



briefing paper



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Inaugural speeches in the NSW Parliament

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by Gareth Griffith

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Inaugural speeches in the NSW Parliament

by

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SUMMARY

With many new members elected to the NSW Parliament at the 2011 general election, the start of the 55th Parliament was remarkable for the making of inaugural speeches, a phenomenon that prompts consideration of the history and development of such speeches.

What used to be called “maiden speeches” but are now referred to as inaugural or first speeches play an important part in the parliamentary life of a Member of Parliament, a moment of achievement, a setting off point, as they step onto the parliamentary stage for the first time. At times these speeches suggest the career that is to follow; a reflection of the intellectual scope of the speech and of the debating skills and style on display. For the historian, too, first speeches occupy a particular niche, as insights into a member’s values and philosophy, their policy interests and concerns. Not every inaugural speech is a triumph. Sometimes first speeches may set a false trail, when expectations are not realised, or where a great career is built on the foundations of a shaky or mundane start. But that, too, is of interest, from a biographical and historical standpoint.

Since the establishment of responsible government in 1856, there have always been first speeches, as new Members made their original contribution to debate in some form or other. But from when did the practice of making what used to be called “maiden” speeches start? And did the practice date from around the same period for both Houses?

For the Legislative Assembly, this account, which uses the first speeches of the Premiers of the State, from Reid to O’Farrell as a narrative spine, traces the record back to around 1860. It does not go further back because, of the ten Premiers prior to Reid (in 1894), six were Assembly members from the start of responsible government and could not have made “maiden” speeches in any meaningful sense at a time when all members were new. The only exceptions were James Farnell (elected May 1860), Patrick Jennings (elected December 1869) and Alexander Stuart and George Dibbs (both elected December 1874).

For the Legislative Council, its early constitutional history and character render unlikely the making of inaugural speeches before the 1860s. From 1856 to its reconstitution in 1861 appointments to the Council were for five years only, with lifetime appointments only applying between September 1861 and 1934. It is doubtful that the conventions of first speeches operated in the “quinquennial” Council, if only because it comprised of very experienced men, many of whom had served in the Legislative Council in the pre-responsible government era.

Legislative Assembly: For the Assembly, one finding is that, as in other comparable Parliaments, inaugural speeches were traditionally made, from the 1880s on at least, during the address-in-reply debate where some acknowledgement was made of the relevant conventions, even if those conventions were not always (or even usually) adhered to in many periods. In particular, those speeches moving and seconding the adoption of the address-in-reply tended to operate within expected conventions, while contributions to

the debate itself and the reception they were given tended to vary depending on the speaker.

Outside the address-in-reply debate inaugural speeches were often, but not always, treated as part of the ordinary business of the House, subject to the same give and take of political life. Often a speech on a bill was simply not recognised as an inaugural speech, a situation which seems to have lasted well into the 1930s, if not beyond. It was certainly very rare to even remark on one's constituency in such speeches, when made on a Bill for instance, rarer still for the speech to be proceed without interjection.

It is probably fair to say that, after World War 2 at least, both the intensity of the political atmosphere and, for want of a better word, the larrikin nature often on display in the Assembly declined. In part it may have been the result of post-war prosperity, in part of the culture of greater civility and respect for parliamentary norms engendered in the post-Lang years. Interjections were still common in the 1950s, but they seem to have died down after that.

Legislative Council: A similar pattern is found in the Upper House, although there a less combative political culture prevailed. Before the 1950s, a less formal and settled approach appears to have applied to first speeches, made in the context of the address-in-reply debate or otherwise. Certainly, where a first speech was made on a Bill or in respect to other business of the House, interjections were commonplace, whereas from the 1950s on the conventions were adhered to far more rigidly.

Changing content: In both Houses, but particularly in the Legislative Assembly, since the 1980s and certainly into the 1990s and beyond there has been a noticeable shift in the content of inaugural speeches, towards the more ready public sharing of the details of personal background and experience. Family life and history is discussed, as are autobiographical reflections, matters which to some extent at least would have been considered private and ill-suited to public airing not so many decades ago.

The same applies to the Legislative Council, except that the changing culture seems to have emerged there earlier, in a House where a different atmosphere has prevailed, less intense in its relationship with power politics, with more women members historically and feeling the impact of minor parties from the early 1980s on. The argument of this paper is that, in their modest way, inaugural speeches provide a window on the evolving parliamentary culture in NSW, along with the broader political context in which it operates.

1 INTRODUCTION

With many new members elected to the NSW Parliament at the 2011 general election, the start of the 55th Parliament was remarkable for the making of inaugural speeches,¹ a phenomenon that prompts consideration of the history and development of such speeches.

What used to be called “maiden speeches” but are now referred to as inaugural or first speeches play an important part in the parliamentary life of a Member of Parliament, a moment of achievement, a setting off point, as they step onto the parliamentary stage for the first time. At times these speeches suggest the career that is to follow; a reflection of the intellectual scope of the speech and of the debating skills and style on display. For the historian, too, first speeches occupy a particular niche, as insights into a member’s values and philosophy, their policy interests and concerns. Not every inaugural speech is a triumph. Sometimes first speeches may set a false trail, when expectations are not realised, or where a great career is built on the foundations of a shaky or mundane start. But that, too, is of interest, from a biographical and historical standpoint.

In NSW, since the establishment of responsible government in 1856, there have always been first speeches, as new Members made their original contribution to debate in some form or other. But from when did the practice of making “maiden” speeches start? And did the practice date from around the same period for both Houses? This account, which uses the first speeches of the Premiers of the State, from Reid to O’Farrell as a narrative spine, traces the record back to around 1860. For the Legislative Assembly, the reason it does not go further back is because of the ten Premiers prior to Reid (in 1894) six were Assembly members from the start of responsible government and could not have made “maiden” speeches in any meaningful sense at a time when all members were new.² The only exceptions were James Farnell (elected May 1860), Patrick Jennings (elected December 1869) and Alexander Stuart and George Dibbs (both elected December 1874). For the Legislative Council, its

¹ In total, 25 Members of the Legislative Assembly retired at the close of the 54th Parliament (18 Labor; five Liberal; and two National). This matched the previous record in 1901, at the State general election that followed the election of 18 MLAs to the new Commonwealth Parliament. In 2011 a further five Members from the Legislative Council also retired (four Labor; one Greens), a figure that excludes two MLCs who were elected to the Assembly at the March 2011 election – John Robertson and Robyn Parker. Including Robertson (Blacktown) and Parker (Maitland), no fewer than 46 new Members were elected to the Legislative Assembly at the 2011 election (32 Liberal; 7 National; 6 Labor; and 1 NSW Greens). In the Legislative Council, eight new MLCs were elected (3 Liberal; 2 National; 2 NSW Greens; and 1 Christian Democrat).

² Five of these had served in the Legislative Council in the pre-responsible government era (Stuart Donaldson, Charles Cowper, Henry Parkes, William Forster and James Martin). The exception is John Robertson, elected to the Assembly in 1856, and not previously serving in the first Legislative Council. But note that Robertson was a Council member for a brief time in 1861, for the specific purpose of steering his land reform legislation through the Upper House.

early constitutional history and character render unlikely the making of inaugural speeches before the 1860s.

Writing on its [website](#) of Millicent Preston Stanley, the first female member elected to the NSW Parliament, the Australian Women's History Forum comments:

But on the day of her first speech in the parliament she deflected such distraction by delivering a powerful speech worthy of the history she was making. Her maiden speech, like Edith Cowan's, was a manifesto of the causes women so long pleaded for outside the parliament. Like their Western Australian colleagues four years before, the NSW MLAs abandoned the convention of silence for maiden speeches.

But was that the case in fact? Had the conventions we now associate with inaugural speeches been established in NSW in 1925? The argument of the paper is that, in their modest way, inaugural speeches provide a window on the evolving parliamentary culture in NSW, along with the broader political context in which it operates.

The focus of this paper is as much on the style and content of first speeches as on the rules of debate and other procedural matters; these are dealt with elsewhere – in Chapter 11 of *NSW Legislative Assembly: Practice, Procedure and Privilege* edited by Russell Grove and Chapter 11 of *NSW Legislative Council Practice* by Lynn Lovelock and John Evans.

As to terminology, Grove refers to "inaugural (formerly first speech or maiden speech)" for the Legislative Assembly,³ whereas the relevant sub-heading in Lovelock and Evans is to "First (Maiden) Speech" for the Legislative Council. In this paper, the two terms are treated as interchangeable.

2. INAUGURAL SPEECHES IN OTHER PARLIAMENTS

2.1 United Kingdom

On the subject of "maiden speeches", the UK Parliament's [website](#) notes:

The first time a newly elected MP speaks in the Chamber of the House of Commons is known as a maiden speech. By tradition, the Member is called ahead of other MPs who may have indicated their wish to speak at the same time. A maiden speech is usually uncontroversial, fairly short and contains a tribute to the MP's predecessor and favourable remarks about the constituency. It is also a tradition that a maiden speech is heard without interruption and for any speeches that may follow, to praise the new MP's first contribution. In the House of Lords a Member making a maiden speech will do so in a debate with a speakers' list so that the House and, in particular the next speaker, may know that

³ The term "maiden speech" seems to have been replaced during the 1990s, more as a consequence of practice than pronouncement.

conventional courtesies apply. The maiden speech is expected to be short and uncontroversial and would not express views that would provoke an interruption.

The tradition of the uncontroversial "maiden speech" is of long standing in the UK Parliament. As ever in such matters there are exceptions to the rule, cases where for one reason or another such speeches ranged beyond the boundaries required by the relevant conventions. A notable example was Disraeli's inaugural speech, delivered on 7 December 1837, described variously as a "public embarrassment"⁴ and as "one of the most celebrated in history" in the sense that it was "a failure which came near to disaster".⁵ The subject he chose, in trying to take the House by storm, was the contentious issue of the validity of certain Irish elections. Clerk of the Privy Council and diarist, Charles Greville, wrote:

D'Israeli made his first exhibition this night, beginning with florid assurance, speedily degenerating into ludicrous absurdity, and being at last put down with inextinguishable shouts of laughter.⁶

Another kind of exception was FE Smith's inaugural speech of 12 March 1906, when as a raw recruit to the heavily outnumbered Tory Party he squared up in the Commons to the big hitters of the Liberal Party, Lloyd George in particular.⁷

Different again is the exception of Margaret Thatcher's inaugural speech of 5 February 1960, introducing her Private Member's Bill which was to become the *Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960*, the purpose of which was to give the press a right of access to the meetings of local councils. The journalist Hugo Young contrasted the speech to what he called the "customary forgettable bromides" associated with such occasions.⁸ An immediate star, Mrs Thatcher parried questions about her possible elevation to the front bench, saying to one inquirer "I couldn't even consider a Cabinet post until my twins are older".⁹

2.2 New Zealand

But in modern times at least these are indeed recognised as among the

⁴ S Weintraub, *Disraeli: a biography*, Hamish Hamilton 1993, p 175.

⁵ R Blake, *Disraeli*, Eyre and Spottiswoode 1966, p 148.

⁶ CCF Greville, *The Greville Memoirs, from 1837 to 1852*, Longmans, Green and Co 1885, p 30. Hansard records that the speech was accompanied by such interjections as "laughter", "loud laughter", "renewed laughter", "renewed murmurs" and a shout of "no!" - *HC Debates*, 7 December 1837, cc 802-818. Other colourful examples can be found in *Parliament Past and Present* by A Wright and P Smith, Hutchinson and Co 1902.

⁷ [HC Debates](#), 12 March 1906, vol 153, cc 1003-52. J Campbell, *FE Smith: First Earl of Birkenhead*, Jonathan Cape 1983, pp 143. The speech earned him a "Spy" cartoon in *Vanity Fair*, aptly titled "A Successful First Speech" - *FE Smith: First Earl of Birkenhead*, Jonathan Cape 1983, Illustration at p 303.

