By 1897, carnival organisers had begun to cut novelty events that had been advertised on the initial programs.⁵⁵² It is important to note that there did not appear to be much variation in the types of feats performed, and in a lot of cases the same performances by the same individuals were given at multiple carnivals. By the turn of the century, these trick swimming performances occurred much less often, and were saved for the

⁵⁴⁷ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 9 February 1895, p. 259.

⁵⁴⁸ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 25 January 1896, p. 162.

⁵⁴⁹ 'Social', *Melbourne Punch*, 9 February 1899, p. 136.

⁵⁵⁰ 'Minetta', 'Lady's Letter', *Melbourne Punch*, 19 January 1899, p. 63.

⁵⁵¹ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 19 February 1898, p. 413.

⁵⁵² 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 9 January 1897, p. 74.

more significant carnivals, rather than being included at every competition. Instead, press correspondents began to marvel at the spectacular feats achieved in the competitive races, with an 1898 report commending a South Melbourne gentleman for swimming across the baths in only four strokes.⁵⁵³

A number of the prominent press correspondents had also begun to tire of the multiple novelties crammed into carnival programs, and began to question why a greater variety of competitive swimming races were not included. One particularly blunt article from the *Australasian* correspondent indicated that the novelties were frivolous, and that more time should be spent on the life-saving and racing components, stating that:

Far too little attention, too, is being given to long-distance races. It is becoming a rarity to have any event over 100 yards on a programme. I am sure the public would soon see a quarter-mile race for a change, and if they would not they should be educated up to it. Swimming races do not depend upon public patronage to such an extent as to require the interests of the sport to be sacrificed to what sports promoters imagine to be the public taste.⁵⁵⁴

However, it is questionable whether the public agreed with this sentiment. The continued provision of novelty events well into the twentieth century suggests that while they did enjoy the competitive events, they were not completely willing to relinquish the spectacular entertainment. Press correspondents in this era, particularly those with dedicated swimming writers, were keen to promote the sportive element. Towards the end of the century, this was perhaps achieved at the expense of these novelty events.

3.11 Conclusions

In late nineteenth century Melbourne, it is clear that spectators attended sporting events for a variety of reasons. Some attended as a form of self-expression, and to simply be seen at certain events in a time of economic and social uncertainty in order to maintain or invent some form of social position. Attending sporting events within the community also became a social ritual, where individuals could feel part of a defined community. However, in the developing era of mass amusements, people also attended sporting events simply to be entertained. This entertainment was achieved

⁵⁵³ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 5 March 1898, p. 253.

⁵⁵⁴ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 2 January 1897, p. 18.

through watching and supporting the sporting activity, or, to a larger degree, through the provision of comedic and theatrical spectacle at these competitions. It is theorised that through linking the themes of carnival with sporting competition, swimming clubs in Melbourne were able to create regular events that spectators could enjoy.

In terms of examining the use of ‘carnival’ terminology to describe nineteenth century swimming competitions, there are some marked differences between carnival theory and the actual manifestation of the swimming ‘carnival’. While Bakhtinian theory dictates that carnival promotes unrestrained behaviour, all-inclusive events and the demarcation of social rank, the status of swimming carnivals as ritualistic, class-exclusive events suggests that this theory is not wholly applicable to explain why these events were termed carnivals. Rather, the ‘carnival’ description that was adopted by the Melbourne print media in order to promote swimming competitions was representative of the provision for spectators at these events. The term was used largely as a marketing tool, in order to attract numerous spectators and compete against more consolidated forms of spectator sport in Melbourne. The carnival aspect of swimming competitions was achieved primarily through the incorporation of novelty, theatrical and farcical events for the amusement of the spectator. It is these types of events, where men dressed as women without fear of public censure and social consequence, which more closely resemble Bakhtin’s notion of carnival.

The provision of this carnival aspect was integral to the public profile of the activity. Swimming, as a relatively new competitive sport, did not have the established tradition, or the initial interest, to draw spectators on its own. The incorporation of these novelty events allowed competition organisers to showcase the sport, among popular forms of entertainment. More importantly, the associated qualities of carnival, such as pageantry, comic relief and light-hearted amusement, contributed to social cohesion at these events, which was a major feature of spectator sport in this era. Specific theatrical events also allowed for the promotion and replication of racial and cultural myths and concerns.

This ‘carnival’ aspect of swimming competitions was heavily utilised by Melbourne press correspondents when reporting on the sport. In this period, competitive swimming received considerable support from the press, as it had a practical use in

terms of life saving, and because it was a purely amateur sport. However, competitive swimming would not have been initially palatable to the newspaper readership in comparison to the other more established sports, such as horse racing, cricket and cycling. In order to promote the sport, the press effectively needed an angle which would interest the general public, which is where the incorporation of popular entertainment was integral. In the formative years of the association, from 1893 though to 1895, press correspondents heavily promoted the novelty events at the expense of competitive sport. While this could be construed as marginalisation, in reality this blatant promotion assisted in attracting spectators to the events, who were then exposed to the competitive sport.

Though it was initially the novelties which attracted spectators, in time the crowds began to appreciate the competitive sport. This can be attributed to many interconnected factors discussed in previous chapters, such as the continued support of the press in promoting the competitive sport, the gradual improvement of Victorian competitive swimmers in relation to the other colonies, and the increasing number of public baths established. As competitive swimming developed, a concerted change can be observed in both the number and nature of the novelty events. The number of novelties decreased as competition organisers tried to fit in additional competitive events, and the novelty events gradually became more competitive in nature. The considerable popularity of the water polo events, and the incorporation of races for special groups, reflects this changing emphasis. By the turn of the century, the originally popular novelty events were seen as superfluous by the press, as the competitive movement gained ascendancy. However, given that a number of these novelties continued to be staged at carnivals well into the twentieth century, it is uncertain whether the public shared this sentiment. It is more likely that while the competitive swimming was now the main feature of 'carnivals', as they were still known, novelty events still provided light amusement as a secondary attraction.

The Melbourne press, and the small number of dedicated swimming correspondents that existed in these years, were instrumental in documenting this shift. It is unrealistic to suggest that they were the sole instigators in igniting public support for competitive swimming in Melbourne, but it can be said that they assisted considerably in decoding the sport for a public that was uneducated on swimming matters. This

was achieved through persistence in reporting on the sportive element, and the continued explanation of simple concepts and events. Readers were able to become educated consumers of the activity, and continued reporting on successful swimmers bred a form of familiarity. This education of spectators led to interest in the sport, as well as in the amusements.

The press's most important role, however, was its alliance with the spectator. Through the closing years of the nineteenth century, the press continued to critique events, clubs and the association, suggesting improvements for the benefit of the spectator, and applauding ventures that would further convenience the audience. It is significant that in the majority of cases, the competition organisers would heed the advice of the correspondents. By establishing the spectator as its most important concern, and ensuring their comfort and entertainment (with the press as a conduit between the two), VASA were able to more adequately promote the sportive element.

Chapter Four

‘This Truly Noble Art’:

Lifesaving, Resuscitation and Swimming Instruction in Melbourne State Schools

Every one should learn to swim, and that, too, when young. It is a healthy pastime – the healthiest, in fact, for it combines fresh air, cleanliness and the exercise of almost all the muscles. Many, through being able to swim, have saved their own lives and the lives of others.⁵⁵⁵

The Education Department, 1898

4.1 Introduction

While the notion of carnival was instrumental in the marketing of swimming to a wider spectator base, the press promotion of the sport’s hygienic and utilitarian benefits was integral in ensuring public participation in the sport. By the late nineteenth century in Australia, medical experts and press correspondents were beginning to espouse the benefits of recreational swimming to a more and more receptive population. The purported benefits of the activity, which were primarily health and hygiene related, prompted a greater public acceptance of an activity that had once been deemed morally questionable due to the associated display of the near-naked form. These benefits, coupled with a greater number of seaside and suburban baths and a greater awareness of competitive swimming propagated by the Melbourne press, inevitably ensured that more people began to swim recreationally.

However, the increase in the number of people swimming subsequently led to an increasing number of drownings, due to the restrictions on public bathing and the lack of affordable bathing options alluded to in the second chapter. If these barriers are considered in conjunction with the expense of swimming and lifesaving tuition, it is likely that a considerable portion of the Melbourne population were prevented from accessing safe bathing sites, compounding their risk of drowning. These factors were further exacerbated by the lack of a systematic program for teaching children how to swim, and with the development of the VSA in 1893, it was suggested by the press that this organisation should take on the responsibility.

⁵⁵⁵ Public Records Office of Victoria, Education Department, VPRS15502: Student Magazines, 1896-2001, P0001/1, ‘The School Paper 1896-1898’, vol. III, no. 25, April 1898, p. 396.

This chapter will examine the role of the Melbourne press in promoting the importance of swimming and lifesaving education to the public, and in ensuring the eventual inclusion of swimming in the Victorian state school curriculum. Additionally, the chapter will also examine VASA's role in working with other organisations to educate the wider public in swimming and lifesaving instruction, particularly in regard to youth swimming, and how this benefited the sport, and the organisation, in general. By promoting their activities to this population, most notably to the state schools, VASA were able to increase awareness of the sport and facilitate growth within the organisation, due to the subsequent surge in popularity. VASA's initial commitment to educating the wider population in swimming and life-saving technique was instrumental in furthering the competitive sport in Melbourne, as well as achieving the ancillary benefits of greater aquatic awareness and a reduction in the number of drownings.⁵⁵⁶

4.2 Early Swimming and Lifesaving Education

Learning to swim was not a simple process for the lower and working classes in Melbourne. The existing by-laws in Melbourne in regard to public bathing dictated that swimming in public areas was forbidden during the day, unless it was enclosed in public baths.⁵⁵⁷ As the second chapter has intimated, while there were a number of baths available for this purpose along the Melbourne shorelines, not everybody could afford to pay the fee for admittance or attend the baths during daylight hours due to work commitments, and consequently a large number of Melburnians were forced to risk their lives by swimming in the open sea.

Within the baths themselves, the number of people swimming in these baths without proper tutelage also increased, and knowledge of lifesaving and swimming techniques soon became highly necessary skills. As Love suggests, one of the primary reasons for swimming's acceptance in conservative circles was its relevance as a humanitarian skill. A person able to swim was able to save his own life if necessary, or the life of someone else.⁵⁵⁸ A great number of drownings in this period can be attributed to well

⁵⁵⁶ For a published synopsis of aspects of this chapter, see Rachel Winterton and Claire Parker, 'A Utilitarian Pursuit: Swimming Education in Nineteenth-Century Australia and England', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 26, no. 14, November 2009, pp. 2106-2125.

⁵⁵⁷ Upton, *Splash!*, p. 5.

⁵⁵⁸ Love, *A Social History of Swimming in England*, p. 101.

meaning individuals jumping in to save a drowning person without the necessary skills, prompting press correspondents in particular to call for additional education of the wider population in this area.⁵⁵⁹

From the inauguration of the VSA in 1893, educating the Melbourne public in swimming and lifesaving techniques was to be a key aspect of their work. Phillips states in the official centenary history of Australian swimming that an early responsibility of the state swimming associations was the promotion of swimming to the community. This was inclusive of actions such as developing the sport in rural areas, providing assistance with school swimming programs and petitioning councils to build or renovate public baths.⁵⁶⁰ In the absence of an official aquatic lifesaving organisation, it was logical that the VSA, and later VASA, would champion the cause of lifesaving to its members and to the wider population. The theory was that it was not sufficient to be able to swim well; it was also necessary to be proficient in lifesaving and resuscitation. By emphasising the importance of lifesaving as part of the sport, it also served to give swimming a practical use. Very few sports and pastimes had such a practical emphasis, which was a further selling point for the sport.

A key incentive for VASA's initial work in this area was the clear lack of structured swimming and lifesaving education in Melbourne during this period. Prior to the incorporation of swimming into school curricula, swimming instruction was undertaken largely at the expense of the individual. Private lessons were available at the baths from professional swimming teachers, where men, women and children could learn to swim for a fee. One prominent female teacher in the 1890s, Madame Kendall, charged £1 1s for ten lessons and 2s 6d for a single lesson, promising that patrons could obtain competency in ten lessons.⁵⁶¹ The cost of these lessons ensured that only the upper and middle classes could utilise these kinds of services, with the lower classes forced to teach themselves to swim. However, the prohibitive entry

⁵⁵⁹ See *Age*, 5 January 1894, p. 5, where a gentleman died trying to save a lady from drowning, or 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 14 December 1895, p. 1131, where it was reported that a man nearly drowned trying to save his friend, who perished. It was noted that 'The number of similar cases reported lately has been painfully large'.

⁵⁶⁰ Phillips, *Swimming Australia*, p. 16.

⁵⁶¹ Public Records Office of Victoria, Education Department, VPRS892, Special Case Files 1862-1977, P0000/79, 1062, 90/56821, 'Swimming', 20 March 1890.

costs to the baths meant that the opportunities to bathe safely in an enclosed environment would have been limited for the lower classes.

Another factor that impacted upon the teaching of swimming was the existing prohibitions against mixed bathing in Melbourne. In particular, this had some significant implications for the teaching of girls and women, who were in many cases reliant on the assistance of male family members to learn how to swim. According to the *Weekly Times*, a petition circulated at a Moorabbin council meeting in 1894 requested that mixed bathing be instituted in the area so that men were able to bathe with their wives and daughters. In keeping with the other councils in Melbourne, the petition was refused.⁵⁶² These by-laws effectively prevented fathers from teaching their wives and daughters how to swim, and effectively ensured that many were not proficient in swimming until an advanced age. In support of this argument, the *Australasian* published an article from the English *Badminton* magazine at the commencement of the 1896 season, stating that ‘by having the assistance of brothers or male friends in learning allows girls to gain that confidence they can never feel with only their weaker sex to depend on’.⁵⁶³

Given the lack of affordable swimming instruction available, it is not surprising that drowning was a common cause of death. An *Argus* report from 1895 examined statistics from inquests held in the previous year, and stated that drowning was the leading cause of accidental death (125 accidental drownings). Six cases of drowning by suicide were recorded, making it the third most popular method behind gunshot wounds and poisoning.⁵⁶⁴ Where this seems an unorthodox method of suicide, a *Weekly Times* column commented that drowning was actually below the average in this year.⁵⁶⁵ This problem was universally acknowledged, with the *Australasian* swimming correspondent noting in the same year, ‘A knowledge of the methods of lifesaving can be gained in a few hours, and many a heart-breaking loss might thus be averted. Is it not time our schools, police corps, militia, rowing clubs, and other bodies at once took up this matter?’.⁵⁶⁶

⁵⁶² ‘Mixed Bathing’, *Weekly Times*, 8 December 1894, p. 19.

⁵⁶³ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 31 October 1896, p. 850.

⁵⁶⁴ *Argus*, 7 January 1895, p. 3.

⁵⁶⁵ ‘Melbourne’s Inquests and Tragedies’, *Weekly Times*, 12 January 1895, p. 12.

⁵⁶⁶ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 14 December 1895, p. 1131.

Despite the apparent lack thereof, lifesaving instruction in Melbourne did exist, and was largely regulated by the Royal Humane Society (RHS). The Melbourne branch of this organisation was formed in 1874, and was the first official body to educate individuals in resuscitation techniques.⁵⁶⁷ This body was inaugurated primarily to prevent the saving of life from drowning, as dictated by their founding objectives:

1. To bestow rewards upon all who promptly risk their own lives to rescue those of their fellow creatures.
2. To provide assistance, as far as it is in the power of the Society, in all cases of apparent death, within the colony of Victoria.
3. To restore the apparently drowned or dead, and to distinguish by like rewards all who by skill and perseverance are, under Providence, successful.
4. To collect and circulate the most approved methods, and the best apparatus to be used for this and kindred purposes.⁵⁶⁸

The prestigious and influential nature of the organisation was reflected by the social status of its founding directors. Within the organisation, Melbourne's social elite were well represented by members of the church, the law, the government and other influential individuals.⁵⁶⁹ Significantly, one of the founding directors of the Victorian RHS was E. L. Zox, a Jewish member of the Legislative Assembly.⁵⁷⁰ Zox was also heavily connected with VASA, acting as a patron at many swimming carnivals, which further reinforced the link between swimming clubs and the lifesaving movement.

The initial measures taken by the RHS to prevent drowning in Melbourne included training in swimming and lifesaving techniques, and the promotion of these activities to schoolchildren. They raised money for the provision of lifebuoys, lobbied for life preserving legislation for ships and vessels, and developed a network of RHS branches around Australasia.⁵⁷¹ Other actions included the collation of over 2,000 reports on resuscitation, and circulation of these to town councils for prominent public display.⁵⁷² The high number of drowning fatalities in the early years of the 1890s prompted the *Weekly Times* to print a caution of behalf of the RHS in 1894, dictating the proper guidelines for bathing. The report suggested that bathing and swimming

⁵⁶⁷ Alleyn Best, *50 Years and More: A History of Surf Life Saving Victoria*, Surf Life Saving Victoria, St Kilda, 2002, p. 19.

⁵⁶⁸ Colin Bannister, *7000 Brave Australians: A History of the Royal Humane Society of Australasia, 1874-1994*, Royal Humane Society of Australasia, Melbourne, 1996, p. 2.

⁵⁶⁹ Bannister, *7000 Brave Australians*, p. 18.

⁵⁷⁰ Bannister, *7000 Brave Australians*, p. 7.

⁵⁷¹ Bannister, *7000 Brave Australians*, p. 2.

⁵⁷² Bannister, *7000 Brave Australians*, pp. 22-23.

was to be avoided for two hours after a meal, when exhausted for any reason, and after perspiring heavily or upon feeling chilled when entering the water. The RHS also suggested that the best time to bathe varied depending on the person, but the young or infirm should bathe two to three hours after breakfast. Any person prone to illness was instructed not to bathe until consulting with a medical adviser.⁵⁷³

Methods of resuscitation were taught by the RHS in Victorian state schools from 1878.⁵⁷⁴ The initial promotion of lifesaving techniques in the schools was undertaken by J. Ellis Stewart, a founding member of the organisation. Stewart firmly believed that all schoolchildren should be instructed in the Society's preferred lifesaving technique, the Sylvester Method. This involved the patient being laid prone on the ground, with two rescuers applying pressure to the chest, raising and lowering the arms to induce breathing. Other earlier methods involved lying patients across a barrel and rolling them from side to side, or placing them between a sheet held by a person at each end and rocking them back and forth.⁵⁷⁵

Stewart was also credited with bringing the RHS report, 'Direction for Restoring the Apparently Dead' to the attention of the Education Department. This action, coupled with continuous lobbying of the Minister of Education, led to certificates for swimming and lifesaving proficiency being awarded from 1881. From 1887, the Society introduced a bronze medallion to be awarded to schoolchildren upon successful completion of a series of lifesaving techniques.⁵⁷⁶ While these programs were initially successful, the response of schools to the rigorous testing protocol waned over time.⁵⁷⁷ With the increased popularity of swimming and the subsequent drownings that occurred in the last decade of the nineteenth century, the teaching of swimming and lifesaving needed to be revived and promoted to a wider audience.

The promotion and incorporation of lifesaving techniques and practices into VASA's swimming clubs was instrumental in further advertising the importance of lifesaving techniques. By incorporating lifesaving activities and displays into club carnivals, a

⁵⁷³ 'Hints to Bathers', *Weekly Times*, 13 January 1894, p. 8.

⁵⁷⁴ E. Sweetman, C. Long and J. Smyth, *A History of State Education in Victoria*, Critchley Parker, Melbourne, 1922, p. 137.

⁵⁷⁵ Best, *50 Years and More*, p. 19.

⁵⁷⁶ Bannister, *7000 Brave Australians*, pp. 23-24.

⁵⁷⁷ Bannister, *7000 Brave Australians*, p. 25.

greater awareness was achieved both by the members of the swimming clubs, and the audiences spectating at carnivals. Most members of swimming clubs could already swim competently, so educating them in lifesaving theoretically enabled them to save the lives of those who could not swim, and resuscitate them if necessary. Given that swimming was promoted by the press due to its status as a useful and utilitarian activity, linking it with a humanitarian act such as lifesaving further increased its appeal. Incorporating lifesaving into carnivals and clubs, therefore, was not only a pragmatic decision, but also one that increased the relevance and popularity of the sport, and increased its marketability in press coverage.

4.3 Lifesaving Clubs and Competitions

Given the growing importance of lifesaving techniques, and their close relationship with swimming, it was natural that VASA and its associated clubs chose to incorporate lifesaving exercises into their carnivals. This practice had already been tested in England, with a Swimmers Lifesaving Society formed in 1889 by members of amateur swimming clubs, in order to educate recreational swimmers on lifesaving techniques. This organisation became the Lifesaving Society in 1891, with an Australian branch established in Sydney in 1894.⁵⁷⁸

Most swimming club committees in this period incorporated an honorary medical officer, to resuscitate swimmers who succumbed to cramp, or simply overexerted themselves.⁵⁷⁹ However, in order to aid the swimmers themselves in saving lives, various aspects of lifesaving manoeuvres were also incorporated into Melbourne carnivals. Events titled ‘Various Modes of Entering the Water’, ‘Lifesaving Competition’ and ‘Rescuing Drowning Persons’ were common on carnival programs. The *South Melbourne Record* detailed the judging criteria for the lifesaving competition as the ‘total time taken to bring your man out’, with the quickest given a prize.⁵⁸⁰ By 1898, the RHS were donating a medallion to be awarded to the winner of the lifesaving competition, in order to create interest and raise awareness.⁵⁸¹

⁵⁷⁸ Best, *50 Years and More*, p. 20. A Melbourne branch of the Society was not established until 1904.

⁵⁷⁹ For example, see ‘Ballarat Swimming Club’, *Ballarat Star*, 2 December 1893, p. 2, for a list of committee positions.

⁵⁸⁰ ‘Swimming’, *South Melbourne Record*, 6 April 1895, p. 3.

⁵⁸¹ ‘Swimming’, *South Melbourne Record*, 19 March 1898, p. 5.

Children were also frequently used to give exhibitions of lifesaving techniques and manoeuvres at swimming carnivals, in order to demonstrate that even the young were capable of saving lives. Marjorie and Trevor Richardson, aged three and six years respectively, gave an exhibition of lifesaving and resuscitation at the 1897 South Melbourne carnival.⁵⁸² It is worth noting that the father of the two children, Francis Richardson, was heavily involved with VASA, and was one of the delegates present at the formation of the association in 1893. Richardson had always shown a dedicated interest in lifesaving and resuscitation, and his son Trevor would become the Australian breaststroke champion in 1909.⁵⁸³ The Richardson family gave a number of exhibitions at Melbourne carnivals in 1897, and while deeming one of their particular displays as ‘interesting’, the *Australasian* correspondent was somewhat critical of the applicability of their performance, suggesting that:

The display would have been much more realistic had the supposed drowning person not been quite so tractable and docile. Drowning people as a rule do not calmly float on the surface and wait quietly to be pulled in by the head with their arms outspread. The chief danger in attempting a rescue is the struggling and grasping of the victim and it is one of the aims of lifesaving tuition to teach how their grip may be released and their struggles rendered ineffectual.⁵⁸⁴

In order to assist their members in rescuing a drowning individual, should it be required, the Melbourne swimming club put some strategies in place shortly after their formation. Club instructors were appointed to teach swimming and diving, and lifesaving classes were instituted. This initiative was already popular in Sydney swimming clubs, with approximately 200 individuals already certified in lifesaving. The Melbourne classes boasted eighteen members shortly after their initiation, and the Middle Park club also established their own lifesaving classes.⁵⁸⁵ As detailed in the *Australasian*, these classes were free of charge, and involved a number of drills on land and in the water, ‘demonstrating the best methods of swimming with the rescued person, of releasing oneself from the grasps of a drowning man, and of resuscitation of an apparently drowned person when you have got him ashore’.⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁸² ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 30 January 1897, p. 216.

⁵⁸³ McDonald, *The First 100*, pp. 5-6.

⁵⁸⁴ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 6 February 1897, p. 268.

⁵⁸⁵ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 1 December 1894, p. 992.

⁵⁸⁶ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 8 December 1894, p. 1023.

Women were also encouraged to attend the lifesaving classes, with the Melbourne club chairman commenting in 1895 that if a sufficient number of women took up the classes, the club would attempt to appoint some lady swimming instructors.⁵⁸⁷ The press were supportive of these classes, praising the tuition of the instructor, J. G. Pearson, on numerous occasions. The *Australasian* correspondent even suggested the introduction of an event where a mock body would be sunk into the baths, and competitors would dive for it, towing it ashore in approved fashion.⁵⁸⁸ This suggestion was actually adopted at an 1898 state school carnival, and proved successful.⁵⁸⁹ Swimming on the back was also recommended by press correspondents, for the reason that it was less taxing for weak swimmers to rescue a person using this stroke.⁵⁹⁰

Another innovation, initially undertaken by the Melbourne club, was a separate lifesaving competition, held at the close of the season, with the advertisement stating 'Lady friends of members are cordially invited'.⁵⁹¹ A report on the 1895 competition commended the honorary instructor, Mr E. W. Pearson, for his proficiency in teaching the members, indicating that these skills were refined throughout the season.⁵⁹² This lifesaving club was further formalised in the 1895/96 season, with the club meeting each Wednesday under the command of instructor Pearson.⁵⁹³ The knowledge gained from these classes soon proved to be invaluable, with an incident at an 1896 Brighton carnival rendering one of the participants unconscious. He was rescued by members of the various lifesaving classes of the swimming clubs, and upon receiving medical attention made a full recovery.⁵⁹⁴ By the close of the 1895/96 season, the Melbourne club were providing lifesaving exhibitions in local halls, accompanied by musical entertainment to entice spectators.⁵⁹⁵ The exhibitions included a lecture on the various methods of resuscitation, using the Brighton incident as a case example of the potential success of learning the art of lifesaving.⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁸⁷ 'Swimming', *Sportsman*, 22 October 1895, p. 8.

⁵⁸⁸ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 2 January 1897, p. 18.

⁵⁸⁹ 'Overarm', 'Swimming', *Weekly Times*, 31 December 1898, p. 26.

⁵⁹⁰ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 25 December 1897, p. 1403.

⁵⁹¹ 'Swimming', *Sportsman*, 2 April 1895, p. 3.

⁵⁹² 'Swimming', *Sportsman*, 9 April 1895, p. 3.

⁵⁹³ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 23 November 1895, p. 987.

⁵⁹⁴ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 18 January 1896, p. 115.

⁵⁹⁵ 'Header', 'Swimming', *Leader*, 28 March 1896, p. 18.

⁵⁹⁶ 'Header', 'Swimming', *Leader*, 11 April 1896, p. 19.

The continual promotion of lifesaving techniques to the public was crucial, as it appeared that there were some public misapprehensions in regard to who was capable of saving a life. A doctor speaking at an 1895 drowning inquest reportedly commented that a middle aged man was incapable of rescuing a drowning person. The *Australasian* correspondent was quick to refute this fact, pointing out that three of the lifesaving competitions held in Melbourne thus far had been won by J. G. Pearson, who was nearing 50 years of age. A number of other valid examples were given to support the point, which made short shrift of this allegation.⁵⁹⁷ These lifesaving classes proved integral to dispelling popular myth that not everybody could save a life. However, despite their popularity and apparent effectiveness, it appears that some of the lifesaving classes were abandoned sometime in the 1896/97 season, as after yet another drowning in Port Phillip Bay, the *Australasian* correspondent commented:

The unfortunate accident to F. W. Styles ... seems to point a moral to those responsible for the collapse of the lifesaving classes. A knowledge of the Sylvester method of resuscitation on the part of anyone of those near by at the time might have saved the lad's life, and is a bit of useful knowledge, very easily and quickly learnt.⁵⁹⁸

The correspondent's suggestion was that if the association were going to allow these classes to be discontinued, they should arrange for methods of resuscitation to be taught in conjunction with the St John's Ambulance lectures that clubs often received. However, his firm view was that resuscitation should be taught in conjunction with other water-based lifesaving exercises.⁵⁹⁹ It would appear, however, that their efforts were not widespread enough. At the commencement of the 1896/97 season, after a prolonged period of unnecessary drownings, the *Punch* editorial suggested that 'for the need of a more far-reaching system, it would not be a bad idea if the various swimming clubs were to give occasional exhibitions of the art of rescuing drowning people'.⁶⁰⁰ However, this initiative had been underway for quite some time. To address the number of drownings that were still occurring, it was clear that some greater action needed to be taken to ensure their teachings were reaching a wider audience.

⁵⁹⁷ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 14 December 1895, p. 1131.

⁵⁹⁸ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 8 January 1898, p. 76.

⁵⁹⁹ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 8 January 1898, p. 76.

⁶⁰⁰ *Melbourne Punch*, 26 November 1896, p. 428.

In terms of encouraging this wider development of swimming and lifesaving techniques, the association's commitment to youth swimming was instrumental in consolidating the teaching of swimming and lifesaving in the Victorian state schools. The Education Act, passed in Victoria in 1872, decreed that education was the responsibility of the public service. It dictated that school was compulsory for children between 6-15 years, and that the prescribed curriculum should be inclusive of reading, writing, arithmetic, grammar, geography, needlework and physical drill.⁶⁰¹ Other subjects could be taught on the payment of a small fee, and upon the approval of the Department of Education.⁶⁰² The RHS had long held the view that instruction in swimming should be included as part of the school curriculum, and made compulsory for all schoolchildren.⁶⁰³ Swimming had been officially included in school curricula in London from 1890, after a protracted period of negotiation with the Education Department, due to its hygienic value and role in achieving physical fitness.⁶⁰⁴ Sydney followed by example, initiating swimming into their curriculum in early 1897.⁶⁰⁵ However, swimming instruction was not officially incorporated into the Victorian state school curriculum until 1898, and this was initiated largely due to continued requests from VASA that swimming clubs and classes should be instituted in schools, and the example set by the Education Department in Sydney.⁶⁰⁶

Swimming had proved a popular choice as an educational subject in England due to its applicability to real life situations and its role in maintaining cleanliness and sanitation. Additionally, it was considered a viable alternative to military drill; a subject in the curriculum which promoted physical fitness.⁶⁰⁷ Military drill was essentially a combination of military skill, gymnastics and callisthenics, and was touted as an 'effective and organised system of physical exercise'.⁶⁰⁸ The intention was to develop bodily faculties, achieving health rather than strength, and to instil

⁶⁰¹ Janet Walsh and Ian Spalding, *Albert Park Primary School 1181, Centenary 1873-1973*, School Committee, Albert Park, 1973, p. 5.

⁶⁰² Sweetman, Long and Smyth, *A History of State Education in Victoria*, p. 66.

⁶⁰³ Best, *50 Years and More*, p. 19.

⁶⁰⁴ Love, *A Social History of Swimming in England*, pp. 88-89.

⁶⁰⁵ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 2 January 1897, p. 18.

⁶⁰⁶ L. J. Blake (ed.), *Vision and Realisation: A Centenary History of State Education in Victoria*, vol. 1, Education Department of Victoria, Melbourne, 1973, p. 991.

⁶⁰⁷ Love, *A Social History of Swimming in England*, p. 89.

⁶⁰⁸ Ray Crawford, 'Thwarted Visions: The Physical Culture of Gustav Techow', *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 8, no. 2, May 1992, p. 170.

discipline in children.⁶⁰⁹ This teaching of discipline was intended to impose order on the students, preventing ‘boorishness’ and teaching them deference to authority.⁶¹⁰ This use of sport to reform schoolboys has its origins in nineteenth century English public schools, where headmasters such as Thomas Arnold of the Rugby school saw that sport and games had the ability to impose morality and discipline upon its participants.⁶¹¹ Sport and games were also perceived to foster imperialism in public schoolboys. As suggested in J. A. Mangan’s seminal work on the games ethic and imperialism in nineteenth century Britain, learning to obey orders from masters in a sporting context as a schoolboy fostered a natural inclination to obey military orders and act for the good of the English race in war.⁶¹²

Clearly, it was thought that the introduction of swimming drill would provide the same moral and healthful benefits, with a more practical application. This was a direct reflection of the Muscular Christian ideology, which has been discussed in a previous chapter and which was highly valued in the British educational system. These values were also prominent in nineteenth century Australia, and as early as 1859 newspapers were espousing the benefits of Muscular Christianity in Melbourne, as it reportedly fostered a ‘manly temperament’, a well-balanced mind and was character building.⁶¹³ D. W. Brown suggests that in colonial Australia, both the independent and state school authorities promoted the moral benefits of physical education and the associated ideology of athleticism.⁶¹⁴ Swimming was said to play a major role in this, in that it challenged the tenet of manliness and resulted in a sound mind, both physically and mentally.⁶¹⁵ Manliness was an important outcome of physical education, as the development of ‘a sturdy sporting manliness’ was becoming prominent in Australian society,⁶¹⁶ undoubtedly due to its importance in establishing Australian national character. Imke Fischer also suggests that the physical training

⁶⁰⁹ Crawford, ‘Thwarted Visions’, p. 171.

⁶¹⁰ Crawford, ‘Thwarted Visions’, p. 175.

⁶¹¹ Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: A Modern History*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989, p. 80.

⁶¹² J. A. Mangan, *The Games Ethic and Imperialism: Aspects of the Diffusion of an Ideal* (Second Edition), Frank Cass, London, 1998, p. 48.

⁶¹³ D. W. Brown, ‘The Legacy of British Victorian Social Thought: Some Prominent Views on Sport, Physical Exercise and Society in Colonial Australia’, in Wray Vamplew (ed.), *Sport and Colonialism in 19th Century Australasia*, Australian Society for Sports History, Campbelltown, 1986, p. 21.

⁶¹⁴ D. W. Brown, ‘Criticisms Against the Value-Claim for Sport and the Physical Ideal in Late Nineteenth Century Australia’, *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 4, no. 2, May 1988, p. 155.

⁶¹⁵ Brown, ‘The Legacy of British Victorian Social Thought’, p. 23.

⁶¹⁶ Brown, ‘The Legacy of British Victorian Social Thought’, p. 24.

and military drill were taught in the Australian state schools in the late nineteenth century for the purpose of instilling patriotism in the students.⁶¹⁷ However, as Brown also states, physical education was also a popular response of reformers to the perceived degeneration of the physical and moral character in Australian cities, which was attributed to flaws in the Victorian state school system.⁶¹⁸

VASA's reasoning for the incorporation of swimming into Victorian state schools was threefold, and similar to that endorsed by the London authorities. As detailed by the leader of the VASA movement, E. L. Zox, swimming was to be incorporated into curriculum for 'hygienic reasons, as a means of reducing the loss of life from drowning, and as a health-giving and pleasurable exercise'.⁶¹⁹ While this was undoubtedly true, it also had the benefit of raising the profile of VASA, and increasing the standard of competitive swimming in Melbourne through teaching young children how to swim. However, prior to the initiation of swimming in the state schools in 1898 and their subsequent involvement, VASA were already making provisions for the younger population at their carnivals and events.

4.4 Youth Swimming Prior to the Schools Movement

The commitment of private and state schools in teaching swimming in the last decade of the nineteenth century was highly beneficial in furthering the development of the sport. Private schools such as St James Grammar and Geelong Church of England Grammar were holding swimming carnivals as early as 1893, and these events were reported on in the media as annual occurrences, suggesting they had been undertaken for some time.⁶²⁰ However, the development of swimming in the Melbourne state schools was most integral to the development of competitive swimming in Melbourne. There had been numerous attempts to institute swimming lessons into Melbourne state schools prior to their 1898 introduction, primarily by bath owners and swimming teachers looking to obtain profit from the venture. In 1881, 49 head teachers of state schools signed a letter backing a physical educator's proposal that an

⁶¹⁷ Imke Fischer, 'The Involvement of the Commonwealth Government in Physical Education', in Richard Cashman, John O'Hara and Andrew Honey (eds), *Sport, Federation, Nation*, Walla Walla Press, Sydney, 2001, p. 17.

⁶¹⁸ Brown, 'The Legacy of British Victorian Social Thought', p. 31.

⁶¹⁹ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 22 January 1898, p. 192.

⁶²⁰ See 'Swimming', *Age*, 7 December 1893, p. 4, for a summary of the 1893 St James Grammar School carnival.

indoor swimming and gymnastics school be constructed in the city, stating that ‘it is desirable that our national system of Education should be supplemented by systematic instruction in Gymnastics and Swimming’. However, the plan was rejected due to economic arguments over the proposed venture.⁶²¹

Attempts to provide swimming education for children later in the nineteenth century also proved unsuccessful, and this was primarily due to the financial implications of such an initiative. One of the early Ministers of the Education Department had instructed their architect to create a plan for large swimming baths that could be instituted in large schools, but these baths were never constructed.⁶²² In 1890, a sporting goods distributor, H. H. Simpson, wrote numerous letters to the Education Department suggesting the erection of a specialised learn-to-swim bath in the city centre, with teaching provided, for the sum of £20 per school per annum. The Department considered the price too high, but suggested an interview with Simpson to discuss the matter.⁶²³ However, in the meantime, the Department were alerted to another offer. Stubbs’ baths at South Melbourne offered to provide tuition to school students at 1d per head, providing a teacher accompanied them. The Department promptly replied once more to Simpson, stating that the Minister did not ‘feel inclined to go to any greater expense than this’.⁶²⁴ The Department also attempted to organise reduced rail fares for students travelling to Stubbs’ Baths, but this venture was unsuccessful.⁶²⁵

Over the last quarter of the nineteenth century a number of boards of advice and head teachers initiated sporadic classes for teaching swimming, but nothing systematic was put in place.⁶²⁶ The first serious attempt came in March 1893, when the Male Assistant Teachers Association sent a deputation to visit the Minister of Public Education, regarding the matter of teaching swimming in state schools. Their requests were that the railway commissioners be approached to offer concessions for children

⁶²¹ Crawford, ‘Thwarted Visions’, p. 173.

⁶²² Sweetman, Long and Smyth, *A History of State Education in Victoria*, pp. 138-139.

⁶²³ Public Records Office of Victoria, Education Department, VPRS892, Special Case Files 1862-1977, P0000/79, 1062, 90/11951, ‘Swimming’, 19 March 1890.

⁶²⁴ Public Records Office of Victoria, Education Department, VPRS892, Special Case Files 1862-1977, P0000/79, 1062, 90/19593, ‘Swimming’, 13 April 1893.

⁶²⁵ Public Records Office of Victoria, Education Department, VPRS892, Special Case Files 1862-1977, P0000/79, 1062, 90/22688, ‘Swimming, Railways’, 19 May 1890.

