

Geoffrey Blainey, Sister Veronica Brady and John Lyons (then the editor of *The Sydney Morning Herald*). And, next year, Paul Brunton is to be the lecturer.

Ms Ratcliff referred to the tripartite launch process of her book, "Three auspicious occasions to honour a man of many parts, whose national significance has hovered around the margins of history. And whilst some interest is maintained in some places, John West is not yet the national figure he ought to be."

She saw echoes of John West's time in contemporary Australia and detailed some of his achievements. What she saw in the 1980s as the parochialism of the metropolitan newspapers reminded her of the parochialism of the 1840s' Sydney Town which "energised John West into forming the first inter-colonial political association. It was he who organised the Australasian League in Launceston in 1851".

She argued that it "was John West's destiny to disenthral his fellow colonists, and address the qualities prevailing in 'the Australias', as he called the colonies. This he did by fashioning a new Australian identity, expressed by the design of the Australasian League banner, the precursor to our flag. Exemplifying a release from the subservience of our colonial status. An independent Christian Liberal he used his pulpit, and the columns of newspapers, to educate, persuade and inspire.

"West would be very pleased with the existence of the Press Council. Its genesis is not in government, but in private enterprise. He would be pleased about that. And he would be very pleased with its most recent Charter of a Free Press."

Ms Ratcliff referred to a Tasmanian review of her book, by Professor Emeritus Michael Rowe who described John West as "the highest spirit, who stood for social and personal virtue" and urged the audience not only to read her history but to seek out John West's essays on federation published fifty years before Federation. She also encouraged other historians to follow and flesh out the John West story during his time in Sydney.

"It is time John West was accorded his appropriate place in history," she concluded. "*The Sydney Morning Herald* wrote in 1852, reviewing his history of Tasmania, 'We congratulate our sister colony Tasmania upon the possession of such a man as Mr West'. I leave you, Sydneysiders, with the charge of honouring his contribution to our nation from the desk of that metropolitan newspaper. I have covered the provinces."

Jack R Herman

Patricia Fitzgerald Ratcliff, *The Usefulness of John West: Dissent and Difference in the Australian Colonies*, The Alberian Press, Launceston, 2003, ISBN 0 9581850 5 0

The Launceston Examiner

**Vol. 1, No. 1
12 March 1842**



The Rev John West's Editorial

[extract]

The legitimate province of the press has long been settled and defined, and notwithstanding its occasional perversion, its immense public utility is fully perceived and admitted. Stronger than charters and laws for protection of the people, it has raised a tribunal, before which the best of rulers bow, and the worst of depots tremble, approach of political danger, and preserves the social edifice from injuries, which could not be averted by arms.

Keen to discover and prompt to tell obnoxious truth, its collective voice cannot be restrained by terror, or stifled by corruption.

Representatives may be intimidated or bribed, and the forms of freedom may survive its principles, but so long as the press exists the spirit of liberty can never perish: its summons will arouse the people to defend their rights when they are invaded – to recover them when they are lost.

The press has other important functions to perform.

All the complicated concerns of man, his wide-spreading relationships, his intellectual achievements, his commercial enterprise, his duties, his wants, his sorrows – all these combine to form the field from whence the diligent journalist may gather instruction, and give importance, variety, and interest to his labours. ...

Yet it is not enough that a newspaper should be innocuous – it ought to be useful. A false delicacy that does not disturb the quiet of speculators or impostors, or shrinks from correcting the errors of well meaning but blundering functionaries, may secure a journalist from opposition, but he must speedily drivel into contempt and drop into oblivion.