⁸ H Young, *One of Us: a biography of Margaret Thatcher, Final Edition*, Macmillan 1991, pp 44-45.

⁹ B Maddox, *Maggie: the first lady*, Hodder & Stoughton 2003, p 74.

exceptions to the rule, as they seem to be in most other Westminster style parliaments. The practice is similar in New Zealand, where “maiden speeches” are usually made during the Address in Reply debate and are delivered free of interjection. Convention also requires that the speech “will not be provocative”. In *Parliamentary Practice in New Zealand* it is further explained that, in their “maiden speech”, Members:

usually try to set out their hopes and aspirations for their careers as parliamentarians. They set out their personal beliefs and describe the character and problems of the electorate which has returned them to Parliament...¹⁰

2.3 Commonwealth of Australia

Broadly the same conventions and practices apply at the Commonwealth level in Australia. The 6th edition of *Odgers’ Australian Senate Practice* states that:

It is a time-honoured custom that a new Senator making his initial speech to the Senate is heard without interjection or interruption. The new Senator, however, should not strain the tradition by being unduly provocative.¹¹

Likewise, in *House of Representatives Practice* it is noted that, in a new Parliament, “first speeches” are usually made during the Address in Reply debate. On these occasions:

There is a convention in the House that a first speech is heard without interjection or interruption, and the Chair will normally draw the attention of the House to the fact that a Member is making a first speech. In return for this courtesy the Member should not be unduly provocative.¹²

There it is noted that a Member’s first speech is not always heard in silence, with reference being made to two exceptions, one from 1976, and the other from 1980. The former made during the course of the first speech of Marshall Baillieu, the newly elected Liberal member for La Trobe, was tendentious and,

¹⁰ D McGee, *Parliamentary Practice in New Zealand*, 3rd ed, NZ Government Printer 2005, p 145. In Canada, it is explained in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* that “maiden speeches”, which are usually made during the Address in Reply debate, are not interrupted: R Marleau and C Montpetit, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, McGraw-Hill 2000, p 521. “Maiden speeches” are outlined in the same terms in the second edition the work, published in 2009, which is available [here](#).

¹¹ JR Odgers, *Australian Senate Practice*, 6th ed, RAIPA 1991, p 212. This later formulation is consistent with the first edition of 1953 which states: “It is a time-honoured custom that a new Senator making his initial speech to the Senate is heard without interjection or interruption. The new Senator, however, should not strain the tradition by being provocative” - *Australian Senate Practice*, 1st ed, 1953, p 48. The 12th edition of the same work states that: “In recent years there has been a practice of passing a special order to allow senators to make their first speeches without any question before the chair”: H Evans ed, *Odgers’ Australian Senate Practice*, 12th ed, Department of the Senate 2008, p 210.

¹² LM Barlin ed, *House of Representatives Practice*, 3rd ed, AGPS 1997, p 159.

on the Deputy Speaker's prompting, was followed by an apology.¹³ The 1980 instance referred to Bob Hawke's first speech, in respect to which Hansard records a government supporter saying "Hear, hear!", words that can be expressed to convey a variety of meanings but which were presumably uttered on this occasion free of irony.¹⁴ Earlier, in 1953, Gough Whitlam's first speech had been interrupted by John McEwen, another budding Prime Minister, to which Whitlam replied:

I thought that the Minister for Commerce and Agriculture (Mr. McEwen) had returned to the more congenial climate of Disraeli's day. I recollect that Disraeli said, on the occasion of his maiden speech, "The time will come when you shall hear me". Perhaps I should say, "The time will come when you may interrupt me".¹⁵

When Liberal Ted St John, in May 1967, used his first speech to canvass the government's failure to properly investigate the 1965 HMAS Melbourne and HMAS Voyager disaster there was an interjection from his own leader, Prime Minister Harold Holt.¹⁶ Listened to without interjection was the inaugural speech of Pauline Hanson, delivered on 10 September 1996, in which the member canvassed controversy, criticising indigenous policy and calling among other things for an end to multiculturalism.¹⁷

3. INAUGURAL SPEECHES IN THE NSW LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

3.1 Procedural note

As noted, the current rules of debate and other procedural matters relating to inaugural speeches in the NSW Parliament are set out in *NSW Legislative Assembly: Practice, Procedure and Privilege* edited by Russell Grove. Grove states that:

It is the general custom that other members extend a greater measure of courtesy to a member making an inaugural speech and refrain from making interjections and other interruptions regardless of whether matters of a controversial nature are raised in that speech.

Reference was made to comments by Speaker Murray on 1 June 1995 in respect to an inaugural speech made during a motion relating to a breach of privilege. A number of points of order were taken during the speech, with the Speaker stating: "Traditionally members have extended the courtesy of not interrupting the maiden speech of a member regardless of whether matters of a

¹³ *CPD (HR)*, 25 March 1976, p 1046.

¹⁴ *CPD (HR)*, 26 November 1980, p 99.

¹⁵ [Commonwealth Hansard \(HR\)](#), 19 March 1953, p 1423 (a second member, RG Pollard, also interjected and the Speaker called for "complete silence").

¹⁶ *CPD (HR)*, 16 May 2169. There was a second interjection by Don Chipp (p 2172).

¹⁷ *CPD (HR)*, 10 September 1996, p 3860.

controversial nature are raised in that speech”.¹⁸

There is at least one precedent for the rule that a member, re-elected to the Assembly after a lapse in membership, is on the later occasion accorded the courtesies associated with an inaugural speech. Labor’s Donald Bowman (Swansea) was first elected in 1981, defeated at the 1988 election and subsequently re-elected in 1991. Bowman’s second inaugural speech was made in the context of a debate on an industrial relations bill. Interruptions were recorded in Hansard, prompting the Acting-Speaker to declare that the member “is deemed to be making his maiden speech”. When John Fahey interjected “He has been here before”, the Acting-Speaker said:

Notwithstanding that, the tradition of this Parliament is that the honourable member is to be regarded as making his maiden speech. Members should allow him to continue without interruption.¹⁹

Procedurally, the mid-1990s were something of a tipping point in respect to inaugural speeches. Whereas currently the usual practice is to make a set piece inaugural speech which is clearly identified as such in Hansard, at least up to the mid-1990s they were made as part of the ordinary business of the House. Usually these speeches were accommodated either in the address-in-reply or budget debate, where traditionally latitude has been given to allow for wide-ranging debate.

Traditionally, the address-in-reply debate occurred in the second session of the new Parliament, following the brief initial session, opened by commission, where such formal business as the election of the Speaker was conducted. These arrangements were altered by sessional order on 26 February 1999, providing for the interruption of the business of the House for the making of an “inaugural speech”, which was to last 15 minutes with a 5 minute extension.²⁰ It is also the case that the traditional practice was not practicable in the 53rd and 54th Parliaments: the first session of the 53rd Parliament lasted for three years, from April 2003 to May 2006; the 54th Parliament, which was opened by commission, was constituted by one long session, lasting from May 2007 to December 2010.²¹ On the other hand, in the 55th Parliament the Governor’s

¹⁸ *NSWPD*, 1 June 1995, p 562; RD Grove (ed), *NSW Legislative Assembly: Practice, Procedure and Privilege*, NSW Parliament 2007, pp 97-98. Standing Order 63 provides: (1) A motion may be moved without notice, amendment or debate for the business before the House to be interrupted at a specified time (but not so as to interrupt a Member speaking) to permit a Member to make an inaugural speech without a question being before the House. Any interrupted business shall be resumed on completion of the speech. (2) The time limit for inaugural speeches will be 15 minutes with a 5 minute extension.

¹⁹ *NSWPD*, 10 September 1991, p 931. Roger Wotton (Burrendong), first elected in 1968, was re-elected in November 1973. His first substantial contribution was in the debate on the Conversion of Cemeteries Bill in February 1974, when he was heard without interruption. However, his speech did not otherwise bear any of the hallmarks of an inaugural speech and does not seem to have been recognised as such – *NSWPD*, 28 February 1974, p 908.

²⁰ The current Legislative Standing Order 63 is in similar terms.

²¹ One partial NSW precedent for this was during the last ill-fated Lang Government when the

speech was delivered on the opening day, 3 May 2011, which provided the opportunity for three members to make their inaugural speeches during the address-in-reply.²²

In summary then, since 1995, only rarely have inaugural speeches been made in the Assembly after a general election as part of the ordinary business of the House. Since 1999 the business of the House has generally been interrupted for the making of such speeches.²³ This applies equally to a member elected at a by-election as at a general election.

3.2 The present day

The content of the speeches have also changed somewhat in recent years, becoming more autobiographical and anecdotal. The building blocks of inaugural speeches have remained: reflections on electorates, their history, character and concerns; political motivations, influences, role models and viewpoints; thanks to supporters, staff and family. Only now, perhaps as a reflection of a broader shift in political culture, family and personal history was acknowledged more openly. In the “Bear Pit” of the Legislative Assembly, inaugural speeches have become more personally revealing.

These observations are supported by those of Deborah Brennan, made in the context of a review of inaugural speeches of female members of the NSW Parliament, where she states that:

Especially in recent years many elements of a first speech appear to follow a formula, new MLAs often acknowledging those who have previously held the seat, and referring to the characteristics and qualities of their electorate. The speech provides an opportunity for thanks to be given publicly to family and friends, many of whom attend Parliament for the event.²⁴

Brennan goes on to comment:

In the early period, it was uncommon for women to reflect on their own lives and struggles in their inaugural speeches, only one of the 30 elected before 1988 doing so. In the more recent period, a majority of women across all parties, as well as Independents, have done so,

only session of the 29th Parliament lasted from November 1930 to May 1932. On that occasion the Governor’s Speech was delivered on the second day of the new Parliament (26 November 1930), with the debate on the address-in-reply proceeding until its adoption (on 9 December 1930). The 54th Parliament on the other hand was opened by commission and without a subsequent Governor’s speech.

²² Robyn Parker (mover), Graham Annesley (seconder) and John Robertson (Leader of the Opposition).

²³ From May 1999 for the first time “inaugural” speeches featured in the contents list for Hansard, and were indexed by reference to individual members.

²⁴ D Brennan and L Chappell eds, *“No fit place for women”? Women in New South Wales politics, 1856-2006*, UNSW Press 2006, p 23.

personal reflection becoming almost *de riquer*.²⁵

The first “inaugural speech” from 1999 was made by Kevin Greene (Georges River), the last part of which started: “One of the things I am doing to make sure that I stay in touch with my family is coaching my daughter’s netball team this year”.²⁶ Imagine Joe Cahill or Robert Askin getting to their feet to say such a thing on the floor of the Assembly, traditionally a bastion of “blokeyness”. While inaugural speeches can still carry weighty political messages, many of them also contain these “softer” elements. Migrant histories are celebrated, as are family relationships generally. Making her inaugural speech on 20 May 2003 Kristine Keneally (Heffron) said: “My children remind me that small things matter; that learning to do up buttons on your pyjamas or pouring your own cereal is important”.²⁷ Nathan Rees (Toongabie), in a politically tough inaugural speech made on 8 May 2007, divulged that he’d met his partner when playing “the undertaker’s pimply apprentice in the school production of *Oliver*”.²⁸ Andrew Stoner’s (Oxley) inaugural speech on 2 June 1999 is another example of a hard hitting speech on behalf of the electorate, where in a novel twist he thanked the Acting Speaker for giving him leave:

to bring this Aussie icon, the Akubra hat, into the Chamber and to display in the Speaker’s Square products from my electorate.²⁹

With very few exceptions³⁰ these inaugural speeches have been heard without interruption.