⁶²⁶ Sweetman, Long and Smyth, *A History of State Education in Victoria*, p. 139.

to travel to the baths at a reduced rate, and that one hour of lessons per week be allotted to the teaching of swimming. Members of the deputation reported that Stubbs, the proprietor of the South Melbourne baths, had continued to admit children for 1d per head, with an assurance of their general supervision and safety. Additionally, they noted that the teaching of swimming was already occurring in some bayside schools outside school hours, and had been successful. It was their belief that by including the lessons in school hours, it was predicted that more children would attend.⁶²⁷

While the Minister supported the initiative, deeming it an ‘an excellent thing’ and stating he ‘would be delighted to see this class a very great success’, he was still not in favour of cutting an hour from student lessons each week to provide the teaching. His reasoning was that in the summer months ‘it was no very great hardship’ to visit the baths outside of school hours (4.00 - 6.30 pm), even though the teachers would have to accompany them, and that the hours of schooling in Victoria were already short in comparison to other countries. However, he promised to consider the matter, and supported the establishment of cheap rail fares for the students, stating that a letter would be written to the railway commissioners to secure these.⁶²⁸ In April 1893, the Minister replied officially to the deputation, stating that:

There can be no difference of opinion as to the extreme desirability of encouraging the teaching of swimming to our young people. Scarcely any outdoor exercise exacts a more salutary influence, moral and physical on the individual while to the community it is of inestimable value as an important aspect in the saving of life. At the same time I see no necessity, while giving every due encouragement to the formation of classes for teaching swimming, for encroaching upon the time at present given to the Programme subjects. There is ample time during the summer months from 4-6pm and in the cases of some schools from 3.30-6 to give adequate attention to the subject.⁶²⁹

He again stated that he would support and organise reduced bathing and transit fares, and an assistant from each school was to take charge of the boys whilst bathing.⁶³⁰ However, a letter received by the Education Department in May 1893 stated that the

⁶²⁷ Public Records Office of Victoria, Education Department, VPRS892, Special Case Files 1862-1977, P0000/79, 1062, 93/9492, ‘Dep. Male Assistant Teachers Association re Swimming’, 1 March 1893.

⁶²⁸ Public Records Office of Victoria, Education Department, VPRS892, Special Case Files 1862-1977, P0000/79, 1062, 93/9492, ‘Dep. Male Assistant Teachers Association re Swimming’, 1 March 1893.

⁶²⁹ Public Records Office of Victoria, Education Department, VPRS892, Special Case Files 1862-1977, P0000/79, 1062, 93/9492, no title, 13 April 1893.

⁶³⁰ Public Records Office of Victoria, Education Department, VPRS892, Special Case Files 1862-1977, P0000/79, 1062, 93/9492, no title, 13 April 1893.

railway commissioners could not offer any reduction in fares, and subsequently this motion was quashed.⁶³¹

In the meantime, Melbourne schools continued to incorporate swimming into their curriculum as best they could without this official approval, which was instrumental in proving the worth of the program in later years. During the season of 1880/81, the headmaster of the Albert Park School initiated a swimming program for the boys of his school, where older boys taught the younger ones.⁶³² The Sandridge School held swimming championships as early as 1881,⁶³³ and the Middle Park State School taught swimming to their students from 1892. A letter from the head teacher to the Education Department in 1894 reported on the continued success of the program and the processes involved. Two boys' classes and one girls' class per week were instituted, with the classes being held at the conclusion of the school day. Students were taught by volunteer teachers at the school, and were instructed in swimming, diving, rescue and resuscitation, with an examination held at the conclusion of the season. It was also stated that four boys who had taken part in the program had been able to save a life as a result of these lessons, and the head teacher asked that this fact be brought to the attention of the Department.⁶³⁴ Undoubtedly, this was an attempt to draw attention to the viability of including swimming lessons in the curriculum, which would not occur for a number of years.

Prior to the official organisation of swimming in the state schools, however, youth swimmers were also being catered for at swimming club carnivals sanctioned by VASA. Assorted races for boys were placed on the majority of carnival programs, and these events were usually classified by age. Specialty youth events, with lucrative prizes, were also instrumental in encouraging youth participation. In particular, an event titled the George Gall Bequest Cup was the most prominent youth event of each season. A deceased prominent Melbourne businessman named George Gall had bequeathed a sum of £100 for the provision of an annual cup for swimming races, to be held in trust by the Mayor of Melbourne. The cup was to be swum for by Victorian

⁶³¹ Public Records Office of Victoria, Education Department, VPRS892, Special Case Files 1862-1977, P0000/79, 1062, 93/15151, 'Railways', 15 May 1893.

⁶³² Priestley, *South Melbourne*, p. 199.

⁶³³ U'Ren and Turnbull, *A History of Port Melbourne*, p. 120.

⁶³⁴ George Morris, *Middle Park School No. 2815: The First Hundred Years, 1887-1987*, Middle Park Primary School, Middle Park, 1987, pp. 25-26.

born male youths under the age of sixteen, with previous winners not permitted to enter. Three races of 100, 200 and 300 yards respectively were swum, with points allocated for each, and the cup awarded to the highest point scorer. The races for the George Gall Bequest Cup were held at a different club carnival each year, at the discretion of the mayor.⁶³⁵ The award had a prestigious place in Victorian swimming folklore, due both to its longevity and its reputation. As the *Australasian* correspondent related, ‘many of our best swimmers graduated as winners of this cup’.⁶³⁶ However, as noted by the same correspondent, there was reportedly no record of previous winners of the George Gall Cup, prompting him to ask the public to send in the names of the winners from previous years.⁶³⁷

Where the George Gall Cup had previously only received superficial coverage in the press, from approximately 1896 the Cup began to draw significant attention, as the standard of youth swimming improved. Press correspondents interpreted the results of the regular boys’ races on club programs as indicators of form, and speculated on which youth would win the George Gall Cup that year. After one particularly convincing win at a Collingwood carnival, the *Leader* correspondent declared, ‘The winner is a candidate for the George Gall Bequest Cup, and if able to sustain the double overarm stroke and pace for 300 yards should have a good chance of annexing this year’s handsome trophy’.⁶³⁸

However, as the status of the George Gall Bequest Cup increased, so too did the incidences of cheating, and the number of protests and complaints associated with it. After the cup was awarded to an A. Michie in 1896, a protest was immediately submitted by the second placegetter ‘on the grounds of incorrect age at the time of entry’.⁶³⁹ The *Australasian* correspondent also stated that another protest had been lodged on the grounds that the competitors had swum the incorrect amount of laps in the 300 yard race.⁶⁴⁰ The *Leader* correspondent reported shortly after that the young gentleman, Bishop, who raised the protest had swum, but not placed, in any of the

⁶³⁵ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 2 February 1895, p. 212.

⁶³⁶ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 2 February 1895, p. 212.

⁶³⁷ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 2 February 1895, p. 212.

⁶³⁸ ‘Header’, ‘Swimming’, *Leader*, 29 February 1896, p. 18.

⁶³⁹ ‘Header’, ‘Swimming’, *Leader*, 14 March 1896, p. 19.

⁶⁴⁰ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 14 March 1896, p. 496.

events.⁶⁴¹ It was therefore suggested that this was a case of sour grapes, as Bishop had no evidence to support his claim, and declined an invitation to make a statement to a committee. The protest was subsequently dismissed, but the Michie protest was upheld, as he was found to be ‘a shade’ over sixteen.⁶⁴² Upon supplying a valid birth certificate stating that he was the appropriate age, the second placegetter was awarded the cup.⁶⁴³

Other examples of age infringements continued to be identified in other youth races, and were dealt with severely. A young boy, who lied about his age to VASA officials, and won a race for boys under eleven years at South Melbourne in 1896, was suspended from competing in VASA competitions for one season.⁶⁴⁴ There were an increased number of transgressions associated with the boys’ races in the later years of the century, and in theory these should not have occurred, given that they were strictly ‘amateur’ races. It can be suggested that the increased incidences of cheating were related to the lucrative prizes and the developing importance and prestige associated with boys’ races. This is somewhat ironic, given VASA’s firm stance on amateurism as a method of avoiding these unsavoury practices. However, it is also demonstrative of the ambiguities of amateurism in these years. As long as monetary prizes were not offered, and the objects awarded as prizes were not significantly valuable, tokens could still be accepted as reward.

In response to the growing popularity of the youth races, another regular race for young boys was introduced in the 1894/95 season, titled the ‘Boys Champion Race’, and open to boys under the age of fourteen competing for an associated club. The race was instituted by VASA, with the trophy donated by Mr H. M. Gooch. Like the George Gall Cup, the location changed each year, with a ballot taking place to decide which club would stage the event. The inaugural race was awarded to the Brighton carnival.⁶⁴⁵ The boys’ races continued to be popular events on competition programs, both with competitors and spectators. As the *Australasian* correspondent stated, ‘the attendance at the Collingwood Swimming Carnival was limited to 200 or 300, but

⁶⁴¹ ‘Header’, ‘Swimming’, *Leader*, 21 March 1896, p. 18.

⁶⁴² ‘Header’, ‘Swimming’, *Leader*, 4 April 1896, p. 18.

⁶⁴³ ‘Header’, ‘Swimming’, *Leader*, 18 April 1896, p. 18.

⁶⁴⁴ ‘Header’, ‘Swimming’, *Leader*, 11 April 1896, p. 19.

⁶⁴⁵ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 23 February 1895, p. 355.

judging from the noise made when the boys' races were in progress one would have thought it much larger'.⁶⁴⁶

As swimming continued to gain popularity in the Melbourne schools, swimming clubs based around schools began to develop. The Albert Park State School Swimming Club held its inaugural ladies' day in 1896, which showcased a series of boys' swimming races as well as a few novelty events. A number of Education Department employees were in attendance to witness the sport, which was described as a success.⁶⁴⁷ These types of carnivals were soon being held by a number of schools in the metropolitan area. Prominent individuals associated with VASA would often assist with the running of school carnivals, which established them as serious events, and undoubtedly allowed VASA to recruit members for their clubs.⁶⁴⁸ The development of these clubs corresponded with the increase of school swimming carnival reports in the press, and as one correspondent noted, 'I am glad to see the schools taking up swimming'.⁶⁴⁹ As these school swimming clubs began to increase in number, the association swiftly realised that their existence could potentially increase both numbers and profits. Therefore, in November 1896, it was proposed that to alleviate VASA's increasing financial burden, school swimming clubs should be invited to affiliate with VASA for half a guinea per year, and to increase this amount if the club should number over 50 members on account of requiring an extra delegate. This would not only increase the number of clubs affiliated, but also increase finances by way of admission costs and entry fees to association and club carnivals.⁶⁵⁰

In response to these developments in school swimming, races for schools were introduced at VASA carnivals, where the competitors represented their school instead of a swimming club. These kinds of races were commonly held at VASA-sanctioned carnivals, in an attempt to encourage maximum participation as part of their provisions for special groups and to boost entries. The inaugural championship of the Victorian schools was swum at the Melbourne club's carnival in 1896, but it is doubtful whether this event was sanctioned by the Education Department, and was

⁶⁴⁶ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 28 December 1895, p. 1233.

⁶⁴⁷ 'Swimming', *Sportsman*, 8 April 1896, p. 6.

⁶⁴⁸ For one example, see 'Swimming', *Argus*, 26 March 1895, p. 3. Two of the officials, J. Pearson and H. Heath, were champion swimmers and were also involved in VASA administration.

⁶⁴⁹ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 29 February 1896, p. 401.

⁶⁵⁰ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 7 November 1896, p. 965.

likely a clever marketing ploy by the Melbourne club to attract a greater number of entries and spectators to their carnival. Nonetheless, the 150 yard race was given ‘especial attention’ by the *Australasian* correspondent, who stated that the race was open to all schoolboys under the age of 21, from public, private and state schools.⁶⁵¹

Despite these provisions for young boys from the earliest days of the association, and the increasing coverage of these in the press, it appears that there was not a great awareness of these competitions. Upon reporting on a weekly athletic competition in New Zealand (which featured boys’ races, the *Australasian* correspondent implored ‘Cannot something of the same sort be done in Melbourne?’⁶⁵² though perhaps it can be theorised that he was referring to organised competitions for public schoolboys. The perceived importance of teaching schoolboys how to swim was gaining favour, and was manifested in the free entry granted to them at the newly established Collingwood baths from 1895, which had been organised by the Education Department upon granting the land for the baths.⁶⁵³

While swimming was not being actively promoted in schools, measures were put in place to ensure schoolchildren could still swim in a safe location. The local council supervising the erection of the Richmond City Baths in 1897 also approved free admittance to the baths for schoolchildren at certain times of the day. Boys under fourteen were admitted from 3.00 pm to 5.00 pm on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday, and girls on Fridays at the same time. This offer was contingent on obtaining a ticket from the class teacher.⁶⁵⁴ This arrangement, in conjunction with the increased prevalence of lessons for boys and the provision of races for schoolboys at VASA carnivals, highlights the lack of attention paid to the aquatic education of girls prior to the inclusion of swimming in state school curriculum. Girls were not always catered for, and if they were, they were given fewer lessons and reduced pool time.

Despite the apparent gender equality, it appears that the Education Department were supportive of swimming, provided it did not take place in school hours. Eventually this barrier to participation was removed, and swimming in the state schools was able

⁶⁵¹ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 15 February 1896, p. 307.

⁶⁵² ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 5 January 1895, p. 19.

⁶⁵³ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 19 January 1895, p. 115.

⁶⁵⁴ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 27 March 1897, p. 699.

to become an approved subject, for both boys and girls. While previous attempts to consolidate swimming as part of the Victorian curriculum had proved unsuccessful, a delegation led by VASA in 1897 was able to achieve this aim, with considerable support from a number of press correspondents.

4.5 The Inauguration of Swimming in Melbourne State Schools

While numerous approaches had previously been made to the Education Department regarding the matter, the major catalyst for developing swimming in Melbourne schools occurred at the beginning of the 1896/97 season. In December 1896, the *Australasian* correspondent stated briefly at the conclusion of his column that in Sydney, a gentleman named H. N. Southwell had begun to champion the cause of swimming in public schools. The column suggested that Southwell intended to introduce the sport into the Sydney school curriculum, by allocating practice time, free bathing and reduced fares to and from the baths.⁶⁵⁵ By January, as reported by the same correspondent, three district schools had held swimming carnivals, with one of the prominent school swimming clubs having almost 300 members. Lifesaving classes were provided, and swimming training was held twice weekly, with teachers and older boys providing instruction. Those boys who wished to swim after school were permitted to leave school early, in order to prolong their time in the water.⁶⁵⁶

In response to this news, the swimming correspondents from the *Leader* and the *Australasian* began to heavily promote the need for swimming to be taught in schools, as was already being undertaken in Sydney. They saw that this was something that VASA, as the state governing body, should be championing. On this topic, they were unusually forceful and persistent, as acknowledged by one correspondent who stated in one column ‘At the risk of wearying my readers I return again to the question of teaching swimming in schools ...’⁶⁵⁷ One report on a carnival held by the Albert Park State School in late 1896 welcomed the patronage of the mayor of South Melbourne and various members of the Board of Advice, suggesting that:

If only these gentlemen will use their influence to get other state schools to take up swimming in earnest they will be conferring a benefit on hundreds of youngsters. And why stop at the boys? Example is better than precept, and I

⁶⁵⁵ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 5 December 1896, p. 1114.

⁶⁵⁶ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 2 January 1897, p. 18.

⁶⁵⁷ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 2 January 1897, p. 18.

should like to see the Albert-park school hold a meeting for girls only with prizes for those who have shown most rapid progress, for lifesaving drill, for learners, &c.⁶⁵⁸

These passionate pleas for swimming to be taken up by the Education Department were further precipitated by the drownings of children that were inevitably occurring, and were reported on by the press in support of their cause. After listing a number of recent water related fatalities, the *Australasian* correspondent questioned:

How many more such cases will it take to induce the State school authorities and other bodies to take up the matter of teaching boys to swim? The V.A.S.A council would only be doing its duty in bringing the subject at once before the Minister of Education ... a little easily-acquired knowledge of lifesaving methods would have averted the catastrophe.⁶⁵⁹

The program that Southwell had instituted in Sydney was widely applauded, and as one correspondent opined, 'Cannot Melbourne do a little in the same direction? Many of those to whom I have spoken regard the project as a novelty. It is nothing of the sort'.⁶⁶⁰ This continued push for swimming in the state schools by the press prompted aquatic entrepreneurs to write numerous letters to the Education Department, offering their services as swimming teachers and citing their qualifications.⁶⁶¹

It appeared that these directed comments by the press hit their mark, as by January 1897 the *Australasian* stated that VASA had finally taken up the cause of promoting swimming in schools, and that a sub-committee had been formed to collect data and submit a proposal for VASA to consider, which would later be presented to the Minister of Education. It is related that a VASA delegate had reportedly communicated favourably with the Education Department in the early years of the association on the matter of teaching swimming in the state schools. Nothing had been done, however, and it was noted that, 'it remains for the council to again bring the matter into public prominence'.⁶⁶² This proposal was met with considerable support by some of the more prestigious followers of Victorian amateur swimming, with E. L.

⁶⁵⁸ "Unda, 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 19 December 1896, p. 1219.

⁶⁵⁹ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 26 December 1896, p. 1271.

⁶⁶⁰ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 2 January 1897, p. 18.

⁶⁶¹ Public Records Office of Victoria, Education Department, VPRS892, Special Case Files 1862-1977, P0000/79, 1062, 'To the Secretary of the Educational Dept.', 10 March 1897.

⁶⁶² 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 13 February 1897, p. 316.

Zox, a prominent member of the Legislative Assembly and member of the RHS, proffering his support to the sub-committee.⁶⁶³

While this report was being compiled, VASA and their affiliated clubs continued to support the schools movement through assisting with the school carnivals that took place, and through provision of events at their carnivals. The 1897 Collingwood carnival included a race on their program intended for Collingwood schoolboys only, with the prize donated by the School Board of Advice.⁶⁶⁴ The VASA carnival that year also hosted a race for boys attending state schools in Victoria. In his column, the *Leader* correspondent congratulated VASA on including the race, and once more suggested that the Education Department might offer some inducement to boys who achieved a high standard of swimming and lifesaving.⁶⁶⁵

The prospect of swimming being officially incorporated into the curriculum was again raised by VASA at the opening association meeting of the 1897/98 season. By this time, several thousand schoolchildren were reportedly already receiving swimming instruction, with reduced tram fares and bath entry fees already secured. The cause of school swimming was also bolstered by a visit from Southwell, the founder of school swimming in Sydney. Most importantly, it was suggested that VASA should take advantage of his presence, and an interview with the Minister of Education was mooted.⁶⁶⁶ This meeting was duly organised, and the agenda for the meeting was outlined succinctly by the *Australasian* correspondent. The VASA contingent met with the Minister of Education in January 1898, and was headed by E. L. Zox and ably supported by J. G. Pearson, B. J. Parkinson (VASA vice presidents), F. G. Richardson (VASA secretary) and Southwell as an adviser. After Southwell had outlined the success of the Sydney movement, detailing the aquatic education of over 6,000 boys and girls per year in New South Wales, it was proposed that such a scheme be instituted in Victoria.⁶⁶⁷

⁶⁶³ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 20 March 1897, p. 564.

⁶⁶⁴ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 27 March 1897, p. 699.

⁶⁶⁵ 'Running Header', 'Swimming', *Leader*, 13 February 1897, p. 19.

⁶⁶⁶ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 8 January 1898, p. 76.

⁶⁶⁷ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 22 January 1898, p. 192.

The proposal requested that the Victorian Minister of Education authorise the formation of school swimming clubs, and allow for the introduction of a compulsory hour each week in the bathing season to teach swimming to boys and girls. The committee pointed out that there were already adequate facilities to undertake such a program, with beach baths all along Port Phillip Bay, as well as four inner city baths and country facilities, and they provided some information on what was already being undertaken by the Albert Park and Williamstown schools. The Minister agreed to introduce swimming into the state school curriculum, albeit only in the one Melbourne school to begin with, with an understanding that this arrangement could gradually be expanded. The *Australasian* correspondent saw this as a sensible move, as it was thought that time would be needed to prepare both teachers and students for this change. However, more significantly, VASA were instructed to provide advice and assistance in establishing the program.⁶⁶⁸ This essentially enabled them to impose their views and practices on the development of the schools program, which assisted in building the profile of the sport.

Once the Minister gave his official approval, the scheme developed rapidly. Only days after the initial meeting, a meeting of headmasters was held at the Education Department to discuss the proposed swimming program. All headmasters present approved of the proposal put forward by Southwell and VASA, and identified 25 metropolitan schools that could accommodate the swimming programs immediately.⁶⁶⁹ A week later, on 27 January, a further meeting was held, with 100 teachers attending to hear more from Southwell about the swimming curriculum. Administrative matters such as the times and venues for swimming instruction, terms of admission and transport logistics were all debated, but the major outcome of this meeting was the decision to form the State Schools' Swimming Association (SSSA), which was commonly referred to in press coverage as the State Schools Swimming Committee (SSSC). Rules were drawn up and noted, and a committee of twelve headmasters and twelve teachers was formed, with a secretary elected.⁶⁷⁰ A statement published in the *School Paper*, the Education Department circular to schools and students, stated that school swimming clubs could be formed if twenty boys or twenty

⁶⁶⁸ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 22 January 1898, p. 192.

⁶⁶⁹ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 29 January 1898, p. 247.

⁶⁷⁰ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 5 February 1898, p. 303.

girls were prepared to join with parental consent, and that on one afternoon per week, the members of the swimming club were permitted to leave school with a teacher at 3.00 pm to take part in swimming practice. Copies of the rules were distributed to all Melbourne schools, and a preliminary survey suggested that approximately 2,000 boys and girls were prepared to join a school club.⁶⁷¹

While the original initiative dealt exclusively with the metropolitan schools, steps were also being taken by VASA to institute the program in regional areas. VASA secretary F. G. Richardson pitched the idea to the Ballarat educational authorities on a visit in late January, and they were highly responsive to the idea.⁶⁷² Other country areas, that were undoubtedly experiencing similar problems with drownings in rivers and lakes, also took up the cause. A *Geelong Advertiser* report highlighted the example of a Warrnambool school, which had organised to have the local baths set aside for their pupils for a number of hours on certain days. This initiative was praised, with the correspondent suggesting that the town council should allocate an amount of money in support of the cause.⁶⁷³

By early February 1898, preliminary reports commissioned by the newly formed SSSC indicated that once the transport arrangements were finalised by the Education Department, it was thought that the program would begin immediately.⁶⁷⁴ This announcement was very well received, with a number of newspapers commenting favourably on the proposal. One female correspondent in particular praised the innovation, but stated that she hoped to see girls incorporated into the program as well, which was part of the initiative. The tone of her column suggests that the initiative was well overdue, given that boys in the state schools had previously been forced to learn sewing as part of the curriculum.⁶⁷⁵ The *Australasian* correspondent did not appear at all surprised the movement has gained such ascendancy, praising the teachers involved and stating that 'Public opinion is a strong motive power, and there is no doubt about it that public opinion is heavily in favour of the project'.⁶⁷⁶

⁶⁷¹ Public Records Office of Victoria, Education Department, VPRS15502: Student Magazines, 1896-2001, P0001/1, 'The School Paper 1896-1898', vol. 1, no. 9, March 1898, pp. 670-71.

⁶⁷² 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 5 February 1898, p. 303.

⁶⁷³ 'Town Talk', *Geelong Advertiser*, 24 February 1898, p. 2.

⁶⁷⁴ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 19 February 1898, p. 413.

⁶⁷⁵ 'Minetta', 'Lady's Letter', *Melbourne Punch*, 27 January 1898, p. 19.

⁶⁷⁶ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 5 February 1898, p. 303.

In order to demonstrate a viable model, and no doubt to promote the VASA activities, the Minister of Education and a number of State School teachers were invited to attend the 1898 Melbourne club carnival to observe the proceedings.⁶⁷⁷ The swimming program in schools was gradually rolled out and extended over the next couple of months. At the conclusion of the 1898 season, the *Australasian* correspondent congratulated the state schoolteachers in their dedication to establishing the program, stating that hundreds of students had already commenced visiting the various beach and suburban baths. His suggestion was to begin recording the numbers of students that were learning to swim in each school.⁶⁷⁸ In a later column, the introduction of swimming into schools was described as ‘the most gratifying feature’ of the season.⁶⁷⁹

4.6 The Consolidation of Swimming in Melbourne State Schools

A major development arising from the incorporation of swimming into the curriculum was the increased number of swimming clubs affiliated with the state schools. By April 1898, 22 state school clubs were in existence, with 1745 boys and 880 girls registered.⁶⁸⁰ In consideration of the sex segregation that was so prevalent in nineteenth century aquatics, the state school clubs were split into a boys’ and a girls’ section. Some of these clubs were quite substantial in size - for example, the Albert Park State School boys’ club had 187 members, and the girls’ club boasted 191 members.⁶⁸¹ The popularity of the initiative with Melbourne girls suggests that the marketing of swimming by the schools as a utilitarian and healthy activity for both sexes had been well received by the public. It is likely that this was particularly pronounced within the lower classes, whom could ill afford for their children to attend the baths otherwise.

The annual carnivals of these state school clubs soon became very popular and reputable events, and rivalled the VASA carnivals in terms of the amount and quality of press coverage. Like the VASA club carnivals, they consisted of a mix of

⁶⁷⁷ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 5 February 1898, p. 303.

⁶⁷⁸ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 12 March 1898, p. 578.

⁶⁷⁹ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 26 March 1898, p. 689.

⁶⁸⁰ Public Records Office of Victoria, Education Department, VPRS15502: Student Magazines, 1896-2001, P0001/1, ‘The School Paper 1896-1898’, vol. I, no. 10, April 1898, p. 687.

⁶⁸¹ Public Records Office of Victoria, Education Department, VPRS15502: Student Magazines, 1896-2001, P0001/1, ‘The School Paper 1896-1898’, vol. III, no. 25, April 1898, p. 397.

competitive, novelty and lifesaving events, with the attendance of ladies welcomed. In keeping with sex segregation requirements, the boys and girls' clubs held separate carnivals. The 1898 carnival of the Albert Park State School Boys' Club was held shortly after the official inauguration of swimming into the Victorian educational curriculum, and the event boasted a number of prestigious attendees. The *South Melbourne Record* reported that a number of Education Department representatives were present at this carnival, including the secretary, as well as a number of members of the South Melbourne Board of Advice. The RHS donated a medal to be awarded for the best practical demonstration of lifesaving, and members of VASA gave a demonstration of swimming. The significance of this event, and an indication of the regard in which swimming was held, was demonstrated by the willingness of the Education Department to award a half-day holiday so that students could participate in the event.⁶⁸²

The eventual introduction of a half-day holiday for school swimming competitions took some time to be achieved, as the Education Department was not initially motivated to grant additional time off from lessons, given that they had initially protested against the hour each week used for swimming instruction. Letters from the Albert Park State School in early 1898 requesting a half-holiday for their carnival received the standard response that 'the Head Teacher is informed that the Department is opposed to granting Special Holidays. He should apply to the Board of Advice for a half-holiday'.⁶⁸³ It would appear that the Board of Advice did not share the Department's view, however, as a few days later the half-holiday was granted with the addendum 'this year the Minister will grant the holiday, but it is not to be taken as a precedent'.⁶⁸⁴ Interestingly, the Middle Park School in the same year received the same outcome.⁶⁸⁵

From this year onward, records indicate that the half-holidays were granted without incident. Leave was readily granted to teachers involved in swimming competitions or

⁶⁸² 'Swimming Club Carnival', *South Melbourne Record*, 5 March 1898, p. 3.

⁶⁸³ Public Records Office of Victoria, Education Department, VPRS796: Outwards Letter Books: Primary Schools 1868-1938, P0000/193/A1, 98/2907, 14 February 1898, p. 89.

⁶⁸⁴ Public Records Office of Victoria, Education Department, VPRS796: Outwards Letter Books: Primary Schools 1868-1938, P0000/193/A1, 98/3252, 16 February 1898, p. 90.

⁶⁸⁵ See Public Records Office of Victoria, Education Department, VPRS796: Outwards Letter Books: Primary Schools 1868-1938, P0000/600/A1, 98/5071, 7 March 1898, p. 87.

for State School Swimming Committee business,⁶⁸⁶ and members of the Education Department were omnipresent at school swimming carnivals. The state schools swimming movement had gained such ascendancy that for the 1899 combined schools swimming demonstration, the Minister authorised, without complaint, a half-day holiday for seventeen Melbourne suburban schools taking part. Two regional schools also took part in the demonstration, but were not granted a half-holiday.⁶⁸⁷ In the swimming off-season, authorities continued to push for improvements to the swimming program. The chairman of The Board of Advice No. 1, Mr Blashki, and a member of the Board of Advice formed a deputation to visit the mayor of Melbourne, asking that free swimming baths be provided in Melbourne for the use of schoolchildren. The mayor was sympathetic to the movement, and stated that he thought that the teaching of swimming to schoolchildren should be compulsory.⁶⁸⁸ However, it is uncertain whether the free baths were provided.

The movement was revived at the beginning of the 1898/99 season, where the *Leader* correspondent expressed pleasure that ‘the subject of swimming in state schools, which was taken up so enthusiastically last season, has not been allowed to drop’.⁶⁸⁹ However, this did not take place quickly enough for some individuals, with a parent writing to the *Argus* in December 1899 on behalf of a number of parents, questioning the delay. As the parent suggested:

I cannot help thinking that a few brass buttons and a little gold braid would have had a wonderful effect in stimulating enthusiasm and helping along the cause. Whatever the reason of the delay, the result will be the loss of the best part of the bathing season, unless a start is made soon, so that I would urge upon those interested to lose no further time.⁶⁹⁰

The Central (Williamstown) State School Swimming Club held its first annual matches in March 1899, which were attended by the Minister of Education.⁶⁹¹ A large portion of these school carnivals was dedicated to the demonstration and practice of lifesaving techniques, indicating that this was a primary aspect of the curriculum. The

⁶⁸⁶ For one such example, see Public Records Office of Victoria, Education Department, VPRS796: Outwards Letter Books: Primary Schools 1868-1938, P0000/193/A1, 99/2589, 10 February 1899, p. 170.

⁶⁸⁷ Public Records Office of Victoria, Education Department, VPRS794: Central Registered Correspondence Files 1873-1986, P0000/938, 99/5152, ‘Swimming’, 25 February 1899.

⁶⁸⁸ *Argus*, 18 May 1898, p. 4.

⁶⁸⁹ ‘Swimming’, *Leader*, 24 December 1898, p. 15.

⁶⁹⁰ ‘State School Swimming Classes’, *Argus*, 10 December 1899, p. 10.

⁶⁹¹ ‘Swimming’, *Leader*, 25 March 1899, p. 17.

1898/99 carnival held by the Albert Park School incorporated ‘many items of a practical nature’,⁶⁹² including a search for a supposedly drowned person as well as the mock rescue of three members of the girls’ swimming club.⁶⁹³ By 1899, schools were encouraging their students to enter for the Queen’s Medallion, awarded for ‘proficiency in swimming exercises with reference to saving life, and certificates for proficiency in the theoretical knowledge of the art of saving life from drowning, etc., open to all public and private schools in the Australasian colonies’.⁶⁹⁴

As the schools swimming program developed, in time a number of problems were identified. In the inaugural season, children from Caulfield had to be transported to the St Kilda baths for their lessons, which was a considerable undertaking. A local councillor suggested that baths at Elsternwick would be advantageous in this regard, as well as being popular with local inhabitants.⁶⁹⁵ By the end of 1898, the *Australasian* correspondent had raised the issue of insufficient teachers for educating the students on swimming and lifesaving, stating that many students were leaving the baths without any tuition.⁶⁹⁶ It was seen that New South Wales was still much ahead of Victoria in teaching their students how to swim, with a column in the *Australasian* in early 1899 suggesting that the formation of swimming classes in the Victorian schools needed to be further pushed forward.⁶⁹⁷

A further visit by Southwell from Sydney to Melbourne in January 1899 confirmed that the system was having some problems. His view, as related grimly by the *Australasian* correspondent, was that the swimming in the Melbourne schools had not been developed significantly in the year it had been in operation. He attributed this lack of progress primarily to the inland schools, which did not have ready access to the baths on the Melbourne shorelines, and to the obstinacy of the private tramways in providing transport.⁶⁹⁸ Another major problem was the lack of funds available for the movement, as the teaching of children to swim and the provision of carnivals was

⁶⁹² ‘Overarm’, ‘Swimming’, *Weekly Times*, 31 December 1898, p. 26.

⁶⁹³ ‘Overarm’, ‘Swimming’, *Weekly Times*, 31 December 1898, p. 26.

⁶⁹⁴ Public Records Office of Victoria, Education Department, VPRS15502: Student Magazines, 1896-2001, P0001/2, ‘The School Paper 1899’, vol II, no. 19, February 1899, p. 192.

⁶⁹⁵ *St Kilda Advertiser*, 12 March 1898, p. 5.

⁶⁹⁶ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 31 December 1898, p. 1486.

⁶⁹⁷ ‘Swimming Drill’, *Australasian*, 7 January 1899, p. 30.

⁶⁹⁸ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 4 February 1899, p. 245.

reliant on voluntary assistance and the generosity of baths proprietors. It was suggested by the *Australasian* correspondent, somewhat optimistically, that ‘parents and the public will readily supply the Hon. Sec. Mr Hanson with any sums he may require’.⁶⁹⁹ This lack of financial support from the government continued, and upon news from New Zealand that their government was allocating funds to the swimming associations, the *Australasian* correspondent was encouraged rather than indignant, but suggested that in Victoria, ‘much more might be achieved with sufficient funds. A little assistance from our own Government would prove money well spent’.⁷⁰⁰

In order to further promote swimming in schools, and no doubt to assuage Southwell’s view that little progress was being made, the SSSC organised a combined State Schools carnival to be held in March 1899. To encourage participation, the Education Department granted a half-holiday to all schools in attendance. The event was so anticipated that the *Australasian* correspondent was of the opinion that South Melbourne Baths would not be big enough to contain the crowd.⁷⁰¹ The event was judged a success, as evidenced by a two-page pictorial spread in the *Australasian*,⁷⁰² with 300 entries received from twenty different clubs. The Education Department offered its patronage, sending a number of its officers. VASA’s role in assisting with the carnival was also acknowledged, as they provided a starter, a referee and a number of proficient swimmers to provide a demonstration. While the races on the program were primarily for boys, there was one girls’ race included, which proved a controversial decision.⁷⁰³

The inclusion of the girls’ race appeared to create some problems within the Education Department, who wrote a letter to the SSSC on this matter, questioning the inclusion of the girls’ race and suggesting that a mixed demonstration should not be held in future. The subsequent response from the secretary of the SSSC in July 1899 questioned whether there had actually been any complaints about the inclusion of the

⁶⁹⁹ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 4 March 1899, p. 469.

⁷⁰⁰ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 20 January 1900, p. 132.

⁷⁰¹ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 11 February 1899, p. 303.

⁷⁰² ‘Studies in Swimming: State School Demonstration at Stubbs Baths, South Melbourne, March 8’, *Australasian*, 18 March 1899, p. 585.

⁷⁰³ Public Records Office of Victoria, Education Department, VPRS15502: Student Magazines, 1896-2001, P0001/2, ‘The School Paper 1899’, vol I, no. 7, April 1899, pp. 396 -399.

girls' race, and the Department stated that there had not.⁷⁰⁴ The SSSC took offence to this, and requested a deputation be received as to the matter. The deputation was received in September 1899, where members of the SSSC executive argued against the cessation of the mixed demonstration. The point was raised that there had not actually been any official complaints, and the negative response had come solely from the Education Department. SSSC representatives requested that the letter in question be withdrawn, and that the Department leave the organisation of these demonstrations to the committee. To assist their cause, the SSSC wisely enlisted the help of VASA to prove the worth of mixed swimming events, and it was able to provide some examples of similar events held that had not been construed as morally questionable. More importantly, an interview was scheduled between the department secretary and A. A. Peverill, the secretary of the VASA-affiliated Albert Park Swimming Club, to discuss the matter. At this meeting, Peverill stated that his club had previously held similar races for girls, and also cited the example of the Brighton club in providing a mixed program. His view was that it was a worthwhile initiative and he had no objections, provided that races were restricted to suitably attired girls below the age of fourteen years under the supervision of a teacher.⁷⁰⁵

It appears that Peverill's testimonial was considered highly valuable, as the Minister's response to the deputation followed all of his guidelines. The SSSC was advised that:

By direction of the Minister ... the Dept's letter of 3rd June is withdrawn and the inclusion of such races in future demonstrations is left to the discretion of the committee. Should it be decided to include them then the Minister is of [the] opinion that they should be restricted to girls under 14 years of age and that they are suitably dressed and are placed under the supervision of experienced female teachers.⁷⁰⁶

While the inaugural State schools' demonstration appeared to be successful, one correspondent suggested that the rescue and resuscitation drills needed more work. His suggestion was that further lessons, as recommended by the Lifesaving Society, should be provided. This further highlighted his point a few weeks earlier that

⁷⁰⁴ Public Records Office of Victoria, Education Department, VPRS794: Central Registered Correspondence Files 1873-1986, P0000/942, 99/21598, 'Swimming', 4 July 1899.

⁷⁰⁵ Public Records Office of Victoria, Education Department, VPRS794: Central Registered Correspondence Files 1873-1986, P0000/945, 99/31270, 'Swimming', 19 September 1899.

⁷⁰⁶ Public Records Office of Victoria, Education Department, VPRS794: Central Registered Correspondence Files 1873-1986, P0000/945, 99/31270, 'Swimming', 19 September 1899.

students were not being properly taught.⁷⁰⁷ It is worth noting that a combined schools gala in New South Wales in the same year, under the direction of Southwell, reportedly drew at least 3,000 spectators, with a number of the boys posting race times better than some of the best adult Victorians.⁷⁰⁸

By 1899, school swimming was beginning to flourish in the inner suburbs of Melbourne. In this year, the town clerk of Richmond wrote to the Department requesting a gala be held in the Richmond baths for schools in the area.⁷⁰⁹ The SSSC continued to move forward, with the Executive (comprising Hanson from Collingwood, Planner from Middle Park and Barclay from Albert Park) holding a meeting in late January outlining some of their season objectives. It was decided that a combined demonstration should again be held at Stubbs' baths, and it was suggested that the committee might arrange a separate demonstration for girls if appropriate. It was also requested that the department arrange with the Executive to print the necessary programs for the demonstration. The support of the Education Department was granted without incident.⁷¹⁰

One other request that was made by the SSSC was that the Education Department provide copies of swimming exercises for distribution in the state schools.⁷¹¹ The increasing importance of swimming as an educational subject had already been consolidated by the substitution of swimming-on-land exercises for the general physical and military drill exercises outlined in the Victorian school curriculum. Taken from the guidelines offered by the British Lifesaving Society, instructions and pictorial representations of these swimming exercises were featured in the September 1898 edition of the *School Paper*, in time for the 1898/99 season. Guidelines for proper execution of arm and leg movements were provided, which were executed in the manner of a mass military drill.⁷¹² As the instructions for the leg movement stated:

⁷⁰⁷ 'Unda', 'Swimming' *Australasian*, 18 March 1899, p. 583.

⁷⁰⁸ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 8 April 1899, p. 750.

⁷⁰⁹ Public Records Office of Victoria, Education Department, VPRS794: Central Registered Correspondence Files, P0000/938, 99/3689, 'Swimming', 14 February 1899.

⁷¹⁰ Public Records Office of Victoria, Education Department, VPRS640: Central Inward Schools Correspondence 1878-1962, P0001/1134, 2815, 1900/3175, 'Swimming', 6 February 1900.

⁷¹¹ Public Records Office of Victoria, Education Department, VPRS640: Central Inward Schools Correspondence 1878-1962, P0001/1134, 2815, 1900/3175, 'Swimming', 6 February 1900.

⁷¹² Public Records Office of Victoria, Education Department, VPRS15502: Student Magazines, 1896-2001, P0001/1, 'The School Paper 1896-1898', vol II, no. 15, September 1898, pp. 765-768.

On the command 'Position', place hands on hips. On 'One', raise the left knee (directing it sideways), the heel of the left foot touching inside of right knee, with toes pointing downwards. On 'Two', straighten and lower the left leg by a backward and rounded movement, until the point of the big toe touches the ground one pace to the left. On 'Three', draw in the left foot along the ground and close the leg smartly. Drop hands to the side and stand at attention. Note. - Perform these movements three or four times, and then repeat the drill with the right leg. When proficient, perform the movements with the right and left leg alternately, particularly emphasising movements 'Two' and 'Three', and continue without counting by judging the time.⁷¹³

The endorsement of these swimming on land exercises was beneficial to schools for a number of reasons. As Terret has noted in the French context, teaching swimming on land meant that the danger of open water was averted, and the teacher in charge could control the classes more effectively.⁷¹⁴ While these activities had the approval of the Education Department, the SSSC reported that a lot of schools were still unsure whether these swimming exercises could be substituted. They therefore requested an official statement from the Minister, and an endorsement was duly granted.⁷¹⁵

For the 1900 combined schools' carnival, the secretary of the SSSC, C. J. Planner, enlisted considerable help from the Education Department to ensure the event was run in accordance with Department guidelines, given the debacle with the girls' race the previous year. The Department delegate for swimming, Major Eddy, was contacted by Planner early in 1900 with a view to gaining assistance with a number of matters. Planner enquired as to whether the Government could undertake the printing of programs and tickets for the demonstration, as well as providing a supply of postage-paid envelopes, and asked that the Minister grant a half-holiday to schools with more than five students taking part in the demonstration. Eddy was happy to acquiesce with these requests, as well as providing judges from the Department to officiate. He also stated that the secretary of the Education Department would donate £1.1s to provide a championship prize. In consideration of the Department's reluctant acceptance of the mixed swimming demonstration the previous year, Planner explained that a separate demonstration would be held later in the season for girls, with one side of Stubbs'

⁷¹³ Public Records Office of Victoria, Education Department, VPRS15502: Student Magazines, 1896-2001, P0001/1, 'The School Paper 1896-1898', vol II, no. 15, September 1898, pp. 765-768.

⁷¹⁴ Terret, 'Educative Pools', pp. 43-44.

⁷¹⁵ Public Records Office of Victoria, Education Department, VPRS640: Central Inward Schools Correspondence 1878-1962, P0001/1134, 2815, 1900/3175, 'Swimming', 16 February 1900.

Baths set aside exclusively for females. In addition, the Department was asked if it had any suggestions for improving the event.⁷¹⁶ Despite the assertion of the SSSC that a separate girls demonstration would be held, there was never any reference to such an event in press coverage, suggesting that it either did not take place or that the press were not interested in covering it.

However, there were some positive and tangible successes of the program. An 1899 column boasted that at least five lives had been saved by members of the Middle Park school club, with one rescuer awarded a certificate from the RHS for his bravery.⁷¹⁷ Schools who struggled to find adult teachers to provide swimming lessons devised strategies to provide the necessary instruction. The headmaster of the Brighton State School offered prizes to those children who were able to teach a fellow pupil how to swim that season, with fifteen children taught to swim as a result of this initiative.⁷¹⁸ In addition, the popularity of the school swimming galas with the public enabled them to become profitable events in their own right. Part of the profit went to the proprietors of baths, who in the past had often donated use of their facilities, but who were now able to capitalise on their popularity. For the 1900 combined schools demonstration, Planner arranged with Stubbs (proprietor of the South Melbourne Baths) that he would receive 30% of the profit on paid admission tickets.⁷¹⁹

The SSSC expanded at the beginning of the 1899/1900 season to include representation for girls' clubs, seaside and suburban clubs. It was seen that by the 1899/1900 season, the movement was firmly consolidated in the education system.⁷²⁰ This was reinforced by the resignation of the inaugural secretary of the SSSC, A. Hanson, at the beginning of the 1899/1900 season, who stated in his resignation letter that:

At the inauguration of the above movement in January of last year, at a meeting of teachers presided over the Inspector general, I consented to act as secretary until the movement was satisfactorily inaugurated. As the successful combined demonstration in March last gave evidence that this object had been

⁷¹⁶ Public Records Office of Victoria, Education Department, VPRS640: Central Inward Schools Correspondence 1878-1962, P0001/1134, 2815, 1900/3175, 'Swimming', 6 February 1900.

⁷¹⁷ 'Swimming', *Leader*, 18 March 1899, p. 18.

⁷¹⁸ 'Swimming Match', *Brighton Leader*, 8 April 1899, p. 2.

⁷¹⁹ Public Records Office of Victoria, Education Department, VPRS640: Central Inward Schools Correspondence 1878-1962, P0001/1134, 2815, 1900/3175, 'Swimming', 6 February 1900.

⁷²⁰ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 16 December 1899, p. 1364.

attained I requested the general meeting of club representatives to relieve me from further duties as sec. In retiring from office, permit me to thank the Department - and especially Mr. Inspector Eddy, with whom I have had much to do - for the very kind cooperation and assistance, without which it would have been impossible to accomplish what we have been able to achieve.⁷²¹

At the 1899 meeting where Hanson tendered his resignation, thirteen teachers were elected onto the SSSC, representative of three female teachers and ten male teachers. G. H. Carter of the Brighton school was elected chairman of the movement, and C. J. Planner of Middle Park as secretary. Hanson remained on the committee as a general representative. Planner stated in his missive to the department that one of the primary objectives for the 1899/1900 season was to gain permission to include the competition for the RHS silver medallion as one of the items on the program for the combined demonstration.⁷²² In the face of continued fatalities, swimming clubs in the state schools remained important, and as the *Australasian* correspondent mused:

It is not easy to calculate arithmetically the value of these swimming clubs, but such fatalities as that in the waterhole at Richmond last week bring home the fact that the most elementary ability to swim may be the saving of a life, and the number of children of both sexes who have acquired that ability through the means of these state school clubs can already be counted by hundreds.⁷²³

The press continued to offer constructive suggestions, based on successful schools programs both in New South Wales and in England. One such example is the *Australasian* correspondent's suggestion to award certificates to Melbourne schoolchildren learning to swim, citing the example of the London Schools Swimming Association.⁷²⁴ By the conclusion of the 1899/1900 season, it was seen that the schools movement required a government appointed instructor, as South Australia had done by employing Charles Bastard.⁷²⁵

With the consolidation of swimming as part of the state school curriculum, youth swimming appeared to thrive at VASA sanctioned carnivals, as VASA continued to

⁷²¹ Public Records Office of Victoria, Education Department, VPRS794: Central Registered Correspondence Files 1873-1986, P0000/947, 99/43396, 'Swimming', 6 December 1899.

⁷²² Public Records Office of Victoria, Education Department, VPRS794: Central Registered Correspondence Files 1873-1986, P0000/947, 99/44570, 'Swimming', 15 December 1899.

⁷²³ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 16 December 1899, p. 1364.

⁷²⁴ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 23 December 1899, p. 1432.

⁷²⁵ 'Overarm', 'Swimming', *Weekly Times*, 7 April 1900, p. 18. Despite the rapid progress of the schools' movement, this objective was not fulfilled until 1910, when May Cox was appointed as the government organiser of swimming. See Sweetman, Long and Smyth, *A History of State Education in Victoria*, p. 139.

provide boys events, and occasionally a girls' race. The George Gall Cup in particular flourished in this period, due to the increased numbers of boys being taught swimming. The event soon became established as a method of talent identification, with the winners lionised in the Melbourne press. Given the number of prominent Victorian senior swimmers who had won the event in past years, it was seen by some press sources as a preview to the champions of the future.⁷²⁶ A notable example of this was the 1898 winner, Vincent Coutie, who was rewarded with his school portrait published in *Punch*, along with his victories for the year to date.⁷²⁷

However, administrative problems impacted somewhat on the event in these years, prompting the press to make constructive suggestions so as not to discourage the boys taking part. In 1897, funding issues surrounding the George Gall Cup led to the event being swum in April, at the conclusion of the season. Press correspondents expressed their displeasure that the event would be held so late in the season, as it was seen that boys would not be fit enough to contest the event, and called on VASA to exert some authority over the scheduling of events.⁷²⁸ As the *Leader* correspondent stated, 'the swimming season had practically closed and most of the swimmers had gone out of training'.⁷²⁹ The next year, when discussing the staging of the 1898 event, the *Australasian* correspondent stated that given the furore over the scheduling of the event the previous season, he was of the opinion that the number of events would be reduced from three to two, to be held on the same day.⁷³⁰ However, VASA chose, upon review, to keep to the original format, drawing the ire of the *Australasian* correspondent, who declared:

I consider this a grave mistake. For grown-up men such an afternoon's swimming would be severe enough, and to put such a strain on a growing boy, under 16, is incurring a totally needless risk. Two races, with a possible third in the event of a tie, should be ample to prove who is the best boy swimmer, and I hope to hear of this decision being reviewed. Such conditions will, to my mind, tend rather to discourage than encourage young swimmers. I am not thinking so much of the effect upon the winner as upon the losers, for it is the poorer swimmers who usually feel the strain the most.⁷³¹

⁷²⁶ 'Running Header', 'Swimming', *Leader*, 10 April 1897, p. 14.

⁷²⁷ 'Winner of the George Gall Bequest Cup', *Melbourne Punch*, 3 March 1898, p. 181.

⁷²⁸ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 27 March 1897, p. 699.

⁷²⁹ 'Running Header', 'Swimming', *Leader*, 10 April 1897, p. 14.

⁷³⁰ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 4 December 1897, p. 1225.

⁷³¹ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 18 December 1897, p. 1339.

Given the increased numbers that were participating in these youth events, and the perceived importance of youth events as developing future Victorian champions, these boys needed to be encouraged. Another boys' championship event, the City of St Kilda Solicitors' Trophy, was added in 1899. Like the George Gall Cup, it was open to boys under the age of sixteen, and was a series of three races.⁷³² However, unlike the George Gall event, all races were swum from scratch, and the winner could 'fairly claim to be the champion of boys up to that age'.⁷³³

The popularity and significance of the boys' races at VASA carnivals appears to have increased in direct correlation with the development of swimming in the state schools. While boys' races had always been included on programs, with the view of 'cultivating junior talent',⁷³⁴ they were assigned little significance in press reports on carnivals. The George Gall Cup, the most prestigious youth event on the calendar, initially received only coverage of results. As swimming was gradually incorporated into the Victorian curriculum, and the numbers of children learning to swim increased, so too did the provision for youth competitors at club and VASA carnivals. Clearly, VASA and their associated clubs wished to capitalise on this development, including greater numbers of schools' races and boys' races on their programs. Their motivations were undoubtedly manifold, as a greater representation of these youth swimmers at carnivals increased profits and developed future Victorian representative swimmers.

More importantly, young boys and girls were able to participate in an activity that had both healthful and humanitarian benefits. The press also had some influence on the increased popularity of boys' races across the years examined, which was largely fostered through their continued promotion of the need for swimming lessons in the Melbourne schools. Their vested interest in promoting swimming for young people as a worthwhile and necessary activity resulted in detailed and celebratory coverage on youth swimming races and events. To this end, it was the press correspondents who assigned meaning to these youth races, by describing the competitors, rating their chances and speculating on results. It can be said that it was actually the press who

⁷³² 'Overarm', 'Swimming', *Weekly Times*, 21 January 1899, p. 26.

⁷³³ 'Swimming', *Leader*, 4 March 1899, p. 18.

⁷³⁴ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 25 January 1896, p. 162.

elevated the perceived status of youth swimming, given their blatant agenda regarding its importance.

4.7 Conclusions

The increasing emphasis on aquatic education in this period, and the consequent development of youth swimming in response, appears to have had positive implications for competitive swimming in Melbourne. VASA's initial willingness to address the need for the public to be schooled in lifesaving and resuscitation, in order to combat the significant number of drownings, brought the sport to the attention of the press. While swimming clubs and competitions had previously existed as sporting organisations and events, and undertaken for entertainment purposes, the sport was now being promoted as a beneficial and necessary activity. Swimming was now perceived by the press as being an activity that was humanitarian in nature, and therefore deserved greater support from the public. Press correspondents applauded the various clubs, and VASA as the general organisation, for their dedication in providing this public service. This positive perception of the activity led to increased press coverage of a more positive nature.

The press interpretation and representation of the sport as worthwhile undoubtedly reinforced its popularity, both to spectators and prospective participants. One pivotal development that occurred as a result of VASA's emphasis on humanitarianism was that the press correspondents finally began to consider VASA as a serious organisation, and implored them to do more in the way of public education in swimming. In the absence of an official schools system, and without a dedicated Lifesaving Society, the press's perception was that it was VASA's responsibility as the governing body for swimming in Victoria to supervise this. Given that the *Australasian* correspondent had derisively referred to VASA in 1894 as an organisation that 'seems to lack vitality, and is seldom heard of',⁷³⁵ this was a much more positive endorsement.

It was this renewed faith in VASA that prompted the press to push for them to initiate a movement for the provision of swimming lessons in the Melbourne state schools.

⁷³⁵ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 1 December 1894, p. 992.

While they did assist in initiating the movement, their official involvement in the state schools program after this point appears to be negligible, and restricted to assistance at carnivals. However, their dedication in organising the inauguration of the program once more drew positive comments from the press, and glowing reviews of the organisation and its activities. Significantly, the introduction of swimming into the state schools further reinforced the worthiness of the activity. Its inclusion in the Victorian school curriculum, at the expense of other lessons, demonstrated its practicality and quashed any remaining notions that swimming was a morally questionable activity. This was particularly the case for girls, as the press strongly supported the provision of swimming lessons for the fairer sex, provided they were undertaken separately to the boys. However, the promotion of the boys' activities far outweighed any coverage the girls received. Given the disapproval of the Education Department in regard to mixed carnivals, it appears that aspects of the activity were still viewed as morally questionable. Despite the endorsement of girls' swimming by the press, it appears that the girls' activities were not championed by the Education Department in any way. Rather, they were simply tolerated, or even ignored where possible.

Despite VASA's relative lack of involvement once the program had been introduced, it was undoubtedly the development of the state schools program in Melbourne that increased the status of youth competitive swimming in Melbourne. While VASA's actual administrative role in the program was negligible, they were still able to capitalise on the rapid development of swimming in the state schools, which in turn greatly enhanced the growth and development of their organisation. The increased number of young boys and girls learning to swim ensured a greater number of competitors in their carnivals. Coupled with the growth of the state schools' swimming clubs, and the affiliation of these with VASA, greater profits could be obtained. As the number of youth swimmers at carnivals grew, VASA and their associated clubs endeavoured to cater for these by adding extra youth events and schools' races on carnival programs. The press, in order to reinforce their view that youth swimming was a worthwhile activity, continued to promote these types of races heavily in their coverage. These combined actions served immeasurably in raising the profile of youth swimming races. Where once they had existed as novelty type events,

they were now serious competitive events, in that they were serving to develop future Victorian champions.

VASA were also able to benefit from the ease with which they insinuated themselves into the development of the schools program without actually holding an administrative role. As suggested by the press, they occupied more of an advisory position, providing counsel to the SSSC as well as officials and swimmers for demonstrations at Melbourne school carnivals. However, given their early involvement in the evolution of the state schools' program, they were essentially able to impose the practices of VASA upon the SSSC, establishing themselves as the advisory body for competitive swimming in Victoria and therefore reinforcing their importance, which was then promoted in the press. Thus, while it is important to note that VASA did not play a significant role in administrating the state schools swimming movement after its inauguration, their dedication in supporting the movement and responding proactively to the developments that occurred as a result of its popularity was highly beneficial to the growth of the association. By promoting a framework to support youth swimming, VASA were able to benefit both financially and competitively, and establish a breeding ground within the Melbourne state schools to furnish their competitive races.

Chapter Five

‘A Question of Propriety’? The Rise of Female Participation in Swimming in Melbourne

5.1 Introduction

As a necessary response to the warm Australian climate, and in consideration of the prevalence of beaches, baths and waterways in the colony, swimming was a pastime enjoyed by both sexes in the nineteenth century. Melbourne males made a rapid transition from participation in recreational activity to involvement in organised sport, with the establishment of the Victoria Swimming Club at St Kilda in 1867.⁷³⁶ However, for female swimmers, this transition took considerably longer for a number of reasons. As Stell suggests, there were several social, medical, aesthetic and temperamental arguments put forward by the male sex in the nineteenth century to limit female participation in sport, and to keep sport a purely male enterprise.⁷³⁷ Therefore, it is unsurprising that the history of swimming in Melbourne, as suggested by the press, is an account of male competition and superiority. Conversely, the press representation of women’s competitive swimming in the period under examination in this thesis was largely one of passivity and understatement.

As demonstrated in previous chapters, Melbourne women were often depicted in the press as frivolous spectators, attending the scheduled Ladies’ Day events in support of male sporting endeavours, which was consistent with their expected gender role. Very little mention was made of their competitive efforts, and this view is endorsed by the official history of competitive swimming in Victoria, which does not raise the notion of a female Victorian swimmer until 1930.⁷³⁸ However, Victorian females were competing decades earlier than this, but their achievements were evidently not significant enough to warrant inclusion when measured against successful lady swimmers in other states, such as Fanny Durack, Mina Wylie and Annette Kellerman.⁷³⁹ The failure of the Swimming Victoria history to mention Kellerman is

⁷³⁶ McDonald, *The First 100*, p. 5.

⁷³⁷ M. K. Stell, *Half the Race: A History of Australian Women in Sport*, Collins/Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1991, p. 22.

⁷³⁸ See McDonald, *The First 100*, p. 47.

⁷³⁹ In 1912, Fanny Durack and Mina Wylie were the first female swimmers to represent Australia in an Olympic Games. Both represented New South Wales, and have been heralded by Raszeja as ‘Australia’s first international sporting heroines’. See Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*, p. 5, or

surprising, given that she spent a portion of her childhood in Melbourne, where she gave aquatic entertainments and in 1905, completed five, ten and fifteen mile swims of the Yarra River in record time.⁷⁴⁰ However, the omission of females from the early history of Victorian swimming should not indicate that the swimming feats of nineteenth century Melbourne women were not influential or significant.

With the development of the state school swimming program from early 1898, and the provision of learn-to-swim classes for young girls, the notion of women's competitive swimming began to take on increased significance in the Melbourne print media. By the close of the nineteenth century, Melbourne girls and women were competing in their own annual ladies' only swimming events, with considerable support from the press. This statement suggests that the ascension of swimming from a recreational pastime to competitive sport was considerably rapid. However, it was a much more gradual and understated process than it appears, with other contextual developments occurring well before this two-year period. This gradual change can also be attributed to a shift in public attitudes, coupled with the general reticence of Melbourne women to outwardly challenge the status quo. The transition of these women from spectators to competitors, in the face of surprisingly little opposition from the male sex, should therefore be examined.

This chapter will explore the various ways in which Melbourne women overcame some of the ideological barriers impeding their participation, and were able to pursue their competitive endeavours. More significantly, the role of the press will be examined in altering the prevailing social attitudes toward women's competitive swimming, and their reasons for promoting the activity. Discussing the role of women in competitive swimming in Melbourne in this period separately, and towards the conclusion of this thesis, would appear to support this ideological construction by the press that women's swimming was largely insignificant. However, chronicling the development of women's competitive swimming independently of the male sport, is not intended to infer that their sporting endeavours were inferior. Conversely, the

their respective entries in Vamplew, Moore, O'Hara, Cashman and Jobling (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian Sport* (Second Edition). Annette Kellerman was also a Sydney born swimmer who in 1902, set New South Wales records for the 100 yard and mile events, and went on to become an internationally renowned aquatic entertainer and motion picture star. See Lucas, 'Making a Statement'.

⁷⁴⁰ Lucas, 'Making a Statement', p. 27.

inclusion of a chapter devoted solely to women is intended to emphasise, rather than understate, the importance of their involvement in competitive swimming, both in their own activities and as part of the male, VASA-sanctioned carnivals. In terms of chapter placement, the discussion of women in the later stages of this thesis has been undertaken for chronological reasons, rather than in terms of their overall sporting influence. The development of women's competitive swimming in Melbourne occurred towards the later stages of the period under examination, and the placement of the chapter towards the conclusion of the thesis allows for the developments in the women's sport to be contextualised against other developments in swimming in Melbourne during this period.⁷⁴¹

5.2 Existing Attitudes Toward Swimming for Women

Kathleen McCrone states that in the late nineteenth century, popular theory dictated that in regard to men and women, their 'biological variations dictated significant differences in behaviour and roles'.⁷⁴² This is particularly applicable when examining women's involvement in recreational sporting activity in this period. Helen Lenskyj states that the inequality between the sexes was perpetuated by the dominant sociological group, white upper-class males, who promoted these cultural differences by means of their roles as societal experts on science, religion and medicine.⁷⁴³ From as early as the 1870s, a number of eminent physicians were espousing the theory that females had only a limited amount of energy, and this energy was required to ensure the adequate development of the reproductive organs, particularly during puberty. As McCrone states, the prevailing view was that if women and girls behaved in a masculine manner, and played sport competitively as the men did, 'their vital energy would be sapped and their health ruined', which would result in the production of degenerate offspring.⁷⁴⁴

⁷⁴¹ For a published version of this chapter, see Rachel Winterton, "'A Question of Propriety?'" Women's Competitive Swimming in Melbourne, 1893-1900', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 26, no. 14, November 2009, pp. 2086-2105.

⁷⁴² K. E. McCrone, 'Play Up! Play Up! And Play the Game! Sport at the Late Victorian Girls' Public Schools', in J. A. Mangan and R. J. Park (eds), *From Fair Sex to Feminism: Sport and the Socialisation of Women in the Industrial and Post-Industrial Eras*, Frank Cass, London, 1987, p. 104.

⁷⁴³ Helen Lenskyj, *Out of Bounds: Women, Sport and Sexuality*, Women's Press, Ontario, 1986, p. 12.

⁷⁴⁴ McCrone, 'Play Up! Play Up!' p. 104.

In this context, it is important to note the differentiation between recreational sport and competitive sport. Recreational sport was that undertaken for the purpose of leisure, not for the sake of competing. While competitive sport for women met with disapproval, the undertaking of moderate, accepted forms of recreational exercise was supported, from the perspective that it would benefit female health and produce healthy offspring. In the British context, McCrone suggests that it was only when females played sport in a masculine manner, vigorously or competitively, that the medical argument was raised, effectively silencing any sporting ambitions women may have harboured.⁷⁴⁵ In short, the medical reasoning behind women's participation in competitive sport was as much a form of social control as a genuine concern for the future British population. So, for a recreational sport to be approved for women, the activity had to be perceived as 'decorous, non-strenuous and non-serious'.⁷⁴⁶ Playing sport in this manner ensured that women were conforming to the characteristics of 'ideal womanhood', a popular ideological construction of the period, which dictated how women should behave in proper society. This theory had great implications for women's level of involvement in physical activity in colonial England, and Australia.

Any activity undertaken by the female sex in the late nineteenth century was subject to its adherence to the social construction of ideal womanhood. As detailed by Raszeja, a woman was required to exhibit the qualities necessary for life as a wife and mother, and therefore character traits such as gentleness, patience and respectability were desired. The qualities associated with participation in sport, such as strength and aggression, were not synonymous with the characteristics of ideal womanhood. Participation in competitive sporting activity also had the detractor of making women physically unattractive, as women with discernible muscles and tanned bodies were seen as abnormal.⁷⁴⁷ Conversely, acceptable sports for women were those that allowed for the maintenance and demonstration of femininity. Sports such as gymnastics were approved, as well as the socially fashionable activities such as tennis, croquet and golf. Participation in these sports allowed females to maintain a feminine demeanour, dress and manners.⁷⁴⁸ As Jennifer Hargreaves indicates, 'the cult of athleticism was in essence a cult of manliness, and so if women joined in on an

⁷⁴⁵ McCrone, 'Play Up! Play Up!' p. 104.

⁷⁴⁶ Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*, p. 20.

⁷⁴⁷ Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*, p. 16.

⁷⁴⁸ Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*, pp. 19-20.

equal footing they could hardly be simultaneously projected as sexual objects by men'.⁷⁴⁹ Sports were depicted as potent symbols of masculinity, chauvinism, power and competitiveness, and to succeed in sporting pursuits imbued the participant with these characteristics.⁷⁵⁰ While these were highly desirable for the male sex, society dictated that these character traits were not valued in a female. However, as Angela Burroughs has noted, the notion of 'ideal behaviour' for women was clearly a middle-upper class construction, as the habitual activities of working class and rural women were certainly not considered in this definition.⁷⁵¹

In line with these requirements, segregated recreational swimming, or bathing as it was commonly referred to for women, was deemed a highly appropriate activity for women to participate in. As Raszeja states, 'swimming combined the popular notions of the health-giving properties of salt-water bathing with the accepted need for women's exercise, and staged it in segregated, secluded surroundings'.⁷⁵² While the nature of the activity itself could be construed as morally questionable, due to the associated display of the body, Hargreaves states that swimming for women was approved because it was rarely conducted in conjunction with men. Therefore, it presented no challenge to the male activity, and any competitive characteristics women later learned were feminised, and therefore appropriate.⁷⁵³

Stell states that swimming instruction for women in Australia was common from the 1870s onward, but the notion of women's swimming in Melbourne was boosted in 1876 by the arrival of Harriett Elphinstone Dick, and her partner Alice Moon, who provided swimming lessons to Melbourne women.⁷⁵⁴ In this period, the majority of

⁷⁴⁹ Jennifer Hargreaves, 'Victorian Familism and the Formative Years of Female Sport', in J. A. Mangan and R. J. Park (eds), *From 'Fair Sex' to Feminism: Sport and the Socialisation of Women in the Industrial and Post-Industrial Eras*, Frank Cass, London, 1987, p. 142.

⁷⁵⁰ Jennifer Hargreaves, *Sporting Females: Critical Issues in the History and Sociology of Women's Sports*, Routledge, London, 1994, p. 43.

⁷⁵¹ Angela Burroughs, 'Women, Femininity and Sport: The Contribution of the "New Woman" to Nationhood', in Richard Cashman, John O'Hara and Andrew Honey (eds), *Sport, Federation, Nation*, Walla Walla Press, Sydney, 2001, p. 167.

⁷⁵² Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*, p. 18.

⁷⁵³ Hargreaves, 'Victorian Familism', p. 141.

⁷⁵⁴ Stell, *Half the Race*, p. 6. While Moon also acted as Dick's business partner, local folklore suggests that they were romantically involved. It is suggested that Dick fell in love with Moon, who was from Brighton, England, and they emigrated to Australia, residing in Brighton, Victoria, until Dick's death in 1902. However, the nature of their relationship is largely unsubstantiated. For further information, see Brighton Ourstory, 'Brighton's Queer Past', <http://www.brightonourstory.co.uk/history.htm>, accessed 20 April 2009.

women who swam recreationally were generally from the middle or upper classes, as there was little available time or money for most working class women to be involved in the activity.⁷⁵⁵ This class-based distinction was also partly due to the rise of the independent schools in this era. The more affluent schools constructed their own private swimming baths, where girls could be instructed in swimming and lifesaving techniques away from the general public.⁷⁵⁶ Stell suggests that from this perspective, the development of private girls' schools throughout Australia in this period contributed to the increased tolerance of women's swimming.⁷⁵⁷ Therefore, the upper middle class girls who attended these types of schools were more likely to have undergone swimming tutelage than their working class sisters.

However, while women's participation in recreational sport was not entirely frowned upon in the late nineteenth century, the popular view was still that women's involvement in competitive sport should be limited to spectatorship. Spectating was seen as a woman's proper role, as it 'reemphasised their natural passivity'.⁷⁵⁸ This practice not only served to preserve the femininity and health of the fairer sex, but established the notion of competitive sport as a male enterprise. Hargreaves suggests that at competitive events, women 'reinforced the superiority of men by adopting a spectator role as members of an admiring female audience watching the physical antics of men'.⁷⁵⁹ As McCrone states, 'to the muscular Christian gentleman a woman's only role in sport was to watch and applaud',⁷⁶⁰ or possibly to 'inspire and admire their menfolk and to encourage and give them sympathy when they erred'.⁷⁶¹ This theory is supported by the founder of the modern Olympic Games, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, who suggested in 1912 that the Olympic Games 'represents the solid period of manifestation of male sports', with 'the applause of women as a recompense'.⁷⁶² In terms of examining this principle in the context of competitive swimming in Melbourne in this period, women did initially attend primarily as

⁷⁵⁵ Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*, p. 5.

⁷⁵⁶ Stell, *Half the Race*, p. 39.

⁷⁵⁷ Stell, *Half the Race*, p. 38.

⁷⁵⁸ K. E. McCrone, *Playing the Game: Sport and the Physical Emancipation of English Women, 1870-1914*, University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, 1988, p. 281.

⁷⁵⁹ Hargreaves, 'Victorian Familism', p. 132.

⁷⁶⁰ McCrone, *Playing the Game*, p. 60.

⁷⁶¹ McCrone, *Playing the Game*, p. 163.

⁷⁶² Pierre de Coubertin, cited in Sheila Mitchell, 'Women's Participation in the Olympic Games 1900-1926', *Journal of Sport History*, vol. 4, no. 2, Summer 1977, p. 214.

spectators. The attendance of women as spectators at the male VASA-sanctioned carnivals was expected, and highly valued. However, the role of the female swimming spectator was much more dynamic than it appeared, which had later implications for the development of the female competitive sport.

5.3 The Feminine Role at Colonial Swimming Carnivals

The social constructs of the period dictated that the primary role of women in competitive swimming was to act as spectators at the male competitive events. However, they were not welcomed at all swimming competitions, and were only permitted to attend the designated Ladies' Day races. These competitions were commonly referred to as 'carnivals', and were specifically marketed to women and families, with plenty of popular entertainment and spectacle provided. The attendance of ladies at these male oriented swimming competitions, although originally frowned upon for reasons of propriety, soon became valued by the male population for reasons other than the entry fee they paid to attend. One reason, as Indian suggests, was that in nineteenth century sporting circles, it was realised that clubs, and consequently their social functions, would be more successful if women were included.⁷⁶³ Social activities were seen to be more enjoyable in mixed company, where the presence and social skills of women were welcomed.⁷⁶⁴ The female presence also reinforced the socially acceptable status of the activity. As Hess states in the context of his investigation into the role of women in Australian Rules football, the females were deemed to honour the game by their presence, and the attendance of middle and upper class women provided sporting activities with a certain amount of status and prestige.⁷⁶⁵

It can also be suggested that admitting women to carnivals was an attempt to sanitise swimming, and promote it as a wholesome, hygienic activity, dispelling the legacy of swimming as a morally questionable sport. While Indian raises the possibility that women were admitted to sporting events 'in a kind of superior, patronising way',⁷⁶⁶ it is unlikely that this is the case at nineteenth century swimming competitions. Women

⁷⁶³ Indian, 'Leisure in City and Suburb', p. 258.

⁷⁶⁴ Indian, 'Leisure in City and Suburb', p. 259.

⁷⁶⁵ Rob Hess, 'Case Studies in the Development of Australian Rules Football, 1896-1908', Doctoral thesis, School of Human Movement, Recreation and Performance, Victoria University, 2000, p. 110.

⁷⁶⁶ Indian, 'Leisure in City and Suburb', p. 260.

were actively encouraged to attend the designated Ladies' Day events, which were heavily marketed to women in the press. Each club generally hosted one Ladies' Day carnival each year, with any other carnivals strictly for men only. The Ladies' Day swimming carnivals were clearly popular events for women to attend, as in most cases press correspondents commented that the attendances were high, with 'the ladies predominating'.⁷⁶⁷ Any fundraiser VASA or club events were usually designated as Ladies' Day galas; for example, the Satchell Memorial Carnival was promoted as such an event.⁷⁶⁸ This reflects the financial and social value that women were perceived to add to these events.

Aside from the entertainment that was provided for women at these events, it is probable that swimming carnivals were attractive to female spectators for other reasons. As Raszeja states, swimming was ideal for women as a spectator sport. The rules were simple to understand, the sport was not violent and unlike most other spectator sports open to women, it was also possible for women to have had some experience in the art of swimming themselves.⁷⁶⁹ It is therefore likely that some of the women attended in order to appreciate the sporting aspect of carnivals. A large attraction for females may also have been the social aspect inherent in swimming carnivals, which they themselves established. According to Oriard, women played an important role in establishing American football as a social event,⁷⁷⁰ and this appears also to have been the case with swimming. This theory is reinforced by the popular perception of the nineteenth century press that women were more interested in the social aspects of sporting activity, rather than the activity itself.⁷⁷¹

In terms of the types of women who attended these swimming competitions, it is suggested that there were a range of ages and classes. According to Waterhouse, young, unmarried women were more likely to take part in activities outside the home, due to their improved working wages and increased leisure hours, than women with families.⁷⁷² Yet, the nature of the Ladies' Day events and their careful marketing suggest that on these days, it was perfectly acceptable for a man to bring his wife and

⁷⁶⁷ 'Melbourne Swimming Club', *St Kilda Advertiser*, 1 February 1896, p. 6.

⁷⁶⁸ See 'Amusements', *Age*, 12 February 1894, p. 8.

⁷⁶⁹ Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*, pp. 52-53.

⁷⁷⁰ Oriard, cited in Hess, 'Case Studies in the Development of Australian Rules Football', p. 116.

⁷⁷¹ Hess, 'Case Studies in the Development of Australian Rules Football', p. 115.

⁷⁷² Waterhouse, *Private Pleasures, Public Leisure*, p. 56.

children. Hess suggests that the press custom of commenting favourably on the female presence at sporting activity, however trivial it may have been, meant that the activity was therefore legitimised as a suitable pastime for both sexes.⁷⁷³ The opportunity was also provided for women to associate with men in an approved social setting,⁷⁷⁴ and this was important in terms of attracting female spectators. Sports that emphasised social interaction as a prelude to marriage, such as golf, croquet and tennis, were highly valued by women in this period.⁷⁷⁵

There may also have been some more superficial reasons that women attended nineteenth century swimming carnivals. Hess raises the point that part of the appeal of Australian Rules football for female spectators may have been the voyeuristic potential of the activity. As he states, sport could not only be appreciated for its athleticism, but it also 'enabled women to appreciate male bodies in a socially acceptable way'.⁷⁷⁶ In a swimming context, Raszeja suggests that in Sydney there was a high interest factor in witnessing the scantily clad young men competing in swimming events.⁷⁷⁷ On the occasions where females were permitted to attend male carnivals, costume requirements were strictly enforced. Participants at a Melbourne carnival in 1896 to which ladies were admitted were attired in 'the fashion of racing cyclists, except as to shoes and hose'.⁷⁷⁸ However, while the men were completely covered, upon entering the water their bathing attire clung to them tightly and left very little to the imagination of the ladies. As the *Punch* ladies' correspondent observed:

The winner of the quarter-mile race was a perfect swimmer, his powerful right arm moving through the water as if to music - and the ladies admired the strapping hero immensely. On coming out of the water they only had a brief view of him before he disappeared behind the canvas screen created in front of the boxes set apart for competitors. The arrangement was a proper one in every sense, and men whose neck-to-knee racing costumes poured streams of water as they went up the steps were thankful to get out of feminine eyesight so quickly.⁷⁷⁹

⁷⁷³ Hess, 'Case Studies in the Development of Australian Rules Football', p. 116.

⁷⁷⁴ Hess, 'Case Studies in the Development of Australian Rules Football', p. 114.

⁷⁷⁵ Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*, pp. 19-20.

⁷⁷⁶ Hess, 'Case Studies in the Development of Australian Rules Football', p. 113.

⁷⁷⁷ Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*, p. 52.

⁷⁷⁸ 'The Melbourne Swimming Club', *Age*, 27 January 1896, p. 3.

⁷⁷⁹ 'Minetta', 'Lady's Letter', *Melbourne Punch*, 19 January 1899, p. 63.

While the use of the term ‘voyeurism’ is suggestive of some kind of ‘illicit’ or ‘secret’ observation,⁷⁸⁰ this is actually highly relevant to swimming carnivals. Swimming carnivals were not ‘open’ activities, as they were completely enclosed within the respective baths in which they were held. Spectators could not crowd public areas to watch the competition, as was possible with some other popular spectator sports, such as Australian Rules football. Additionally, the only carnivals women were generally permitted to attend were ladies’ day events. Other carnivals were strictly forbidden for women, due to the improper costumes (or lack thereof) that often accompanied these men-only events. Therefore, the nature of these occasions as closed events undoubtedly contributed to a voyeuristic atmosphere. It is also probable that the legacy of swimming as a morally questionable activity, due to the associated display of the body, also proved irresistible to some female spectators.

Despite the positive effect that women had on the gate takings, women did not instantly become welcome at all carnivals and competitions staged by VASA and its associated clubs. In recognition of the rapidly increasing popularity of the sport with the fairer sex, ladies were admitted to the Melbourne club’s championship carnival in 1896 for the first time.⁷⁸¹ However, this appeared to be the exception to the rule. While this may seem illogical, there are a number of possible reasons for this systematic exclusion. A plausible explanation is the effect that female spectators had on the entries. At carnivals where women were present, the male participants were required to wear regulation VASA costumes, which were seen as fairly cumbersome and detracted from performance. These stringent costume regulations, as printed in the *Leader* in 1899, dictated that:

All competitors must wear costume (to be known as the association costume). In accordance with the following regulations: - a) Only dark blue or black costumes shall be worn; b) trunks of club colours must be worn outside the costume; c) trimmings may be used ad lib; d) the shoulder straps of costumes shall not be less than 2 inches wide; e) in the front the costume shall reach not lower than 2 inches below the pit of the neck; f) at the back the costume shall be cut straight from top of shoulder to top of shoulder; g) the costumes shall extend not less than 8 inches from the inside measurement of the leg downwards, and shall be cut in a straight line round the circumference of the leg; h) all costumes should be buttoned on the shoulders, and the arm hole shall be cut no more than 3 inches from the armpit.⁷⁸²

⁷⁸⁰ Hess, ‘Case Studies in the Development of Australian Rules Football’, p. 114.