3.3 O’Farrell to Greiner

From the mid-1990s period, Barry O’Farrell’s first speech was delivered on 19 September 1995³¹ during the second reading debate on the Endangered Fauna (Interim Protection) Bill. In the speech Mr O’Farrell veered away from commenting on the Bill to reflect on his constituency of Northcott and its former member, Bruce Baird, as well as at the close to thank his family. The speech also articulated his views on the democratic system of politics and on his own Liberal political philosophy, stating (in part):

All of us enter this place with a set of beliefs, values and experiences that we hope will add to party-room and parliamentary debate. Obviously, my political philosophy is Liberal. It is liberal in its concern for the rights of the individual and it is conservative in its respect for the values of the past, and recognises the limitations of both individuals and government.

²⁵ “No fit place for women”? *Women in New South Wales politics, 1856-2006*, p 25.

²⁶ *NSWPD*, 12 May 1999, p 112.

²⁷ *NSWPD*, 20 May 2003, p 734.

²⁸ *NSWPD*, 8 May 2007, p 32.

²⁹ *NSWPD*, 2 June 1999, p 850.

³⁰ See for example – *NSWPD*, 26 May 1999, p 529; *NSWPD* 27 May 1999, p 592; *NSWPD*, 9 May 2007, 87; *NSWPD* 9 May 2007, p 89; *NSWPD* 30 May 2007, p 530.

³¹ O’Farrell was elected at the general election of March 1995.

Many find it difficult to come to terms with the existence of both liberal and conservative strands in Liberal Party philosophy. Countless pointless debates occur on the issue and I appreciate that nothing I say will end them. However, for me there is no difficulty; instead of a problem, I see a strength.³²

The inaugural speech of former Premier Morris Iemma, delivered on 30 October 1991, was made during the course of the second reading debate on the budget.³³ The usual courtesies were shown to the speech, which set out a trenchant critique of the Greiner Government's budget, describing it as representing the "the lost vision of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Regan", before ending with the customary acknowledgements to his family and supporters in the Hurstville constituency and beyond.³⁴

One of 18 new members elected in March 1984, John Fahey made his inaugural speech on 15 August 1984 during the address-in-reply debate in the second session of the 48th Parliament. Consistent with the conventions of the time it started with a brief acknowledgement of his political supporters, his family and his predecessor in the seat of Camden (Ralph Brading). He then proceeded to make a lengthy and uninterrupted speech on the building and mining industries before turning his attention to local government; granted a further 15 minutes, he spoke about transport and other issues affecting his electorate. Verging on the prescient was Fahey's description of Camden as a "versatile performer; in Olympic vernacular, a performer who can compete in the decathlon rather than a single event..."³⁵

It is clear that by the 1980s inaugural speeches, whether made as part of the address-in-reply debate or in other circumstances, were invariably treated with the appropriate decorum. Examples from the first session of the same Parliament include the first speeches of Bruce Baird (Northcott) and Peter Crawford (Balmain), both made in the course of second reading debates on different bills. Baird opened with a brief tribute to his predecessor and with a comment on transport issues facing his electorate, before moving on to debate the Lotteries and Art Unions (Amendment) Bill.³⁶ Crawford's inaugural speech was longer on history and acknowledgements³⁷ and also, once he turned his attention to the Forestry Revocation and National Parks Bill, far more tendentious, in particular in its criticism of the Coalition's environmental credentials. If the speech suggests the tolerance shown to new members at this time, to be heard free of interruption, it also indicates the limits to that tolerance where the privilege is seen to be abused. A speech described by Crawford's Labor colleague Terry Sheahan (Burrinjuck) as "aggressive and thought-

³² *NSWPD*, 19 September 1995, p 1094.

³³ Iemma was elected at the general election of 25 May 1991.

³⁴ *NSWPD*, 30 October 1991, p 3978.

³⁵ *NSWPD*, 15 August 1984, pp 186-187.

³⁶ *NSWPD*, 8 May 1984, p 333.

³⁷ To Mary Quirk (A former member for Balmain and Labor's first female Assembly member) and Dawn Fraser (elected to represent Balmain at the next election in 1988).

provoking”³⁸ closed with the statement:

I seriously believe that it is the intention of the National Party and its running dog, the Liberal Party, at the first possible to open up these parks, to subject them to logging and to the eventual desecration and ruin that has been the fate of so much of the once beautiful forest areas of New South Wales.³⁹

From the Opposition side, Peter Collins (Willoughby) spoke to congratulate Crawford on his speech and to point out that:

It is most unfortunate and indeed premature that a new member making a maiden speech should attempt to so distort Liberal Party policy on rainforests and attempt to continue the lie that the Liberal Party will log them.⁴⁰

Elected to the Assembly at a by election, Bob Carr’s inaugural speech was made on 23 November 1983 as part of the second reading debate on the three cognate police regulation Bills.⁴¹ He spoke on the history of Maroubra electorate and its representation, in praise of Sir William McKell and in support of the Bills, arguing in strong terms in favour of the Wran Government’s attempts to “purify New South Wales civic life after the debauchery of the Askin years”. The more tendentious remarks prompted the interjection “Return to the good years” by the member for Eastwood, JA Clough, in response to which, cognisant of the conventions at issue, self-consciously echoing D’Israeli and Whitlam, Carr retorted “The time will come when you may interrupt”.⁴²

On that occasion Carr had got to his feet immediately after Nick Greiner, another member elected at a by-election. Greiner’s inaugural speech had been made on 15 October 1980 during the debate on the budget.⁴³ After commenting on the electorate of Ku-ring-gai and his predecessor (John Clarkson Maddison), Greiner articulated his own philosophical position by reference to a statement by Lord Hailsham’s on “freedom under law”. Free of interjection, he then proceeded to offer a characteristically forensic analysis of the State’s financial position and criticising the current budget as a “cosmetic, do-nothing budget which hides its face from the serious structural problems of the public and private sectors in the New South Wales in the 1970s”.⁴⁴

A common feature of these speeches is that they were overwhelmingly political, not personal, in nature. In most cases brief mention is made of family, in some of political mentors, but they are not in any sense autobiographical and certainly

³⁸ *NSWPD*, 8 May 1984, p 355.

³⁹ *NSWPD*, 8 May 1984, p 352.

⁴⁰ *NSWPD*, 8 May 1984, p 352.

⁴¹ Carr was elected at the by-election held on 22 October 1983.

⁴² *NSWPD*, 23 November 1983, pp 3327-3331.

⁴³ Greiner was elected at the by-election held on 13 September 1980.

⁴⁴ *NSWPD*, 15 October 1980, pp 1684-1692.

not self-revelatory in anything but a political or philosophical sense. The distinction between the public and private spheres is evident in the restraint shown in the inaugural speech made on 7 August 1974 by Mary Meillon, the first female Liberal member elected to the Assembly for the seat of Murray, previously held by her father JA Lawson since 1932.⁴⁵ Her father is mentioned of course as is her mother but only briefly and unsentimentally, with the speech, which proceeded without interjection, concentrating almost entirely on the issues facing the Murray region. The same distinction between the public and private spheres applies with even greater force to the inaugural speeches made in earlier periods. It is also the case that prior to the 1960s at least the convention against interjection was regularly flouted in the Assembly.

3.4 Willis to McGirr

True to this earlier type was the inaugural speech of Tom Lewis, Premier in 1975-76, who won the seat of Wollondilly at a by-election on 26 October 1957. His inaugural speech was made on 5 March 1958 during the debate on the Road Maintenance (Contribution) Bill. Starting with brief thanks to his Party leader (Philip Morton) and predecessor (BR Pelly), Lewis proceeded straight to the Bill, experiencing several interjections along the way. A slightly humorous note was injected when, after Lewis had mentioned the unorthodox revenue raising strategies adopted by the state police in the United States, there followed this exchange:

Mr Mallam: Ned Kelly used to do that.

Mr Lewis: Is he a relative of the honourable member?

Mr Mallam: He was active in the Wollondilly area.

Mr Lewis: He fully appreciated the salubrious effects of Wollondilly.⁴⁶

Former Premiers Robert Askin and Eric Willis both became members following the election of 17 June 1950 and both made their inaugural speeches during the address-in-reply debate. In his speech Askin referred extensively to matters affecting his constituency (Collaroy), including the Surf Life Saving Association, and to the politics of the day, but was silent on the personal side, giving no acknowledgement to his political supporters or mentors even.⁴⁷ This seemed to be the practice at the time, where thanks were restricted to the electors of the relevant constituency and sometimes to parliamentary staff. Eric Willis, who said he rose with “trepidation to deliver this, my maiden speech” thanked the electors of Earlwood and added that as the youngest member of the House he hoped to become a “very rebellious child”. He then set out his political credentials, arguing ultimately for decentralisation, saying “I have long cherished as an ideal the establishment of twenty-four or twenty-five states in Australia...”.⁴⁸ His speech was not heard in complete silence, with Joe Cahill

⁴⁵ *NSWPD*, 7 August 1974, p 76. Meillon was elected at a by-election held on 6 October 1973.

⁴⁶ *NSWPD*, 5 March 1958, p 2444.

⁴⁷ *NSWPD*, 26 September 1950, p 358.

⁴⁸ *NSWPD*, 27 September 1950, p 424.

interrupting to defend the government's record.⁴⁹

The practice was firmly established for a newly elected member to move and second the address-in-reply to the Governor's speech⁵⁰ and where practicable for other new recruits to make their inaugural speeches in the subsequent debate. In 1941, at the start of the McKell ministry, with war the great issue of the day, the address-in-reply was indeed moved and seconded by new members and heard without interruption. One of the speakers was Jack Renshaw, member for Castlereagh and the last Labor Premier before Askin came to office in 1965. Such speeches were generally straightforward commentaries on the politics of the day and Renshaw's was of this kind.⁵¹ Contributing to the later debate was WH Sheahan (Yass) who came out fighting, telling the previous speaker, Lt-Colonel Bruxner:

I require no privileges from him, and if he desires to interrupt me during the course of my maiden speech he has every right to do so, because I believe that would only conform to the standard of the speech he has just delivered, and the speeches that were so coldly received during the election campaign.⁵²

Opposition members duly obliged with a string of interruptions during Sheahan's long, politically charged speech. He ended on a somewhat sweeter note, saying he felt deeply the privilege of addressing the House for the first time and commenting that the wisdom of the people of Yass in electing him will depend primarily on the ability of the Government to carry out its legislative programme.⁵³

When the first female Labor member in the Assembly, Mary Quirk, made her inaugural speech on 17 March 1939 she was filling the shoes of her dead husband, John Quirk, the member for Balmain since 1920. The speech, made from "the point of view of a woman",⁵⁴ was on the Child Welfare Bill and took as its broad theme the argument that "no cost is too great for the Government to incur when the welfare of the children is directly or indirectly involved".⁵⁵ Quirk was heard without interruption and ended on a sombre and, for the time unusually personal note, reflecting that her late husband had "worked hard and long in the great cause of social justice for suffering humanity".⁵⁶

It may be that the circumstances of her election dampened the usually

⁴⁹ *NSWPD*, 27 September 1950, p 424.

⁵⁰ *NSWPD*, 12 September 1950, p 31 (John McMahon, member for Balmain). Traditionally in the first session of a new Parliament a newly elected member of the government has the honour of moving (and seconding) the motion for the address-in-reply.

⁵¹ *NSWPD*, 23 July 1941, p 31. The address-in-reply was moved by George Weir (Dulwich Hill).

⁵² *NSWPD*, 24 July 1941, p 65.

⁵³ *NSWPD*, 24 July 1941, p 71.

⁵⁴ *NSWPD*, 17 March 1939, p 4096.

⁵⁵ *NSWPD*, 17 March 1939, p 4093.

⁵⁶ *NSWPD*, 17 March 1939, p 4096.

boisterous spirit in the Assembly. At any rate, in the late 1930s it was not always the practice for even those first speeches moving the address-in-reply to be heard without interruption, as in the case of Vernon Treatt's (Woollahra) inaugural speech of 29 June 1938; when that speech veered off onto the question of speed limits there were interruptions from an unnamed member and from the soon to be Premier Bill McKell, usually considered a paragon of parliamentary standards.⁵⁷ Again there were interruptions when Griffith Evans (Lachlan) spoke for a first time on 3 August 1938 in the debate on the Soil Conservation Bill.⁵⁸ In fact, the occasion was not acknowledged as an inaugural speech, which suggests that the conventions attached to such speeches tended only to be adhered to when made in the context of the address-in-reply debate, if then.

That was the case when Alexander Mair, the new member for Albury and Premier in 1939-1941, made his first substantive contribution to debate on the Farmers' Relief Bill on 15 September 1932, when there was no acknowledgement of an inaugural speech.⁵⁹ These were controversial times, with the first Stevens-Bruxner government in office following Lang's dismissal in May 1932. The ladies' gallery witnessed a demonstration during HE Harper's (Arncliffe) speech moving the adoption of the address-in-reply, a speech interrupted on a number of occasions, once by McKell.⁶⁰ Breathing fire, Lang congratulated Harper and CA Sinclair (Namoi) on the "excellent manner and method of their speeches", only finding fault with the content of what they said.⁶¹

It was in the address-in-reply debate in December 1930, with Lang in power, that Bob Heffron, the new member for Botany and Premier between 1959 and 1964, made his inaugural speech. Acknowledging the responsibility that membership of the Parliament entails, Heffron went on the offensive against the Opposition, focusing on their record on industrial issues. Courting controversy, he implied corruption in high places, impugning former Premier Bavin and his connections with a Mr Justice Harvey and what Heffron described as "that rich Council-squarer, that disrupter of the morals of public men, Mr Arnot, Mr Bavin's fishing pal". When asked if he impugned Bavin's honesty, Heffron replied "I say this: One man is the Premier, another is a judge, and the other is worse than a jury squarer".⁶² The calm waters of the model inaugural speech were not for the NSW Legislative Assembly of this time.

On his winning the seat of Croydon in 1927, Betram Stevens immediately entered the Bavin Ministry as Assistant Treasurer. He found himself therefore at once at the centre of political debate with no opportunity to make anything that could meaningfully be called an inaugural speech, speaking first in the debate

⁵⁷ *NSWPD*, 29 June 1938, pp 40-41.

⁵⁸ *NSWPD*, 3 August 1938, pp 787-790.

⁵⁹ *NSWPD*, 15 September 1932, p 277.

⁶⁰ *NSWPD*, 7 September 1932, pp 37-41.

⁶¹ *NSWPD*, 7 September 1932, p 48.

⁶² *NSWPD*, 3 December 1930, p 162.

on the Supply Bill on 15 November 1927.⁶³

Joe Cahill (St George) was elected to the Assembly in 1925, the same year as the redoubtable Millicent Preston Stanley. On different sides of the political divide, they belonged to a combative cohort of new members, appropriately enough for an election that brought Jack Lang to government for the first time. The 27th Parliament was opened by commission, with a characteristically formal first session in June 1925 lasting only a day, followed by a second session starting in August, featuring a speech by Governor de Chair. Far from avoiding controversy, littered with interjections, Cahill's own inaugural speech, made during the address-in-reply debate, was in fighting terms, long and hard, taking on the big class issues of the day, including working hours, unemployment, and the continuing fallout from the railway strikes of 1917. When Cahill rounded on the National Party member for the North Shore, Scott Fell, telling him that he regarded "those whom you employ in your workshops as mere pieces of machinery", there followed this angry exchange:

Mr Scott Fell: That is not true!

Mr Cahill: It is true. Your experience only reaches as far as your office, where you sit in the midst of luxury.

Mr Scott Fell: That is not true either. I started from scratch!⁶⁴

It was no time for faint hearts or for the niceties of inaugural speeches. The address-in-reply was moved by another famously combative parliamentary performer, Dr Evatt (Balmain). He started by acknowledging that the 27th Parliament would be memorable "because this is the first occasion on which a woman has been elected to this Assembly", a comment that provoked an unidentified Opposition member to interject, "She is not on your side though!"⁶⁵ When Dr Evatt spoke of the Government's plans to reform the Fair Rents Act, another unattributed interjection stated "Do away with it!"⁶⁶ At the end of Evatt's speech, the gallery erupted in applause, which caused the Speaker (James Dooley) to issue a warning about disorderly conduct, along with a reminder that "it is a time-honoured custom of this House that young members making their maiden speeches are heard in silence".⁶⁷ This statement of principle notwithstanding, the pattern of interjection continued along with the practice of allowing new members to open the address-in-reply debate with Labor's Kenneth Hoad (Cootamundra) seconding the motion. Hoad said that the plan to return to the "first past the post" electoral system would be a matter for "mature consideration" by the Government, a remark that prompted an unidentified Opposition member to interject "By the caucus!"⁶⁸

⁶³ *NSWPD*, 15 November 1927, p 276.

⁶⁴ *NSWPD*, 19 August 1925, p 245.

⁶⁵ *NSWPD*, 12 August 1925, p 66.

⁶⁶ *NSWPD*, 12 August 1925, p 69.

⁶⁷ *NSWPD*, 12 August 1925, p 71.

⁶⁸ *NSWPD*, 12 August 1925, p 72.

And so it went on, until Miss Preston-Stanley (Eastern Suburbs) got to her feet some days later, again during the address-in-reply debate, to make what has become perhaps the most memorable inaugural speech in NSW political history. Rejecting the view that women should be protected from the "hurly-burly" of politics, in her feminist guise she argued that as tax-payers and workers women were touched by every "turn of the political wheel". Never one to mince words, she said that women "are subject to the laws you make, the inadequate wages you impose, the taxes you collect, the injustices you perpetuate, the anomalies you tolerate, and they suffer under the vital and important matters you forget to handle".⁶⁹ That part of her speech ended with a strong statement of the contribution that only women can make to "the life of the nation" and by emphasising that "women's questions are national questions, and that national questions are women's questions", all of which was heard without interruption, as was her acknowledgement of the assistance provided to her by the Speaker and the officers of the House. From there the speech focused on the pressing health issues facing women and children, including the preventable deaths of 300 women a year in childbirth. The first interjection came from Nationalist's James Arkins (St George) who asked "Are not many of the causes parental?"

From this feminist platform Preston-Stanley diverged to argue at length for the reform of the criminal justice system and the state control of breeding founded on the science of eugenics, an issue which she referred to as "the question of the feeble-minded" or the "pests which are undermining the tree of life".⁷⁰ Obviously ever since the Second World War such views have become highly controversial but, dubious as they may be at any time, they were less shocking and extreme in the 1920s and were heard in silence.

Only after she had commented on the "trifling and contemptible issues" which split her own side of politics, the National and Country parties, did she seek to directly address the content of the Governor's speech, taking up the cudgels in particular against the proposed 44 hours week. It was then the interruptions started in earnest, with Labor members disputing her claims about "ca'canny" and "go slow" industrial practices. Returning to her feminist theme, she said:

Furthermore, from the woman's point of view, has the Labor Party ever thought of even an eighty-eight hours week for women? Goodness me! the average woman works 112 hours per week, and she is lucky if she gets through in her work in that time.⁷¹

From there the speech lost some direction and momentum, engaging in contemporary controversies, among them Lang's treatment of Bertram Stevens, who had been driven out of Treasury. Nonetheless, in all it was a brave and politically charged speech, as radical as it was conservative, fiercely

⁶⁹ *NSWPD*, 26 August 1925, p 369.

⁷⁰ *NSWPD*, 26 August 1925, pp 374-375.

⁷¹ *NSWPD*, 26 August 1925, p 377.

impersonal, barely mentioning her electorate let alone her personal history, a speech that certainly stretched the usual boundaries without breaking apart the rather loose fitting conventions in place in the Assembly. With interjections more the norm than the exception in the Assembly in this period, it is not quite accurate to suggest, as Brennan does, that those interjections were prompted solely by gender. Brennan commented:

Although the press reported that her speech was warmly received, Hansard records that men both from [sic] sides of the Chamber interjected frequently. The idea that a woman in Parliament should be taken seriously, and her ideas treated with respect, was clearly difficult for some to accept.⁷²

Of course some members may have thought exactly that. The next speaker, her fellow National Party member, John Fitzpatrick (Bathurst), referred to the attention of members and the “large gallery” being held “for a long time”. He added with more than a hint of condescension:

Miss Stanley has spoken upon such a multiplicity of questions that I who have some kindly regard for the lady folk of the community and appreciate their lectures when they are not delivered at 11 o'clock at night, find it impossible to add much on general questions.⁷³

Another combative first speaker was James McGirr, Premier between 1947 and 1952, who as the new member for Cootamundra delivered his inaugural speech in the address-in-reply debate on 12 July 1922. He started conventionally enough with the comment that that was his “first opportunity of addressing the House” and saying he was pleased “to be here tonight as one of the Labor Party members representing a country constituency”.⁷⁴ From there he launched into a feisty speech, scathing in his criticism of Fuller’s second Ministry. An early interjection reads “That is absolute rubbish. It is not true!”⁷⁵ There followed this exchange:

Mr James McGirr: ...There is no doubt the Government wants to filch from the worker in this State the only measure of reform he has ever had – the forty-four hours week.

An Hon Member: Is that the only reform?

Mr James McGirr: The only one, because the people of your class, when he got a rise in wages, filched it from him. The forty-four hours week they could not filch from him. I venture to say that within three years of your Government in this State the conditions here will be more appalling than they are in Victoria, and even worse than in the slums of the East End of London. Only one section of the community sent you here. Go out to

⁷² “No fit place for women”? *Women in New South Wales politics, 1856-2006*, p 24.

⁷³ *NSWPD*, 26 August 1925, p 383.

⁷⁴ *NSWPD*, 12 July 1922, p 274.

⁷⁵ *NSWPD*, 12 July 1922, p 274.

Potts Point and you will find people wearing huge diamonds costing thousands of pounds, which were obtained by exploiting the workers of the community.⁷⁶

Note that up until 1922 it had been the practice in the Assembly for the address-in-reply to be referred to a pro forma select committee, a practice abandoned in the Upper House in 1875 (see below).⁷⁷ In the Assembly, the change in practice does not appear to have had much, if any, practical effect on the making of inaugural speeches, the referral being only a formal step omitted in the modern era. It seems that in the Assembly those who moved and seconded the referral had always led the debate on the committee's return to the House.

3.5 McKell to Federation

Thomas Bavin and William McKell were both elected to the Assembly in 1917, at the time of Holman's Nationalist Ministry, Bavin on the Government's side, McKell in Opposition. Bavin (Gordon) seconded the address-in-reply motion and chose for his theme the war and "the obligation of doing the best we can to help the Empire in the war". After two interruptions, the Speaker (JJ Cohen) sought to bring proceedings to order, saying:

Interjections are at all times disorderly. It has been a tradition of this House, and of every House which has responsible government, that new members shall be heard in silence...I ask that the honourable member be allowed to proceed without interruption.⁷⁸

Bavin was only interrupted on three further occasions. The interjections during McKell's inaugural speech, delivered during the same address-in-reply debate, ran into double figures. Little wonder perhaps when, in seeking to defend Labor against claims of association with the militant unionist movement IWW (International Workers of the World), he raised the raw question of Holman's disloyalty to the Empire during the Boer War. This caused the Speaker to call him to order, saying "It is unparliamentary to accuse any honourable member of being disloyal".⁷⁹ When McKell moved on to the recent snap election, calling it a "trick" played by Holman to disenfranchise many working people, the Speaker again pulled him up, saying:

The honourable member is exceeding the bounds of parliamentary license in accusing the leader of the National Party, or any other member of this House, of having been guilty of a deliberate trick.⁸⁰

His point well and truly made, twice over, like a practised barrister working on

⁷⁶ *NSWPD*, 12 July 1922, p 278.