⁷⁸¹ ‘Swimming’, *Age*, 29 February 1896, p. 8.

⁷⁸² ‘Swimming’, *Leader*, 25 March 1899, p. 17.

The Ballarat club, therefore, decided in 1896 that they would, as a test, exclude women from that year's carnival in an effort to boost the entries to events.⁷⁸³ However, this ban on female attendance was revoked when the club secured the services of Charles Cavill to give an aquatic exhibition at their 1897 carnival.⁷⁸⁴ It was no doubt anticipated that the gate takings to witness his feats would compensate for the poor entries.

However, it is also possible that the notion of competitive sport as a masculine domain led to the assumption that women would simply not be interested in witnessing serious swimming matches. Women were not initially invited to attend the annual sports of a swimming club, and their presence was only required at the ladies' day events, where the program contained more comedic and theatrical events than competitive races. Also, by dictating where and when women were permitted to attend, the male population were able to maintain control of the sport, and reinforce their superiority.

Women were also systematically excluded from another traditionally male institution that became popular with swimming clubs in this period, the annual smoke night. Smoke nights, the annual function where swimming clubs awarded prizes to their members, were prominent events that most swimming clubs adopted. These nights were, in much the same way as the competitions themselves, an opportunity for the club's prominent gentlemen to gather without the presence of women. The Melbourne club's 1895 smoke concert boasted the attendance of the Mayor of St Kilda, Councillor Conibere, and a number of members of the Legislative Assembly. As well as the distribution of prizes won over the season, the Zingan Septette Orchestra provided musical entertainment over the course of the evening.⁷⁸⁵

Despite the provision of culturally appropriate entertainment, women were not invited to attend these events. According to Indian, publicising an event as a 'smoke night' effectively excluded women by means of the expectation that ladies would not attend

⁷⁸³ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 12 December 1896, p. 1161.

⁷⁸⁴ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 23 January 1897, p. 172.

⁷⁸⁵ 'Social', *Table Talk*, 29 March 1895, p. 14.

a function where men were permitted to smoke.⁷⁸⁶ The status of these nights as administrative events also acted as another method of exclusion for women. In line with the status of sport as a masculine domain, matters of administration were also exclusive to the sterner sex. Smoke nights existed as an act of self-congratulation for the male committee, and for their achievements that season. These nights often concluded with a toast to the health of all prominent gentlemen involved with the club, with one 1896 smoke night speaker using the opportunity to wax lyrical on the continued success of the club:

He ... drew a graphic picture of a meeting that had been held in that very room ten years ago, when ten gentlemen assembled on a very wet night, with dripping umbrellas to form a swimming club, and pointed out that, notwithstanding the amount of cold water that had then been thrown on the proceedings, the club seemed to have thrived remarkably well.⁷⁸⁷

It is also doubtful whether some of the musical diversions provided by the members at these nights would have been suitable for women. At the South Melbourne club's 1896 smoke night, a number of respectable gentlemen provided renditions of well known songs, investing in them a great deal of dry and droll humour. One song that 'brought down the house' was suggestively entitled 'The Dirty Boy'.⁷⁸⁸ This fits with Indian's description of an 1898 cycling club smoke night, where it was related that 'no doubt the women would have found the words of the impromptu songs as upsetting as the smoke'.⁷⁸⁹ In essence, the VASA affiliated swimming clubs and carnivals were male dominated spaces, run by men for the benefit of men, with women playing a largely passive and supporting role.

In terms of women's active participation, rather than as passive spectators, there was limited scope for this within the VASA carnivals. Helen King states that there has

⁷⁸⁶ Indian, 'Leisure in City and Suburb', p. 260.

⁷⁸⁷ 'South Melbourne Swimming Club', *South Melbourne Record*, 27 March 1896, p. 5. It should be noted that according to this passage, the South Melbourne club was inaugurated in 1886. In actual fact, the club was operating much earlier than this. McDonald claims that the club was established on 15 November 1876, and this is supported by the South Melbourne Swimming Club 1881-82 annual report, which states that the 1881-82 season was its sixth in existence. See McDonald, *The First 100*, p. 1, and South Melbourne Swimming Club, 'Season 1881-82 Annual Report and Balance Sheet', *Ephemera (1881-1888)*, 3073/74, Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria.

⁷⁸⁸ 'South Melbourne Swimming Club', *South Melbourne Record*, 27 March 1896, p. 5.

⁷⁸⁹ Indian, 'Leisure in City and Suburb', p. 260.

been a great emphasis on the supporting role of women in sporting history,⁷⁹⁰ in that they were often refused membership to male sporting clubs. Therefore, they were relegated to auxiliary status, with their primary role to raise money for and support the men.⁷⁹¹ This has been observed in a limited fashion with regard to the VASA carnivals. For example, a committee comprised of the wives of members was appointed to award prizes for the ‘grotesque’ costumes donned by the men at an 1895 Melbourne club carnival.⁷⁹² The ladies’ bracelet event was also a key feature at most ladies’ day carnivals, and a popular event in terms of entries. Male competitors were nominated by ladies to compete in the event, and the winner was awarded an item of jewellery, which was then presented to the lady nominator.⁷⁹³ In some cases, the prize was subscribed for by ladies in the district.⁷⁹⁴ One ladies’ bracelet event in 1896 drew 37 entries, which was more than were received for the blue ribbon event, the 100 yards Open Handicap.⁷⁹⁵

While there was a minor component of female participation in this type of auxiliary event, in reality it emphasised the expectation that women would maintain a passive role in sport, with the men taking centre stage. The motivations surrounding the ladies’ bracelet event can be compared to the North American practice of parading women before football games, which had ‘a strong medieval overtone, harking back to an age of chivalry and pageantry, where young men vied on the “field of honour” for the attention and affection of young women’.⁷⁹⁶ While it can be suggested that this passive, supportive role women played at VASA-sanctioned carnivals was not advantageous to the cause of women’s participation, their role was less subordinate than it appears. This passivity was integral in demonstrating support for men’s sporting activity, and this support was required in order for women to undertake their own physical activities. McCrone suggests that apart from supporting the men, spectating offered women new social outlets and a chance to identify with a large group of individuals. Also importantly, spectating was an important step on the road

⁷⁹⁰ Helen King, ‘The Sexual Politics of Sport: An Australian Perspective’, in Richard Cashman and Michael McKernan (eds), *Sport in History: The Making of Modern Sporting History*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1979, p. 69.

⁷⁹¹ King, ‘The Sexual Politics of Sport’, p. 79.

⁷⁹² ‘Social’, *Melbourne Punch*, 7 February 1895, p. 93.

⁷⁹³ ‘The Brighton Swimming Club’, *Age*, 25 February 1895, p. 3.

⁷⁹⁴ See ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 11 January 1896, p. 67.

⁷⁹⁵ ‘Swimming’, *Argus*, 25 January 1896, p. 4.

⁷⁹⁶ Andrew Doyle, cited in Hess, “‘Ladies are Specially Invited’”, p. 120.

to participation. Their presence at sporting activities legitimised their sporting connection, and familiarised them with sporting competition.⁷⁹⁷

Active female participation, in the form of swimming at VASA carnivals, did not occur often. The exception to this was the female role of entertainers, where girls and young women sometimes took to the water as aquatic performers. Traditionally, it was young girls who undertook this role in conjunction with male family members. Professor Beaumont, a prominent aquatic entertainer of the period, often used his young daughters in his entertainments.⁷⁹⁸ While their role as aquatic entertainers was, again, in support of the male enterprise, Parker states that, in the British context at least, the positive publicity these female entertainers received was influential in dispelling the myth that females were frail and physically incapable of such feats.⁷⁹⁹ In terms of competitive racing, there was very little scope for this at VASA carnivals. Ladies' races were held infrequently at carnivals, but did occur as early as 1894.⁸⁰⁰ The entries for these races were generally very few, with an 1895 ladies' race staged at Brighton attracting only three competitors.⁸⁰¹ However, this particular race drew the attention of the *Australasian* correspondent, who commented favourably on the venture. While acknowledging that there were only three entries, he stated that:

Still, it is a beginning, and until the ladies are numerous and energetic enough to form a club of their own I hope the gentlemen will encourage them by affording opportunities for racing. It may be said that racing is not a necessary part of swimming education, but within due limits I consider it of the greatest importance. Such contests as we witnessed on Saturday draw the attention of other ladies to the art of swimming, induce emulation, and improve the speed, style and stamina of the competitors. With an increase in numbers efficient teachers will come forward, and the result will be the spread of an exercise which is as delightful and useful to the one sex as other.⁸⁰²

He also presented the case of Harriet Elphinstone Dick's earlier women's swimming galas as examples of what should be occurring, and suggested that with the introduction of lifesaving classes and the examples set by other colonies, there should be some permanent progress in the area of women's swimming. Reportedly, several ladies' clubs already existed in New South Wales, and the women held their own

⁷⁹⁷ McCrone, *Playing the Game*, p. 281.

⁷⁹⁸ For example, see 'Satchell Memorial Aquatic Sports', *Argus*, 15 January 1894, p. 7.

⁷⁹⁹ Parker, 'An Urban and Historical Perspective', p. 305.

⁸⁰⁰ 'Swimming', *Sportsman*, 30 January 1894, p. 6.

⁸⁰¹ 'The Brighton Swimming Club', *Age*, 25 February 1895, p. 3.

⁸⁰² 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 2 March 1895, p. 403.

carnivals.⁸⁰³ Despite this endorsement, however, there was no significant increase in the number of ladies' races held at VASA carnivals. The *Brighton Leader* reported in 1896 that the ladies' race at the Brighton carnival had been cancelled due to only two entries being received.⁸⁰⁴

Despite the lack of criticism from the press in regard to the ladies' races, the races were sporadic in nature, and there was a prolonged lack of interest from the ladies in terms of participation. This suggests that there were still a number of barriers women needed to negotiate in order to compete. The reticence of females to participate in the occasional competitive races held at the VASA-sanctioned carnivals can be attributed to the indignity of parading in wet, clingy clothing, in front of the hundreds of males that were present at the VASA-sanctioned carnivals. As Hargreaves suggests, respectable women needed to be assured that an activity was not morally questionable before participating in it.⁸⁰⁵ For most middle or upper class women, appearing in front of a large audience in a relative state of undress did not fall within this category. Given that all events sanctioned by VASA were strictly amateur, with no incentive of financial profit, it is unlikely that these events would have drawn any professional female swimmers, such as swimming teachers. So while there was tentative press support, participation in VASA carnivals was still problematic for women. This can be attributed to the perceived and actual barriers for women to participate in competitive swimming generally, with the popular notion of competition as a masculine pursuit undoubtedly a major reason for this reticence.

5.4 Barriers to Participation and Inclusion

Some of the general barriers to women's participation in sport have already been examined in this chapter, but there were also some additional hurdles for women to overcome in terms of competitive sport, and competitive swimming more specifically. In participating in competitive swimming, women were subject to a number of

⁸⁰³ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 2 March 1895, p. 403. The statement regarding the presence of women's swimming clubs in Sydney in this period is interesting, as according to multiple historians, the first Sydney ladies' club was not established until 1902. It is possible these clubs are not considered official from the perspective that they were not affiliated with a state association, while the inaugural Sydney club in 1902 was granted conditional affiliation. See Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*, p. 59, or Phillips, *Swimming Australia*, p. 17.

⁸⁰⁴ 'Brighton Swimming Club', *Brighton Leader*, 18 January 1896, p. 2.

⁸⁰⁵ Hargreaves, *Sporting Females*, p. 96.

administrative and ideological barriers, as well as the physiological problems that would reportedly ensue. One of the primary problems was access, and Phillips asserts that within public baths women had less than half the time allocated to the men, as women supposedly did not require as much access.⁸⁰⁶ Therefore, if women wanted to be able to swim at a reasonable standard, they were expected to do so in a reduced time period. Parker states that in England, pool time for the ladies was dependent on male baths administrators, as well as male swimming club committees,⁸⁰⁷ and it is probable that this was also the case in Melbourne. As well as the time restrictions imposed on the women by baths administrators, working class women often did not possess sufficient leisure time to participate in the competitive aspect of the sport, which would have involved training, participation in club activities, and later the competitions themselves.⁸⁰⁸

In terms of actual participation, another obstacle to competitive swimming was the restrictive swimming costumes women were expected to wear, so that the body was not exposed. Sex segregated swimming meant that costumes were freer than they would have been in mixed company, with early female bathing dresses consisting of a long-sleeved full-length dress and hat,⁸⁰⁹ but were still relatively cumbersome. The upper classes were able to import their costumes from Europe, but the lower classes were forced to make their own. It was recommended by women's magazines that these costumes should be made from cotton serge or twill, as these materials did not cling to the body, but they were heavy and therefore difficult to swim in.⁸¹⁰ From cursory examination of some of these barriers, it is immediately clear that competitive swimming for women was heavily skewed toward the middle and upper classes, who could afford the time and funds to do so.

However, regardless of class, there was also the general stigma of women's competitive sporting involvement to overcome. In regard to approved female sporting and recreational activity, competitive sport was perceived as an indicator of masculinity. Female participation in competitive sport was incongruous with the aims

⁸⁰⁶ Phillips, *Swimming Australia*, p. 11.

⁸⁰⁷ Parker, 'An Urban and Historical Perspective', p. 311.

⁸⁰⁸ Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*, p. 5.

⁸⁰⁹ Parker, 'An Urban and Historical Perspective', p. 284.

⁸¹⁰ Stell, *Half the Race*, p. 7.

and objectives of the activity, as sport was essential in developing masculine traits such as manliness and leadership.⁸¹¹ Given that these were not socially desirable traits for the nineteenth century female, any activity women participated in needed to be significantly different, in order to prevent the masculine nature of sport from being corrupted. Therefore, the activities that were approved for women to participate in were 'decorous, non strenuous and designed for perpetuation of the British race and its morals'.⁸¹²

As McCrone suggests, female participants needed to play in moderation while maintaining their femininity, and play under conditions that minimised threats to modesty and femininity in order to gain public acceptance, and the activities they participated in had to reflect these values.⁸¹³ It was also highly desirable for female competitive activities to have a utilitarian function.⁸¹⁴ One of the primary reasons swimming for women was approved was its status as a 'useful' activity. Competitive swimming was endorsed due to its role in developing fast swimming, which would assist in the saving of a person from drowning. Therefore it could be construed that females were not competing for the sake of competition, but for the greater good of society.

McCrone also states that in the English context, sport for women in the late nineteenth century was a repressive and constraining mechanism. It idealised maleness, segregated the sexes and rendered women inferior to men. However, it could also be transforming and liberating, and offered women the opportunity to challenge some of the key principles underlying the popular ideology of femininity.⁸¹⁵ In regard to competitive sport for women, there were a number of cultural constructs that dictated how they should compete. Participation in individual sports was much more acceptable than in team games, with team games considered undesirable for women as they were inconsistent with the ideology of how women should play. They were seen as 'unbecoming', 'freakish' and 'frivolous'.⁸¹⁶ Conversely, individual sports were desirable because they fitted the appropriate criteria for women's involvement.

⁸¹¹ McCrone, 'Play Up! Play Up!' p. 117.

⁸¹² Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*, p. 19.

⁸¹³ McCrone, 'Play Up! Play Up!' p. 118.

⁸¹⁴ Hargreaves, 'Victorian Familism', p. 137.

⁸¹⁵ McCrone, *Playing the Game*, p. 2.

⁸¹⁶ McCrone, *Playing the Game*, p. 127.

They generally had a longer history of female participation, and often involved membership in a socially exclusive club. According to McCrone, this rendered them more acceptable as the images associated with these socially exclusive clubs were much less competitive and not as overtly masculine.⁸¹⁷

More notably, as McCrone suggests, individual sports were more likely to fit the social construct of how women should participate in physical activity. Bodily contact and displays of strength or intensity were rare, competitions were sex-segregated, and the women involved often made compromises that emphasised their femininity. Families could take part in individual sports, which enabled married women to compete without compromising their familial role. Therefore, their activities were not perceived as threatening to the existing male dominance of athleticism, and in some cases reinforced this male supremacy. Women's competitive sport often required the patronage of men as organisers or advisers, which reinforced their higher position, ensured their approval, and prevented criticism.⁸¹⁸ As Hargreaves also states, by partaking in their own approved activities and not threatening the existing patriarchal sporting order by impinging on the male institution, women were able to gradually extend the scope and nature of their participation.⁸¹⁹

In line with such views, Raszeja suggests that competitive swimming was the first acceptable and recommended sport for women.⁸²⁰ As she states:

By virtue of its long association with health, by virtue of its 'hidden' qualities, and by virtue of the lack of obvious physical demands it made upon its participants, women's competitive swimming escaped the constraints put upon the newer, more 'public' sports ... It was a sport which epitomised the contradictions and ambivalences surrounding[sic] the development of women's physical liberation. It involved the incorporation of the masculine qualities of stamina, endurance and striving for physical excellence, yet, conducted in a cool, aquatic environment, it retained a feminine image of gracefulness and non-exertion. It required the wearing of costumes often skimpier than those in penny peep-shows, yet because they were for a specific purpose, a purpose with long-standing medical and scientific sanction, they raised few eyebrows ... it posed no threat to the image and ideals of 'respectable' womanhood ...⁸²¹

⁸¹⁷ McCrone, *Playing the Game*, p. 154.

⁸¹⁸ McCrone, *Playing the Game*, p. 185.

⁸¹⁹ Hargreaves, 'Victorian Familism', p. 137.

⁸²⁰ Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*, p. 2.

⁸²¹ Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*, pp. 43-44.

Another key reason for the public approval for women's competitive swimming was that it remained largely segregated from the male sport. Women bathed recreationally at separate times, which ensured that the competitive sport could also develop free of the rules governing behaviour in mixed society, in regard to dress.⁸²² Therefore, the female competitive swimmer was able to escape censure, despite the sport being neither fashionable nor frivolous. The sport was not perceived to present a threat to the established order, or to the perceived idea of womanhood. It did not provoke hostility or outrage within the general public, or incite a great deal of public ridicule.⁸²³

In reference to the early women's races that took place at VASA carnivals, it is significant that these races were sometimes referred to as 'novelty' events in press coverage. A press correspondent reporting on the prospective races at the 1895 Brighton carnival categorised the ladies' event as part of the novelty component, alongside comical events such as tilting tournaments, greasy pole races and the harlequinade.⁸²⁴ It can be demonstrated that these events were considered novelties because of their rare inclusion, but it is also possible that this term was employed by males in order to reinforce women's role as the inferior sex. By assigning a comical emphasis to these events, the subconscious fear that the women would shame the men in the sporting arena was somewhat assuaged.⁸²⁵

This 'novelty' terminology can also be considered in connection with the fancy dress novelty races that were held at the vast majority of carnivals. While it is suggested by the nature of the press coverage that these events were put on for the benefit of women attending Ladies' Day events, often the winners of these events were males dressed as females. These costumes often bordered on the ludicrous, with competitors attired as characters such as 'Little Red Riding Hood' creating 'roars of laughter'.⁸²⁶ One participant in the 1896 Melbourne carnival was attired as the 'New Woman', whose paper costume and the subsequent loss thereof in the water also provoked

⁸²² Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*, p. 41.

⁸²³ Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*, p. 25.

⁸²⁴ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 23 February 1895, p. 355.

⁸²⁵ McCrone, *Playing the Game*, p. 281.

⁸²⁶ 'The Brighton Swimming Club', *Age*, 25 February 1895, p. 3.

much hilarity.⁸²⁷ His costume, according to the *Australasian* correspondent, was ‘sufficiently grotesque to evoke loud laughter’.⁸²⁸ Another gentleman in the same race was attired as the ‘New Girl in Old Clothes’.⁸²⁹ The use of these characters for inciting amusement was highly symbolic.

The ‘New Woman’, or the ‘New Girl’ as she was sometimes referred to, was the symbolic figurehead of women’s emancipation and a popular topic of public debate in the final years of the nineteenth century. At her most radical, she ‘challenged the most basic social institutions and beliefs, including marriage’ and ‘forced the re-conceptualisation of society’s view of womanhood’.⁸³⁰ As Parratt states, a key component of the ‘New Woman’ was her emerging sense of physicality.⁸³¹ It was this aspect that the public latched onto in professing their disapproval of the ‘New Woman’. Raszeja states that the image of the ‘New Woman’ and her sporting achievements ‘summed up women’s attempts to transgress the dividing line between the sexes’.⁸³² Participation in competitive sport, and the subsequent adoption of all the associated masculine qualities that it was meant to foster, was seen to be symbolic of the attempt by the ‘New Woman’ to overthrow patriarchy. Therefore, caricaturists frequently used images of sporting women to ridicule the idea of the ‘New Woman’ and to nullify their effect on society by making fun of their athletic efforts.⁸³³

It is likely that the adoption of ‘New Woman’ costumes at swimming carnivals was a reflection of these values. As a popular point of political humour at the time, it was natural that this would be reflected in wider society. Yet, it possibly served the purpose it was intended for in the press, ridiculing women’s attempts to seriously compete in the same manner as men. In a hegemonic fashion, it was the women who were supposed to be amused by these forms of comic representation, further reinforcing the importance of ideal womanhood in late nineteenth century society. However, this is not to suggest that men were not generally supportive of women’s efforts to compete. Popular opinion dictated that they should be, given the

⁸²⁷ ‘Melbourne Swimming Club’, *Age*, 27 January 1896, p. 3.

⁸²⁸ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 1 February 1896, p. 212.

⁸²⁹ ‘Costumes in the Fancy Costume Race’, *Melbourne Punch*, 30 January 1896, p. 77.

⁸³⁰ Parratt, ‘Athletic “Womanhood”’, p. 142.

⁸³¹ Parratt, ‘Athletic “Womanhood”’, p. 142.

⁸³² Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*, p. 23.

⁸³³ Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*, p. 23.

humanitarian and healthful benefits the sport provided. As Raszeja also states, the inclusion of women's races in carnivals was beneficial to the attendance. Competing women would bring their families, and more males would attend to watch the women swimming.⁸³⁴ However, men needed to control the form in which women competed, so they did not 'feminise' their masculine sporting activities.

It should be noted that these occasional ladies' races at VASA carnivals received very little press coverage, apart from the listing of results. The *Brighton Leader* appears to be the only source which makes some comment on the actual competitive element, complaining about the handicapping in the 1895 ladies' race:

Miss N. Nicholls was given ten seconds start of Miss K. Edmonds, which the latter young lady had no chance of making up. Emily Fagg, with eight seconds head start, also beat her. If three seconds each had been deducted from Miss Fagg's and Miss Nicholls' handicap the finish would have been closer.⁸³⁵

However, this was the exception to the rule, and it must be questioned why the press coverage of these races was limited, but not critical. It should be noted that the premier (and most prestigious) swimming club, Melbourne, did not hold races for women, and their carnivals commandeered the most press attention. Nevertheless, given the controversy surrounding women's competitive sport in this period, it is surprising that these women's races did not garner more coverage. Mixed bathing was still forbidden in Melbourne, yet the women who swam in front of men at these events not only escaped censure, but were commended by press correspondents. Clearly, women's swimming races were not considered hugely controversial, and were being undertaken in the right spirit. The women that competed in these races were still feminine, submissive to the male competitors and were not demonstrably competitive. Undoubtedly, their sporting talent was also no threat to the males taking part.

It is suggested that rather than being serious competitors, the women involved in these races were perhaps relatives of the male competitors. Therefore, as long they were not threatening the masculine institution, and were solely reliant on men to provide them with these opportunities, the administrators of these events were happy to indulge these pioneering women. However, in much the same manner as the passive role of

⁸³⁴ Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*, p. 54.

⁸³⁵ 'Brighton Aquatic Sports', *Brighton Leader*, 2 March 1895, p. 3.

women as spectators, the inauspicious nature of these races paved the way for a distinct brand of female competitive sport. The lack of participation in the ladies' races staged at the VASA carnivals suggested that Melbourne women were uncomfortable with this format, and another solution was required for women to swim competitively, whilst still maintaining their femininity and respectability.

5.5 'Not a Swimming Animal': Building a Case for Women's Carnivals

Despite the widespread popularity of recreational bathing, women were still not perceived as competent swimmers. In reference to this problem, the *Punch* correspondent was typically blunt in an 1898 column, stating that:

Women do not swim. There are exceptions, but they are comparatively so rare that it is safe to say that woman is not a swimming animal. Amongst any twenty women who might be present when a child falls into the sea it is almost certain that there will not be one swimmer.⁸³⁶

However, Phillips suggests that there was a boom in women's competitive swimming in this period, and he attributes this to three major factors, namely the general acceptance of the activity, access to tuition and the opportunities provided within the education system. These increased opportunities ensured that by the 1890s, the popularity of the sport meant that the inclusion of women's races in swimming club programs was desirable.⁸³⁷ It is noted that ladies' races became more popular on VASA carnival programs from approximately 1895 onwards, which is testament to the growing public acceptance of the activity. However, an examination of press coverage suggests that the boom in women's swimming in this period was also assisted by the popularity of bathing with the Melbourne gentry, and the representation of this in press coverage. By reporting on swimming as a fashionable activity, and highlighting its popularity with the social elite, a trickle down effect was created, with women naturally seeking to emulate their social betters.

From 1896 onwards, press columns espousing the benefits of recreational swimming for women became commonplace, with these columns often penned by female correspondents. One such column suggested that swimming improved the figure, with the chest becoming more developed and the waist smaller. This was compared with

⁸³⁶ *Melbourne Punch*, 13 January 1898, p. 22.

⁸³⁷ Phillips, *Swimming Australia*, p. 17.

cycling, a popular sport for females in this era, where it was reported that the activity enlarged the waist with ‘fearful rapidity’.⁸³⁸ This was, as the lady correspondent dramatically declared, ‘a consummation but few devoutly wish ... the average smart Melbourne girl is not at all willing to adopt the kind of figure favoured by a certain set of women in our midst, who regard intemperance, corsets and cigarette smoking with equal horror’.⁸³⁹ Another article in the *Australasian* in 1896 provided instructions on teaching girls how to swim, and on the important issue of bathing costumes for women. The column suggested that in putting together a swimming costume, ladies should follow the prescribed fashion guidelines:

Avoid frills and furbelows. Push back all the hair on the forehead under the rubber cap, substituting an artificial fringe of Polish hair, warranted to curl tightly however wet it becomes. This is tucked into the rubber cap, which is then concealed by a smart red silk handkerchief, tied into a bow on the top of the head. A neatly fitting bodice and knickers, cut in one, with an added gored skirt, not too short, looks well, and a broad black or blue canvas belt round the waist. Many also wear stockings.⁸⁴⁰

However, it appears that this was wishful thinking on the correspondent’s part, as one female correspondent declared that the majority of ladies’ costumes were ‘of the most primitive kind, and one looks in vain for even a suggestion of those fetching French bathing dresses which Continental women wear with such grace and style’.⁸⁴¹ She blamed this lack of fashion sense on the lack of mixed bathing in Melbourne, in comparison to Europe where it was the norm. As she reported, ‘Angelina must take her morning dip in quite a different portion of the sea to that where Edwin disports himself, with the result that if Edwin’s is a costume notable for its economy of material, Angelina’s wanting in smartness is equally shocking’.⁸⁴²

The cause of ladies’ swimming was also bolstered by reports of prominent Melbourne women taking up the activity recreationally. The female *Punch* correspondent declared in 1896 that:

The latest society craze is swimming, and you would be amused could you see some of our smartest women nobly following Lady Brassey’s example and bathing every morning at St Kilda. The majority hate wetting their hair and

⁸³⁸ ‘Minetta’, ‘Lady’s Letter’, *Melbourne Punch*, 20 January 1896, p. 71.

⁸³⁹ ‘Minetta’, ‘Lady’s Letter’, *Melbourne Punch*, 20 January 1896, p. 71.

⁸⁴⁰ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 31 October 1896, p. 850.

⁸⁴¹ ‘Minetta’, ‘Lady’s Letter’, *Melbourne Punch*, 10 December 1896, p. 479.

⁸⁴² ‘Minetta’, ‘Lady’s Letter’, *Melbourne Punch*, 10 December 1896, p. 479.

getting their arms and neck horribly sunburnt; but, of course, what Lady Brassey does must be imitated at the cost of every possible convenience.⁸⁴³

Lady Brassey was the wife of Lord Brassey, the current governor of Victoria, who had been appointed in October 1895.⁸⁴⁴ Both the Brasseys had a keen interest in swimming and bathing, with Lord Brassey often attending Hegarty's Baths in St Kilda with the current Premier of Victoria, George Turner, who was a prominent member of the Melbourne Swimming Club.⁸⁴⁵ Lady Brassey's bathing habits were followed keenly by the popular press, and especially by the *Punch* ladies' correspondent. According to *Punch*, Lady Brassey bathed before 7.00 am each morning at Hegarty's Baths in St Kilda, and was taking lessons from a Miss Simmons, who 'is as expert as a mermaid'.⁸⁴⁶ From 1896, Hegarty's Baths in St Kilda received the regular patronage of Lady Brassey and the Hon. Mrs Freeman-Thomas, who would cycle down to the baths for their bathe. To accommodate the female sex, Hegarty's Baths provided accommodation for bicycles, and a special tea room for their exclusive use.⁸⁴⁷

It is worthwhile to note that the cycling craze in Melbourne coincided with the period of rapid development of women's swimming. Cycling became a widely popular recreational pursuit for women from the mid 1890s, and, like women's swimming, was popularised by factors such as fashion, class-consciousness and a desire for independence.⁸⁴⁸ The two sports were significantly different, but as two of the more fashionable sports for middle and upper class women in this period, it seems that they complemented each other rather than competing with each other for prominence. In fact, the emergence of the cycling craze was integral to the popularity of women's swimming. Fiona Kinsey states that the safety bicycle created numerous opportunities for emancipated middle and upper class women who were seeking recreation.⁸⁴⁹ Not only could women now cycle for social and health reasons, they could now transport

⁸⁴³ 'Minetta', 'Lady's Letter', *Melbourne Punch*, 10 December 1896, p. 479.

⁸⁴⁴ Davis McCaughey, Naomi Perkins and Angus Trumble, *Victoria's Colonial Governors, 1839-1900*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1993, p. viii.

⁸⁴⁵ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 19 December 1896, p. 1219.

⁸⁴⁶ 'Minetta', 'Lady's Letter', *Melbourne Punch*, 24 December 1896, p. 519.

⁸⁴⁷ 'Cycling Notes', *Melbourne Punch*, 5 December 1896, p. 464.

⁸⁴⁸ Fiona Kinsey, 'Australian Women Cyclists in the 1890s', in C. S. Simpson (ed.), *Scorchers, Ramblers and Rovers: Australasian Cycling Histories*, Australian Society for Sports History, Melbourne, 2006, p. 82.

⁸⁴⁹ Kinsey, 'Australian Women Cyclists in the 1890s', p. 81.

themselves to other locations independently of their husbands or families, which was beneficial in terms of the women's swimming movement. Given that men and women bathed at different times or in different locations, this independence was often necessary in terms of women's participation.⁸⁵⁰ A column promoting the benefits of swimming for women suggested that 'now that cycles are so universal, the distance of the home from the bath is hardly worth mentioning'.⁸⁵¹ It is also probable that the woman cyclist helped to pave the way for the acceptance of women swimmers, in that the notion of a female cyclist was much more threatening to the status quo than a female swimmer. As Kinsey states, the highly controversial 'New Woman' persona was closely associated with the female cyclist.⁸⁵²

While women were encouraged by the press to swim recreationally, correspondents were disapproving of their lack of swimming knowledge. One correspondent suggested that a female was virtually incapable of saving a life, suggesting 'she, as a general rule, simply sacrifices herself, but more often she loses head and heart at the same moment, and is not sane enough in her terror and excitement to even walk into a few feet of water and carry a drowning child to land'.⁸⁵³ In aid of this, the *Australasian* correspondent had, at the beginning of the 1896/97 season, printed some basic instructions for teaching girls to swim. These instructions were taken from Mabel V. Batten's article in the British *Badminton* magazine, and recommended the assistance of their brothers or male friends, suggesting that male assistance 'allows girls to gain that confidence they can never feel with only their weaker sex to depend on'.⁸⁵⁴ Yet, as has already been stated, the mixed bathing prohibitions ensured that women could only be taught how to swim by other competent women.

While the number of women who could swim capably was growing, they were still very much in the minority. It was reported that a lady residing in Middle Brighton had taught a number of girls and women to swim from the mid 1890s.⁸⁵⁵ It should also be noted that not everybody could afford the time to take part in recreational swimming. Indian suggests that women who had time, money and access to child care had greater

⁸⁵⁰ Kinsey, 'Australian Women Cyclists in the 1890s', p. 84.

⁸⁵¹ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 19 December 1896, p. 1219.

⁸⁵² Kinsey, 'Australian Women Cyclists in the 1890s', p. 84.

⁸⁵³ *Melbourne Punch*, 13 January 1898, p. 22.

⁸⁵⁴ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 31 October 1896, p. 850.

⁸⁵⁵ 'Minetta', 'Lady's Letter', *Melbourne Punch*, 27 January 1898, p. 19.

leisure opportunities than those who did not.⁸⁵⁶ One press correspondent stated that there was a desperate need for ladies who could swim to impart their knowledge to those who could not. They suggested that ‘it would not interfere in any way with the pleasure of the bath if when in the water herself a bather seized any opportunity that offered itself of familiarising a girl with the element, teaching her confidence and the simple tricks of the swimmer’.⁸⁵⁷ The inclusion of swimming lessons for girls into the Victorian state school curriculum, as discussed in the previous chapter, was significant in reducing this ongoing concern.

The teaching of swimming to girls in Melbourne private and state schools was a significant contributor to the development of women’s swimming in Melbourne, and Stell states that the independent girls’ schools actually accelerated the growth and acceptance of competitive swimming for women.⁸⁵⁸ However, the introduction of swimming into the state school curriculum in early 1898 was much more widespread in introducing competitive swimming to thousands of girls within the state, regardless of class, and this initiative was to have an important legacy. Raszeja states that the introduction of swimming into Australian school curriculum was integral to the development of women’s competitive swimming in the twentieth century, as ‘a whole generation of children was to grow up with the idea that competitive swimming for women was not only acceptable, but a part of life’.⁸⁵⁹

From the very beginnings of the state school swimming program, it was thought that girls needed to be involved. After all, females that could not swim were putting not only themselves, but also their children at risk. Upon hearing of the initiative, one female correspondent commented that she hoped that girls would be included in the innovation, and that lady volunteers could be found to provide the necessary instruction.⁸⁶⁰ It would appear that this was always the intention, as it was stated in an *Australasian* column in reference to the early organisation of the program that ‘various baths will be available for the visits of the boys and girls’.⁸⁶¹ As the school program developed, girls’ school swimming clubs began to develop. The Port

⁸⁵⁶ Indian, ‘Leisure in City and Suburb’, p. 260.

⁸⁵⁷ *Melbourne Punch*, 13 January 1898, p. 22.

⁸⁵⁸ Stell, *Half the Race*, p. 38.

⁸⁵⁹ Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*, p. 57.

⁸⁶⁰ ‘Minetta’, ‘Lady’s Letter’, *Melbourne Punch*, 27 January 1898, p. 19.

⁸⁶¹ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 5 February 1898, p. 303.

Melbourne Girls State School Swimming Club held a competition in April 1898, where 120 members of the club attended.⁸⁶² Boys and girls generally had their own swimming clubs within the state schools, and hosted separate events. However, a press report on the first annual matches of the Central (Williamstown) State School reported that both sexes competed at this event.⁸⁶³

The support garnered for women's swimming through its promotion in the state schools and through the support proffered in press coverage gave rise to the notion of ladies' only swimming carnivals. Girls' swimming carnivals had been occurring in the state schools for some time, and were considered highly reputable events. It was the advent of these carnivals that consolidated women's swimming as a competitive sport, while maintaining its respectability. Raszeja suggests that the banning of men from Sydney ladies' carnivals in the early twentieth century saved women's competitive swimming 'from degenerating into a peep-show event'.⁸⁶⁴ It would appear that the Melbourne women were slightly ahead of their Sydney counterparts in this regard. By eliminating the masculine presence, women's swimming was able to flourish in a nurturing and supportive environment, while remaining unthreatening to the male institution.

The subsequent section of this chapter examines the development of the Brighton ladies' swimming carnivals. The inaugural Brighton ladies' carnival was held in 1898, and these events immediately became a significant fixture on the Melbourne aquatic calendar. The carnivals received a considerable amount of positive press coverage, which can be attributed to the innovative nature of the activity, and the public interest that followed. However, while negative press coverage did eventuate, it was not in response to the public perception that women should not be holding their own carnivals. Rather, it was a response to the systematic exclusion of males from the ladies' events in 1899, which was inclusive of the press correspondents wishing to report on the activity. This section focuses specifically on the 1899 Brighton ladies' carnival as a case study, and evaluates the manner and agenda of the press in reporting on both this event, and the ladies' carnivals that followed. As the forthcoming

⁸⁶² 'Girls Swimming Club', *Port Melbourne Standard*, 9 April 1898, p. 3.

⁸⁶³ 'Overarm', 'Swimming', *Weekly Times*, 1 April 1899, p. 25.

⁸⁶⁴ Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*, p. 67.

discussion will demonstrate, the 1899 Brighton ladies' carnival had a significant impact on the development of women's swimming in Melbourne.

5.6 The Brighton Ladies' Carnivals: A Case Study

In response to the few races that had been held for women at VASA carnivals, and the growing popularity of swimming with women, it was agreed by a small number of press correspondents that swimming carnivals for women should be introduced. In 1896, the ladies' correspondent in *Punch* had suggested that a ladies' only swimming contest would be an excellent initiative, with only lady spectators permitted to attend. She proposed that a great number of lady swimmers could be found at St Kilda, Brighton and South Melbourne, which would ensure a competitive program of racing. Yet, even the ladies' correspondent referred to the proposed event as a novelty.⁸⁶⁵ It is notable that in referring to women's competitive swimming in this period, press correspondents consistently utilised the term 'ladies' to describe the women taking part in these events. This insinuates that the women who took part in these activities were from the higher echelons of society, and provides another explanation as to why women's swimming was endorsed by the press. The social status of these women ensured that they would participate in the activity in the proper, class appropriate manner. It is unlikely that the press would have been quite so supportive of the endeavours of lower class women to compete in competitive races.