⁷⁷ The new practice was first adopted for the Third Session of the 26th Parliament, on 7 August 1923.

⁷⁸ *NSWPD*, 17 July 1917, p 51.

⁷⁹ *NSWPD*, 31 July 1917, p 316.

⁸⁰ *NSWPD*, 31 July 1917, p 319.

the minds of a jury, McKell apologised if he had “transgressed the rules of debate”. In some ways the speech is a good companion to Preston Stanley’s, pugnacious, wide ranging, dealing with issues as diverse as sectarianism in politics, revived at the recent election, along with industrial law and policy, never hesitating to take up the most intense party political quarrels, and managing to insert a reference to Liberal Party members as “oppressors of the class to which I belong”.⁸¹ Pulling no punches of his own, McKell seemed happy enough to parry the interjections that came his way.

Jack Lang, the member for Granville, had been elected in December 1913, to a Parliament which only really got down to business in July of the following year, a matter of weeks before war broke out in Europe. These were the days of the first Holman Labor Ministry, before the Party split over conscription, in power since 1910. The address-in-reply motion was moved and seconded by new Labor members, William Bagnall (St George) and Thomas Brown (Lachlan), neither of whom were heard without several interjections.⁸² Ironically and perhaps inadvertently that courtesy was extended to Lang who, for all his reputation for domineering bluster, during the course of the debate on the budget delivered what by the standards of the day was a rather tame inaugural speech, more local than many in its focus, grouped around what he termed an opportunity to air his “grievances”.⁸³

After the 1910 election, with the McGowen Labor Government in office, the address-in-reply was moved and seconded by new members, JP Osborne (Paddington) and GRW McDonald (Bingara), neither of whom was heard without interruption. Congratulating them on their first speeches, the next speaker, CA Lee, the member for Tenterfield since 1884, made reference to the “moderate way in which they spoke this evening”; then after saying he would not criticise them, he added that “like all new members who come to this House, they are very green in political matters”.⁸⁴ It seemed that some if not all of the formalities of inaugural speeches were adhered to, at least in respect to those members moving and seconding the address-in-reply.

Beyond that, however, it is doubtful that new members could expect anything but the usual rough and tumble politics of the Assembly. A case in point is the first speech of the new Liberal member for the Upper Hunter, Henry Willis,⁸⁵ who in the same address-in-reply debate made a tendentious verbal charge at the Government’s “socialistic policy” for the “nationalisation of the sources of production – land – distribution, and exchange”⁸⁶ and closed on the theme that “the Government are in favour of crime and criminals”.⁸⁷ The very model of a

⁸¹ *NSWPD*, 31 July 1917, p 324. For comment on the speech see – C Cunneen, *William John McKell: Boilermaker, Premier, Governor-General*, UNSW Press 2000, p 58.

⁸² *NSWPD*, 7 July 1914, p 20 (Bagnall) and p 27 (Brown).

⁸³ *NSWPD*, 29 July 1914, p 498.

⁸⁴ *NSWPD*, 16 November 1910, p 30.

⁸⁵ Willis was a member of the House of Representatives from 1901 to 1910.

⁸⁶ *NSWPD*, 24 November 1910, p 327.

⁸⁷ *NSWPD*, 24 November 1910, p 334.

controversial inaugural speech, peppered with interruptions, Willis was to become in 1911 the most notoriously divisive Speaker in NSW political history, described in that role as “arrogant” and “dictatorial”.⁸⁸

A similar pattern is found at the start of the Wade Liberal-Reform Ministry in October 1907, where the motion for the address-in-reply was moved and seconded by new members,⁸⁹ subject to even more interjections and provided, on this occasion, with none of the courtesies we now associate with inaugural speeches. The next speaker, James McGowen, made no reference of a congratulatory or other nature to the speeches, instead getting straight down to the business of telling the Government that he was refusing to give any pair.⁹⁰ The complete absence of any of the practices associated with inaugural speeches was evident in George Beeby’s first contribution in the Assembly, again in the address-in-reply debate. Described as one of the “great loose cannons of NSW politics”,⁹¹ at this time a Labor recruit, Beeby (Blayney) spoke without any regard to the fact this was his inaugural speech and was treated by others as if he were a long-standing member of the House.⁹²

On the other hand, when the new member for Hartley, James Dooley, Labor Premier in 1921-22 and Speaker in 1925-27,⁹³ first spoke in the same debate he was at pains to stress his inexperience and to crave the House’s indulgence over his unfamiliarity with the “routine of debate in this Chamber”.⁹⁴ The formalities over, Dooley went on to claim that “no man in this State earns a thousand a year by his own personal exertion”. “What about a doctor?” a member asked. Dooley responded, “A doctor does not earn his income by his own personal exertion. He has four or five servants, he has a groom...”, at which point he was interrupted by “loud laughter”.⁹⁵

In the Carruthers Liberal-Reform Ministry in August 1904 the members moving and seconding the address-in-reply were not new members.⁹⁶ Later in the debate, Robert Booth (Leichhardt), acknowledged that he was speaking as a “new member” but said he was only doing so to defend himself against what had been said by the previous speaker.⁹⁷ Needless to say, Booth was not heard in silence. As with Dooley previously and Booth in 1904, the common (but not universal) practice at this time seems to have been for a new member to acknowledge their inexperience in some way before proceeding to debate

⁸⁸ D Clune and G Griffith, *Decision and Deliberation: The Parliament of NSW, 1856-2003*, The Federation Press 2006, p 219.

⁸⁹ AGF James (Goulburn) and J Miller (Bathurst).

⁹⁰ *NSWPD*, 9 October 1907, p 38.

⁹¹ *Decision and Deliberation: The Parliament of NSW, 1856-2003*, p 269.

⁹² *NSWPD*, 10 October 1907, p 110.

⁹³ Dooley’s premiership was interrupted by Fuller’s seven hour premiership on 20 December 1921.

⁹⁴ *NSWPD*, 15 October 1907, p 129.

⁹⁵ *NSWPD*, 15 October 1907, p 134.

⁹⁶ *NSWPD*, 24 August 1904, p 34 (GS Briner) and p 35 (JF Smith).

⁹⁷ *NSWPD*, 25 August 1904, p 92.

whatever matter was before the House. A good example is the first contribution of CG Wade, Premier from 1907 to 1910, elected originally at the Willoughby by-election in September 1903. Within days of entering the House he was on his feet debating the Regulation of Wages in Coal Mines Bill, setting out on his parliamentary career with this smooth statement:

I apologise for addressing the House so soon after my appearance here, and I ask indulgence if, through inexperience, I transgress any usages of the House in dealing with this question.⁹⁸

Wade's lengthy disquisition on the coal mining industry, a model in its way of detailed analysis, resulted in this testy exchange with Alfred Edden, the Labor member for Kahibah:

Mr Wade: The experience in America, New Zealand, and many parts of England is that the only way you can work this system of coal-cutting by machinery is by means of a daily wage.

Mr Edden: Humbug!

Mr Wade: It is a fact, for all that.

Mr Edden: It is not true!

Mr Wade: I am sorry the honourable gentleman says that. I am speaking from what I see in books, and from statistics on the point. They show clearly that that has been the system in operation in nearly every part of the world.

Mr Edden: Humbug!⁹⁹

In August 1901, with the See Protectionist Ministry and federation in place, the motion for adoption of the address-in-reply was moved and seconded by new members.¹⁰⁰ Both stuck to the issues raised in the Governor's speech and, in the case of Eden George (Sydney-Belmore) he was only a few minutes in before an interjection claimed that he was reading his speech. There followed this exchange of words among some of the rowdiest members of an incredibly rowdy House:

MR T Fitzpatrick: No, he is not!

Mr O'Sullivan: They are only copious notes.

Mr Dick: There is a standing order which provides against an honourable member reading his speech.

Mr Crick: It is an extraordinary point to take in regard to a new member!¹⁰¹

The idea of Paddy Crick, one of the "Wild Men of Sydney", the arch user and abuser of procedure, defending the decorum of the House on behalf of a new

⁹⁸ *NSWPD*, 16 September 1903, p 2449.

⁹⁹ *NSWPD*, 16 September 1903, pp 2454-2455.

¹⁰⁰ E George (Sydney-Belmore) and WD McIntyre (Inverell).

¹⁰¹ *NSWPD*, 24 July 1901, p 31.

member or anyone else is amusing. More in character was the contribution of John Norton (Paddington), sometimes Crick's partner in crime, sometimes his sparring partner, who laid into George for "beating out...the old worn-out platitudes of loyalty to her Most Gracious Majesty who is dead, to the King who is alive, and to the king that is to come".¹⁰² Indeed, it is fair to say that, in this quarrelsome company, the very idea of any member making a speech, the equivalent of which we would recognise today as an inaugural speech, free of interjections, would count as a triumph of hope over experience. When the new member for Balmain North, John Storey, Labour Premier from 1920 to 1921, made his first speech in the debate on the Industrial Arbitration Bill he launched straight into his subject, craving no one's indulgence and not expecting any special courtesies to be shown.¹⁰³

3.6 Before Federation

In August 1898, when federation was the big issue of the day for the Reid Free Trade Ministry, the mover and seconder of the address-in-reply motion were new members and both were heard without interruption. The mover, John Garland (Woollahra) begged the indulgence of the House before speaking briefly on the federation question, while Thomas Clarke (Darlington) offered some pithy thoughts on aspects of the Governor's speech.¹⁰⁴ The debate was then taken over by the big political hitters of the day, Reid, Lyne and Bernhard Ringrose Wise, with Paddy Crick flitting amongst them, like a horsefly pestering gallopers.

An example of an inaugural speech from the time is that of the new member for Grenfell, WA Holman, first Labor then Nationalist Premier. He spoke in the committee stage of the debate on the Australasian Federation Resolutions, specifically on an amendment moved by his party leader, McGowen, concerning the method of altering the proposed federal constitution. Referring at first to "my immature views",¹⁰⁵ he delivered a closely reasoned speech, nearly an hour long, with a number of interjections from Wise, Reid and See among others. Fine as it is, a harbinger of great things to come, its relationship to what we now call an inaugural speech is tenuous at best. At the very least, as a model of its kind, in form and substance, it indicates the journey such speeches have taken in the Assembly.

As for McGowen (Redfern), when he entered Parliament in 1891, as leader of the first phalanx of Labor members, he was required to get straight down to

¹⁰² *NSWPD*, 25 July 1901, p 66.

¹⁰³ *NSWPD*, 12 September 1901, p 1332. Storey had asked two questions previously – *NSWPD*, 11 September 1901, p 1233 and p 1234.

¹⁰⁴ *NSWPD*, 17 August 1898, p 25 and p 27.