However, despite their apparent acceptance of women's competitive swimming, a correspondent suggested that Australians were not yet ready for mixed carnivals, stating that:

I daresay you will be horrified to learn that at Brighton (England) a number of ladies entered for a swimming race in conjunction with men, but we in Melbourne are not yet advanced enough to countenance either mixed bathing or mixed swimming matches.⁸⁶⁶

Although this practice had also taken place in Melbourne, with females competing at VASA carnivals, the venture was, as the correspondent suggested, not well received. Therefore, the Brighton ladies' swimming carnival was launched to cater for women who wished to compete in swimming contests in a same-sex environment. The

⁸⁶⁵ 'Minetta', 'Lady's Letter', *Melbourne Punch*, 24 December 1896, p. 519.

⁸⁶⁶ 'Minetta', 'Lady's Letter', *Melbourne Punch*, 24 December 1896, p. 519.

inaugural carnival was held in March 1898, the same year in which the state school swimming program was established in Melbourne, and approximately 600 women attended the event. Described in press coverage as an aquatic entertainment, the afternoon consisted of swimming races, life saving demonstrations and a resuscitation lesson provided by female members of the St John's Ambulance Society. The event was patronised by the mayoress of Brighton, Mrs Davies, who provided a prize for one of the events.⁸⁶⁷ As predicted, males were not permitted to attend.⁸⁶⁸ Parker states that in England, fathers of girl competitors and later husbands were allowed to witness the ladies' sport,⁸⁶⁹ but this does not appear to have been an acceptable practice in Melbourne.

Press correspondents (both male and female) were extremely supportive of the venture, giving only positive feedback on the event and glowing descriptions of the female swimmers. The *Punch* ladies' correspondent described one particularly competent swimmer as having 'the ease and grace of a young Amazon'.⁸⁷⁰ This same correspondent also applauded the superior organisational skills of the Brighton ladies, commenting that their gala had been carried off in an extremely inexpensive manner, which was largely due to the liberal donations to the prize fund and managerial skills of the ladies.⁸⁷¹ The *Australasian* correspondent declared that 'This movement on the part of the ladies of Brighton is to be highly commended, and it is to be hoped the ladies in other parts will go and do likewise'.⁸⁷²

Significantly, the success of this initial venture appears to have heralded the development of ladies' swimming clubs in Melbourne. Parker states that by the end of the nineteenth century in England, ladies' swimming clubs were commonly found at public baths,⁸⁷³ and Parratt relates that there was a considerable program of races across England for the members of these clubs to participate in.⁸⁷⁴ In Australia, the first official Sydney ladies' club was not inaugurated until 1902,⁸⁷⁵ but unaffiliated

⁸⁶⁷ 'Minetta', 'Lady's Letter', *Melbourne Punch*, 10 March 1898, p. 215.

⁸⁶⁸ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 12 March 1898, p. 578.

⁸⁶⁹ Parker, 'An Urban and Historical Perspective', p. 287.

⁸⁷⁰ 'Minetta', 'Lady's Letter', *Melbourne Punch*, 10 March 1898, p. 215.

⁸⁷¹ 'Minetta', 'Lady's Letter', *Melbourne Punch*, 10 March 1898, p. 215.

⁸⁷² 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 12 March 1898, p. 578.

⁸⁷³ Parker, 'An Urban and Historical Perspective', p. 306.

⁸⁷⁴ Parratt, 'Athletic "Womanhood"', p. 149.

⁸⁷⁵ Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*, p. 59.

clubs existed as early as 1895.⁸⁷⁶ Ladies' clubs in South Australia did not feature in the association's official history until 1921,⁸⁷⁷ but the first ladies' swimming club in Melbourne, the Brighton Ladies' Swimming Club was formed in 1899.⁸⁷⁸ The popularity of the first Brighton ladies' event, coupled with the inauguration of the competitive club, paved way for the continuance of these ladies-only carnivals.

As a result of the popularity of the inaugural event, the press began to complain early in 1899 that no ladies' event had yet been organised for that year,⁸⁷⁹ and so matches were promptly organised by the Brighton club for 18 February 1899.⁸⁸⁰ However, some administrative decisions made in this year by the Brighton ladies' committee in order to preserve the integrity of their sport were directly opposed to the interests of the press. Prior to the 1899 carnival, a decision was made by the Brighton ladies' committee to exclude all males from their event. While this practice had been employed the previous year, the policy was extended in 1899 to include male press correspondents and photographers, and this had some positive and negative implications for the press coverage surrounding the event.

Prior to the decision of the Brighton ladies' committee to exclude male press correspondents from their 1899 carnival, press coverage surrounding the forthcoming event was largely supportive in nature, if not slightly patronising. It is somewhat ironic that this patronising humour was, in most cases, centred on the implications of the ladies' decision the previous year to exclude males from attending. In a number of cases, unsympathetic male press correspondents gleefully reported on the problems that the carnival organisers were facing in terms of maintaining their ladies-only edict. The Brighton ladies were keen to secure a musical band for their carnival, as was the custom, but given no males were permitted to attend, this was an issue. As the *Punch* editorial mused teasingly:

How to have a band present, and yet so arrange matters that the sporting of the water nymphs should not be overlooked by the rude eye of man. The idea of

⁸⁷⁶ See 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 2 March 1895, p. 403.

⁸⁷⁷ Daly, *The Splendid Journey*, p. 49. There were two ladies' clubs in existence in 1921, though Daly does not state when they were formed.

⁸⁷⁸ 'Overarm', 'Swimming', *Weekly Times*, 11 February 1899, p. 26. It is uncertain whether this club was affiliated with VASA under the umbrella of the Brighton club, which became affiliated in 1895, or was a stand-alone club. See McDonald, *The First 100*, p. 197.

⁸⁷⁹ See 'Minetta', 'Lady's Letter', *Melbourne Punch*, 19 January 1899, p. 63.

⁸⁸⁰ 'Minetta', 'Lady's Letter', *Melbourne Punch*, 2 February 1899, p. 117.

blindfolding the band was not felt to be reliable, and a suggestion to put the musicians in an iron tank was scouted at once. Then a bright mind rose to the occasion, and someone suggested the notion of securing the band from the Blind Asylum. This suggestion should be carried out. It quite fits the bill, and the mind picture of that innocent blind band calmly tootling away whilst the mermaids dabble under their placid noses is just delicious. By all means let the blind band play.⁸⁸¹

The quirky publicity provided prior to the event only increased its appeal, with over 100 entries received for the twelve-event program.⁸⁸² A diving match, amateur championship race and life saving exhibitions were included on the program,⁸⁸³ and, in what was undoubtedly an effort to cater for the growing numbers of girls learning to swim through the state schools swimming program, races for girls under eleven, thirteen and fifteen years of age were also included.⁸⁸⁴ The *Table Talk* ladies' correspondent suggested that 'if Melbourne women want to see their sisters shine in water (literally) they need only go on Saturday to the Middle Brighton Swimming Baths, which offer the golden opportunity of a display of aquatic feats and marvels of muscle'.⁸⁸⁵ The event was given the patronage of Lady Brassey, indicating the prestige of the occasion,⁸⁸⁶ and it was reported that all proceeds from the event were to be donated to the local Ladies' Benevolent Society.⁸⁸⁷

However, the support afforded to the Brighton ladies' swimming gala by the male press correspondents was quickly withdrawn, upon the revelation that male press photographers would not be permitted to enter the 1899 gala. It was reported in a *Brighton Leader* editorial that female photographers had been engaged for the event, and as the editorial joked, 'Not Castle Adamant itself will be more inaccessible to man than the Brighton baths on this particular occasion'.⁸⁸⁸ The *Australasian* correspondent commented in jest that 'the mere man will not even be admitted as a spectator. So strict is the edict that, on this occasion, even the press will have to wear frocks'.⁸⁸⁹ This decision by the Brighton ladies was undoubtedly a response to an incident that had occurred at the previous year's event, where a male photographer

⁸⁸¹ *Melbourne Punch*, 16 February 1899, p. 147.

⁸⁸² 'Minetta', 'Lady's Letter', *Melbourne Punch*, 16 February 1899, p. 159.

⁸⁸³ 'Minetta', 'Lady's Letter', *Melbourne Punch*, 2 February 1899, p. 117.

⁸⁸⁴ 'Minetta', 'Lady's Letter', *Melbourne Punch*, 16 February 1899, p. 159.

⁸⁸⁵ 'Stella's Ladies Letter', *Table Talk*, 17 February 1899, p. 17.

⁸⁸⁶ 'Overarm', 'Swimming', *Weekly Times*, 25 February 1899, p. 26.

⁸⁸⁷ 'Overarm', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 11 February 1899, p. 26.

⁸⁸⁸ 'A Question of Propriety?', *Brighton Leader*, 18 February 1899, p. 2.

⁸⁸⁹ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 4 February 1899, p. 245.

had managed to gain entry and, as the *Argus* reported, ‘revelled in entertaining snapshots’, despite numerous requests for him to leave.⁸⁹⁰

This revelation prompted a barrage of disapproving columns and editorials in the press, both prior to and after the conclusion of the event, questioning why males were being excluded from these carnivals. In one editorial, the point was raised that ladies were welcomed at most men’s swimming events, and it was considered proper for men to swim before ladies if properly costumed, so why not for women to swim in front of men? As the editorial dramatically concluded, ‘it was wisely felt that the question of propriety was put a little too obtrusively’.⁸⁹¹ *Table Talk* questioned whether their motives for holding a strictly ladies’ only gala were selfish or modest, deeming their actions prohibitive and questioning the double standards:

Why for ladies only? Is this the way they would reciprocate the courtesy of the ruder and sterner sex, who never fail to extend their kindness to woman on the occasion of kindred amusements inaugurated on man’s behalf? Ladies flock to these tournaments indiscriminately, and are the most enthusiastic supporters of man’s aquatic prowess on such occasions. No insinuation of indelicacy has ever been implied by their presence, nor has the acceptance of these invitations given reasonable grounds for the belief that woman herself viewed the exhibition with the hesitancy of wounded modesty. And yet, while lending piquancy to the male rivalry by her presence, she manifests an unreasonable inconsistency when she refuses man a precisely similar privilege to that which she invariably accepts with cheerfulness at his hands. Her conduct on this occasion is incomprehensible.⁸⁹²

The correspondent also found it hard to attribute the decision to prudery alone, suggesting that any spectator that found swimming tournaments indecent was lacking in moral character. In his opinion, no sex was any less proper than the other in bathing costume, and he pointed out the rise of Continental bathing in most countries as an example. His final word was that the Brighton women had ‘outstepped the threshold of discretion in their desire to be considered irreproachable. Shakespeare says somewhere, “Methinks, madam, thou dost protest too much!”’⁸⁹³ It is interesting that the press only began to argue this point upon their systematic exclusion from the event. While males had been excluded from attending the previous year, few comments had been made in the press coverage surrounding the event. It can therefore

⁸⁹⁰ ‘Ladies Swimming Tournament’, *Argus*, 15 February 1899, p. 8.

⁸⁹¹ ‘A Question of Propriety?’, *Brighton Leader*, 18 February 1899, p. 2.

⁸⁹² ‘Is it Selfishness or Modesty?’, *Table Talk*, 24 February 1899, p. 12.

⁸⁹³ ‘Is it Selfishness or Modesty?’, *Table Talk*, 24 February 1899, p. 12.

be concluded that the ladies-only edict mattered little to press correspondents, until it began to affect their capacity to report on the event. To that end, it is evident that the dissatisfaction of the male press correspondents at being excluded was reflected in their coverage of the event.

Despite the furore surrounding the event, and possibly because of it, the press coverage surrounding the 1899 Brighton Ladies' Carnival was both voluminous and detailed. Press reports suggest that the 1899 ladies' carnival was a success, with approximately 800 women in attendance. True to their word, the women-only edict was strictly followed, with no males admitted. This was integral to the success of the event, as one report suggested that 'nervous, old fashioned women' grew agitated upon having to hand their entry ticket to the male collector, and this was only appeased by the presence of lady committee members, who had faithfully promised that no males would be admitted.⁸⁹⁴ The success of the event was attributed to the hard work of the committee, and as one correspondent commented:

... if it is said as a compliment to the committee that everything was quite up to the masculine standard supporters of the woman movement may retort, without meaning to be unkind, that the masculine standard was aspired to for want of something more perfect.⁸⁹⁵

It is possible that this comment was a subtle jibe at the VASA male-run carnivals, which were substantially less organised.⁸⁹⁶ As the *Argus* suggested, 'a committee of the weaker sex who can arrange a program of swimming events attractive enough to bring together a crowd of 800 women and girls can well afford to forbid mere man from attendance'.⁸⁹⁷

There were a great number of lady photographers present at the carnival, which assuaged the fear of the male correspondents that 'many good pictures would be missed for want of ladies to photograph them'.⁸⁹⁸ In the absence of male photographers, it was reported that female photographers took snapshots of the day's sport, and at the conclusion of the proceedings, a male was permitted to enter and take

⁸⁹⁴ 'Ladies' Swimming Matches', *Argus*, 20 February 1899, p. 6.

⁸⁹⁵ 'Ladies' Swimming Matches', *Argus*, 20 February 1899, p. 6.

⁸⁹⁶ For a discussion on the organisational problems experienced at the VASA carnivals, see the following chapter.

⁸⁹⁷ 'Ladies' Swimming Matches', *Argus*, 20 February 1899, p. 6.

⁸⁹⁸ 'Ladies' Swimming Matches', *Argus*, 20 February 1899, p. 6.

the tripod and camera away to be developed.⁸⁹⁹ The practice was met with amusement by one particular male correspondent, who remarked that it ‘seemed rather a novelty after the Kodak fiend with which we are all familiar’.⁹⁰⁰ Despite the general disapproval of the press correspondents in regard to their exclusion, the women’s activities were too newsworthy to ignore, and so a number of photographic spreads were included in Melbourne newspapers that week. The images in most cases depicted the events themselves, such as the lifesaving contests and aquatic rescues.⁹⁰¹ As the photographs were all taken by women, questions are raised as to whether the content of the photographs may have been more decorous had they been taken by males.

Reports on the 1899 carnival by male correspondents were generally supportive, but largely indifferent. Given that they were now reliant on second-hand knowledge, this is unsurprising. However, while the event was judged an overall success by a number of press correspondents, their coverage on the event was in some cases less than celebratory, and sought to both belittle and objectify the women’s activities. The *Age* correspondent pointed out, rather cruelly, that the society matrons resembled children in their plain, dark costumes, and cast some aspersions on the costumes of others:

No woman weighing over eight stone should attempt fancy dress - in the water. One competitor of ample proportions had donned a gown with horizontal stripes, and though once in the water she looked approximately fish like, out of that element she was fain to shelter herself within a friendly wrapper.⁹⁰²

Other reports chose to utilise ridicule and objectification to convey their disapproval. Despite the ladies-only edict, a *Melbourne Punch* report suggested that one of their reporters, ‘Colonial Boy’, was supposedly able to gain entry to the event. Thus, a two-page spread was published in the following week’s newspaper, complete with photographs, with the ‘Colonial Boy’ giving a highly irreverent account of the day’s sport to the apparently incredulous *Melbourne Punch* reporters. Given the cheek of some of the comments made by the reporter, it seems unlikely that he actually attended, with the article perhaps intended solely to poke fun at the women’s attempts

⁸⁹⁹ ‘Ladies’ Swimming Tournament’, *Brighton Leader*, 25 February 1899, p. 3.

⁹⁰⁰ ‘Overarm’, ‘Swimming’, *Weekly Times*, 25 February 1899, p. 26.

⁹⁰¹ For example, see ‘Ladies Swimming Matches at Middle Brighton’, *Weekly Times*, 25 February 1899, p. 9.

⁹⁰² ‘Aquatics at Middle Brighton’, *Age*, 20 February 1899, p. 6.

to keep their sport free of the male influence. According to the article, the ‘Colonial Boy’ dressed as a woman to gain entrance, and was assisted by the baths-keeper who supposedly turned a blind eye, stating ‘there’s been about three thousand Press-ladies in now - and some of them forgot to shave’.⁹⁰³ His sole objective for entry was supposedly to take pictures of the ladies swimming and as the article related:

‘What is the good of ladies photographing ladies? They don’t do them justice - they don’t see the points of them as a Man would’ – and the Boy winked with the leer of a man of forty. ‘No, sir, when a woman is to be photographed it takes a man to show her at her best’.⁹⁰⁴

Apparently, the ‘Colonial Boy’ was not the only man who found the event infinitely appealing, and as he detailed:

I got there about half an hour too soon ... there was about a million men on the pier with field-glasses, telescopes and flasks of whiskey. They had come to stay till the bitter end. There were yachts and rowing-boats and a steam-launch hanging around outside and too tired to put out to sea. The way the wind just beat them in to windward or leeward of the baths was just simply marvellous. They boxed the compass until she headed for the ladies’ baths.⁹⁰⁵

While the tone of the report raises some questions as to the factuality of the content, the purpose is immediately clear, as the use of humour to belittle the event highlights the perceived threat of this new development in women’s swimming. McCrone suggests that the male population employed a number of devices to belittle women in their sporting ventures, in response to perceived threats to the masculine institution. The use of humour reputedly camouflaged fears of a threat to the male dominance of sport, and often female sport was trivialised, disparaged or treated simply as an object of fun.⁹⁰⁶ In the case of swimming, the success of the Brighton women’s event and the subsequent exclusion of men may have provoked a number of fears. The exclusion of male reporters also undoubtedly created a problem in terms of how the press might report on these popular events. As they were not able to physically attend the events, they were reliant on second-hand knowledge, which restricted their ability to report on, judge or belittle the ladies’ events. Additionally, the continued success of the male, VASA administrated carnivals was highly reliant on the support of females as

⁹⁰³ ‘Lady Go-Divas at Brighton’, *Melbourne Punch*, 23 February 1899, p. 188.

⁹⁰⁴ ‘Lady Go-Divas at Brighton’, *Melbourne Punch*, 23 February 1899, p. 188.

⁹⁰⁵ ‘Lady Go-Divas at Brighton’, *Melbourne Punch*, 23 February 1899, p. 188.

⁹⁰⁶ McCrone, *Playing the Game*, p. 281.

spectators. Therefore, it was perhaps perceived that women would cease attending their carnivals once their own were well established.

Most importantly, the women were challenging a key tenet of the male sporting hierarchy, namely their superiority. By running their events without the assistance of males, and preventing them from spectating, the implication was that their presence was not necessary. This perceived threat is alluded to in an *Argus* report, where one reporter related that a number of the married women had swum under assumed names to prevent their husbands finding out they had competed, and suggested that ‘every man must, therefore, feel with some relief that independence of him at a ladies swimming match is not coupled with independence of him as an outside critic’.⁹⁰⁷ In what may have been an attempt by VASA to remind the women of their superior status, a column in March 1899 stated that the Melbourne club would be holding an extra meeting, with lady spectators or photographers not admitted.⁹⁰⁸

It is worth noting that the banning of men from the women’s carnivals in Sydney in the early twentieth century received much the same response from press correspondents. As Raszeja states, the banning of men from Sydney women’s carnivals ‘inspired some initial sarcastic remarks from a rejected sporting press’.⁹⁰⁹ However, in much the same manner as the Melbourne press, their initial responses had been positive.⁹¹⁰ It is also symbolic that a considerable amount of press coverage on this event is devoted to the objectification of women, whereas closing the event to males was intended to prevent this. The irreverent depiction of the competing women in the article borders on the ridiculous, making fun of their preference for women-only galas, and degrading their event in a light hearted way. The implication was that the women were being over-sensitive in excluding the male population, and so the event was depicted in a comical manner, attracting the kind of objectified attention the women had wished to eliminate by excluding male spectators. Though no extant public response to the *Melbourne Punch* article was located, it is interesting to speculate on how this item was received.

⁹⁰⁷ ‘Ladies’ Swimming Matches’, *Argus*, 20 February 1899, p. 6.

⁹⁰⁸ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 11 March 1899, p. 526.

⁹⁰⁹ Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*, p. 68.

⁹¹⁰ Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*, p. 68.

Conversely, the 1899 ladies' swimming carnival was celebrated in press columns written by female correspondents, and their reports were descriptive and lavish. Rather than objectifying the women, or commenting on the exclusion of the male sex, their reports focused on the physical feats of the competitors. The *Leader* ladies' correspondent noted that there were a number of entries for all the events, and that all competitors were remarkably gifted in the water. However, she also observed that 'the lithe muscular girl that can hold her own against her more robust sister in most forms of athletics is more or less at a disadvantage in the water. Why this should be I don't quite see'.⁹¹¹ The *Table Talk* ladies' correspondent was so inspired by the female swimmers that a poem was penned in honour of the sporting nymphs:

Out the Brighton belles came tripping,
 Like so many naiads skipping,
 Skipping in a sportive mood;
 Came, and showed their pretty paces,
 In bare feet and nudest [*sic*] graces
 Only to the sisterhood!

Bright the noonday sun was glancing
 On those lithesome figures prancing
 In their glowing grace of limb;
 Decker in bloomers brightly braided,
 By a simple cincture aided
 In their effort to be trim.

Stood they there-old Neptune's daughters-
 Like Narcissus o'er the waters,
 Never caring they of what
 Was reflected in the briny
 Of each swimmer, tall or tiny.
 Never cared a single jot.

For the pride of strength heroic
 Primed these maids of mettle stoic,
 Growing soon to adamant;
 How, they thought, would man despotic,
 Marvel at their feats aquatic,
 If he saw them plunge and pant.
 So the Brighton nymphs cut capers,
 Unrestricted by the drapers,
 In the natatory race,
 Nor did man, denied, besiege 'em,
 NECESSITAS NON HABET LEGEM
 Shut the wicket in his face.

⁹¹¹ 'Social Circle', *Leader*, 25 February 1899, p. 37.

While three hundred gentle creatures,
 Who had studied all the features
 Of the swimmers, minus fins,
 Cheered and clapped their clever sisters
 Till their hands were gloved with blisters
 To the tune of mandolins.

Tell us not of woman's glories
 From the mythic Grecian stories
 Of their godly strength and grace;
 Maids as modest as Minerva,
 Strong as gods that tried to serve her,
 Glorify to-day the race!⁹¹²

While the poem was entirely celebratory of the aquatic feats, it also attempts to justify the exclusion of males in a light-hearted manner by means of the exertion argument. As stated earlier, the primary argument of those opposed to female competitive sport was the element of physical exertion that often accompanied it.

Predictably, the female correspondents were supportive of the ladies-only status of the event. In her column, the female correspondent from *Table Talk* condemned the numerous men that spent the afternoon peering through the fences, stating that it was a wonder that 'they were not punished by some awful retributive affliction for their dishonesty'.⁹¹³ However, another lady correspondent made short shrift of this notion, advocating that 'A good deal of exaggerated nonsense about the excluded male has found its way into print, but for my own part I saw small evidence of any overwhelming desire on his part to force himself where he wasn't wanted'.⁹¹⁴

While male press correspondents were not supportive of the exclusion of males from the ladies' carnivals, and this was conveyed in their reports in a variety of ways, they could not deny that the event was both popular and successful, and fortunately this was also reflected in press coverage. It is ironic that the success of these carnivals was undoubtedly assisted by the large amounts of publicity garnered by the exclusion of the press correspondents. While a large amount of the press coverage received was critical in nature, it was instrumental in piquing public interest in the event, and

⁹¹² 'Stella's Ladies Letter', *Table Talk*, 24 February 1899, p. 17.

⁹¹³ 'Stella's Ladies Letter', *Table Talk*, 24 February 1899, p. 17.

⁹¹⁴ 'Social Circle', *Leader*, 25 February 1899, p. 37.

promoting the cause of women's swimming. This, in turn, was integral in ensuring that the event continued to be successful.

The immense public support for the Brighton ladies' carnivals had not been adversely affected by the negative press coverage surrounding the previous year's event, and it is likely that this negative coverage had inspired additional Melbourne women to offer their support to the venture. This is certainly evident when examining the financial support proffered by Melbourne women in the lead-up to the 1900 event. Prior to the 1900 carnival, the Brighton organisers received a welcome financial contribution from one of Melbourne's most influential women. A number of press correspondents reported that Lady Brassey had kindly donated an amount of money to the prize fund, with which a gold medal was commissioned. The gold medal was to be awarded to the winner of the 100 yards amateur championship.⁹¹⁵ Other prizes on offer were considerably numerous and lucrative, as evidenced by the long list provided in the *Leader*. Apart from Lady Brassey's gold medal, the prizes included gold jewellery, writing desks and drawing room clocks. These prizes were to be presented to the successful swimmers on the day by prominent ladies of the community.⁹¹⁶ Given that the prizes were the gifts of 'friends',⁹¹⁷ it can be concluded that the public support for women's swimming contests was considerable.

The 1900 Brighton ladies' carnival was scheduled for 10 February, and the event itself came off without a hitch as had occurred in the previous years. Due to the hot weather, spectators were fewer than in 1899, but the races were well contested, and were inclusive of both swimming and lifesaving events.⁹¹⁸ The status of swimming as a family sport was reinforced by the daughter of the club secretary, Miss L. McKinley, placing second in one of the races.⁹¹⁹ Instead of having the musical portion of the program provided by a female band, a brass band was situated outside of the baths on the adjacent pier. According to the female correspondent from the *Leader*, a 'code of signals had to be hastily arranged between the directress of affairs inside and

⁹¹⁵ 'Minetta', 'Lady's Letter', *Melbourne Punch*, 11 January 1900, p. 39.

⁹¹⁶ 'Swimming', *Leader*, 17 February 1900, p. 18.

⁹¹⁷ 'Ladies Swimming Club', *Brighton Leader*, 17 February 1900, p. 2.

⁹¹⁸ 'Overarm', 'Swimming', *Weekly Times*, 17 February 1900, p. 19.

⁹¹⁹ 'Ladies Open Column', *Weekly Times*, 17 February 1900, p. 30.

the band master beyond', and this provided considerable hilarity.⁹²⁰ The event raised £10 for the Brighton Ladies' Benevolent Society, which was looked upon as a 'satisfactory result'.⁹²¹ This auxiliary factor also undoubtedly assisted in gaining approval for the women's sport. They were competing for a cause, and their sport was serving a useful function. The women were not outwardly competing for the sake of competing, which rendered their activity socially acceptable.

In terms of press coverage of the event, the press were still smarting about being restricted from attending the events, and the nature of their coverage suggests that they were still unhappy about being excluded. The *Australasian* correspondent, while commenting on the hyperbole surrounding the carnival prior to the event, reiterated that:

Photographers and men (they are separate classes) are strictly tabooed, and though I have received certain information about the gala, it was accompanied with such an air of mystery I am afraid to make it all known. Even the name of the secretary appears to be kept secret'.⁹²²

As a general rule, the male correspondents refrained on commenting on the exclusion of the male sex, with only positive coverage provided in comparison to that of the previous year. However, once more it was suggested by the female correspondents that the male population took offence at having their entry denied, with the *Leader* ladies' correspondent stating in her column that the anxiety exhibited by the male sex at being excluded was endlessly amusing. However, she also provided an excellent justification for the exclusion of the male sex, suggesting that:

. . . the committee women of the Brighton Ladies' Swimming Club – are well aware that their annual fuss with the male sex gives them not only the harmless, necessary advertisement, but puts their little function at the necessary premium. It's just the old story of forbidden fruit, and the scores of men who cycled down to Middle Brighton last week . . . would probably have been anywhere else had their presence been counted on by an over indulgent management'.⁹²³

Again, it is little wonder that the males wished to gain entry to the event, given the poetic images of women's swimming evoked by press correspondents. Many reports

⁹²⁰ 'Society Letter', *Leader*, 17 February 1900, p. 37.

⁹²¹ 'Social', *Melbourne Punch*, 8 March 1900, p. 235.

⁹²² 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 10 February 1900, p. 300.

⁹²³ 'Society Letter', *Leader*, 17 February 1900, p. 37.

on the event waxed lyrical about the swimming techniques of the ladies, dubbing them ‘water-nymphs’ and suggesting that ‘art students sighed for charcoal and drawing paper, and longed to take an impressionist sketch of this fine specimen’.⁹²⁴ However, rather than marvelling at their ethereal beauty, the focus was on their physical selves, and their athletic feats, which were reported on in wonderment by correspondents. Upon describing the winner of the 100 yards championship, Miss Wendel, the female correspondent from the *Weekly Times* proclaimed that ‘It was a pleasure to watch her swim, with her head well poised. She cut through the water with a steady breast-stroke, and seemed to find the 100yds easy travelling’.⁹²⁵ In the previous year, the *Australasian* correspondent had described the competitors as being of ‘splendid physique’.⁹²⁶

Based on the press coverage of the 1900 carnival, it can be suggested that the male press correspondents adjusted quickly to their exclusion from the ladies-only carnivals. However, it must be noted that while the coverage was not critical, it was considerably less voluminous and descriptive as the previous year, signifying that the ladies’ events now held little interest. However, while the previous year’s coverage had been largely critical, it had proved integral in promoting the cause of women’s swimming. This is apparent upon reviewing the developments in women’s swimming that occurred as a result of the Brighton ladies’ carnivals.

5.7 Further Developments in Women’s Swimming

With the advent of ladies-only swimming contests, the actions of the girls’ state schools swimming clubs began to draw increased attention from the press, providing further publicity for the female swimming movement. As Burroughs has noted, the role of women’s swimming in challenging the status quo in the public arena was instrumental in providing empowerment and ‘freedom of expression’ for women, in a period where they had little political impact.⁹²⁷ Therefore, it is unsurprising that once established, women’s swimming in Melbourne began to grow at a rapid rate, and it is

⁹²⁴ ‘Minetta’, ‘Lady’s Letter’, *Melbourne Punch*, 15 February 1900, p. 161.

⁹²⁵ ‘Ladies Open Column’, *Weekly Times*, 17 February 1900, p. 30.

⁹²⁶ ‘Middle Brighton Ladies Swimming Tournament’, *Australasian*, 25 February 1899, p. 421.

⁹²⁷ Burroughs, ‘Women, Femininity and Sport’, p. 167.

significant that the ladies' races held at regular VASA carnivals began to attract further interest.⁹²⁸

Swimming races for women were frequently held at traditionally male carnivals in the 1899/1900 season.⁹²⁹ It appears that these became more patronised, with a ladies' race in March 1899 attracting over a dozen entries.⁹³⁰ In what was a major stamp of approval for women's swimming, Melbourne Swimming Club included a ladies' race as a 'novelty' in their 1900 annual carnival, and as the *Sportsman* correspondent stated, 'needless to say, it created no little excitement'.⁹³¹ However, despite the advent of these swimming clubs, races and carnivals for ladies, the press were still not respectful of the idea of women swimming. Rather than condemning them for participating, though, the consensus was that they needed to swim better! When discussing a ladies' carnival at Geelong in April 1900, the *Table Talk* correspondent mused, 'Most women seem to be not quite sure if they can swim or not. They have learnt, but I think perhaps they have forgotten - they can swim about 5yds etc'.⁹³²

However, the notion of women as competent swimmers also began to gain more attention in the press, and began to challenge some of the misconceptions surrounding women's swimming. In 1899, *Melbourne Punch* ran a short fictional story in their newspaper titled 'Two in a Boat and Out: A Tale of a Lady Swimmer', which detailed the rescue of a drowning man by his female companion after their yacht capsized. Prior to the incident, the male is wary at the girl's revelations of her prizes for swimming and athletics, stating that 'a wife that hustled would presently be following me to the tomb'. After being rescued, however, the story ends with 'He took the wet form to his dripping bosom, and – well, he is now the most conspicuous and most prized of all her swimming trophies, and says all his girls shall be taught to swim like their duck of a mother'.⁹³³ Again, this example reinforces the perceived utilitarian purpose of competitive swimming as a means of saving life, and the juxtaposition of

⁹²⁸ See 'Overarm', 'Swimming', *Weekly Times*, 11 March 1899, p. 27.

⁹²⁹ For examples, see 'Overarm', 'Swimming', *Weekly Times*, 10 February 1900, p. 19; 'Overarm', 'Swimming', *Weekly Times*, 31 March 1900, p. 18, and 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 3 March 1900, p. 469.

⁹³⁰ 'Overarm', 'Swimming', *Weekly Times*, 11 March 1899, p. 27.

⁹³¹ 'Swimming', *Sportsman*, 27 February 1900, p. 3.

⁹³² 'Sporting', *Table Talk*, 5 April 1900, p. 20.

⁹³³ 'Two in a Boat and Out', *Melbourne Punch*, 23 February 1899, p. 171.

this against the widespread view of the athletic female. These positive depictions of sporting aquatic women reinforced the sport as being both acceptable to the status quo, and demonstrated that female athleticism need not be as extreme as the 'New Woman' depictions would suggest.

In response to the continued success of the Brighton ventures, the idea of ladies' swimming clubs was soon manifested in other areas. A meeting held in Geelong in March 1900 resulted in the formation of the Geelong Ladies' Swimming Club, with approximately 70 women joining the club.⁹³⁴ The elected president, Mrs W. P. Carr, was the mayoress of Geelong, with a mixture of married and unmarried ladies occupying committee positions. It was decided that ladies' swimming matches would be held in Geelong before the close of the season.⁹³⁵ These matches were held in April 1900, with one correspondent commenting that it was a curious time to begin a swimming club, but 'no doubt the ladies know their business'.⁹³⁶ Like the Brighton matches, no men were permitted to enter. According to one female correspondent, this was unfortunate, as 'the swimming was well worth seeing by mere men'.⁹³⁷ One race was won by the mayoress of Geelong, which reportedly 'set a good example to other married women in keeping up that physical exercise so essential to all women who like to be thoroughly healthy and strong'.⁹³⁸ The swimming was generally acknowledged as being of a high quality, but according to the *Geelong Times*, not all swimmers 'could be termed graceful exponents of the natatorial art'.⁹³⁹ As observed in regard to the Brighton ladies' event, the public demonstrated their support of the activity through some liberal donations of trophies for the winning women.⁹⁴⁰

With the rapid development of women's competitive swimming in Melbourne, the effect of this on the spectatorship at the male carnivals must be questioned. Far from having an adverse effect, it would appear that more women attended than ever before. Press correspondents continued to comment positively on the vast number of females attending the events. In regard to the 1899 Melbourne club's championship meeting,

⁹³⁴ 'Overarm', 'Swimming', *Weekly Times*, 7 April 1900, p. 18.

⁹³⁵ 'Overarm', 'Swimming', *Weekly Times*, 24 March 1900, p. 19.

⁹³⁶ 'Sporting', *Table Talk*, 5 April 1900, p. 20.

⁹³⁷ 'Minetta', 'Lady's Letter', *Melbourne Punch*, 5 April 1900, p. 329.

⁹³⁸ 'Minetta', 'Lady's Letter', *Melbourne Punch*, 5 April 1900, p. 329.

⁹³⁹ 'Overarm', 'Swimming', *Weekly Times*, 7 April 1900, p. 18.

⁹⁴⁰ 'Geelong Ladies Swimming Club', *Geelong Advertiser*, 2 April 1900, no pagination.

the *Weekly Times* commented that ‘a ladies day was advertised, and as will be seen by our pictures the fair sex was strongly represented; in fact, there would appear to have been more ladies present than gentlemen’.⁹⁴¹ In 1900, *Sportsman* commented that the Melbourne club ladies’ day carnival attendance reached a record 900 persons, with a large proportion of these being women.⁹⁴²

It would seem that participation in their own activities did nothing to detract from the female enjoyment of the male competitions, which undoubtedly contributed greatly to the eventual male acceptance of the activity. After all, women who did not swim still attended these carnivals for the same reasons that they had before the female carnivals existed. Additionally, aquatically capable women were now able to enjoy a new appreciation for the sportive aspect of swimming carnivals, having experienced it directly first-hand. As the male population grew to accept the notion of women competing in swimming, whether as novelty or sport, women were also able to compete at VASA carnivals if they so desired. Women’s carnivals were still infrequent, and did not possess the entertaining aspects that the large-scale VASA club carnivals could provide. Therefore, they were not a direct threat to the male activities, and as long as the women continued to support the male competitions, this threat was minimised.

5.8 Conclusions

From examining the press reports on swimming for women in Melbourne in this period, it would appear that the popular opinions regarding competitive sport for women were not reflected in swimming. The associated health benefits and lifesaving skills outweighed any issues of modesty, and given its gradual evolution from recreation to competition, it was a notion that society became slowly accustomed to. The absence of criticism from the press, particularly in the face of the ‘New Woman’ threat, indicates that Melbourne women were participating in the activity in an appropriately feminine fashion. They were attired appropriately, competed separately from men and did not outwardly exhibit the same competitive characteristics as the male swimmers. Most importantly, they maintained a passive role in regard to their position within the male competitive sporting institution.

⁹⁴¹ *Weekly Times*, 4 March 1899, p. 14.

⁹⁴² ‘Swimming’, *Sportsman*, 30 January 1900, p. 3.

This passivity was integral in maintaining the continued support of women's competitive swimming by the male population. This is inclusive of VASA, as the administrators of the activity, and the male press correspondents who reported on the female activities. Despite the growing popularity of the activity, it would appear that there were no trailblazing women who demanded systematic inclusion within the VASA activities, and this was undoubtedly advantageous. Instead, women behaved appropriately at the VASA carnivals in terms of their dictated gender role. They applauded and supported the men, boosted attendances and formed a critical mass to witness, and appreciate the reinforcement of masculine athleticism and superiority. While this can be construed as a negative form of participation, in reality this passivity was integral to the women's eventual involvement in the sport. From the women's perspective, they were able to gain an appreciation for the competitive sport.

Additionally, the male population became accustomed to the notion of women attending competitive swimming carnivals. Their presence became not only tolerated, but welcomed. Women became such a valued part of the VASA carnivals in terms of their effect on the attendances that club administrators saw no problem with including women's races on their all-male programs. While these races were not intended as serious competitive events, they were a significant indicator that there was no perceived threat posed by females swimming competitively, both in terms of femininity and modesty. It is also possible that these races were intended to poke fun at the notion of females swimming, in the face of a perceived threat, but the positive press coverage garnered by the inclusion of these races suggests otherwise.

The advent of the ladies' only swimming carnivals in 1898 was another important step forward in terms of women's participation, and had a significant impact on the development of women's swimming in Melbourne. The mostly positive press coverage of these events reflected the appropriate manner in which these events were executed. Rather than being associated with the classless 'new women' attempting to challenge the men's competitive sport, these carnivals were organised by gentrified women, participating in the sport for healthful reasons, for the purpose of fundraising and to refine their lifesaving skills. While large portions of the programs were competitive, this competitive element was conducted appropriately, in that it was separate from the males, and for a greater purpose. Had the women been participating

for the sake of competing, it is unlikely these events would have been as well received. This emphasis is demonstrated in press coverage of these events, as press correspondents commonly emphasised the lifesaving aspects of the programs rather than the actual competitive sport.