¹⁰⁵ *NSWPD*, 27 October 1898, p 1936. For comment on the speech see – D Clune and K Turner eds, *The Premiers of New South Wales, Volume 2, 1901-2005*, The Federation Press 2006, p 122. Michael Hogan writes that "The speech established Holman's reputation as one of the most effective debaters in the Assembly – a reputation he maintained for the remainder of his career in the Chamber".

political business.¹⁰⁶ There was no time for the niceties of inaugural speeches. George Fuller (Kiama), Premier in the 1920s, was first elected in February 1889 on a free trade ticket, at a time when Parkes and Dibbs were vying for supremacy in an Assembly characterised not by parties but factions. Fuller does not appear to have made anything like an inaugural speech, speaking first on a motion to end duty on bacon, butter, cheese and kerosene and later in an adjournment debate on railway construction.¹⁰⁷

In March 1887, at the start of the fourth Parkes Ministry, the address-in-reply was moved and seconded by new members, William McMillan (East Sydney) and JE Kelly (The Bogan) respectively. McMillan began by saying:

I understand, sir, that it is a time honoured custom in this House on the first occasion upon which a member addresses it that he should receive a certain amount of good natured consideration owing to the peculiar position he occupies...¹⁰⁸

On this occasion, McMillan was indeed heard without interjection, a courtesy that was not extended to Kelly. In the same debate it was almost extended to Thomas Waddell, the member for Bourke and briefly Premier in 1904, except for an interjection by John McElhone (Upper Hunter), an able but mischievous member who is said to have contributed to the Assembly's growing reputation in the 1880s as "the bear-garden in Macquarie Street".¹⁰⁹ Waddell had started by saying that he had not intended to "speak at the present time", a form of words favoured by new members, but for the remarks made by the previous speaker on the Lands Act. He was followed in the debate by two other newcomers. One was WS Dowell (Tamworth) who, having said he hoped members "will not think it presumptuous for a new member to make a few remarks at this stage of the debate", proceeded to speak about the working of the land law without interruption.¹¹⁰ The other was Alfred Allen (Paddington) who took a more abrasive approach, voicing his extreme opposition to protectionism, calling it "one of the most barbarous, the most ungodly, the most unwholesome theories ever given to humanity".¹¹¹ In a speech bristling with political controversy and insult against the Opposition, Allen succeeded in sufficiently goading the future Protectionist Premier, John See, to earn the rebuke: "Our modest friend from Paddington has assumed to lecture honourable members in a way quite unbecoming a junior member".¹¹²

¹⁰⁶ *NSWPD*, 14 July 1891, p 21.

¹⁰⁷ *NSWPD*, 2 April 1889, p 354; *NSWPD*, 28 May 1889, p 1592. He later spoke briefly on the Supply Bill (No 5) - *NSWPD*, 25 July 1889, p 3464.

¹⁰⁸ *NSWPD*, 9 March 1887, p 36.

¹⁰⁹ C Pearl, *Wild Men of Sydney*, Angus and Robertson 1977, p 11.

¹¹⁰ *NSWPD*, 15 March 1887, p 173.

¹¹¹ *NSWPD*, 15 March 1887, p 177.

¹¹² *NSWPD*, 15 March 1887, p 179.

Taken together, these speeches confirm the extent to which new members were granted at least some of the courtesies associated with inaugural speeches in the pre-federation period. However, those courtesies, often honoured in the breach, appear to have been largely confined to the address-in-reply debate. The speeches were exclusively political in nature and, if Allen's contribution is any guide, while trenchant argument could be accommodated such speeches were expected to rise above deliberately provocative hectoring. On the other hand, if a member missed out on the address-in-reply debate they appear to have been left very much to their own devices. Joseph Carruthers (Canterbury), the future Liberal Reform Premier, was another new member at this time. Again in his case there appears to be nothing like an inaugural speech. He spoke first against a motion to appoint a select committee on the Kogarah to San Souci tramway, in relation to which allegations of political corruption had been made.¹¹³ Carruthers came up against McElhone at his scathing best, describing Carruthers as "young in this House" and full of "virtuous indignation". Eventually Carruthers made a personal explanation of his own financial interests in the tramway,¹¹⁴ after the wily McElhone had concluded by saying:

When the honourable member for Canterbury has been in Parliament as long as I have, he will not be quite so indignant when charges of corruption are made. Many a man who has come into the House as poor as Job has gone out with a good sum in his pocket.¹¹⁵

Undaunted by this baptism of fire, Carruthers asked his first question three days later and participated in the debate on the Divorce Extension Bill, again without any hint of an inaugural speech.¹¹⁶

The same pattern was evident in the 10th Parliament which started in December 1880, during Parkes' third ministry. The address-in-reply was moved and seconded by new members,¹¹⁷ and at least one other new member participated in the debate, albeit briefly, with only one interjection in total.¹¹⁸ Making their parliamentary debuts outside that debate were three future Premiers, all of them elected in November 1880 – George Reid (East Sydney), William Lyne (The Hume) and John See (Grafton). None of these made recognisably inaugural speeches. Quick off the mark, Reid asked his first question on 17 December 1880¹¹⁹ and made his first substantive speech on 8 February 1881 on a motion for the eight hour working day, which he supported in most part.¹²⁰ Lyne entered

¹¹³ *NSWPD*, 22 March 1887, p 302.

¹¹⁴ *NSWPD*, 22 March 1887, p 308.

¹¹⁵ *NSWPD*, 22 March 1887, p 307.

¹¹⁶ *NSWPD*, 25 March 1887, p 412 and p 432.

¹¹⁷ *NSWPD*, 16 December 1880, p 28 (WH Pigott - Canterbury) and p 29 (JH Douglas – The Murrumbidgee).

¹¹⁸ *NSWPD*, 16 December 1880, p 46 (WA Brodribb – Wentworth).

¹¹⁹ *NSWPD*, 17 December 1880, p 58.

¹²⁰ *NSWPD*, 8 February 1881, p 280.

the debating lists on 17 February 1881 in the budget debate, launching straight into an argument against raising taxes and in favour of a new policy on the sale of land.¹²¹ On 16 March 1881 See made a brief foray into parliamentary debate in the budget debate on loan estimates for railways,¹²² then speaking at greater length in the committee stage of the debate on loan estimates for the Northern Junction Railway, from Homebush to Waratah in the Hunter region, a project he considered premature and unlikely to “pay for many years to come”.¹²³

With the NSW Hansard only starting in 1879, tracking the course of first speeches becomes more difficult and less certain beyond this point. First elected in December 1874 were Alexander Stuart (East Sydney) and George Dibbs (West Sydney), two later Premiers in the factionalist era of NSW politics. Stuart spoke first in January 1875 in the politically charged address-in-reply debate, which concerned the conditional pardon granted by Governor Robinson to the bushranger Frank Gardiner who was released into exile in Hong Kong.¹²⁴ Stuart started by saying that he felt “some diffidence” in speaking and only did so to voice the opinion of his “large and influential constituency”. The tenor of his speech, which was punctuated by several “Cheers” and calls of “Hear, Hear”, was in defence of the petition signed against Gardiner’s release whose “reign of terror” was said to have turned the country “upside down”. Stuart also defended the rights of the House to debate the question, even if the result was a change of government.¹²⁵ It was confident, powerful stuff, not exactly the model of the modest inaugural speech. True to later practice, the adoption of the address-in-reply was moved (Patrick Shepherd, The Nepean) and seconded (JJ Wright, Queenbeyan) by new members, the first speaking at some length without interruption, the second only perfunctorily, which seems to have been the pattern in the early years. Speaking first in March 1875 in the budget debate, Dibbs was assertive in his brief defence of public money to boost population and production. Uninterrupted seemingly, the record makes no further suggestion that this was an inaugural speech.¹²⁶

Serving as Premier from February 1886 to January 1887, Patrick Jennings, originally a member of the Upper House, was elected to the Assembly in December 1869 as the member for The Murray. In his case the record suggests that he slotted into his Assembly work without ceremony, speaking first on a point of statutory definition in a public roads Bill and later on matrimonial causes and other issues.¹²⁷

¹²¹ NSWPD, 17 February 1881, p 473.

¹²² NSWPD, 16 March 1881, p 962.

¹²³ NSWPD, 22 March 1881, p 1082.

¹²⁴ D Clune and K Turner eds, *The Governors of New South Wales*, The Federation Press 2009, pp 298-301.

¹²⁵ SMH, 29 January 1875; *NSW Index to Parliamentary Debates, First to Fifth Parliaments, Volume 2 – 27 January 1870 to 9 November 1880*, p 2905.

¹²⁶ SMH, 26 March 1875; *NSW Index to Parliamentary Debates, First to Fifth Parliaments, Volume 2 – 27 January 1870 to 9 November 1880*, p 2684.

¹²⁷ SMH, 26 February 1870; 5 March 1870; 9 March 1870; *NSW Index to Parliamentary Debates, First to Fifth Parliaments, Volume 2 – 27 January 1870 to 9 November 1880*, p

Closer still to the start of responsible government, James Farnell, Premier from December 1877 to 1878, was first elected in May 1860 to the Third Parliament. Asking two questions in June 1860 of the then Premier, John Robertson, neither contribution bore any of the hallmarks of inaugural speeches; the same applied to Farnell's contribution in October 1860 in the debate in committee on the Crown Lands Alienation Bill.¹²⁸ As for the address-in-reply, in the factional era, when governments lived on their wits, these debates tended to be more testing in nature, procedurally tough and seeking to tease out confidence in the Ministry. While new members moved the adoption of the address-in-reply, any scope for making what we would recognise today as an inaugural speech was very limited; the same was true of the ensuing debate. That seems to have been the case at the opening of the Third Parliament in September 1859, where land reform was the big issue of the day, when adoption was moved in short order by the new member for Darling Downs, John Douglas, with SW Gray, the new member for Kiama, recorded simply as having "seconded the motion".¹²⁹ Frills and elaborations were for another time. At the opening of the Fifth Parliament in January 1865 neither the mover nor seconder of the motion was a new member even, which is suggestive of evolving and intermittent practices.¹³⁰

3.7 In summary

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this review of inaugural speeches in the NSW Legislative Assembly, from 1860 to the present day. One is that, as in other comparable Parliaments, inaugural speeches were traditionally made, from the 1880s on at least, during the address-in-reply debate where some acknowledgement was made of the relevant conventions, even if those conventions were not always (or even usually) adhered to in many periods. In particular, those speeches moving and seconding the adoption of the address-in-reply tended to operate within expected conventions, while contributions to the debate itself and the reception they were given tended to vary depending on the speaker. All such speeches were exclusively political, up to the Second War and for some time afterwards; some were relatively short and modest in the scope and content, whereas others were very different, taking a wide ranging brief and courting controversy in their abrasive manner and content. Very few were heard without interjection, a requirement occasionally mentioned at appropriate moments in the Assembly but one that was rarely complied with, a practice of interjection that seems to have survived into the late 1950s.

Outside the address-in-reply debate inaugural speeches were often, but not always, treated as part of the ordinary business of the House, subject to the same give and take of political life. Often a speech on a bill was simply not recognised as an inaugural speech, a situation which seems to have lasted well

1822.

¹²⁸ *SMH* 13 June 1860 and 25 October 1860; *NSW Index to Parliamentary Debates, First to Fifth Parliaments, Volume 1 – 22 May 1856 to 15 November 1869*, p 521.

¹²⁹ *SMH*, 1 September 1859.

¹³⁰ William Walker (Windsor) has been a member since 1860; Hugh Gordon (Tenterfield) since 1861: *SMH*, 28 January 1865.

into the 1930s, if not beyond. It was certainly very rare to even remark on one's constituency in such speeches, when made on a Bill for instance, rarer still for the speech to be proceed without interjection.

In the 1880s the great debate was between free trade and protection, which could spill over into contentious inaugural speeches. Then when the Labor Party entered the Assembly in 1891 class issues were placed on the table, to be fought over in every context, including inaugural speeches. Added to this was the question of federation that dogged the Parliament for much of the 1890. How these and other sources of conflict were handled, in the 19th and into the 20th centuries, depended very much on the individual, and also on the supporting cast of Assembly members who contributed to a notoriously unruly Chamber.

It is probably fair to say that, after World War 2 at least, both the intensity of the political atmosphere and, for want of a better word, the larrikin nature often on display in the Assembly declined. In part it may have been the result of post-war prosperity, in part of the culture of greater civility and respect for parliamentary norms engendered in the post-Lang years. Interjections were still common in the 1950s, but they seem to have died down after that. It is also the case that, while inaugural speeches remained strongly political and trenchantly argued, the abrasiveness of the earlier period also declined. The pressure cooker that had been the Assembly in the 1920s and the early 1930s became a bubbling pot, not tame by any means, but a little less explosive.

4. INAUGURAL SPEECHES IN THE NSW LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

4.1 The nominated Council, 1856 to 1934

The position in the Council is made more complicated by the changing methods of appointment or election to the Upper House, which was a nominated Chamber from 1856 to 1934, then indirectly elected by an electoral college of members of both Houses up until 1978, and only fully directly elected since 1984. For the nominated Council, the appointment of new members did not necessarily correspond to the electoral cycle at work in the Assembly, which meant that new members could enter the Upper House at any point, singly or in greater numbers. It was also the case that many, if not most, Upper House members had once been Assembly members, which may have influenced the way some looked upon themselves as "new" members. Of course, the conventions associated with first speeches could still apply, either in the case of members appointed mid-session for example, or in respect to former members of the Lower House. But were they? One thing we know for be sure is that Council members have never represented defined geographical constituencies, other than the State of the NSW as a whole, with the result that the focus on electorates in the Assembly's inaugural speeches will not be found in the Upper House.

Complicating matters further, from 1856 to its reconstitution in 1861 appointments to the Council were for five years only, with lifetime appointments

only applying between September 1861 and 1934. It is doubtful that the conventions of first speeches operated in the “quinquennial” Council, if only because it comprised of very experienced men, many of whom had served in the Legislative Council in the pre-responsible government era.¹³¹ At reconstitution in September 1861, with only 23 members, the Upper House still largely bore the same character, as a gathering of the colony’s elite into which new members dribbled from time to time.¹³² Membership was still only 30 at the end of the 1872-73 session and 37 at the end of the 1878-79 session.

As noted, the later Premier, Patrick Jennings, started his parliamentary career in the Upper House, to which he was appointed on 28 March 1867. His first contribution to debate appears to have been made in December 1867, a brief and straightforward comment on the terms of the Municipalities Bill.¹³³ If that is any guide, inaugural speeches were not made outside the address-in-reply in this early period. Nor was there much, if any scope, for such speeches to be made in the address-in-reply, which up until 1875 was referred to a select committee, followed usually by only a brief debate. At the start of the Third Parliament in 1859 the referral was moved in pro forma language by Dr John MacFarlane, a member since August 1858, and seconded by Francis Lord, who had been in the Council since May 1856; when the committee returned to the Chamber, it was its chairman Edward Deas Thomson who spoke first, with neither MacFarlane nor Lord participating in the debate.¹³⁴ Again, if that is any guide, before the change of practice in 1875 the address-in-reply debate was not an occasion for making first speeches, even to a limited extent.

The first volume of Hansard opens on 28 October 1879, the third session of the 9th Parliament, at which time seven new members took the oath, one a former Council President (Sir Alfred Stephen), five former Assembly members and one man, James Norton, who was new to Parliament. The practice of new members moving and seconding the address-in-reply was followed by this time, but that appears to have been the full extent of the observance of inaugural speeches. Seconding the adoption of the address-in-reply, Norton stuck within a narrow frame and was heard without interruption.¹³⁵ On the other hand, when WR Piddington, who moved the adoption, set off into controversial territory, arguing in strong terms against the provision of public money for the separate education of Catholic children, a member reluctantly interrupted submitting that Norton “is wandering entirely from his subject”.¹³⁶ A second interruption occurred with another member saying that Norton was “departing from the rule of the House, inasmuch as he is going into a question of religion, and giving his views on

¹³¹ *Decision and Deliberation: The Parliament of NSW, 1856-2003*, p 99.

¹³² *Decision and Deliberation: The Parliament of NSW, 1856-2003*, p 112.

¹³³ *SMH*, 13 December 1867; *NSW Index to Parliamentary Debates, First to Fifth Parliaments, Volume 1 – 22 May 1856 to 15 November 1869*, p 1296.

¹³⁴ *SMH*, 1 September 1859; see also *SMH* 28 January 1865 for the opening of the Fifth Parliament.

¹³⁵ *NSWPD*, 28 October 1879, p 8.

¹³⁶ *NSWPD*, 28 October 1879, p 7.

religious matters".¹³⁷ With the President ruling on his behalf, Piddington said he was surprised at the last interruption, coming as it did from a former Assembly member (John Campbell). Piddington acknowledged that the culture of the Council was different, less boisterous, more inclined to adhere to the courtesies of parliamentary practice, adding "though I am aware that I have now entered into an atmosphere much more serene".¹³⁸

What is clear is that in the Upper House the courtesies were only departed from reluctantly during the opening speeches of the address-in-reply. On the other hand, as in the Assembly in this period, when new members spoke first in the course of other business, including in the second reading debates on Bills, no consideration seems to have been given to the conventions of inaugural speeches.¹³⁹ The same is true of the first session of the 10th Parliament in December 1880, when 10 new Council members took the oath, a precursor to the time when Parkes was said to be swamping the Upper House by stealth.¹⁴⁰ New members moved and seconded the adoption of the address-in-reply, without interruption, although in seconding the motion Richard Hill barely occupied five lines of Hansard. Otherwise no other new members participated in the brief address in reply debate and later found themselves slotting into the normal course of business without ceremony.

In June 1900, in the 5th session of the 18th Parliament, with the Lyne government preparing for federation, 13 new Council members were sworn in. Again, the patters of inaugural speeches was similar, with at least four of the new members participating in the address-in-reply, all of them making straightforward contributions on issues raised in the Governor's speech, without interjection, among them FB Suttor, President of the Council from 1903 to 1915.¹⁴¹ As before, the other new members contributed in the normal way to the business of the House, including Fred Flowers, later the first Labor President of the Upper House, from 1915 to 1928.¹⁴² In one case at least, a new member JB Nash started his first speech on a Bill by acknowledging that he was "one of the junior members of this House". Both Flowers and Nash spoke without interruption.

At the opening of the second session of the 24th Parliament in July 1917 no fewer than 21 new Council members were sworn in to bolster the position of the Holman Nationalist Ministry. The adoption of the address-in-reply was moved by JB Peden, President of the Council from 1929 to 1946, and seconded by another new member, HY Braddon.¹⁴³ Both were standard speeches of their

¹³⁷ *NSWPD*, 28 October 1879, p 7.

¹³⁸ *NSWPD*, 28 October 1879, p 7.

¹³⁹ See for example *NSWPD*, 4 December 1879, p 478 (J Stewart); 10 December 1879, p 534 (E Flood); 17 December 1879, p 629 (G Oakes).

¹⁴⁰ *Decision and Deliberation: The Parliament of NSW, 1856-2003*, pp 114-115.

¹⁴¹ *NSWPD*, 12 June 1900 p 6 (RJ Black), 8 (AW Meeks), p 15 (WM Robson) and p 16 (FB Suttor).

¹⁴² *NSWPD*, 26 July 1900, p 1357 and p 1359 (H Langwell).

¹⁴³ *NSWPD*, 17 July 1917, p 32 (JB Peden) and p 34 (HY Braddon).

kind and were listened to in silence, unlike the speeches of two other new members who participated in the address-in-reply debate, SR Innes-Noade and William Brooks.¹⁴⁴ Speaking during debates on Bills were two former Premiers, Thomas Waddell and James MCGowen, neither of whom bothered with the niceties of inaugural speeches.¹⁴⁵ Nor were these hinted at in the first speeches of the other new members, where interruptions were commonplace.¹⁴⁶

Following Peden as President, from 1946 to 1952, dying in harness as it were, but appointed before Peden in March 1912, was EH Farrar. His first speech, made on 25 September 1912 on the Greater Sydney Convention Bill, which kept very much within the four corners of the proposed legislation, was subject to a number of interjections.¹⁴⁷ Taking Farrar's place in the President's chair was WE Dickson, appointed to the Council in December 1925 but only speaking in the House for the first time on a workmen's compensation Bill on 23 February 1927. Speaking exclusively on the Bill, Dickson was interrupted several times, once by Farrar.¹⁴⁸

When the two titans of the Legislative Council, Sir Henry Manning on the conservative side, Reg Downing on the left, spoke for a first time in the House it was to make a ministerial statement, Manning in the dying days of the old nominated Council,¹⁴⁹ Downing on 28 May 1941 in Manning's pet creation, the indirectly elected Upper House.¹⁵⁰ An inaugural speech was not the order of the day in either case. Between them, Manning and Downing served as Representative or Leader of the Government in the Upper House and as Vice-President of the Executive Council from 1932 to 1965, Downing occupying that role in all the years of Labor government from 1941 onwards. Belatedly, on 25 August 1965 he made what he called his "maiden speech" as Leader of the Opposition in the address-in-reply debate.¹⁵¹

4.2 The indirectly elected Council, 1934 to 1978

Shortly after Manning retired in 1958, his oddly titled position as "principal representative" of those Members of the Council "who are not supporters of the Government" was taken by Hector Clayton, who was first elected to the Council in December 1936. When Clayton first spoke in the House on a railway funding Bill a year later it was without any suggestion of an inaugural speech.¹⁵² The same is true of AD Bridges, Clayton's successor in 1962 and Leader of the Government in the Council when the Askin-Cutler Ministry was formed in May

¹⁴⁴ *NSWPD*, 18 July 1917, p 62 and p 64.

¹⁴⁵ *NSWPD*, 25 July 1917, p 206; 15 August 1917, p 541 and 13 September 1917, p 1168.

¹⁴⁶ See for example - *NSWPD*, 18 October 1917, p 1794 (GHG Varley) and 24 October 1917, p 2009 (J Ryan).

¹⁴⁷ *NSWPD*, 25 September 1912, p 1440.

¹⁴⁸ *NSWPD*, 23 February 1927, p 1461.

¹⁴⁹ *NSWPD*, 23 June 1932, p 2.

¹⁵⁰ *NSWPD*, 28 May 1941, p 2. Downing had been elected on 1 November 1939.

¹⁵¹ *Decision and Deliberation: The Parliament of NSW, 1856-2003*, p 446.

¹⁵² *NSWPD*, 8 December 1937, p 2348.

1965. He was elected on 14 March 1946 and spoke first in September of that year during the budget debate, a speech which dealt with various facets of the post-war financial situation and was subject to interjection by Labor's JJ Maloney.¹⁵³ Elected at the same time as Bridges but not speaking in the House until December 1946 was Harry Budd, President of the Council from 1966 to 1978. His first speech, which proceeded without interjection, was on the Legislative Council Abolition Bill and he at least acknowledged the fact that he was a new member, by saying:

I am one of the new members of this Chamber, and I feel that it would be appropriate if I begin by paraphrasing the words of Mr Churchill, who, on a certain occasion, said: "I have not come into power to preside over the dissolution of the British Empire". I have not come into this House to assist in its abolition.¹⁵⁴

By the late 1950s at least a more formal and settled approach appears to have formed in respect to first speeches. John Fuller, in 1968 Bridge's successor as Leader of the Government in the Council, spoke first in November 1961 during the debate on the budget, using the occasion to offer his views on Australia's vertical fiscal imbalance.¹⁵⁵ Neither Fuller nor the next speaker Dr RAAF de Bryon-Faes, another member making his inaugural speech, were interrupted and in the latter case some considerable show of making such a speech was made, at least by the standards of the time. He started by saying this was the first occasion he had for acknowledging the help, advice and assistance he had received, from fellow parliamentarians and parliamentary staff, before indulging the latitude of the budget debate to its fullest by talking about "censorship on obscene and indecent literature". His economic point seemed to be that the best response to such literature was to boycott it, "to apply economic sanctions".¹⁵⁶

The changing practices can be traced through the female members of the Upper House, from the first appointments in the pre-1934 Council up to the early 1960s. The first appointments, on 23 November 1931 in the Lang years, were Ellen Webster and Catherine Green. It was Green who uttered the first words spoken by a woman on the floor of the Chamber, in an adjournment debate on 23 December 1931, when she tangled with FS Boyce, formerly Attorney General in the Bavin Ministry and later a Supreme Court judge, over disparaging remarks he had made about Lang's latest appointees. Neither on this occasion, nor in her other early forays, was there any suggestion that Green was making a formal first speech. Boyce was reported to have said that, since joining the Council, Green and Webster had swapped political sides, which resulted in this steely exchange:

The Hon Mrs CE Green: I desire to state that I will never vote with the

¹⁵³ *NSWPD*, 10 September 1946, p 418.