It is somewhat ironic that the severest press criticisms of the women's sport were because of the complete exclusion of men, including administrators and press correspondents, from their carnivals. This action was incongruous with the passivity that the women had so far displayed in their participation in the sport. It was a necessary move in terms of ensuring that women would swim competitively, but was seen as a rejection of the male patriarchy, and a threat to the masculine activities. The VASA-sanctioned carnivals were heavily reliant on the spectatorship of women to survive, and there was perhaps a perceived threat that this support would cease if the women had their own successful sporting events. This gives a great deal of insight into the apparent importance of women to competitive swimming in Melbourne.

While the press coverage surrounding the exclusion of males at the ladies' only carnivals was generally negative, in reality it was less damaging than it appeared. The amount of coverage devoted to these events was considerably more than was devoted to any other swimming event, receiving coverage in general editorial columns, and elevated the profile of the women's sport immeasurably. The question must also be raised as to whether the male sex would have been as interested in the women's events had they not been forbidden from entering. Press columns outline humorous accounts of men attempting desperately to catch a glimpse of the women competing within the Brighton baths, which is somewhat incongruous with the status of women's competitive sport in this period. It can therefore be concluded that women's competitive swimming provoked a great deal of curiosity and interest as a result of this elevated press coverage. In holding their own sporting events and excluding the male sex from attending, women were labelled as being exceedingly prudish and sensitive by the press, and were depicted as inconsiderate in not extending the same courtesy to men that women were afforded at the VASA events. If this is considered against the definition of 'ideal womanhood', the Melbourne women swimmers were doing all the right things. In a period where women were being censored publicly in the press for not acting in an appropriately feminine manner, the female competitive

swimmers were being condemned for being too protective of their modesty and femininity.

These ladies' only swimming events were integral in allowing for the continued development of female competitive swimming, despite the criticism that they attracted in press coverage. They provided a nurturing environment in which the sport could develop, and ensured that competitive swimming was reinforced as a natural and valued activity for girls and women. In turn, the evolution of these events was reinforced by the development of the girls' swimming program in the state schools, and the continued support of influential Melbourne women in promoting swimming as an acceptable sport. However, it can be questioned whether the development of women's swimming would have been as well received had it not been for their continued support of the male swimming carnivals. By maintaining their traditional role as spectators, keeping their own events hidden and separate, and overemphasising the 'women only' edict, the appropriate gender role for women was maintained and the threat to the male sporting institution was minimised.

Chapter Six

‘A Spirit of Emulation’: Governing Competitive Swimming in Melbourne

6.1 Introduction

In examining the development of swimming in Melbourne between 1893 and 1900, a number of factors have been identified thus far in this thesis that contributed significantly to both the status and development of the sport. The associated notion of carnival, the development of swimming in schools and the establishment of women’s competitions were reported in a positive manner in press coverage, and were deemed to have impacted positively on the popularity of swimming in Melbourne. Therefore, it is pertinent to examine how these factors impacted on the systematic development of the competitive sport from the perspective of the press, and how this development was regulated by the newly established state governing body for the sport, the Victorian Swimming Association, who were formed in October 1893.

The notion of a governing body for competitive swimming had first been introduced in England in 1886, with the formation of the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA).⁹⁴³ In Australia, the New South Wales Amateur Swimming Association (NSWASA) were the first governing body for competitive swimming to inaugurate in 1892,⁹⁴⁴ with the VSA the second to form in 1893. The formation of these colonial associations ensured that the sport was more standardised and more organised, with competitions occurring less sporadically. From the inauguration of the Victorian association in 1893, most competitions staged in Melbourne were under the patronage of the VSA, and clubs affiliated with the association would routinely attend the carnivals of other affiliated clubs. This ensured a rotating roster of swimming carnivals in Melbourne and regional areas between November and April each year. In consideration of the growing amateur influence on competitive swimming, the VSA changed its name to the Victorian Amateur Swimming Association in 1895.⁹⁴⁵

When contextualised against the successful development of swimming as a spectator sport, the rise of women’s swimming and the role of VASA in developing school and

⁹⁴³ Love, *A Social History of Swimming in England*, p. 143.

⁹⁴⁴ Phillips, *Swimming Australia*, p. 16.

⁹⁴⁵ McDonald, *The First 100*, p. 7.

youth swimming, it could be suggested that competitive swimming in Melbourne was a highly successful, regulated sport in the period under examination. However, while there were a lot of positive developments in terms of club and association growth during this time, these were eclipsed in press coverage by VASA's poor administrative handling of the sport, and the subsequent financial and competitive failures that ensued. This chapter will examine the development of VASA and its associated swimming clubs from the perspective of the Melbourne press, and the barriers that were encountered in raising the standard of competitive swimming in Melbourne.

6.2 The Reflected Importance of Amateurism

In order to understand some of the actions undertaken by VASA in this period, it is important to examine them against the amateur ideals of the association. As defined more thoroughly in a previous chapter, the concept of amateurism dominated Australian sport from the 1850s in Australia, and promoted the view that sport could develop character and provide discipline through fair play. In line with such a view, it also suggested that the payment of money for playing sport was detrimental to the development of these qualities. The gradual evolution of amateurism led to the marginalisation of professional sports, and the promotion of this ideology led to class segregation and conflict within a wide variety of sports across Australia.⁹⁴⁶ This class conflict was manifested within the development of Australian swimming, due to its early professional emphasis, the moral qualities already associated with the sport due to its hygienic value, and the formal organization of the sport in the formative period of amateurism.

Phillips suggests that swimming administrators favoured amateurism,⁹⁴⁷ and given that sporting administration was regulated largely by the upper classes, this is hardly surprising. Daly states that in late nineteenth century Australia, wealthy, influential men of the community sought to influence the leisure activities of the lower orders, and therefore amateur activities were heavily promoted.⁹⁴⁸ This effectively reinforced the position of sport as an upper class domain, as few working class citizens could

⁹⁴⁶ Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, p. 54.

⁹⁴⁷ Phillips, *Swimming Australia*, p. 18.

⁹⁴⁸ Daly, *Elysian Fields*, p. 183.

afford to participate without being paid to play. While the upper classes participated freely in their own aristocratic sports discreetly, they were also able to reinforce their class status by serving as administrators.⁹⁴⁹ Therefore, they were free to impose their views on how sport should be played, which was in an amateur fashion. Daly also states in his history on swimming in Adelaide that the gentry would generally only patronise swimming as long as it was undertaken according to English amateur rules.⁹⁵⁰

In terms of the administration of swimming under amateur rules, Phillips states that there were an additional series of criteria for swimming, as well as the general criteria for amateurism, which prohibited ‘pace making for an individual, accepting a challenge for a side wager, selling a prize for cash, betting on races, and accepting travelling expenses’, or the participation of ‘those who were employed for money or wages in a swimming bath or elsewhere as an attendant on swimmers; or being a bath proprietor, lessee, or manager’.⁹⁵¹ These criteria effectively excluded anybody who received payment for any sporting or associated physical activity, and as Phillips suggests, ‘specifically discriminated against working class people who supplemented their income from their success at athletic pursuits’.⁹⁵²

The developing preference for amateurism in competitive swimming in Melbourne was reflected by the 1894/95 name change for the association, from the VSA to the VASA.⁹⁵³ This reflected the developing amateur/professional dichotomy within the sport, and as such dictated the Victorian association’s preference. Young suggests that it has long been perceived that professionalism was the secondary practice that sullied the amateur sporting world, but this was not the case. Amateurism was a concerted effort to reform the professional sporting practices that were already well established in society.⁹⁵⁴ This was reflected in competitive swimming, as the sport’s foundations in Australia were largely professional. As Phillips states, a great number of swimming professionals (such as Professor Fred Cavill) relocated from England to Australia in the formative years of competitive swimming, and so swimming in the bathing

⁹⁴⁹ Daly, *Elysian Fields*, p. 193.

⁹⁵⁰ Daly, *The Splendid Journey*, p. 15.

⁹⁵¹ Phillips, *Swimming Australia*, p. 18.

⁹⁵² Phillips, *Swimming Australia*, p. 18.

⁹⁵³ McDonald, *The First 100*, p. 7.

⁹⁵⁴ Young, *The Olympic Myth*, p. 15.

establishments under their management was largely professional.⁹⁵⁵ The inauguration of amateur governing bodies in each colony was largely an upper class movement to reclaim the sport from the professionals, and these colonial associations were specifically formed to combat the rise of professional swimming.⁹⁵⁶ Examination of the early office bearers of the various colonial associations yields a veritable collection of governors and titled individuals holding positions of prominence.⁹⁵⁷

As the name change of the association in 1895 suggests, competitive swimming in Melbourne was primarily of the amateur variety. In press coverage, all swimming championship events were clearly defined as ‘amateur’, intimating that only amateur swimmers were able to compete. In comparison to other colonies at the time, swimming in Melbourne appears to have been largely free of the professional influence upon the inauguration of an amateur governing body, or so it appears from a press perspective. This is despite the continued existence of professional swimming organisations throughout Australia in the late nineteenth century, with both New South Wales and South Australia hosting large professional swimming leagues. The South Australian League of professional swimmers was in existence as early as 1898, with the amateur organisation, the South Australian Amateur Swimming Association (SAASA), forming in that same year.⁹⁵⁸ Charles Bastard, the secretary of the League, ran the professional events at the City Baths, which boasted large prize money but the races were reputedly often staged and manipulated, with amateur swimmers often lured to compete in these events.⁹⁵⁹

Given the prevalence of professional swimming leagues in other colonies, it is surprising that there seems to have been no such equivalent professional organisation operating in Melbourne in this period, when it is considered that Melbourne also had a long history of professional swimming contests earlier in the nineteenth century. As Parker states, many English professional swimmers migrated to Australia in the

⁹⁵⁵ Phillips, *Swimming Australia*, p. 5. Professor Fred Cavill arrived in Australia in 1879 and managed the Lavender Bay baths in Sydney, teaching swimming to men, women and children. For further information, see Raszeja, ‘Cavill Family’, p. 92.

⁹⁵⁶ Daly, *The Splendid Journey*, p. 10.

⁹⁵⁷ For example, see Barrett, *The First 100 Years*, p. 8, where the inaugural patron of the Queensland association was the Governor Lord Lamington.

⁹⁵⁸ Daly, *The Splendid Journey*, p. 10. For further information on the New South Wales league, see Richardson, ‘An Aquatic Divide and Conquer’, p. 71.

⁹⁵⁹ Daly, *The Splendid Journey*, p. 27.

twentieth century, in order to make a living in a less competitive environment and in a location where their aquatic feats were new and exciting.⁹⁶⁰ Three of the better-known professional swimmers in Australian history, Walter McIndoe, A. T. Kenney and Charles Steedman all resided in Melbourne in the late nineteenth century. According to Seth Richardson, in 1884 Kenney defeated McIndoe for the championship of Australia in Melbourne, collecting a £100 prize.⁹⁶¹ Steedman's aquatic accomplishments in his native England have been documented in a previous chapter. In Melbourne, he was renowned as a 'top professional swimmer' and in 1858, competed in the first purported World Swimming Championships at Captain Kenney's baths at St Kilda.⁹⁶² Therefore, it can only be speculated as to why no professional swimming league existed in Melbourne in this period. It is noted the South Australian and New South Wales leagues were driven by aquatic professionals who had access to their own baths to run such events,⁹⁶³ which may have been integral to their existence. In the period under examination, it appears that none of the prominent baths proprietors in Melbourne were engaged in professional swimming, and their baths were used solely for amateur swimming competitions.

The poor tolerance of professional swimming in the Melbourne press may have also been a factor in explaining the absence of a Melbourne professional swimming league. Grow states that between the years of 1880 and 1900, the Melbourne metropolitan press damned all elements of professionalism in their coverage, and conversely all amateur sport was celebrated.⁹⁶⁴ The amateur status of the association would also seem to be an important factor in explaining why competitive swimming gained so much positive press coverage. As Daly suggests, 'playing sport for the love of it possessed a moral imperative that engaged the attention of news editors ...'.⁹⁶⁵ However, while amateurism was a popular concept in theory, and had the unwavering support of press correspondents, some of the associated practices were somewhat

⁹⁶⁰ Parker, 'The Rise of Competitive Swimming', p. 63.

⁹⁶¹ Richardson, 'An Aquatic Divide and Conquer', p. 46.

⁹⁶² Colwin, *Breakthrough Swimming*, p. 198.

⁹⁶³ The organiser of the South Australian professional league (Charles Bastard) was the lessee of the Adelaide city baths. While the organisers of the New South Wales league are not known, individuals who were involved with the league (such as George Farmer and the Cavill family) also leased baths in the Sydney area. See Daly, *The Splendid Journey*, pp. 20-21, and Richardson, 'An Aquatic Divide and Conquer', p. 63.

⁹⁶⁴ Grow, 'Nineteenth Century Football and the Melbourne Press', p. 33.

⁹⁶⁵ Daly, *The Splendid Journey*, p. 10.

detrimental to swimming. In 1893, the *Sportsman* published a statement from a Mr St Clair, the head of the New Zealand Amateur Swimming Association (NZASA), concerning the rise of amateurism. St Clair was of the view that as long as trophies were awarded at competitions, amateurism was non-existent, and that they should be ‘done away’ with altogether. The retort of the *Sportsman* correspondent was typically blunt, stating that ‘this notion may be very good in theory, but if put into practice Mr. St. Clair would find his association badly left’.⁹⁶⁶

Trophies and the other assorted prizes offered at carnivals were integral to attracting a substantial number of competitors at carnivals. The prizes on offer attracted the entrants in the various events, who would pay an entry fee for each event they entered. Considering that in most cases the prizes were donated, a lucrative prize could increase profits considerably. Love states in his study of British swimming that in the late nineteenth century, it was common for wealthy locals and commercial businesses to donate prizes for swimming competitions.⁹⁶⁷ Melbourne swimming clubs particularly welcomed the patronage of the social elite, because of the contributions they made to the annual carnival. In most cases, they donated prizes, such as a case of wine awarded to the winner of the costume competition by a Mr E. L. Jacoby, the manager of the Yackandandah Wine Company.⁹⁶⁸ Trophies at carnivals were often named after the individuals who donated them, or for the respective companies they represented, such as The Singer Sewing Machine Trophy,⁹⁶⁹ or the Foy and Gibson’s Silver Cup.⁹⁷⁰ Nevertheless, although the provision of prizes at carnivals was very necessary, they could not be too lucrative, with VASA keen to preserve the amateur nature of the sport.

Apart from the inherent character traits that amateurism was intended to foster, it was also largely beneficial as a marketing tool for the fledgling sport. As the concept of amateurism gained ascendancy, sports associated with this ideal became popular, and were marketed more prominently in press coverage. In regard to swimming coverage, press correspondents never failed to draw positive attention to overt displays of

⁹⁶⁶ ‘Sporting Bits’, *Sportsman*, 14 November 1893, p. 5.

⁹⁶⁷ Love, *A Social History of Swimming in England*, p. 10.

⁹⁶⁸ ‘On The Briny’, *St Kilda Advertiser*, 13 December 1893, p. 2.

⁹⁶⁹ ‘Amusements’, *Age*, 12 February 1894, p. 8.

⁹⁷⁰ ‘The Collingwood Swimming Baths’, *Argus*, 18 February 1895, p. 7.

amateurism, as such dictating their preference. In an 1895 column, the *Australasian* correspondent stated that ‘the swimmers of Geelong are evidently genuine amateurs, for there were no prizes at all for the winners of their races last Saturday ... and I am assured that the racing was as keen and well-contested as one could wish to see’.⁹⁷¹ This amateur status also served as a conduit between swimming and other amateur sports, and was useful for recruitment purposes. In particular, the strong link between swimming and amateur athletics in these early years of the activity should be noted. When reporting on the formation of the Melbourne Swimming Club in 1894, the correspondent for the *Sportsman* commented, ‘As there are several famous swimmers amongst our amateur runners I hope they will attend in force’.⁹⁷²

As a relatively new, and seasonal, competitive sport, swimming relied heavily on the patronage of athletes from other sporting clubs who were looking for a summer activity. As a strictly amateur sport, swimming clubs wished to welcome only amateur athletes, and athletics met this criterion effectively. Melbourne swimming carnivals were advertised during 1894 in the *Sportsman* under the column titled ‘Amateur Athletics’ and the VSA were in the process of negotiating an affiliation with the VAAA. This move gained the approval of the *Sportsman*’s correspondent, who suggested in his column that ‘I hope this will come about, as it will strengthen the ranks of both bodies materially’.⁹⁷³

However, the stringent guidelines in place that regulated amateurism meant that clarifications were often sought in the press. In an 1897 *Australasian* column, it was stated that ‘competing in bicycle races for cash or against professionals since 1st January, 1897, would disqualify men for amateur swimming, but taking part in militia competitions would not’.⁹⁷⁴ These stringent guidelines, coupled with an understandable desire for monetary reward by some, inevitably meant that breaches did occur that had to be dealt with. At the opening races at the Richmond baths in 1897, a number of swimmers competed for monetary prizes, and these swimmers were disqualified from the association on the guise that the races were not held under VASA rules, and monetary prizes had been accepted. All offending participants who

⁹⁷¹ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 23 March 1895, p. 547.

⁹⁷² ‘Whip’, ‘Amateur Athletics’, *Sportsman*, 2 October 1894, p. 2.

⁹⁷³ ‘Whip’, ‘Amateur Athletics’, *Sportsman*, 9 October 1894, p. 3.

⁹⁷⁴ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 23 January 1897, p. 172.

wished to take part in future VASA events were recommended to apply to the honorary secretary, F. G. Richardson, stating their case and asking to be reinstated. As the *Australasian* correspondent suggested, ‘the majority of these competitors, no doubt, swam in ignorance of these facts, and I suppose the association council will in that case be clement in dealing with them’.⁹⁷⁵ As Hayes suggests in the English context, it could be construed that there were two types of professional swimmer - those who were solely in swimming as a profit-making venture, and those who broke amateur laws accidentally due to unfamiliarity with the complex definition, or because they occasionally made money from their swimming.⁹⁷⁶

It is interesting to note that some of the associated problems in terms of breaches of amateurism occurred towards the turn of the century, as swimming gained ascendancy and significance. The conduct of the majority of Melbourne amateur swimming events as ‘handicapped’ races was a primary cause of these problems. As Mewett has identified, handicapping is defined as the provision of staggered starts in a race, where the slower athletes start the race in front of those who are quicker. This method accounts for the differences in ability between the athletes.⁹⁷⁷ To circumvent this, it was sometimes suggested that competitors in VASA races swam ‘stiff’, implying that the competitor swam his initial race slower than he was capable of, in order to lower his handicap and therefore increase his chances of winning. However, any allusions to swimming in Melbourne being anything other than amateur were denied stringently by the press, or strongly condemned. This is evidenced by the response of a press correspondent who was accused of implying that a competitor swam ‘stiff’ in an 1899 VASA race. He stated that:

Everyone acquainted with swimming matches in Melbourne must be aware that such an imputation against any swimmer would be simply ridiculous ... The first prize in the race in question was a trophy of the value of just one guinea, and such a thing as betting on swimming races is absolutely unknown in any of our Melbourne baths.⁹⁷⁸

⁹⁷⁵ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 15 January 1898, p. 131.

⁹⁷⁶ Hayes, ‘The Professional Swimmer’, p. 136.

⁹⁷⁷ P. G. Mewett, ‘Discourses of Deception: Cheating in Professional Running’, *Australian Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2002, p. 295.

⁹⁷⁸ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 28 January 1899, p. 189.

Yet, at a later 1899 carnival, a competitor was disqualified for swimming stiff. As the *Leader* correspondent commented ‘This is to be regretted, as we look to swimming to be above this’.⁹⁷⁹

The lack of coverage on Melbourne professional swimmers suggests the preference of the press in this period was strongly amateur. It is impractical to suggest that professional swimming did not occur in Melbourne in this period, given its prevalence in other states, but it was certainly not publicised in the press. For example, two Victorian brothers, Alfred and George Ware, competed in professional swimming events in Adelaide in 1899,⁹⁸⁰ but this was not alluded to in the press. Occasionally professional swimming events in other states were reported on, suggesting that the Melbourne press would cover them if they did exist.⁹⁸¹ However, coverage of this nature may also have served to highlight the purity of competitive swimming in Melbourne.

Nevertheless, the lack of professional swimming in Melbourne did not mean that the public were not exposed to the professional swimming movement that was found in other Australian colonies. As the association developed, and the quality of competitive swimming improved, the strictly amateur status of the association became a problem in terms of attracting quality opposition from other colonies. In 1896, the Middle Park club proposed to hold a race between Harry Heath, the current 100 yard Victorian amateur champion, and Charles Cavill, the ‘champion’ of Australia, who was a professional swimmer. The *Australasian* correspondent noted in his column that this would be a great attraction, but also questioned whether this was possible under VASA amateur rules.⁹⁸² In the meantime, Cavill was supposed to swim an ‘exhibition’ quarter-mile race at another carnival, but the *Argus* noted that ‘the other competitors, for some reason, did not make their appearance’.⁹⁸³ It is impossible to

⁹⁷⁹ ‘Running Header’, ‘Swimming’, *Leader*, 4 March 1899, p. 18.

⁹⁸⁰ See Daly, *The Splendid Journey*, p. 27.

⁹⁸¹ For example, see ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 25 February 1899, p. 415, and ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 26 February 1898, p. 467, where the results from a series of races undertaken by the professional South Australian League of Swimmers were provided, along with a short discussion.

⁹⁸² ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 26 December 1896, p. 1271.

⁹⁸³ ‘Swimming’, *Argus*, 4 January 1897, p. 6.

tell whether the other competitors were intimidated by Cavill's prowess, or whether they feared damage to their own amateur status.

The association did give its approval for the race between Cavill and Heath to take place in January 1897, and the event, deemed an 'exhibition race', was won by Heath by a yard.⁹⁸⁴ Nevertheless, the race drew some disapproval from the *Australasian* correspondent, who stated:

The event was under the sanction of the association, and was, I am satisfied, a thoroughly sportsmanlike affair, to which neither prize, wager, nor anything else was attached, the sole object being to provide an interesting event for the spectators. Nevertheless, I venture to question very seriously the advisability of the association permitting such events, and I am glad to learn that it was only sanctioned under stress of peculiar circumstances, and with an addendum to the minutes that it was not at any time to be deemed a precedent of indicative of the association's practice should any similar case occur in future.⁹⁸⁵

Later in 1897, Charles' brother, Percy, who still maintained amateur status, swam at the Melbourne club carnival, but was condemned by the *Leader* correspondent for taking part in an aquatic exhibition at Stubbs' Baths with his sibling. Though all the profits from the gate takings went to Charles, therefore allowing Percy to maintain his amateur status, the correspondent suggested that 'the Amateur Swimming Association have their duty to perform and see their rules are not ignored by those swimming under them'.⁹⁸⁶ VASA passed a vote of censure at their meeting regarding the matter, which was met with general approval by the *Leader* correspondent, as he suggested 'Percy Cavill is deservedly popular amongst the swimmers here, and the amateurs could ill afford to lose such a fine exponent of the natatory art'.⁹⁸⁷ From this perspective, it would appear that the press were highly in favour of amateur swimming, and any threat to the amateur status of the association was condemned in press coverage. This, coupled with the lack of coverage on professional swimming, dictated that competitive swimming would inevitably develop in Melbourne as an amateur sport.

⁹⁸⁴ 'Sports and Sportsmen', *Table Talk*, 22 January 1897, p. 12.

⁹⁸⁵ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 23 January 1897, p. 172.

⁹⁸⁶ 'Running Header', 'Swimming', *Leader*, 20 March 1897, p. 17.

⁹⁸⁷ 'Running Header', 'Swimming', *Leader*, 27 March 1897, p. 18.

6.3 The Development of Clubs and Competitions

Phillips has established that the role of colonial swimming associations in standardising and organising competitive swimming ensured that regular competitions were held.⁹⁸⁸ In line with such a view, apart from dictating a preference for amateur sport, the establishment of a state association for Victorian swimming was instrumental in developing a universal code of conduct and competition program. The VSA were inaugurated for this specific reason, as prior to the inauguration of the VSA, there was no administrative consistency. In 1891, the Williamstown swimming club wrote a letter to the South Melbourne club requesting that they recognise a suspension they had placed on two of their swimmers, and suggesting that an amateur association was needed to address such matters. However, this matter was not dealt with until October 1893, where A. A. Peverill, secretary of the Middle Park club, wrote to secretaries of seven other clubs requesting a meeting to organise the formation of the association.⁹⁸⁹ At this meeting, the association was duly formed, and a constitution and a set of rules were established.⁹⁹⁰ From this point, regular, scheduled competitions were hosted by clubs under the auspices of the VSA/VASA, and these competitions commonly included handicap races of a number of distances, with a number of novelty races included for entertainment value.⁹⁹¹

In conjunction with the associations, swimming clubs were integral in ensuring the growth of competitive swimming in colonial Australia. Prior to the establishment of swimming clubs, swimming competitions were sporadic, hastily organised and because they were often held by baths proprietors for profit, expensive to attend. Once clubs took over the organisation of competitive swimming, events were held in enclosed baths rather than in open water, administrative positions such as starters, handicappers and judges were created, and races over varied distances were instituted.⁹⁹² However, upon the formation of the VSA in 1893, only four Melbourne clubs sent delegates, namely Middle Park, Port Melbourne, South Melbourne and St Kilda.⁹⁹³ In order to increase the profile of the association, one of the association's

⁹⁸⁸ Phillips, *Swimming Australia*, p. 16.

⁹⁸⁹ McDonald, *The First 100*, p. 3.

⁹⁹⁰ McDonald, *The First 100*, p. 4.

⁹⁹¹ For example, see 'Swimming', *Sportsman*, 30 January 1894, p. 6.

⁹⁹² Phillips, *Swimming Australia*, p. 14.

⁹⁹³ McDonald, *The First 100*, p. 4.

first matters of business was to request the affiliation of existing clubs throughout Victoria.

It must be noted that swimming clubs were not required to affiliate with the association, and a great number, particularly those from regional Victoria, refused to join the association upon request. For example, an 1893 column in the *Ballarat Star* reports that a letter was sent to the Ballarat club in regard to this matter, which they declined with a vote of thanks.⁹⁹⁴ Mordialloc was another club that was not affiliated with VASA, but their events appear to have been primarily entertainment-based, with very little emphasis on the competitive swimming element.⁹⁹⁵ In a further blow to the numerical strength of the association, a small number of clubs folded in the early years of the association, with the prominent South Melbourne club disbanding in the 1895/96 season.⁹⁹⁶ However, it was reformed again at the beginning of the 1896/97 season, with the *Australasian* reporting that a meeting was to be held regarding this matter, yet failing to mention that it had previously existed.⁹⁹⁷ A *Leader* report confirmed that this re-affiliation had occurred.⁹⁹⁸

Despite the inauguration of VASA, swimming was, at this point, not an overly popular sport in Melbourne, receiving only minute, results-based coverage in the Melbourne metropolitan and sporting newspapers. However, the low status of swimming in the state was altered significantly with the formation of the Melbourne Swimming Club in October 1894. This club was by no means an innovation, but merely a reorganisation and re-branding of the St Kilda Swimming Club, which had disbanded earlier that year.⁹⁹⁹ What was significant about the club was the prestigious status it was afforded, if judged by the amount and quality of press coverage their carnivals and activities received. The club was officially formed on 3 October 1894, at a meeting held at the George Hotel in St Kilda.¹⁰⁰⁰ Forty gentlemen attended this inaugural meeting and signalled their intention for membership, with an honorary secretary elected, and other committee members appointed. It was decided that the

⁹⁹⁴ 'Ballarat Swimming Club', *Ballarat Star*, 2 December 1893, p. 2.

⁹⁹⁵ For example, see 'Notes and Comments', *Brighton Leader*, 19 January 1895, p. 4.

⁹⁹⁶ See 'Header', 'Swimming', *Leader*, 4 April 1896, p. 18.

⁹⁹⁷ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 7 November 1896, p. 965.

⁹⁹⁸ 'Header', 'Swimming', *Leader*, 21 November 1896, p. 17.

⁹⁹⁹ Belfrage, *Victorian Amateur Swimming Association*, no pagination.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Melbourne Swimming Club, *Melbourne Swimming Club*, no pagination.

club should naturally affiliate with the VSA, and it was agreed that a further meeting should be held to decide on the club rules and by-laws.¹⁰⁰¹

As the status of swimming as an amateur sport suggests, the social elite ran swimming clubs. Club committees were comprised of society gentlemen, and it was desirable for club office bearers to hold a prominent position in society, as this was indicative of club respectability.¹⁰⁰² Support of the upper classes was integral to the ongoing financial security of a club. It was important in terms of attracting spectators to club events that eminent leaders of society were present, and it was commonplace for press coverage of the event to mention the prominent citizens in attendance. A St Kilda carnival in 1893 boasted the attendance of ‘the Hon. George Turner, president of the club, Mayor Jacoby, Mr. J.N. Browne, town clerk, and a large number of leading citizens, with their families’.¹⁰⁰³ The opening carnival of the Collingwood baths boasted ‘the names of half the members of the Legislative Assembly as patrons’.¹⁰⁰⁴ Some swimming clubs were fortunate enough to have an official patron, which also conferred a desired respectability to club activities and events. The Western club in Geelong boasted His Excellency Lord Hopetoun, the current governor of Victoria, as their patron at the beginning of the 1894/1895 season.¹⁰⁰⁵

While most swimming clubs possessed a few influential citizens as part of their membership, the Melbourne club appeared to have an exceptional number, which may account for the increased press coverage they received. For example, the inaugural president of the club was the Right Honourable Sir George Turner, the Premier of Victoria,¹⁰⁰⁶ and one 1895 Melbourne carnival boasted the attendance of the Premier and the Mayor of Melbourne.¹⁰⁰⁷ The entries at their carnivals were also greater than at any other. For their 1895 ladies’ day carnival, the Melbourne club received 250

¹⁰⁰¹ ‘Whip’, ‘Amateur Athletics’, *Sportsman*, 9 October 1894, p. 3.

¹⁰⁰² Daly, *The Splendid Journey*, p. 25.

¹⁰⁰³ ‘On The Briny’, *St Kilda Advertiser*, 13 December 1893, p. 2.

¹⁰⁰⁴ ‘Aquatic Carnival at Collingwood’, *Age*, 18 February 1895, p. 7.

¹⁰⁰⁵ ‘Whip’, ‘Amateur Athletics’, *Sportsman*, 30 October 1894, p. 2. Lord Hopetoun was the governor of Victoria until July 1895, at which time Lord Brassey came into office. See McCaughey, Perkins and Trumble, *Victoria’s Colonial Governors*, p. viii.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Melbourne Swimming Club, *Melbourne Swimming Club*, no pagination. Turner was the Victorian Premier from September 1894 until 1901, at which time he became the national treasurer. See John Rickard, ‘The Quiet Little Man in a Brown Suit: George Turner and the Politics of Consensus’, in Paul Strangion and Brian Costar (eds), *The Victorian Premiers, 1856-2006*, Federation Press, Annandale, 2006, pp. 109-118.

¹⁰⁰⁷ ‘Swimming’, *Argus*, 11 March 1895, p. 7.

entries for the various events,¹⁰⁰⁸ in comparison with the Middle Park club's carnival that same year, which received 90 entries.¹⁰⁰⁹ The club certainly hosted a greater number of carnivals per year than any other club, and reports of their events indicate that they were considerably more elaborate. It is suggested that the social status of their carnivals, as well as their superior entertainment, was instrumental in attracting press coverage. This in turn attracted more spectators, members and therefore more profit, which allowed them to host extra carnivals throughout the year.

The establishment of the Melbourne Swimming Club appears to have been a turning point for swimming in Melbourne, as the amount of press coverage on swimming increased exponentially upon their formation. Prior to this, the actions of VASA received little recognition in the press, as the *Australasian* correspondent suggested:

Years ago swimming held a fairly prominent position among Victorian sports, but of late this excellent exercise seems to have been kept in the background. There is a Victorian Amateur Swimming Association, but it seems to lack vitality, and is seldom heard of. After a lengthy struggle for existence the St Kilda S. C. went spark out last season, but, like a phoenix, there has arisen from its ashes the Melbourne Swimming Club, with a lot of earnest, hard-working men at the head of affairs, hopeful of doing something substantial for the benefit and pleasure of their fellows.¹⁰¹⁰

Six weeks after their formation, the Melbourne club held their inaugural Members' Race meeting at Hegarty's Baths, St Kilda. The membership had swelled to over 140 members by this time, and the event was well attended by local councillors and by members of other swimming clubs.¹⁰¹¹ This carnival proved an inordinate success, and a second, more elaborate carnival was scheduled for February 1895. Touted as a 'grand ladies day', this event was promoted heavily in a number of newspapers, promising a highly entertaining program. Scheduled for the afternoon was the popular Ladies' Bracelet event, as well as 'the Melbourne Swimming Club handicap; 300yds; diving competitions, boys' races, umbrella race, cigar, band box and fancy costume races, greasy pole and various other comic novelties'.¹⁰¹² The newspaper coverage of this event suggests that the carnival was extremely successful, from both an entertainment and competitive point of view. The various newspaper reports suggest

¹⁰⁰⁸ 'Amateur Athletics', *Sportsman*, 29 January 1895, p. 3.

¹⁰⁰⁹ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 26 January 1895, p. 163.

¹⁰¹⁰ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 1 December 1894, p. 992.

¹⁰¹¹ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 1 December 1894, p. 992.

¹⁰¹² 'Swimming', *Age*, 30 January 1895, p. 7.

different attendance statistics, with the number appearing to have been between 1500-2,000 spectators.¹⁰¹³ The *Age* pithily noted that the event was a success ‘from the point of view both of the sportsmen and the financier’.¹⁰¹⁴ While newspaper reports suggest that the competitive races of the day were enjoyed, the emphasis was on the more entertaining aspects swimming could offer, and this ‘carnival’ element became a trademark of the Melbourne club competitions. *Melbourne Punch* praised the program organiser, the honorary secretary Casper, stating that he had ‘taken care to include mostly every novelty, and also provided for a display of skill in diving and swimming under water’.¹⁰¹⁵

The popularity of the Melbourne club was attributed to the low membership fees (5s for men and 2s 6d for boys per annum), and the energy put into forming and developing the club by its prestigious member base.¹⁰¹⁶ The *Australasian* correspondent declared at the conclusion of the 1894/95 season that ‘the Melbourne Swimming Club has made excellent progress in this its first season, and has at once jumped into premier position among Victorian clubs, possessing as it does the largest membership roll, many of our finest swimmers, and some real energy’.¹⁰¹⁷ With the formation of the Melbourne club, a large number of other clubs soon began to affiliate and hold competitive races. Soon enough, swimming clubs were being formed wherever freshwater baths were constructed around the city suburbs. The Brighton club held their inaugural aquatic sports in December 1894,¹⁰¹⁸ and with the opening of the Collingwood baths in 1895, it was immediately proposed that a swimming club should be formed.¹⁰¹⁹

Swimming was a sport that was greatly appreciated by the press, and competitors were held up in press columns as shining examples. One 1895 column commented that ‘the ease with which the competitors went through their events should certainly prove an incentive to those who cannot swim to perfect themselves in the art’.¹⁰²⁰ By

¹⁰¹³ For example, see ‘Swimming’, *Sportsman*, 5 February 1895, p. 2, and ‘The Melbourne Swimming Club’s Meeting’, *Age*, 6 February 1895, p. 7.

¹⁰¹⁴ ‘The Melbourne Swimming Club’s Meeting’, *Age*, 6 February 1895, p. 7.

¹⁰¹⁵ ‘Social’, *Melbourne Punch*, 7 February 1895, p. 93.

¹⁰¹⁶ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 1 December 1894, p. 992.

¹⁰¹⁷ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 16 March 1895, p. 499.

¹⁰¹⁸ ‘Aquatic Sports at Brighton’, *Age*, 17 December 1894, p. 3.

¹⁰¹⁹ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 19 January 1895, p. 115.

¹⁰²⁰ ‘Social’, *Melbourne Punch*, 7 February 1895, p. 93.

1895, the increase in, and quality of press coverage on, swimming suggested that the sport was experiencing a boom in popularity. As the *Australasian* correspondent noted at the commencement of the 1894/95 season:

Victorian swimming enthusiasts are shaking hands with themselves on the signs of revived interest which this season has furnished them with. In place of the lethargy and apathy so apparent the last year or two there is now quite a breeze of interest, and to hear some of our leading swimmers talk of tackling their New South Wales neighbours gives hope that we may yet see this truly noble art taking its proper place in the forefront of the exercises of young Victoria.¹⁰²¹

The entries to competitions continued to grow in this period, with the *Argus* attributing the greater number of entries to the gradual improvements made by VASA.¹⁰²² A total of 185 entries were received for the 1896 Melbourne carnival, which was attributed to ‘the wonderful revival that has taken place in swimming during the past few seasons’.¹⁰²³

This positive reinforcement was duplicated at the commencement of the 1895/96 season, where it was stated that ‘if the work done at the first meeting of the new committee of the Victorian Amateur Swimming Association on December 6 is to be taken as a criterion it is evident there is to be a new era for swimming in this colony’.¹⁰²⁴ This meeting heralded VASA’s decision to hold the first Victorian championships as part of the 1895/96 season.¹⁰²⁵ In reference to this, the Melbourne club’s influence on Victorian swimming was further demonstrated by the club’s donation of two perpetual shields to be awarded for the Victorian 440 and 880 yard titles. The only condition was that these events must be staged at Melbourne Swimming Club carnivals. The Middle Park club soon followed suit, offering a shield for the 100 yard championship, with the same conditions attached.¹⁰²⁶ In 1896, the Western (Geelong) club requested permission from VASA to introduce a 500 yard

¹⁰²¹ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 26 January 1895, p. 163.

¹⁰²² ‘Swimming’, *Argus*, 23 January 1896, p. 6.

¹⁰²³ ‘Header’, ‘Swimming’, *Leader*, 1 February 1896, p. 19.

¹⁰²⁴ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 14 December 1895, p. 1131.

¹⁰²⁵ Interestingly, the Brighton club carnival in early 1895 hosted an event titled ‘50 Yards Amateur Championship of Victoria’, which was evidently an unsanctioned and therefore unofficial event.

¹⁰²⁶ Belfrage, *Victorian Amateur Swimming Association*, no pagination.

championship event to be held at their meeting, for which they would provide the requisite medals.¹⁰²⁷

VASA continued to request that clubs affiliate with the association, with an 1896 column reporting that 'efforts were being made to induce the Geelong and Ballarat clubs to affiliate with the Association ... It will be a mutual advantage, for union is certainly strength in these matters'.¹⁰²⁸ The Geelong Swimming Club joined the association after receiving this letter.¹⁰²⁹ However, the Ballarat club were more reticent, with the *Australasian* correspondent continuing to urge them to affiliate, so that metropolitan swimmers could compete at their competitions.¹⁰³⁰ A 'well known' patron of swimming in Melbourne offered to contribute a prize to be awarded at Ballarat carnivals if the club was to affiliate.¹⁰³¹ The *Leader* correspondent supported this affiliation, suggesting that:

In the best interest of the sport and of the swimmers likely to disport themselves in their events, the Ballarat people should not hesitate to do so, even without any such inducement. Under the present circumstances, a member of an associated club is debarred from competing at Ballarat, because the latter is not with one controlling body. This will probably be far reaching in its effect on the entries, now that the Geelong clubs are joining the Victorian Swimming Association'.¹⁰³²

The constant haranguing of the press appeared to be effective, as the Ballarat club postponed their 1896 competition so that a meeting could be held in regard to affiliation. The *Leader* correspondent suggested that representation on the VASA committee would not be an issue, as there were a number of gentlemen residing in Melbourne who would be happy to stand in for them at meetings.¹⁰³³ The Ballarat club finally agreed to affiliate in March 1896.¹⁰³⁴ The Western Club (Geelong) had been admitted to VASA in February 1896,¹⁰³⁵ and the Eastern Geelong club joined in April 1896.¹⁰³⁶

¹⁰²⁷ 'Header', 'Swimming', *Leader*, 26 December 1896, p. 18.

¹⁰²⁸ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 11 January 1896, p. 67.

¹⁰²⁹ 'Swimming', *Sportsman*, 21 January 1896, p. 2.

¹⁰³⁰ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 25 January 1896, p. 162.

¹⁰³¹ 'Header', 'Swimming', *Leader*, 1 February 1896, p. 19.

¹⁰³² 'Header', 'Swimming', *Leader*, 1 February 1896, p. 19.

¹⁰³³ 'Header', 'Swimming', *Leader*, 8 February 1896, p. 15.

¹⁰³⁴ 'Swimming', *Sportsman*, 3 March 1896, p. 8.

¹⁰³⁵ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 29 February 1896, p. 401.

¹⁰³⁶ 'Header', 'Swimming', *Leader*, 4 April 1896, p. 18.

The affiliation of these regional clubs allowed swimmers from the VASA clubs to attend additional carnivals over the season. In March 1896, a group of 35 swimmers from assorted Melbourne clubs made a trip across Port Phillip Bay to attend the Western club carnival, making special arrangements with the *S.S. Edina* to ferry them there and back. According to the *Australasian*, the visitors were ‘highly impressed with the quality of the Geelong swimmers, who are a very welcome addition to the strength of the association’.¹⁰³⁷

At the conclusion of the 1895/96 season, the *Leader* correspondent declared that ‘the association is doing good work in the true interests of swimming’,¹⁰³⁸ and the numbers of members associated with VASA’s clubs continued to rise. By the 1896/97 season it was anticipated that the membership rolls would reach approximately 700 members,¹⁰³⁹ and by the end of the 1896/97 season, ten clubs had joined the ranks of VASA.¹⁰⁴⁰ Fixtures for the season began to be published in the *Australasian*, and an 1897 column in reference to the inner-city Collingwood club suggested that spectatorship at carnivals was so good that ‘the club no longer has to complain that the public do not support it’.¹⁰⁴¹

In time, other inner-city clubs began to affiliate. The Williamstown club became affiliated at the beginning of the 1896/97 season,¹⁰⁴² and the Richmond club was inaugurated at the beginning of 1898 as a result of the opening of the new public baths.¹⁰⁴³ Prior to the commencement of the 1899/1900 season, the Melbourne club attempted to organise an amalgamation between themselves, Middle Park and South Melbourne, to form one larger club. Middle Park and South Melbourne declined the proposal, and in an attempt to reinforce the superiority of the Melbourne club, their patron, Lord Brassey, put forward a petition to the Secretary of State for the club to be granted ‘Royal’ status.¹⁰⁴⁴ There was never any reference to suggest that this occurred.

¹⁰³⁷ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 21 March 1896, p. 548.

¹⁰³⁸ ‘Header’, ‘Swimming’ *Leader*, 11 April 1896, p. 19.

¹⁰³⁹ ‘Swimming’, *Leader*, 28 November 1896, p. 18.

¹⁰⁴⁰ McDonald, *The First 100*, p. 11.

¹⁰⁴¹ ‘Running Header’, ‘Swimming’, *Leader*, 6 February 1897, p. 18.

¹⁰⁴² ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 21 November 1896, p. 1008.

¹⁰⁴³ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 8 January 1898, p. 76.

¹⁰⁴⁴ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 9 December 1899, p. 1308.

While the development of VASA and its clubs was celebrated in press columns of the sport, and swimming was deemed a highly worthy activity, some of the initial problems experienced by the association and its clubs in their early years were also highlighted. From a press perspective, the inconsistencies in rules and regulations, the poor attention paid to regional administration, the poor financing of VASA and its clubs, and the lack of intercolonial success were prominent factors which hindered the growth of competitive swimming in Melbourne.

6.4 Inconsistencies in Rules and Regulations

The inauguration of VASA was theoretically intended to ensure consistency in regulations across the Melbourne swimming clubs, but there were some initial problems in this regard. Early competitions were fraught with administrative and technical inconsistencies, which were condemned by the press. A common complaint was the lack of standardisation at VASA-sanctioned carnivals, with the *Australasian* correspondent commenting in regard to one 1895 carnival that the course was too short, resulting in times that were not standardised.¹⁰⁴⁵ It was never stated in press coverage what the standard length actually was, which may have confused clubs in this regard. The clubs' ad hoc approach to record keeping was also condemned by the press, and it was observed at one 1895 carnival that 'no times appear to have been taken, which robs them of some interest. This should be seen to by clubs, as without times readers in the country and other colonies are quite unable to gauge the merit of the performances'.¹⁰⁴⁶

One correspondent questioned at the beginning of 1895 whether there were any official Victorian swimming records,¹⁰⁴⁷ and while this issue was never clarified in the press, an 1896 *Leader* report stated that a records sub-committee had been formed.¹⁰⁴⁸ In the following season, the point was raised that the boundary lines of swimming baths were not permanently fixed, and therefore the distances of races at carnival venues varied depending on the tide levels. It was suggested that records could not possibly be granted under these conditions, and since VASA did not yet have any records, it was desirable for distances to be completely standardised before

¹⁰⁴⁵ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 26 January 1895, p. 163.

¹⁰⁴⁶ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 6 April 1895, p. 643.

¹⁰⁴⁷ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 16 February 1895, p. 308.

¹⁰⁴⁸ 'Header', 'Swimming', *Leader*, 28 March 1896, p. 18.

any were recorded in the ‘virgin tablets’ of the association. It was put forward that wooden planks should be fixed over the baths for swimmers to turn at.¹⁰⁴⁹ Timing issues continued to be a problem, and upon questioning a time put forward by one particularly prominent swimmer, a correspondent commented ‘Why is it that no care is taken in these matters? It is an injustice to the swimmers, and the association should certainly at once see that all the usual courses are accurately surveyed and permanently marked’.¹⁰⁵⁰

The issue of standardised rules was addressed at the beginning of the 1895/96 season, where a column reporting on VASA’s first meeting for that season stated that a revised set of rules had been suggested, with a sub-committee formed to review these.¹⁰⁵¹ These rules were passed at the February 1896 meeting, with the primary amendment that ‘competitors in all events must touch or pass the boundary of the course with the hand or head at the conclusion of each separate lap’.¹⁰⁵² This amendment was in response to a carnival earlier that month, where a swimmer leading by a considerable margin had failed to touch the rope at the end of the course and was disqualified. The *Australasian* correspondent had suggested that the decision made by the judges was at the ‘height of absurdity’, as there was no rule governing it.¹⁰⁵³ He welcomed this amendment, deeming it ‘necessary and reasonable’, and stated that the new rules were binding and would be circulated to all clubs shortly.¹⁰⁵⁴ Another sub-committee was appointed to further revise the rules in March 1896 after another controversy, where a protest was lodged over lap-counting procedures.¹⁰⁵⁵

These rules and regulations were amended and expanded over the course of the 1895/96 season, and at the beginning of the 1896/97 season it was decided that a general meeting would be held, where all affiliated clubs and their swimmers could attend. At this meeting, it was proposed to formally introduce the rules that had been revised in the previous season, and that the swimmers should elect the new VASA office bearers. A president, five vice-presidents, a secretary and a treasurer were to be

¹⁰⁴⁹ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 12 December 1896, p. 1161.

¹⁰⁵⁰ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 23 January 1897, p. 172.

¹⁰⁵¹ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 14 December 1895, p. 1131

¹⁰⁵² ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 29 February 1896, p. 401.

¹⁰⁵³ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 8 February 1896, p. 258.

¹⁰⁵⁴ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 29 February 1896, p. 401.

¹⁰⁵⁵ ‘Header’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 28 March 1896, p. 18.

elected, and as the *Australasian* correspondent commented, ‘this is the first occasion in the association’s history on which the general body of swimmers have been given an opportunity of voicing their sentiments directly, and I expect to see a full house’.¹⁰⁵⁶

After this meeting, the new rules were clarified in the press. The *Leader* correspondent stated that there were approximately 120 rules, all based on a similar premise to the rules of the New South Wales, England and New Zealand associations. It was decided that clubs with less than 50 members were permitted to have one VASA delegate, and clubs with more than that number were permitted to have two. Clubs had to pay the association £1 1s for each delegate. Additionally, clubs had to have 25 members to become affiliated with VASA, and a strong emphasis was put on the desirability of having country clubs affiliate, with arrangements for this incorporated.¹⁰⁵⁷ With the affiliation of some of these regional clubs, some variations in procedure began to come to the fore. At a Geelong carnival in 1896, shortly after their affiliation with VASA, a number of protests were entered that were largely based on the Geelong club’s method of starting races, where they dropped a flag instead of using a starting gun.¹⁰⁵⁸

On a number of occasions, the correspondents would compare the VASA organisational practices very unfavourably with those adopted by the NSWASA. An *Argus* column in 1896 suggested that to obtain closer and more accurate finishes for the events ‘the association would do well to adopt the New South Wales system of appointing an Association handicapper, who is furnished with the times of the competitors’,¹⁰⁵⁹ which was also supported by the *Australasian* correspondent.¹⁰⁶⁰ A column bemoaning errors in handicapping at a Brighton carnival suggested that this was due to the lack of circulation of the printed rules, which had reportedly not yet been distributed:

The sooner these rules are published and circulated the better, as it will take some little time for club members and officials to become au fait with them, and until then no blame can fairly attach to mistakes such as this of not

¹⁰⁵⁶ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 7 November 1896, p. 965.

¹⁰⁵⁷ ‘Swimming’, *Leader*, 28 November 1896, p. 18.

¹⁰⁵⁸ ‘Header’, ‘Swimming’, *Leader*, 21 March 1896, p. 18.

¹⁰⁵⁹ ‘Swimming’, *Argus*, 23 January 1896, p. 6.

¹⁰⁶⁰ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 14 March 1896, p. 496.

consulting the official handicappers, the erroneous rule as to protests printed on the back of the Brighton programme, or the fact that the programme was not stated, as it should have been, to be held under V.A.S.A rules. Hurry up with those rules, Mr. Secretary.¹⁰⁶¹

However, once the rules were circulated, the press began to reproach clubs and swimmers for not adhering to the new rules. As the *Australasian* reported in regard to a South Melbourne carnival, 'had the V.A.S.A rules been properly enforced several competitors would have been disqualified for wearing improper costumes, and I advise them to accept this warning not to offend again'.¹⁰⁶² It is not certain what these improper costumes entailed, but a motion was passed in 1898 that 'in future dark blue or black costumes will be de rigueur, and all trunks must be worn under the costume and not outside it'.¹⁰⁶³

In early 1897, the issue of swimmers competing for more than one club was raised at a VASA meeting. Proficient swimmers such as Harry Heath were reportedly competing for three different clubs at different carnivals, and it was suggested that a rule preventing this be discussed at the next meeting.¹⁰⁶⁴ This issue was brought to a head in 1898, with the *Australasian* correspondent admonishing VASA yet again for their poor decision-making in regard to rules. The Middle Park club had poached a swimmer from the Melbourne club to enhance their Flying Squadron relay team, and won the race convincingly over Melbourne, who was forced to withdraw their team upon their swimmer's defection. This left a considerable number of clubs largely disgruntled, and as the correspondent suggested:

The whole proceedings are detrimental to the best interests of the sport, to say the least of it. What is the result? Geelong clubs dissatisfied, Melbourne club disgusted, other clubs disheartened and Middle Park despoiled of the credit that would otherwise have been given them. The association should certainly have refused Meagher's entry, as they were justified in doing under the circumstances.¹⁰⁶⁵

This debacle led to the adoption of a new VASA rule, stating that:

The club in whose name a competitor swims in his first race during the season has first call on such competitor, and he cannot compete in any matches

¹⁰⁶¹ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 19 December 1896, p. 1219.

¹⁰⁶² 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 9 January 1897, p. 74.

¹⁰⁶³ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 24 December 1898, p. 1432.

¹⁰⁶⁴ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 13 February 1897, p. 316.

¹⁰⁶⁵ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 19 February 1898, p. 413.

against such club during that season unless he first obtains a written permit from such club or from the association.¹⁰⁶⁶

However, competitors were still able to be members of more than one swimming club in the same season.¹⁰⁶⁷

The press dissatisfaction with VASA was again displayed at the beginning of the 1899/1900 season, where it was reported that as had occurred in the previous year, VASA was late in holding their annual meeting, and this was seen as highly detrimental. It was suggested that ‘with such an example at headquarters is it surprising that some of the clubs grow equally somnolent, and that the more active ones grow restive and dissatisfied’.¹⁰⁶⁸ Correspondents wrote to the *Australasian* complaining of the early hosting of the first Victorian championship for the season, which was attributed to the late start of the season, and the entire racing program having to be held in just ten weeks.¹⁰⁶⁹

The annual meeting was therefore scheduled for 14 December 1899, but, in keeping with the poor organisation of VASA, it was cancelled due to an insufficient quorum. As the *Australasian* stated, ‘There is no doubt things have drifted too much, but the lapsing of this meeting will, I think, be found to have been a blessing in disguise. It has served to rouse a number of those connected with the association to a sense of the position’.¹⁰⁷⁰ Undoubtedly the rapid expansion of the association was the cause of some of the administrative strain, and as Love observed in his study of swimming in England, ‘while there was steady growth of swimming ... the last quarter of the nineteenth century was also marked by dispute and argument’.¹⁰⁷¹ However, a great deal of the conflict may have been caused by a lack of support for the administrative positions necessary for the consistency of the sport, due to its upper class governance as an amateur sport. Daly has observed that in the early years of the SAASA, honorary positions such as vice-president were easily filled by ‘men of substance and reputation’, but actual, necessary positions such as secretary or handicapper were not

¹⁰⁶⁶ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 28 January 1899, p. 189.

¹⁰⁶⁷ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 28 January 1899, p. 189.

¹⁰⁶⁸ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 9 December 1899, p. 1308.

¹⁰⁶⁹ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 16 December 1899, p. 1364.

¹⁰⁷⁰ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 23 December 1899, p. 1432.

¹⁰⁷¹ Love, *A Social History of Swimming in England*, p. 11.

filled by these individuals. Therefore, they were often taken up by swimmers, which was highly impractical on race day.¹⁰⁷²

From examination of the administrative difficulties faced by VASA in this period, it is evident that their actions to amend the problems experienced were highly reactive in nature. Problems were often dealt with as they arose, and this was primarily in response to complaints from clubs, or to issues raised by press correspondents in their columns. This process has been observed in a similar fashion in Australian Rules football, where Grow states that many of the rules that were introduced to football in Melbourne during this period were originally suggested by the metropolitan press.¹⁰⁷³ However, the constructive criticism of VASA's administrative shortcomings in the press undoubtedly had a negative effect on their public profile, and this was strongly reinforced by the issues that arose in regard to the regional clubs.

6.5 Poor Attention to Regional Clubs

The Melbourne press saw that a key factor in developing VASA as an association, and subsequently the standard of competitive swimming in Victoria, was to expand into country areas. As has already been discussed, a number of regional clubs were affiliated with VASA, and by 1895 a number of small country towns had begun to hold informal races, at which prominent Melbourne swimmers would occasionally compete. A number of Port Melbourne swimmers competed at races in Kyneton in 1895,¹⁰⁷⁴ and swimming matches were organised by promoters in Bairnsdale in 1896.¹⁰⁷⁵ The *Australasian* correspondent identified a number of regional areas where swimming clubs could be accommodated, and upon discovering that there was a Kilmore Swimming Club, established in 1895, commented:

The club holds no galas, and sadly wants galvanising into activity, but, I believe, if the metropolitan clubs were to hold good races there (why not the mile championship, among others?) they would prove successful, and be the means of promoting the sport in a new centre ... There is such a dearth of good, or even promising, swimmers about the city that no effort should be lost to discover talent in the country.¹⁰⁷⁶

¹⁰⁷² Daly, *The Splendid Journey*, p. 26.

¹⁰⁷³ Grow, 'Nineteenth Century Football and the Melbourne Press', p. 30.

¹⁰⁷⁴ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 9 February 1895, p. 259.

¹⁰⁷⁵ 'Swimming', *Argus*, 14 March 1896, p. 5.

¹⁰⁷⁶ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 16 January 1897, p. 124.

However, VASA were having enough problems dealing with the regional clubs already under their control, which was largely a result of their poor administration and rule inconsistencies. This issue was exacerbated in 1898, when a report in the *Geelong Advertiser* hinted that as a result of the continued poor handicapping of non-metropolitan swimmers, the Geelong and Western clubs from Geelong, and the Ballarat club, were looking at withdrawing from the association and forming their own independent association. To discuss the viability of withdrawing from VASA, the Geelong clubs called a special meeting.¹⁰⁷⁷

Twenty-four members attended this meeting, and the chairman put forward a number of reasons why the Geelong clubs should withdraw. He suggested that VASA were a 'mismanaged body', and that swimming had gone backwards in Geelong since joining the association. His view was that the Geelong clubs did not receive fair treatment in terms of handicapping, and that the level of support Geelong swimmers gave to metropolitan contests was not reciprocated. A resolution was moved that the Geelong clubs withdraw from VASA, which was accepted by the Geelong club. A representative from the Western club stated that due to insufficient attendance from their members, they would need to hold a separate meeting.¹⁰⁷⁸ This meeting was duly held, and it was reported that the Western club would also withdraw from the association at once.¹⁰⁷⁹

This was met with surprise by the metropolitan press, who reported that the withdrawal of the Geelong clubs was attributed to VASA's general incompetency, the faulty handicapping by VASA handicappers, the poor entries of Melbourne swimmers for Geelong events, and the poor treatment of Geelong competitors in the George Gall Cup, the premier Victorian youth race. The *Australasian* correspondent was unusually reticent in discussing the event, suggesting that:

I don't want to say any more than this at present, that the club have acted apparently without giving the matter fair or proper consideration, and that when this is given I feel sure no such extreme step will be thought necessary. Should not any complaints have been made known through the club's delegates, Messrs F. Blunt and H. W. Scott?¹⁰⁸⁰

¹⁰⁷⁷ 'Swimming', *Geelong Advertiser*, 14 February 1898, no pagination.

¹⁰⁷⁸ 'The Swimming Association', *Geelong Advertiser*, 15 February 1898, no pagination.

¹⁰⁷⁹ 'Town Talk', *Geelong Advertiser*, 16 February 1898, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸⁰ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 19 February 1898, p. 413.

The *Sportsman* correspondent was more blunt in criticising the decision:

The action of the Geelong club in notifying its intention to secede from the VSA [*sic*] has called forth much adverse criticism in swimming circles, Surely the members of the club must be labouring under some misapprehension. But, of course, they know their own affairs best. The club, no doubt, is well aware that none of their members can race in meetings under VSA patronage, nor affiliated swimmers at its meets.¹⁰⁸¹

The issue was raised at the March 1898 VASA meeting, where the Geelong club announced their desire to withdraw. However, the Western club representative denied the press reports that they were also withdrawing, and stated that they had held a meeting and decided to remain with VASA. It was decided that the matter would be further discussed at the next VASA meeting.¹⁰⁸²

The Geelong withdrawal was further discussed at the next VASA meeting, where the secretary was instructed to reply to the Geelong club acknowledging their withdrawal, and to remind them of the rule that swimmers competing at carnivals of unregistered clubs would be disqualified from VASA, therefore ensuring that no VASA affiliated swimmer could attend their carnivals.¹⁰⁸³ This rule was strictly obeyed by swimmers at the 1898 Geelong carnival, where it was reported that:

On account of the Western Swimming Club refusing to follow in the footsteps of the Geelong club in the matter of withdrawing from the Victorian Amateur Swimming Association, no members of the former club took an active part in the racing events of Saturday. Had they done so they would have rendered themselves liable to disqualification, as the rules of the association expressly forbids swimmers to swim at meetings outside their jurisdiction. The risk, therefore, was too great ...¹⁰⁸⁴

Upon commenting that in addition to the boycotting of affiliated swimmers from Geelong events, prominent club members from Geelong had defected to affiliated clubs, the *Australasian* correspondent suggested at the conclusion of this column that 'the sooner the Geelong club recognises that its action has been hasty, ill advised and disastrous the better for itself'.¹⁰⁸⁵

¹⁰⁸¹ 'Evemel', 'Swimming', *Sportsman*, 28 February 1898, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸² 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 5 March 1898, p. 523.

¹⁰⁸³ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 19 March 1898, p. 634.

¹⁰⁸⁴ 'Geelong Swimming Club', *Geelong Advertiser*, 14 March 1898, no pagination.

¹⁰⁸⁵ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 19 March 1898, p. 634.

In the midst of the affiliation conflict, the resolve of the Western club's decision to remain affiliated was undoubtedly tested upon the hosting of their annual carnival. A report on the event suggested that despite the attendance of key VASA officials, the support of the event by the metropolitan contingent was less than satisfactory:

The large entry expected from the affiliated clubs in the metropolis was not realised, and with the exception of F. Blunt there was not a swimmer of any note from Melbourne. The club had been given to understand that all the crack swimmers from Melbourne would be in attendance, and this had induced them to put a scratch race on the programme, for which valuable prizes were offered ... the value of the race to test the respective merits of the Geelong and Melbourne 'sprinters' was rendered worthless.¹⁰⁸⁶

Given that the lack of support from the Melbourne clubs had been a primary reason for Geelong's withdrawal, it is somewhat surprising that the attendance was not greater.

The Geelong club, upon withdrawing, had written to the Ballarat club suggesting that they too should withdraw and form a regional association. This was discussed at Ballarat's annual meeting, where it was decided that their secretary would obtain some additional information in regard to Geelong's reasons for withdrawing.¹⁰⁸⁷ It was reported in the *Geelong Advertiser* that a representative from the Ballarat club, Major Bennett, had spoken with VASA in regard to the matter. It was clarified that the Geelong club had withdrawn in protest of the poor administration and handicapping, and that VASA were attempting to convince them to reconsider. Bennett put forward a number of suggestions at this meeting that would make the regional clubs more amenable to remaining affiliated, namely the use of local handicappers at regional carnivals, and that championship events should be divided between metropolitan and regional areas. While VASA could not acquiesce to the local handicappers, they did agree to the altered hosting of championship events, and also suggested that the George Gall Cup (the premier youth event) could be held in this manner also. As a result, the Ballarat club agreed to remain affiliated with VASA, and also passed a motion that the club should ask the Geelong club to reconsider their actions.¹⁰⁸⁸

¹⁰⁸⁶ 'Western Swimming Club', *Geelong Advertiser*, 28 March 1898, no pagination.

¹⁰⁸⁷ 'Overarm', 'Swimming', *Weekly Times*, 10 December 1898, p. 25.

¹⁰⁸⁸ 'Swimming', *Geelong Advertiser*, 14 December 1898, no pagination.

However, in the meantime, VASA were able to rectify the problem by means of a clever administrative decision. In December 1898, the *Australasian* correspondent reported that Harry Heath, who originally hailed from Geelong, had accepted the position of VASA secretary and official handicapper. Given that Geelong had been the club vociferously protesting against the unfair handicapping, the correspondent suggested that 'I trust that the Geelong club will come out of the Achilles tent in which they have been sulking, and again be found working heartily with the other clubs in the association'.¹⁰⁸⁹ Predictably, it was reported at the next VASA meeting that Geelong had decided to rejoin the association, and had submitted necessary payment for this to occur. As one correspondent remarked, 'It is satisfactory to know that all differences between them and the association are now at an end'.¹⁰⁹⁰

A major attraction of having the regional clubs affiliated with VASA was undoubtedly the financial contribution that they made to the association's account balance. It has been acknowledged thus far that VASA experienced numerous and varied problems in regard to administration, and these were exacerbated by the poor financial status of the association and its clubs. The expenses associated with running swimming competitions, and the financial problems faced by smaller swimming clubs, were also significant in hindering the development of the competitive sport.

6.6 Financial Problems

As the association and its clubs developed, the financial implications of running regular competitions and carnivals became evident. Most swimming clubs charged 1s for the public to attend their competitions,¹⁰⁹¹ and it would appear that for most of the smaller clubs, this was not a sufficient amount to meet expenses. Sinclair and Henry suggest that in regard to nineteenth century swimming in England, 'the continued drain upon club funds leads to a state of insolvency, and many organizations have for that reason been compelled to abstain from holding open competitions'.¹⁰⁹² In the Melbourne context, there were also a lot of associated costs with opening swimming competitions up to the public, and often they were not profitable. For example, according to a report in the *Geelong Advertiser* in 1898, the entry takings for the 1897

¹⁰⁸⁹ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 24 December 1898, p. 1432.

¹⁰⁹⁰ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 28 January 1899, p. 189.

¹⁰⁹¹ See *St Kilda Advertiser*, 26 January 1895, p. 2.

¹⁰⁹² Sinclair and Henry, *Swimming*, p. 355.

Western club carnival were £23, which was the exact amount spent on trophies awarded at that carnival.¹⁰⁹³ A concise explanation of the financial breakdown of a swimming carnival was provided in an 1896 *Brighton Leader* column, in reference to a Brighton club event:

The total income will amount to something over £20, exclusive of the proportion of members' tickets charged to this meeting. The total value of the prize money offered was about £19, but the actual prize money paid was reduced to about £16 owing to two events being left out of the original program for want of entries ... The total expenditure will reach over £30, and thus there must be a debit balance.¹⁰⁹⁴

Given that a member's ticket admitted one gentleman and two ladies, the financial status of the event was not surprising.¹⁰⁹⁵ The financial woes of the Brighton club continued, and their 1897 competition was cancelled due to poor public support. As the correspondent noted, 'it seems to me they cater for the public at too cheap a rate'.¹⁰⁹⁶ However, the bigger and more prestigious clubs appeared to be faring well, with a report on the 1896 annual meeting of the Middle Park club commenting that the club was in a 'sound financial position'.¹⁰⁹⁷ In 1898, the Western club reported that while they were in debt of approximately £5, this had been gradually reduced over the past few seasons, and it was expected that the club would be out of debt by the next season. The primary sources of revenue for the club for the previous season were takings from carnivals, donations from the public and members' subscriptions.¹⁰⁹⁸

The financial security of these bigger, more prestigious clubs can be attributed to a number of interrelated factors. As Parker states in regard to swimming clubs in England, clubs that were able to obtain the financial support of a generous patron or local business were much more likely to survive.¹⁰⁹⁹ Given the prestigious membership base of clubs such as Middle Park and Melbourne, it is unlikely that they had problems attracting patronage or spectators to their events. However, smaller and less influential swimming clubs without a patron needed to keep their entrance fees

¹⁰⁹³ 'Swimming', *Geelong Advertiser*, 14 December 1898, no pagination.

¹⁰⁹⁴ 'Brighton Swimming Club', *Brighton Leader*, 18 January 1896, p. 2.

¹⁰⁹⁵ 'Brighton Swimming Club', *Brighton Leader*, 18 January 1896, p. 2.

¹⁰⁹⁶ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 20 February 1897, p. 364.

¹⁰⁹⁷ 'Header', 'Swimming', *Leader*, 14 November 1896, p. 11.

¹⁰⁹⁸ 'Swimming', *Geelong Advertiser*, 14 December 1898, no pagination.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Parker, 'The Rise of Competitive Swimming', p. 68.

down in order to attract sufficient spectators to make a profit, and this was especially challenging in the face of competition from other clubs and other sports. From 1896, as the number of clubs increased, the number of weekly carnivals began to increase also. This caused some problems in terms of clashing fixtures, with more than one carnival held each Saturday. This was seen as detrimental to both entries and attendance. The press were always quick to point out a clash, with one 1896 column urging the Williamstown club to change the date of their matches to another Saturday to avoid such a situation.¹¹⁰⁰ As Sinclair and Henry stated in their 1894 seminal work on swimming in England, ‘very great care should be taken to avoid clashing with another gala in the same district, as otherwise both may result in financial failures’.¹¹⁰¹

The allure of other sports was also a threat to the attendance of swimming carnivals. The *Sportsman* reported in 1896 that the St Kilda Yacht club was holding a race day on the same day as the Melbourne club’s championship races. It was perceived that this would be detrimental to the club’s gate takings, and a letter was sent to the yacht club requesting if their date could be changed.¹¹⁰² In the same year, the Ballarat club were also forced to postpone their carnival for a week owing to some bicycle races taking place at the same time.¹¹⁰³ At the commencement of the 1898 season, it was suggested by club officials that ‘Cricket and cycling will ruin us this year’.¹¹⁰⁴ Cycling was particularly popular, with the Melbourne club postponing their meeting in late 1896 on account of the majority of their members wanting to go and witness the cycling sports at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. However, as one correspondent pithily commented, ‘*En passant*, it may be said to-day is not the Melbourne’s ladies day’.¹¹⁰⁵

While some of the smaller clubs were struggling financially, VASA were not immune to financial difficulties either. Their lack of funds prevented necessary improvements being undertaken to improve the sport, and hindered their progress. To assuage this, it was proposed at a VASA meeting in January 1896 that a ladies’ day gala at Stubbs’s

¹¹⁰⁰ ‘Header’, ‘Swimming’, *Leader*, 8 February 1896, p. 15.

¹¹⁰¹ Sinclair and Henry, *Swimming*, p. 349.

¹¹⁰² ‘Swimming’, *Sportsman*, 3 March 1896, p. 8.

¹¹⁰³ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 8 February 1896, p. 258.

¹¹⁰⁴ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 12 February 1898, p. 359.

¹¹⁰⁵ ‘Header’, ‘Swimming’, *Leader*, 19 December 1896, p. 15.

baths in February should be held to boost the association's funds.¹¹⁰⁶ The event was advertised for 14 March, and F. G. Richardson, the honorary secretary of the association, was able to 'obtain the support and patronage of a number of prominent citizens'.¹¹⁰⁷ This gala was seen as a key fundraiser for VASA, and as the *Australasian* stated, 'Every swimmer should lend his aid by coming and bringing his friends with him, and thus place the association in funds to do much necessary and useful work which is still ahead'.¹¹⁰⁸ While the event was deemed a success, it was not the financial solution that VASA had hoped for. It was reported in the *Australasian* that the association would not make any profit from the gala, and this was attributed to the late stage of the season.¹¹⁰⁹

For the 1897 VASA gala, clubs were delegated the duty of securing at least one trophy or donation as a contribution. To further boost the profits for the day, they were also asked to promote the gala amongst their membership.¹¹¹⁰ The press did their bit by encouraging attendance of the public in their columns, appealing to the association's work in providing a public service in 'cultivating swimming and lifesaving'.¹¹¹¹ Later in 1896, further attention was drawn to VASA's precarious financial situation when it was revealed in the *Leader* that Harry Heath's trip to Sydney to attend the Australasian championships had not been funded by VASA, as previously thought, but by a gentleman associated with Heath. The correspondent stated that clubs were being asked to donate the amount owed by Heath, so that he was not paying for the effort.¹¹¹²

These cumulative problems evidently raised awareness of the poor financial standing of VASA, as the press began to comment on the inability of VASA to further the cause of competitive swimming because of their precarious financial status. At the beginning of the 1896/97 season, one correspondent commented that 'up till now the association has had a ridiculous income of three to four guineas per annum, added to by a few donations. To do any real good and become a power in the land this amount

¹¹⁰⁶ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 18 January 1896, p. 115.

¹¹⁰⁷ 'Header', 'Swimming', *Leader*, 15 February 1896, p. 19.

¹¹⁰⁸ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 21 March 1896, p. 548.

¹¹⁰⁹ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 28 March 1896, p. 594.

¹¹¹⁰ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 30 January 1897, p. 216.

¹¹¹¹ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 13 February 1897, p. 316.

¹¹¹² 'Swimming', *Leader*, 5 December 1896, p. 18.

must be considerably increased'.¹¹¹³ At the 1896 annual association meeting, it was reported that the expenditure for the previous season had exceeded the income, despite the gala that VASA had hosted for fundraising purposes. To assist with fundraising, it was decided that the association would sell copies of the new rules to members for a low price, so that they could acquaint themselves with these, as well as those regarding the management of competitions and the water polo rules.¹¹¹⁴

The 1897 annual meeting of VASA was held in November, where it was established that the association had again posted a loss, but held stock and trophies worth significantly more than the loss.¹¹¹⁵ However, by 1898, the *Weekly Times* reported that the association was in 'a good financial position',¹¹¹⁶ and the *Australasian* stated that the association was free of debt, 'and if only councillors will throw fresh energy and care into its work there is a good future before it'.¹¹¹⁷ However, in the same column, it was reported that competitors were entering competitions without paying the fees, and it was suggested that 'this practice is the more despicable when it is remembered that in no sport are entry fees so low, 1s being the usual fee'.¹¹¹⁸

The press clearly saw that the key to addressing the financial problems of the association and its clubs was to cater more effectively for spectators. As has been demonstrated by examining the popular entertainment aspect of swimming competitions, most of the suggestions made by the press were to benefit the spectators, who were still becoming accustomed to the sport. After the inaugural 1895 Collingwood carnival, the correspondent conceded that 'the arrangements for an initial meeting were very fair, but more accommodation for the spectators was required, and it is not usual or advisable to start a handicap swimming race with a gun'.¹¹¹⁹ A report on the 1895 Middle Park matches suggested that a results board was required to inform spectators,¹¹²⁰ and this view was supported by the *Australasian* correspondent, who suggested that 'if swimming committees desire to attract the

¹¹¹³ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 7 November 1896, p. 965.

¹¹¹⁴ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 21 November 1896, p. 1008.

¹¹¹⁵ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 20 November 1897, p. 1116.

¹¹¹⁶ 'Overarm', 'Swimming', *Weekly Times*, 17 December 1898, p. 26.

¹¹¹⁷ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 24 December 1898, p. 1432.

¹¹¹⁸ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 24 December 1898, p. 1432.

¹¹¹⁹ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 23 February 1895, p. 355.

¹¹²⁰ 'Amateur Athletics', *Sportsman*, 22 January 1895, p. 2.

public they should give some attention to these details'.¹¹²¹ On cue, the *Australasian* reported after the 1895 Melbourne club carnival that a scoring board was utilised and proved very 'effective'.¹¹²²

Press reports suggest that it was very difficult for swimmers to be identified by spectators, and therefore initiatives that enhanced the experience of the spectator were applauded. At the inaugural VASA fundraising carnival, the spectator was at the forefront of all the decisions made, with the races swum between two stages in the centre of the baths for maximum viewing. Swimmers were transported to the starting line in boats.¹¹²³ Later in 1896, the *Leader* correspondent praised the Middle Park club for their course alteration, stating that 'this enabled the spectators to have a clear view of the racing from start to finish, which is a great consideration'.¹¹²⁴ The *Australasian* correspondent suggested the adoption of numbers or coloured caps to aid identification, as the programs were of no help in identifying the swimmers.¹¹²⁵ At the 1899/1900 VASA annual meeting, suggestions were made to allocate all swimmers a registration number, which could then be worn on their swimming costume so that spectators could identify them, and to reduce the number of men starting in each heat.¹¹²⁶

It was also mentioned by the press that clubs did not provide sufficient information to press correspondents to assist in promoting their events. The importance of catering to the press was highlighted in Sinclair and Henry's nineteenth century swimming instructional manual, which suggested that:

A week before the meeting a ticket of admission should be sent to the principal papers, and a day or two before some particulars as to the entries and general arrangements. These should be written out in form ready for publication, as they are more likely to be inserted than if they require editing. They should not be too long - in fact, the briefer they are the better.¹¹²⁷

¹¹²¹ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 2 February 1895, p. 212.

¹¹²² 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 9 February 1895, p. 259.

¹¹²³ 'Header', 'Swimming', *Leader*, 15 February 1896, p. 19.

¹¹²⁴ 'Swimming', *Leader*, 25 January 1896, p. 19.

¹¹²⁵ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 2 February 1895, p. 212.

¹¹²⁶ 'Overarm', 'Swimming', *Weekly Times*, 13 January 1900, p. 19.

¹¹²⁷ Sinclair and Henry, *Swimming*, p. 355.

It was also suggested that a special program be printed for press correspondents, with blank pages for scribing comments on race results.¹¹²⁸ However, in 1898, the *Australasian* correspondent stated that ‘I cannot compliment the club secretaries and officials on their energy in press matters. I have never received a program or a line this season, with two small exceptions’.¹¹²⁹ It appears that this practice continued, as later in the year, the same correspondent stated in regard to the Middle Park carnival that, ‘I have not had any information about them, nor could those of whom I asked tell me’.¹¹³⁰

While VASA were able to improve their financial status by means of fundraising, their smaller affiliated clubs continued to struggle in the face of increased competition. The poor financial status of the association, coupled with the poor administration and organisation of VASA and its clubs, were significant in thwarting the development of competitive swimming in Melbourne from a performance-based perspective. This did not go unnoticed by the press, particularly in the face of significant development in other parts of Australia.

6.7 The Unacceptable Standard of Competitive Swimming

While the press were highly supportive of competitive swimming, and VASA’s initial actions in developing the sport, this support had begun to wane slightly by the conclusion of the 1894/95 season. The general consensus was that VASA needed to do more work in ensuring the development of the competitive element, and as one correspondent stated:

I hope this winter that the Victorian Swimming Association will really work to put their house in order, and make themselves fully representative of the colony. There is plenty of work for them to do, such as the introduction of a uniform system of starting and timing races, colour regulations, polo badge matches, Victorian championships at various distances, arrangement of intercolonial visits, more general introduction of lifesaving classes, appointment of official handicappers, &c, and the success which has attended the efforts of the various clubs this past season should encourage the association in the task.¹¹³¹

¹¹²⁸ Sinclair and Henry, *Swimming*, p. 358.