¹⁵⁴ *NSWPD*, 10 December 1946, p 644.

¹⁵⁵ *NSWPD*, 1 November 1961, p 1977.

¹⁵⁶ *NSWPD*, 1 November 1961, p 1982.

Opposition, nor betray the confidence of a body of women who place their trust in me.

The Hon FS Boyce: I think it is only fair to say that I have never had any encouragement from the ladies!¹⁵⁷

Ellen Webster first spoke on 18 October 1932, after Lang's demise, to oppose the Farmers' Relief Bill, sticking entirely to the terms of the proposed legislation which she described as "The Farmers' Enslavement Act".¹⁵⁸

In the more decorous 1950s, the first woman to speak in the indirectly elected Council was Gertrude Melville, another ALP member, who in August 1953 seconded the adoption of the address-in-reply, raising equal pay for women and the high cost of maternity among other issues in what was very clearly her inaugural speech.¹⁵⁹ She was followed into the Council by the redoubtable Edna Roper who, on 20 August 1958, was granted the honour of moving the adoption of the address-in-reply, taking that opportunity to acknowledge Melville's ground breaking contribution in the fight for economic equality for women.¹⁶⁰ More telling still than these more formal occasions was the short speech of Labor's Anne Press in December 1959 on the Gaming and Betting (Poker Machines) Bill, in which she looked forward to a time when "these iniquitous monsters are banned".¹⁶¹ Press's contribution was recognised by the next speaker, Hector Clayton, as "her maiden speech",¹⁶² something which would not have occurred in the nominated Council or, it would seem, in the early years of its indirectly elected successor. Speaking in the debate on the budget on 20 October 1963, the first Liberal member of the Council, Eileen Furley delivered a copybook inaugural speech, which started "To make my first speech as a member of this Parliament is, to me, a rather emotional experience", words that would not have been echoed in the all-male Assembly in this period. Furley went on to make reference to her nominal predecessor, to thank members and staff and to speak widely on housing, education and youth related issues, all without interjection.¹⁶³ Clearly the equivalent of the modern inaugural speech had arrived in the Upper House.

A more controversial contribution to the genre was provided by Clyde Packer, son of the newspaper magnate Sir Frank Packer, who at the tender age of 29 took it upon himself to inform the Council of the failings of the industrial relations regime.¹⁶⁴ It earned a reprimand from Labor's RS Jackson who said he could not congratulate Packer on his maiden speech, saying:

¹⁵⁷ *NSWPD*, 23 December 1931, p 7651.

¹⁵⁸ *NSWPD*, 18 October 1932, p 1151.

¹⁵⁹ *NSWPD*, 12 August 1953, p 9.

¹⁶⁰ *NSWPD*, 20 August 1958, p 10.

¹⁶¹ *NSWPD*, 2 December 1959, p 2529.

¹⁶² *NSWPD*, 2 December 1959, p 2530.

¹⁶³ *NSWPD*, 30 October 1963, p 6014. Furley filled a vacancy produced by the death of Leicester Saddington.

¹⁶⁴ *NSWPD*, 1 September 1964, p 174.

I feel that the speech made by the honourable gentleman - and I am very sorry that he has seen fit to go into another part of the House rather than remain here for the moment - is the speech of one who has never in his life been in an industrial struggle.¹⁶⁵

In the case of the two 20th century Premiers whose parliamentary careers started in the Council, Neville Wran in 1970 and Barrie Unsworth in 1978 as part of the first cohort of directly elected members, both made their inaugural speeches during the debate on the budget. Wran spoke in considerable detail on educational and other concerns and ended by thanking the House “for the indulgence I have been afforded in my being allowed to address you without interruption – an indulgence I know I shall not receive again”.¹⁶⁶ A difference between the two was that Unsworth’s contribution had a more personal flavour, as a directly elected member thanking “the people of New South Wales”, his several mentors and supporters, along with members and staff; in his reflections on the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences he mentioned that he had visited it first “at the age of 4” and that his grandmother had lived in Thomas Street, Ultimo, all of which were small signs of a changing parliamentary culture, one that was running in the Council by a short neck ahead of the Assembly.¹⁶⁷

Before moving on to the contemporary period, note can be made of the what is probably the second most remarked upon first speech in NSW parliamentary history, one made by Amelia Rygate in November 1976. A member since 1961, Rygate made her speech on the wrong Bill.¹⁶⁸

4.3 The directly elected Council

The practice and conventions that apply to the Council in the modern period are set out in detail in *NSW Legislative Council Practice* by Lynn Lovelock and John Evans.¹⁶⁹ Unlike the Assembly, first speeches continue to be made mainly during debate on the address-in-reply or the budget debate “as these debates are typically wide-ranging and the issue of relevancy does not arise”. It is the case, however, that inaugural speeches are acknowledged as such in Hansard. Where these speeches are made in second reading debates on government Bills, the same conventions apply and “the Chair has allowed wide latitude of debate”.¹⁷⁰ Rulings of the President, dating from 1982 onwards, are cited requiring first speeches to be heard in silence “without interjection or interruption”.¹⁷¹

A window into the style and content of these speeches is found in three

¹⁶⁵ *NSWPD*, 1 September 1964, p 182.

¹⁶⁶ *NSWPD*, 28 October 1970, p 7006.

¹⁶⁷ *NSWPD*, 15 November 1978, p 309.

¹⁶⁸ *Decision and Deliberation: The Parliament of NSW, 1856-2003*, p 454; L Lovelock and J Evans, *NSW Legislative Council Practice*, Federation Press 2008, p 335.

¹⁶⁹ *NSW Legislative Council Practice*, Federation Press 2008, pp 334 -336.

¹⁷⁰ *NSW Legislative Council Practice*, Federation Press 2008, p 335.

¹⁷¹ *NSW Legislative Council Practice*, Federation Press 2008, p 334.

speeches from 1981, from Liz Kirkby, the first Australian Democrat, the Reverend Fred Nile, the first Call to Australia member and Franca Arena, originally Labor and later an independent. As well as briefly thanking supporters and the like, Kirkby traversed benefits of proportional representation and such social issues as housing costs, airing concerns she said that were shared by all members, across all allegiances. Keeping to script Kirkby said: "I shall not abuse the privilege granted me for this my maiden speech by discussing the highly controversial matters that are implicit in this large-scale programme of infrastructure borrowing".¹⁷² More autobiographical in approach was the Reverend Fred Nile, who also canvassed the basis of his religious and philosophical beliefs and several issues of moral and social concern, touching on censorship, law and order and the "gambling explosion in New South Wales".¹⁷³ He was followed by Franca Arena who gave an account of her migrant background, spoke of her commitment to Labor values and, going into more controversial territory, set out her republican views.¹⁷⁴

Part of the same cohort was George Brenner, another Labor member with an autobiographical tale to tell of his early life in wartime Hungary, told as a preface to his thoughts on the transport industry.¹⁷⁵ The content depended very much on personality, background and the like. The variation in approach, with the shifting balance between the more personal and purely political, is on display in John Hannaford's speech from August 1984, very much a political creation and particularly noteworthy for its advocacy of a stronger committee system in the Upper House.¹⁷⁶

Taken together these speeches are probably a reasonable reflection of the kinds of first speeches in the contemporary Council, in which the more personal elements seem to have featured before they were a regular part of speeches in the Assembly, which may have something to do with the greater number of women in the Upper House but also owing to its more fluid party mix in the directly elected era. The 1995 election saw the first representatives of the Shooters Party on one side, John Tingle, and of the NSW Greens on the other, Ian Cohen. Tingle, who spoke first on a Bill concerned with indictable offences, posed the question why he was speaking on that occasion, in answer to which he said, "Perhaps I might be allowed to say a little about myself and the party and the people I represent to explain that".¹⁷⁷ When Cohen spoke the next day he struck a new note in the Chamber, describing himself and his fellow Greens as "part of an emergent culture asserting itself at this time of planetary crisis".¹⁷⁸ When David Oldfield, the first and (to date) only representative of Pauline

¹⁷² *NSWPD*, 24 November 1981, p 622.

¹⁷³ *NSWPD*, 25 November 1981, p 741. The Reverend Nile does not appear to have made a second first speech after his re-election to the Council in October 2004, following his resignation in August 2004 to run for the Senate.

¹⁷⁴ *NSWPD*, 25 November 1981, p 744.

¹⁷⁵ *NSWPD*, 24 November 1981, p 616.

¹⁷⁶ *NSWPD*, 15 August 1984, p 89.

¹⁷⁷ *NSWPD*, 31 May 1995, p 397.

¹⁷⁸ *NSWPD*, 1 June 1995, p 513.

Hanson's One Nation Party, elected in 1999, made his first speech, he raised the controversial issues of race and multiculturalism, at the same time speaking at some length about his family's history, military and otherwise. Speaking of his parents and siblings, he said "I only pray I will one day be as good as them and my brother and sisters".¹⁷⁹ Neither Manning nor Downing, different as they were in almost every way, would have said that.

5. CONCLUSION

In both Houses, but particularly in the Legislative Assembly, since the 1980s and certainly into the 1990s and beyond there has been a noticeable shift in the content of inaugural speeches, towards the more ready public sharing of the details of personal background and experience. Family life and history is discussed, as are autobiographical reflections, matters which to some extent at least would have been considered private and ill-suited to public airing not so many decades ago. That applies with particular force to the Assembly, built on and dominated for long years by unreconstructed male attitudes and standards of conduct. Public life in general has moved on, taking the culture of the Assembly along with it. The influx of women into the House, albeit modest by some international standards, must have had some direct influence on this process; and in the wider world the barriers between the public and private spheres appear to be weakening, if not actually dissolving. The changing content of inaugural speeches in the NSW Legislative Assembly is one small window into this new landscape.

The same might be said of the Legislative Council, except that the changing culture seems to have emerged there earlier, in a House where a different atmosphere has prevailed, less intense in its relationship with power politics, with more women members historically and feeling the impact of minor parties from the early 1980s on. The precise reasons are hard to pin down, but they would seem to lie somewhere within that causal constellation. Now the Assembly's inaugural speeches are neck and neck with the Council's, the one distinguishing feature being the Assembly's references to distinct geographical constituencies, whereas in the Council that remains the State as a whole, along with any constituencies of interests or ideas that might apply.

Of course inaugural speeches in both Houses remain essentially political in nature, based on issues, values and concerns. Admittedly, there is nothing to compare to Millicent Preston-Stanley in the contemporary period, but that is not to say that first speeches cannot be politically tough, perhaps even controversial on occasions. Historically, at least, the NSW Parliament, the Assembly in particular, was known for its aggressive political style, its no-holds-barred debates which were never for the faint-hearted. On the evidence provided in this paper, the history of inaugural speeches reflects that reputation, where the rule against interruption or interjection was only intermittently applied, certainly before the Second World War, even in the address-in-reply debate where some

¹⁷⁹ *NSWPD*, 26 October 1999, p 1909.

regard was paid to the relevant conventions.