¹¹²⁹ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 29 January 1898, p. 247.

¹¹³⁰ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 21 January 1899, p. 133.

¹¹³¹ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 6 April 1895, p. 643.

At the conclusion of the 1894/95 season, the VASA committee had discussed the probability of sending Victorian representatives to the inaugural Australasian championships in Sydney. The *Australasian* reported in April 1895 that E. S. Marks, the secretary of the New South Wales Amateur Athletic Association (NSWAAA) had finalised plans for biennial intercolonial swimming championships to take place. The inaugural championships were to be held in Sydney in January 1896, with New Zealand already committed to sending a team. The correspondent had initially applauded this move, particularly in the face of the New South Wales dominance, stating that:

I hope Victoria will please take note and arrange to send a few men over to the meeting, even though defeat may be in store for them. The Victorians competing would, no doubt, pick up some valuable wrinkles, both as to swimming methods and management of galas, and the standard of swimming in this colony would, no doubt, be raised as a result, for there must be plenty of good material in Victoria.¹¹³²

It was decided at the VASA meeting that it was desirable for Victoria to be represented at these championships, with a number of the colony's leading swimmers to be approached. This was met with approval by the *Australasian* correspondent, who reasoned that if the right swimmers were sent, Victoria would not be embarrassed, and that the potential reciprocal visit by Sydney swimmers would provoke a great deal of public interest.¹¹³³ As the correspondent stated, 'I trust they will respond even at the expense of some inconvenience and loss to themselves for such action will be the surest method of advancing interest on this side of the Murray', and implored the swimmers 'Why not make the attempt?'.¹¹³⁴ This desire for Victorian representation undoubtedly stemmed from the existing general intercolonial sporting rivalry between Victoria and New South Wales, which Cashman states was prevalent from the 1850s, and became more pronounced from the late nineteenth century when competition became more frequent.¹¹³⁵

However, despite the impassioned pleas from the correspondent, only one Victorian, Harry Heath from the Melbourne club, attended the inaugural championships. This pleased the *Australasian* correspondent, but he had no huge expectations for Heath's

¹¹³² 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 6 April 1895, p. 643.

¹¹³³ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 14 December 1895, p. 1131.

¹¹³⁴ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 4 January 1896, p. 36.

¹¹³⁵ Cashman, *Sport in the National Imagination*, p. 56.

performance, dismissing any chance that he would beat W. J. Gormly, the record holder, but suggesting that he ‘will not prove by any means the worst swimmer’.¹¹³⁶ Heath did not carry away any prizes from the championships, with the *Leader* correspondent intimating that his preparation was too hurried, and that he had experienced illness while in Sydney.¹¹³⁷ However, his presence did not disgrace Victoria, as a Sydney paper remarked:

He made a lot of friends here through his frank, good-natured bearing, and would have left his mark had he been in good condition. He is undoubtedly all that Victorians claim. In the 100 yards championship Gormly could not get away from him for two laps, and then Heath’s lack of condition told the inevitable tale. It is a thousand pities he did not have a chance of getting fit, and so do justice to his ability.¹¹³⁸

To the chagrin of the press, Victoria had remained unrepresented at the 1898 Australasian championships held in New Zealand.¹¹³⁹ The Melbourne club had requested funds from the association to send swimmers, but it was reported that VASA were unable to accommodate the request.¹¹⁴⁰ It was resolved in late 1899 that Tom Maynard, of the Geelong Western club, would be invited to be Victoria’s representative at the 1900 Australasian championships in Sydney, and he accepted. While the *Australasian* correspondent stated that he was in ‘capital’ form, he also suggested that he would have some tough competition.¹¹⁴¹ The *Weekly Times* correspondent were more complimentary, suggesting that Maynard ‘was in excellent form and as he has been making far better times than he has ever put up before, I expect to hear of him carrying off a few of the honors on behalf of Victoria’.¹¹⁴² The cost of sending swimmers and the superiority of the New South Welshmen appeared to dissuade more than one association, as it was reported that Sydney had received poor entries for the Australasian championships.¹¹⁴³ As predicted, Maynard did not perform well, with one press correspondent labelling his efforts ‘somewhat of a disappointment’.¹¹⁴⁴

¹¹³⁶ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 18 January 1896, p. 115.

¹¹³⁷ ‘Header’, ‘Swimming’, *Leader*, 1 February 1896, p. 19.

¹¹³⁸ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 8 February 1896, p. 258.

¹¹³⁹ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 15 January 1898, p. 131.

¹¹⁴⁰ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 29 January 1898, p. 247.

¹¹⁴¹ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 23 December 1899, p. 1432.

¹¹⁴² ‘Overarm’, ‘Swimming’, *Weekly Times*, 13 January 1900, p. 19.

¹¹⁴³ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 6 January 1900, p. 23.

¹¹⁴⁴ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 13 January 1900, p. 78.

As Victorian swimmers began to attend swimming competitions in other colonies, this was reciprocated, with a handful of New South Welshmen visiting Melbourne to swim in Victorian championship races. With Heath's visit to Sydney to compete at the Australasian championships in 1896, press correspondents began to speculate on when the Sydney swimmers would reciprocate his visit. In reporting on the proposed dates for the 1896 Victorian championships, the *Australasian* correspondent questioned, 'Will not the 20-guinea shields and gold medals attached to the quarter and half-mile championships attract some of the talent across the Murray?'.¹¹⁴⁵ They did not have to wait long, as a *Sportsman* article in February 1896 reported that Percy Cavill had entered for the Melbourne Swimming Club championship meeting.¹¹⁴⁶

This provoked great excitement in the press, with many correspondents speculating on whether any Victorian could beat Cavill. The *Age* correspondent suggested that 'the contest between him and H. Heath, the Victorian champion, should be very close, and if the water is at all rough, the Victorian's chance of beating the champion is greatly fancied'.¹¹⁴⁷ However, the *Australasian* correspondent disagreed, stating that 'Cavill is the best man in Australia at the present time, and he should win the longer race, but the quarter will be a tough fight, though I fancy at this distance he will be a bit too good for his rivals'.¹¹⁴⁸ The correspondent noted also that the presence of Cavill appeared to have a positive effect on the entries for the event. In what was undoubtedly a pointed suggestion to the Melbourne club, he also hoped that the club had organised for 'competent' timekeepers and had made sure the distances were accurate, as he expected that a Victorian record would be set that day.¹¹⁴⁹

Cavill beat Heath by over 80 yards to win the quarter-mile championship, and was the only swimmer to contest the half-mile event. Heath was reportedly too 'knocked up' to contest the half-mile.¹¹⁵⁰ As one correspondent noted, Cavill's 'presence and prowess had the effect of preventing all swimmers except H. Heath, of Geelong (the Victorian champion) and A. Ware, of Sale, from contesting the title with him'.¹¹⁵¹ An

¹¹⁴⁵ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 8 February 1896, p. 258.

¹¹⁴⁶ 'Whip', 'Amateur Athletics', *Sportsman*, 26 February 1896, p. 2.

¹¹⁴⁷ 'Swimming', *Age*, 29 February 1896, p. 8.

¹¹⁴⁸ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 29 February 1896, p. 401.

¹¹⁴⁹ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 29 February 1896, p. 401.

¹¹⁵⁰ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 7 March 1896, p. 451.

¹¹⁵¹ 'Swimming', *St Kilda Advertiser*, 7 March 1896, p. 8.

interview with Percy Cavill was published in the *Sportsman* shortly after the race, extolling his virtues and asking his opinion of Victorian swimming. Cavill was effusive in his praise for the Melbourne Swimming Club, who provided him with the services of a trainer. However, he was relatively unfamiliar with the Victorian swimmers, stating that ‘I do not know all your Victorian swimmers, of course. We have many more in Sydney than you have here, but you have some good ones. Heath is a fine swimmer. Of those I have seen, I look upon Arthur Pearson as the best coming swimmer’.¹¹⁵² Cavill’s visit was well received by the Melbourne public, with one correspondent stating that ‘Victorians will be glad to see him competing in their waters again’.¹¹⁵³

The press were effusive in their praise for Cavill, with the *Australasian* correspondent comparing him rather unfavourably with Heath:

He is a pleasant-featured, broad-shouldered youth of only 20 summers, standing 5ft. 11in. in height, and weighing in condition 11st. 6lb. He gets a strong kick and nip with his legs, and uses his arms perfectly, the right coming as straight as an arrow under the water and left brought right over the head, giving a splendid long stroke. In comparison, Heath appeared to be swimming with bent arms.¹¹⁵⁴

The correspondent did concede that Heath, who was considerably older, ‘is to be warmly complimented on his performance’,¹¹⁵⁵ and, as another correspondent suggested:

Had he not gone to Sydney it is probable Percy Cavill would not have paid us a visit, and there will be hardly any denying the fact that Cavill’s exhibition of long distance swimming at St Kilda has roused many youngsters to a spirit of emulation. He will find stouter fields on his next visit to Victoria.¹¹⁵⁶

A suggestion by the *Australasian* correspondent to invite F. C. V. Lane, a prominent Sydney swimmer, to give an exhibition swim in Melbourne in 1899 was heeded, and it was advertised that Lane would swim a race on Easter Monday at Hegarty’s Baths. All Melbourne’s leading sprinters were asked to compete, and it was hoped that ‘a goodly number would have the sporting instinct to do so’.¹¹⁵⁷ A number of local

¹¹⁵² ‘Swimming’, *Sportsman*, 3 March 1896, p. 8.

¹¹⁵³ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 7 March 1896, p. 451.

¹¹⁵⁴ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 7 March 1896, p. 451.

¹¹⁵⁵ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 7 March 1896, p. 451.

¹¹⁵⁶ ‘Swimming’, *Leader*, 5 December 1896, p. 18.

¹¹⁵⁷ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 25 March 1899, p. 638.

swimmers competed in the race, which Lane won easily, but as one correspondent commented, 'Lane's visit is sure to be of service. Before he had left the water, I saw several trying his style of swimming. He uses the trudgeon, or overarm stroke'.¹¹⁵⁸ Maynard's attendance at the Australasian championships in 1900 was advantageous in securing a return visit from the prominent Sydney swimmer W. H. Bond. Bond competed in the quarter-mile championship of Victoria against Maynard, and was a very convincing winner.¹¹⁵⁹

The exposure to the swimming talent in other colonies, by means of attendance at the Australasian championships and visits from prominent swimmers, revealed the dearth of swimming talent in Victoria. From this point, the press began to critique the quality of swimmers and the organisation of the sport in their coverage. The growing emphasis placed on the competitive element in swimming during this period may be attributed to the hosting of the first modern Olympic Games in 1896, where swimming was included as a sport and the Games were strictly amateur.¹¹⁶⁰ As one correspondent suggested, there was need for 'much more attention to training, and especially to style, if our swimmers are to approach the quality of those in Sydney, or even in New Zealand'.¹¹⁶¹ The superiority of New South Wales in regard to competitive swimming was seen by many to be the result of better organisation, weather and facilities. While it was acknowledged that weather was an irreducible factor, the *Australasian* correspondent suggested that the facilities were improving rapidly, and ventured that the organisation of the sport would be improved by 'a more energetic and business-like handling of our local association'.¹¹⁶² However, by way of excuse, it was declared that the seas in Melbourne were rougher than those in Sydney, making it more difficult to put up good times, and more difficult to master the popular trudgeon stroke that was being used by the prominent Sydney swimmers.¹¹⁶³

Regardless of weather, the intra-colonial championship races were never well patronised in terms of entries, with most only having three or four competitors.¹¹⁶⁴

¹¹⁵⁸ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 8 April 1899, p. 750.

¹¹⁵⁹ 'Overarm', 'Swimming', *Weekly Times*, 3 February 1900, p. 19.

¹¹⁶⁰ Longworth, 'Swimming in Australia', p. 10.

¹¹⁶¹ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 6 February 1897, p. 268.

¹¹⁶² 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 30 December 1899, p. 1485.

¹¹⁶³ 'Swimming', *Header*, 12 December 1896, p. 18.

¹¹⁶⁴ For example, see 'Overarm', 'Swimming', *Weekly Times*, 4 March 1899, p. 26.

This was seen as a major issue with Victorian swimming, and as the *Australasian* correspondent remarked in regard to poor entries in the 220 yard event in 1897, ‘Of course Heath’s presence kept some away, but if so, what must be expected in the quarter and half-mile races next Saturday week? Even second place is worth struggling for surely’.¹¹⁶⁵ The press continued to criticise the execution of club competitions, and after one particularly poor carnival hosted by the Middle Park club in 1899, it was proclaimed that ‘the meeting will do nothing to advance swimming, and was quite unworthy of the champion club of the colony’.¹¹⁶⁶ It seemed to the press that the Victorian swimmers were getting slower, and this theory was supported by the revelation that the 100 yards championship for 1900 was reportedly the slowest since the establishment of the championships. One correspondent acknowledged that the water was choppy, but also declared that it ‘evidences no sign of improvement in Victorian swimming’.¹¹⁶⁷

In consideration of this, the Melbourne press continued to offer constructive advice in terms of what VASA needed to be doing in order to better the competitive aspect of swimming. The *Australasian* correspondent suggested in 1897 that more attention needed to be given to long distance races, stating that ‘I am sure the public would sooner see a quarter-mile race for a change, and if they would not they should be educated up to it’.¹¹⁶⁸ This theme continued upon the announcement that the South Melbourne club were holding morning handicap races,¹¹⁶⁹ and as the *Australasian* correspondent mused:

If morning races are to become popular, as seems not unlikely, could they not be held over distances of a quarter or half mile, instead of the everlasting sprints. Probably entries at first would not be too numerous, but many an inferior sprinter might find himself thus acquiring considerable stamina, and many an old buffer who has lost pace and does not like to show up in a short race, might find he could still hold his own fairly well in the longer races.¹¹⁷⁰

It was seen that an easy solution to this was to offer better or more numerous prizes. As one correspondent suggested, ‘Distance swimmers deserve more encouragement

¹¹⁶⁵ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 27 February 1897, p. 413.

¹¹⁶⁶ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 11 March 1899, p. 526.

¹¹⁶⁷ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 24 March 1900, p. 683.

¹¹⁶⁸ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 2 January 1897, p. 18.

¹¹⁶⁹ ‘Header’, ‘Swimming’, *Leader*, 26 December 1896, p. 18.

¹¹⁷⁰ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 2 January 1897, p. 18.

than “squibs,” as a Sydney friend calls those who will only go for a 40 or 50 yards dash’.¹¹⁷¹

With the systematic development of competitive swimming associations in other colonies, the press began to criticise VASA for not assuming a prominent position in terms of intercolonial swimming. The Queensland Amateur Swimming Association (QASA) had formed in November 1897, and had immediately set out to forge ties with the New Zealand body, securing the next biennial Australasian championships for Queensland. This was met with disapproval by one correspondent, who opined, ‘When will Victorians insist on seeing their own association take its proper place in these matters?’¹¹⁷² VASA were further insulted by the revelation in an 1899 column that the SAASA had put forward a motion to affiliate with the amateur associations of New South Wales, Queensland and New Zealand, with no mention made of Victoria. Though suggesting that no offence would be taken, the *Australasian* correspondent questioned:

The Victorian Amateur Swimming Association has always been of a somewhat backward and retiring disposition ... The South Australian Association was only formed a month or two ago, the Queensland Association only last year, the Victorian about five years ago. Yet, either the existence of the Victorian body is unknown to the Adelaide amateurs or its cooperation is not thought worth asking.¹¹⁷³

The question was cleared up in an ensuing column, with a representative from the South Australian association writing to the correspondent and acknowledging that he had not been aware of the existence of VASA, but hoped that they would also affiliate in the aim of having annual swimming championships in which each association would be bound to send representatives, and subsidise expenses for these representatives. He apologised for the slight, and hoped that all associations could become affiliated by the beginning of the next season. After relating the details of the apology, the *Australasian* correspondent again reinforced that no offence would be taken, and pithily suggested that he did not ‘blame him in the least’ for his ignorance of VASA’s existence.¹¹⁷⁴

¹¹⁷¹ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 11 February 1899, p. 303.

¹¹⁷² ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 31 December 1898, p. 1486.

¹¹⁷³ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 18 February 1899, p. 358.

¹¹⁷⁴ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 4 March 1899, p. 469.

The *Leader* correspondent printed the details of the proposed agreement between the state swimming associations, in regard to the hosting of annual Australasian championship events, in a March 1899 column. It was proposed that the first would be held in Sydney in the following season, with races held over 100, 220, 440 and 880 yards and one mile, with plunging and water polo also included.¹¹⁷⁵ The *Weekly Times* correspondent saw that the proposed agreement was an excellent one, and suggested that if it was achieved, the sport would greatly benefit.¹¹⁷⁶ However, the *Australasian* correspondent raised some questions as to the proposed compulsory representation, and financial implications of associations financing swimmers, suggesting that:

From associations financially weak, and having swimmers of only poor quality available, it will be injudicious and worthless to expect a numerical strong contingent of swimmers to visit another colony. It would be improvident to send men with no earthly chance of success when your local clubs are starving for funds.¹¹⁷⁷

It was determined in a later column that compulsory representation meant that one or more swimmers should be sent by each colony, which was met with approval with the *Australasian* correspondent, who again highlighted the inferiority of the Victorian swimmers. He suggested that while Victoria had no swimmers capable of swimming under 70 seconds for 100 yards, New South Wales had 20 or 30, and other colonies their fair share. While he stated that it would be a ‘useless, unsatisfactory and expensive process to despatch inferior men’, it was also suggested that ‘efforts will be made to supply these deficiencies’.¹¹⁷⁸

These efforts became even more important upon the announcement in January 1900 that Victoria had secured the right to host the 1900/01 Australasian championships.¹¹⁷⁹ Upon hearing this news, it was suggested that ‘Victoria needs to carefully develop and train any promising material with a view to cutting at least a respectable figure at the next Australasian championships’.¹¹⁸⁰ While Victoria was trailing competitively, there was now a goal to strive for. At the conclusion of the 1899/1900 season, the *Australasian* correspondent brought the season to a close by stating:

¹¹⁷⁵ ‘Swimming’, *Leader*, 25 March 1899, p. 17.

¹¹⁷⁶ ‘Overarm’, ‘Swimming’, *Weekly Times*, 1 April 1899, p. 25.

¹¹⁷⁷ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 1 April 1899, p. 695.

¹¹⁷⁸ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 30 December 1899, p. 1485.

¹¹⁷⁹ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 13 January 1900, p. 78.

¹¹⁸⁰ ‘Unda’, ‘Swimming’, *Australasian*, 10 February 1900, p. 300.

It is to be hoped that between now and next October the association will not be idle, for there is plenty of work to be done to put matters in proper train for next season. The Australasian championships will then be held in Victoria, and it behoves all the clubs to do what they can to work up that meeting to a successful issue. The first duty lies upon the organisation to conduct its affairs with an earlier regard to business requirements, and to hold its general meeting in October in order to set the ball rolling and decide on the allotment of those championships. The past season has failed to produce any new swimmers of marked merit, but, Micawber-like, we must wait for something to turn up.¹¹⁸¹

6.8 Conclusions

As represented in press coverage, the inauguration of VSA, or VASA as it became shortly after, was a positive move for competitive swimming in Melbourne. The strict stance on amateurism from its beginnings gained significant approval in the Melbourne press, ensuring that swimming was positively represented and endorsed. This amateur stance also ensured that the sport gained upper class patronage, further reinforcing its respectability, and enabled it to be associated with other amateur sports. This amateur, upper class emphasis resulted in the establishment of clubs such as the Melbourne Swimming Club, which further increased the publicity of competitive swimming. By means of their prestigious member base and the patronage of their carnivals by prominent individuals, their swimming competitions received considerable coverage in the press, further elevating the profile of the sport. As a result of this elevated profile, increased numbers of metropolitan and regional clubs began to affiliate, entries to competitions increased, and Victorian swimming championships were introduced at a number of distances. From this perspective, VASA were doing good work.

However, by 1895, the Melbourne press began to identify a number of factors that were detrimental to the development of VASA, and consequently to the competitive sport. The disorganisation of VASA, and their reactive policy to problems and issues within the sport, was the general source of press discontent, and this was reflected in the threat from regional clubs to withdraw from the association. This poor administrative control was further exacerbated by the financial issues experienced by VASA and the associated clubs. While the amateur status of the sport was

¹¹⁸¹ 'Unda', 'Swimming', *Australasian*, 31 March 1900, p. 693.

advantageous in gaining financial support through patronage for competitive swimming, this was primarily only reflected in the bigger, more prestigious clubs.

To improve the sport, it was seen that increased funds were required, but these funds were difficult to attract from the perspective that swimming competitions were the main source of revenue, and therefore contingent on both spectatorship and entries. Again, the amateur element ensured support of these competitions by spectators and participants, but this support was not often financially sufficient to allow for significant improvements to be made. For example, prizes at carnivals were integral in attracting entries for events, but these could not be too lucrative in the face of the stringent amateur laws. Consequently, entry fees for events had to be kept low, and therefore clubs made very little money from these events, unless they had a wealthy patron to donate prizes.

Entry fees also had to be kept low to attract spectators, in the face of competition from other well established Melbourne sports. Paradoxically, as swimming grew, it became harder for clubs to attract funds due to the competition posed by other rival clubs. Additionally, finances played a large role in preventing Victorian participation in Australasian intercolonial championships, which was also seen to hinder the sport's development. The organisational and financial problems experienced within VASA were, in the eyes of the press, highly detrimental to the development of both the competitive sport and the association itself. However, it has to be questioned whether the poor financial status of VASA affected their ability to properly organise competitive swimming, or whether their financial problems were a result of their poor organisation. The press coverage suggests that perhaps it was a combination of the two.

From a press perspective, the inadequacy of VASA was reflected in the poor competitive status of Victorian swimmers. The performances of Victorian competitive swimmers against those of swimmers from other colonies were depicted as symbolic of everything that was wrong with the association. While the performances of a select few Victorians at intercolonial championships in this period were instrumental in attracting visiting talent to Victoria, they also provoked a stark realisation of how much work needed to be done. This comparative, competitive aspect symbolises a

definite shift toward a press desire for competitive success that Victorians were not yet able to meet. To that end, actions and initiatives furthering the development of the sport were celebrated, and poor administration and performance was criticised or compared unfavourably with the New South Wales equivalent.

The lack of direction provided by VASA from an administrative perspective, coupled with a concerted lack of prominent Victorian swimmers, ensured that VASA became a rather unassuming state governing body both in the eyes of the Melbourne press, and from an intercolonial perspective. This is reflected both in the continued reference to VSA right through till 1900 in press coverage, despite the 1895 name change to VASA, and the failure of other intercolonial swimming associations to recognise their existence. Therefore, it is suggested that while VASA were instrumental in developing a network of clubs and establishing a standard code of conduct for competitive swimming in Victoria, they were not financially or organisationally equipped to make any significant changes in the sport during the period under examination.

Chapter Seven

Conclusions

In line with the objectives identified in the opening chapter, this thesis has examined the representation of swimming in press coverage in late colonial Melbourne, and explored the reasons underpinning this depiction. It has also identified a number of factors that were beneficial or detrimental to the continued development of the competitive sport in Melbourne, by means of a thematic analysis of the press coverage of the period. In particular, this research has identified that the press played a significant and interactive role in promoting specific aspects of swimming to the Melbourne public, and made a noteworthy contribution to the development of competitive swimming in late colonial Melbourne, and in Victoria more generally. Thus, this concluding chapter will summarise the role and agenda of the press in promoting swimming in late colonial Melbourne. The relative importance of the factors that were emphasised in press coverage will be assessed, in order to highlight their contribution to the development of competitive swimming. Furthermore, questions are raised as to how an investigation based on nineteenth century press coverage of swimming can shed new light on the history of swimming in Melbourne.

However, it is important to note that this is a history, not the history, of swimming in colonial Melbourne. The nature of press coverage has ensured that this historical account is biased toward the agenda of the press, who write for a public audience. Therefore, the themes, issues and tensions that this work has explored are most likely those that were seen to be culturally significant to the nineteenth century public, and those that the public found interesting. From this perspective, this historical account effectively represents how swimming was marketed to the Melbourne public in the late nineteenth century, and has therefore resulted in a much less optimistic picture of competitive sport than traditional historical narratives will provide. It is important to acknowledge these barriers and difficulties, as well as the prizes and achievements that traditional narratives on swimming emphasise. The exploration of press coverage in this work demonstrates that the development of sport is not just driven by the sporting organisations themselves, but by other cultural factors, external organisations and media agencies.

The role of the press in promoting swimming in late colonial Melbourne was multi-faceted, and through their columns they were able to 'sell' swimming to the public in a number of different ways. Primarily, the press acted as the voice of the spectator. Across the time period examined, correspondents on swimming promoted the aspects of the sport that they thought the public would be interested in. By doing so, they were able to establish the notion of a carnival culture within competitive swimming, further fuelling the public desire for these sorts of entertainments, and in doing so, established competitive swimming as something of a sideshow to the novelty events provided. In line with this approach, press columns also established ladies' involvement as a primary component of a successful swimming carnival. This promoted the notion that their attendance was integral to the success of a carnival, highlighted the need to cater for their needs, and normalised the attendance of women at the male sporting events.

The press were also able to raise the profile of the sport by providing social commentary on competitive swimming events, which further established them as desirable events to attend, and prestigious clubs to join. In a class-conscious society, the outlining of prominent attendees at carnivals, the social profile of swimming clubs and detailing which prominent individuals swam where further increased the attraction of swimming carnivals and clubs. Through their columns, the press were also able to decode the sport for an initially uneducated public. Rules and rule changes could be published, the actions of VASA could be explained, and new events could be described for the convenience of the spectator. Most importantly, the press were able to invest the sport with meaning. Their columns indicated for the reader what was important about competitive swimming, which was further reinforced by the aspects of the sport that were downplayed in their columns, or left out completely.

In terms of assigning meaning from a more interactive perspective, the press often used their columns as a forum to provide their opinion on the development of competitive swimming. They were passionate supporters of certain initiatives, such as water polo and the development of swimming in schools, and tolerated some potentially controversial events, such as the introduction of women's competitive swimming. They provided suggestions to further popularise or improve swimming, which were largely intended to improve the sport for the benefit of the spectator.

Examples of this include ideas for new carnival events, seating for spectators and numbered caps for swimmers.

However, their most significant aspect of their columns was their predilection to pass judgement on matters pertaining to swimming, whether it was competitive or otherwise. These matters were diverse in nature, ranging from the notion that women needed to swim better, through to the criticism of carnival proceedings. It is significant that most of these judgements related directly to aspects of the sport that VASA could control, such as poor administrative procedures, or aspects that threatened patronage of the sport or the amateur ideal. From this perspective, these actions were noteworthy in catalysing improvements in the sport, as their criticisms in a public forum cast aspersions on VASA's ability to manage competitive swimming, and had the ability to threaten public patronage and future membership.

The standard of competitive swimming in Victoria was also a major concern for Melbourne press correspondents, and through their columns they were able to set the desired benchmark for Victorian swimming. This was integral in creating a shift from reporting on the more entertainment based origins of the sport. By voicing their disapproval in regard to the Victorian lack of success, providing information on the developments occurring in swimming in other areas and comparing the efforts of Victorian swimmers unfavourably with swimmers in other Australian colonies, the press were able to foster a desire for increased Victorian swimming success, and create a benchmark to which VASA and its swimmers needed to aspire.

It is significant that this shift occurred around the time of the association name change from the VSA to VASA, and coincided with the first intracolony championships. This suggests that the hosting of these championships may have exposed some deficiencies in Victorian swimming, or perhaps that public acknowledgement of the amateur ideal called for greater commitment to the competitive and sporting element. Instead of criticising the novelty events, the press began to criticise the competitive swimming, and VASA's administration of the competitive sport. Money in particular was identified as a considerable barrier in advancing competitive swimming, and this extended to the Melbourne swimming clubs themselves, in providing swimming

programs for schoolchildren, and in ensuring that Victoria had adequate intercolonial representation.

While the inauguration of the VSA in October 1893 was essentially the beginning of a new era for competitive swimming in Melbourne, the founding ideals of the association were based upon a cultural legacy that had been established from the development of Melbourne itself. The appeal of competitive swimming to the public, and therefore the way in which the activity was promoted by the press, was based on a mixture of carnival, hygiene, national duty, muscular Christianity and amateurism. While these were by no means new values in Australian sporting folklore, or even in swimming, their interaction with competitive swimming from the establishment of the VSA resulted in some marked benefits and some negative outcomes. In addition to highlighting the class, gender and cultural interactions that existed in swimming in late colonial Melbourne, examination of press coverage has also yielded some information on the various developments, initiatives and practices that were beneficial to the advancement and popularisation of competitive swimming in Melbourne in this period.

Utilizing press coverage to construct a history of swimming yields some invaluable findings as to the class, gender and cultural interactions that underpinned the sport. The cultural element of competitive swimming in this period was instrumental in ensuring its popularity with the public, and this was largely fostered through the carnival tradition. The importance of the carnival tradition to the development of competitive swimming in this period is demonstrated strongly in the press coverage of these events. The consistent promotion of swimming competitions as ‘carnivals’, and the incorporation of the popular entertainment associated with carnivals, ensured that swimming could be marketed to a wider audience. Carnival allowed swimming to transcend the boundaries of sport, and become a form of public entertainment. Swimming carnivals provided a site for socialisation between men and women and an opportunity for light-hearted fun in a time of social and economic recovery and redefinition.

Significantly, swimming carnivals were culturally significant in that they often provided a form of social commentary. Through fancy dress, pantomime and farcical

events, competitors and entertainers were able to dramatise and highlight social, cultural or racial myths and practices, and draw attention to prominent issues. In this regard, carnival acted as more than just entertainment for the masses. While people might not have been familiar with competitive swimming as such, the various novelties that were provided ensured that they could enjoy the aquatic activities. The carnival aspect attracted a greater number of people, which raised money for the clubs that hosted them, and fostered a greater public awareness for competitive swimming generally. As the sport grew both in terms of membership and spectatorship, Melburnians came to value the competitive sport. Press coverage highlights that discussion of the competitive swimming events became more prominent in press coverage from the 1894/95 season, and subsequently the carnival tradition became more muted.

Also importantly, VASA's involvement in establishing the state school swimming program was able to further promote the cause of competitive swimming. The positive press coverage that this attracted not only established VASA as a prominent organisation, but also ensured that the sport was promoted as a healthy, beneficial and worthwhile sport for children to participate in. Significantly, with the establishment of the state school swimming program, and the state school swimming clubs that followed, thousands of children were being exposed to competitive swimming. VASA were able to capitalise on this by incorporating the state school clubs into the association, ensuring both financial gain and an increasing talent pool of youth swimmers. The inclusion of girls in the state schools swimming program was integral to the development of ladies-only swimming carnivals in Melbourne, and the controversy involved with these events further increased press coverage of the sport.

The involvement of women in competitive swimming in this period was largely a class construction. The Melbourne press were reluctant to critique the involvement of women in competitive swimming, due to the increasing societal emphasis on health hygiene and reducing drownings in this period. However, a major aspect of this celebration of women's swimming in press coverage was because it was new and sensational, and because it was being undertaken in an appropriate manner. The perceived appropriateness of the activity was not just dictated by the manner in which the activity was undertaken, but also by the social status of the women who

participated. It is significant that aquatic activities involving women in this period were termed as being for 'ladies', which insinuated that they were for women from the higher echelons of society. It is unlikely that the women's activities would have been as well received if they had been undertaken by lower class women, who did not have the social breeding to participate in the activity in the correct, class appropriate manner. It is suggested that this emphasis on class may have been slightly diluted upon the establishment of public school swimming clubs, and the affiliation of these clubs with VASA. However, as the reports on the ladies'-only swimming carnivals suggest, these events were organised and administered by ladies holding a prominent position in society, in much the same way that Melbourne's gentlemen organised and patronised the VASA activities.

While their activities were often reported on in an amused, whimsical fashion, the importance of women to the growth of competitive swimming in Melbourne in this period cannot be underestimated. Their presence at Melbourne swimming carnivals and other swimming club activities was controlled, but highly valued. They provided an appreciative audience for the men's competitive activities, justified the inclusion of carnival-type activities, and exemplified the passive nature of women's participation in sport, which paved the way for an increased level of participation. The importance of women to the male sport was reinforced upon the backlash surrounding the development of the women-only carnivals, where it was perceived that women would cease to attend the male events. This not only reinforces the importance of women to the survival of the male competitive swimming, but also of the spectator generally, and the continued need to cater for the public tastes to ensure the survival of the sport.

While it could be argued that recreational swimming in Melbourne had the potential to be a relatively classless activity, given the prevalence of open waterways and the large number of baths available in which to bathe, the reality was that competitive swimming was a class-stratified activity. This can be attributed to VASA's strong stance on amateurism, coupled with the costs associated with participating in the sport, such as event entry fees, bath entry and club membership fees. This class divide was also reflected within the swimming clubs themselves, where it can be said that certain clubs occupied a higher social position than others, due to their ability to recruit prominent Melbourne gentlemen to their membership. Clubs of this calibre

were able to attract considerable financial support, which allowed them to host elaborate carnivals with quality prizes, attracting numerous spectators and competitors and further ensuring their financial security. This is in contrast to other less prominent clubs that could not attract an influential patron or offer quality entertainments and prizes, and therefore struggled to attract sufficient spectators and competitors to ensure a profit. This divide was reinforced by both the quality and quantity of press coverage on their respective events.

As the association developed, the popularity of competitive swimming was heightened by a number of interrelated factors, namely the strong emphasis on amateurism, the improved administration and standardisation of the sport, the introduction of colonial championships and the increased exposure to quality swimmers from other colonies through Victorian participation in intercolonial swimming. The growth of the sport in Melbourne, and the inclusion of clubs from regional Victoria, ensured that the talent base grew and the swimmers became quicker and more competitive. Additionally, the audiences became increasingly more educated as to the finer points of competitive swimming through the dedicated press coverage on the weekly carnivals that were held.

However, while the Melbourne press were generally supportive of VASA and their activities, they were also highly critical of the association's control over certain aspects of the sport's development, and often highlighted problems and barriers to the further improvement of the sport. From the perspective of the press, the association struggled to deal proactively with the growth of the association, and were financially and administratively lacking. Rules were not adequately distributed, times and records were not always noted and even if they were, they were irrelevant due to the inconsistent measurement of the baths. It is impossible to tell whether their poor administration caused their financial problems, or whether their financial problems were responsible for their lack of administrative control. Regardless, both were seen as detrimental to attracting spectators, and in furthering the development of the sport. Again, it is unclear exactly how an increase in finances would have assisted in dealing with some of the problems faced by VASA in their initial years, but from the press's point of view, this was a significant issue.

It is somewhat paradoxical that as the sportive element evolved, it was suggested that VASA and its swimming clubs placed the public desire for entertainment above the growth of the sport. From all accounts, this provision of carnivalesque entertainment was integral in funding the sport's development. The evolution of the sport also initiated some other problems that cast aspersions on the founding ideals of VASA, particularly in terms of amateurism. The increased popularity and prestige attached to youth swimming that was fostered by the press upon the advancement of the schools movement led to increased incidences of swimmers fabricating their age to participate. Additionally, the increasing number of clubs meant that they needed to compete against each other for patronage, which often meant that the clubs that could provide the most valuable prizes gained the most entries for their carnivals.

While not all aspects of the sport in its founding years were positive influences, the notion of carnival, the involvement of women and schoolchildren and the evolution of the competitive element all acted as marketing tools for competitive swimming. The emphasis of these factors in press coverage signifies that they were integral in investing the sport with social significance. While this was highly beneficial from the press perspective, in that interesting and relevant columns sold newspapers, the manner in which the Melbourne press reported swimming dictated how the public interpreted competitive swimming. While the general picture painted by the press suggests that swimming was a healthy, enjoyable and beneficial activity to attend and to participate in, their criticisms ensured that VASA could not rest on their laurels. To this end, the press's role in developing competitive swimming was both tangible and interactive, and ensured that swimming was able to develop in Melbourne as a sport that enjoyed considerable public support.

In consideration of the critical nature of this study, it is pertinent to note that this is not a comparative work. It is likely that examination of press coverage on swimming in other Australian colonies in this period, given the judgemental nature of the press, would yield a similar set of contextual problems and negative accounts. There is scope for a comparative study in this area, particularly in the case of New South Wales. The considerable amount of primary source material that exists from the inauguration of the NSWASA would allow for more in-depth triangulation to occur, and for further exploration of the role of the press in promoting swimming.

Additionally, this study has highlighted the prominent position of New Zealand in colonial Australasian swimming, which warrants further research, and has raised some questions as to the nature and scope of professional swimming in late colonial Melbourne.

When juxtaposed against the omnipresence of professional swimming organisations in colonial England, New South Wales and South Australia, the presence of professional swimmers in Melbourne appears, through an examination of press coverage, to be either hidden or non-existent. While the scope of this study did not allow for detailed exploration of this phenomenon, a comparative work examining Melbourne professional swimming in relation to that in other Australian cities would make a significant contribution to the growing body of work on Australian swimming. This revelation has highlighted the fact that there are considerable differences between the Australian colonies in terms of their organisation of and preferences for competitive swimming, and that the social and cultural history of Australian swimming is not generic. Further research of this nature will ensure a more balanced history of Australian swimming that is representative of all the colonies of Australia. Significantly, a more accurate account will be provided of the social and cultural preferences of those who participated in the sport.

While this study has only focused on swimming in one specific Australian city, the findings that have emerged are likely to be applicable to both swimming in other cities and colonies, and to other sports that developed in this period. This construction of a history of swimming in Melbourne by means of nineteenth century press coverage has uncovered a complex picture of the social and cultural interactions that underpinned the early years of the sport, as governed by VASA. It has highlighted some of the actual and perceived barriers to the development of the competitive sport, as well as some of the factors that were beneficial to its expansion. Also importantly, it has uncovered the complexities and tensions inherent in ensuring the successful administration and governance of nineteenth century sporting clubs and organisations, and the difficulties of maintaining the integrity of a sport in the face of financial difficulties, power struggles and a reliance on public patronage. Thus, a more thorough understanding of the socio-cultural processes involved in the development of competitive swimming is achieved. Significantly, this research has also, by

addressing the development of the sport in a colony that has traditionally been neglected in academic research on swimming, provided a platform for comparison, reflection and discussion. This ensures that the historiography of competitive swimming in Australia will continue to be interrogated, critiqued and explored, resulting in an ongoing and significant contribution to the field of sport history.

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