Pioneer Women and Social Memory: Shifting Energies, Changing Tensions

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Statement of Originality

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. Research for this thesis was begun as a candidate enrolled at Flinders University in January 2002 and was continued under this enrolment until the formal transfer of my candidature to the University of Newcastle in April 2007. The research and writing of this thesis has been under the sole and continuing supervision of Dr Victoria Haskins, who took up an appointment at the University of Newcastle in April 2006, throughout my entire candidature from January 2002 to May 2008. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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Abstract

This thesis examines how the ideal of the Australian pioneer woman has been so broadly circulated in Australian national social memory. Through the study of the dissemination of the social memory in a range of diverse sources, I will scrutinise the tensions that have existed around this ideal; how these tensions have been reconciled into a dominant narrative; and how they have shifted through the time of the inception of the legend to the present day.

In its approach to the creation of social memory, to understand the changing influences of this particular memory in the Australian psyche, this thesis draws upon a number of types of sources for history that have tended to be overlooked – such as headstones, popular and family histories, and museum exhibitions. Significantly, the thesis will examine the role that such non-traditional accounts of the past have played in the transmission of social memory. Most people do not gain their knowledge of the past through intensive and exhaustive research; instead, they appropriate, as their own, the messages and meanings that they are fed through a variety of modes.

The relationship between sources and social memory is a symbiotic one, where the sources are informed by social memory, and then in turn shape and elaborate social memory. In so many cases, the very creation of sources happens within the parameters of the national social memory. These sources are then drawn upon by subsequent generations to form their own social memory of pioneer women.

This thesis will demonstrate that social memory is not rigid, but instead is subjected to shifting energies and changing tensions; and explain, through a discussion of a diverse range of sources through which it is disseminated, how memory remains fluid so that it is able to respond to the needs of the community that it serves. Australia’s pioneer woman remains an important aspect of the national identity – her creation and, thus, significance situated firmly in the present.
Introduction

‘Authenticity matters little ... Our willingness to accept legends depends far more upon their expression of concepts we want to believe than upon their plausibility.’

David Mikkelson

Australia was first settled by white people in 1788 who gradually and devastatingly destroyed thousands of years of Aboriginal history in this nation. Instead of looking to the Indigenous people for a long and proud past on which to draw, the whites who colonised Australia actively ignored the traditions of the original inhabitants and sought to create their own histories and legends, in which the white man (and, in later tellings, the white woman) tamed the virgin land and created a nation.

Foremost in this glorious retelling of the past were the hardy pioneers, who entered Australia’s interior with a plucky spirit and forged a national identity in the bush. In this vein, on the landscape of Australia’s past stands the pioneer woman, her heart devoted to her family and the opening of Australia’s seemingly impervious interior. This fanciful woman does not celebrate the Australian ‘traditions’ of multiculturalism, of egalitarianism, or of diversity. And yet, she is fêted within the national narrative, an example of perfect colonial womanliness and of the strength of the Australian spirit. The Australian social memory has firmly clasped the ideal of its ‘pioneer women’ to its breast, providing an enduring memory of the female face of the frontier.

Despite the high esteem of the pioneer woman in the wider community, since the 1970s academics have challenged the ideal that is so widely believed. They have shown that the ideal was just that – an ideal that was too tightly circumscribed to have been a reality. And despite the challenges that have occurred, the wider community has continued to hold to this ideal as the ‘reality’ of the past. Whilst history seeks inclusiveness (and this is particularly true since the rise of women’s and social history), social memory actively seeks to be
exclusive: a fact which is perfectly displayed in popular legend, and the pioneer women’s legend in particular.

The legend of Australia’s pioneer women has been examined in depth by other historians; and indeed this thesis does not seek to examine the veracity of the various myths that surround the women of the white frontier of Australia. Instead, I will examine the way that the social memory of these women has changed and evolved with the shifting energies through time; and I will do so by examining the way that social memory can and is transmitted through various media, some previously unconsidered by historians.

About twelve months after I began this project, I gave a lecture entitled ‘Are pioneer women truthfully depicted in colonial paintings?’ The audience was a group of adults of varying ages who had no tertiary education, but who hoped to enter university through the bridging course that I was lecturing in. At the beginning of the lecture, I asked, ‘What were Australian pioneer women like?’ The answers came back quickly: loyal, loving, stoic-when-needed and hard-working were just some of the responses. I then asked another question – ‘And how do you know this?’ This time, the answer did not come so quickly – someone finally ventured, ‘It’s just one of those things that you know.’

This thesis will examine how the ideal of the pioneer woman has been so widely disseminated through our national social memory. Through the examination of the dissemination of the social memory, I will examine the tensions that have existed around the memory; how these tensions have been reconciled into a dominant narrative; and how they have shifted through the time of the inception of the legend to the present day.

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For some, social memory may seem the antidote to the more empirical study of history: indeed, it is the stuff of legend and folklore, and with that carries the veneer of magic and the mystical. However, whilst history was once thought of as a discipline in which it was easy to distinguish right from wrong, in which facts were black and white and shades of grey were irrelevant, it is now widely held that as human nature creates bias in everything it does, so too does this occur in the study of history. Eyewitness accounts differ by the standpoint of those recounting them; interpretations are different depending on the baggage brought into their understanding. All interpretations of the past are coloured, not just the myths and legends of social memory; and as shown in Chris Healy’s *From the Ruins of Colonialism* Australians consistently draw on social memory comprehend their past. Healy pointed to the colonial period as the defining era of the Australian social memory; and noted that social memory provides us with a more complete picture of the past than traditional histories, which may be ‘too narrow and too formal.’

In the Australian national psyche, the pioneers are seen as noble whites who dared to face the bush, against incredible odds and were – for the most part – successful (at least to some degree) in their pursuits. The role of pioneer women in this paradigm is, to borrow a term from Coventry Patmore, as the ‘angel of the house’ or, more precisely, as the ‘angel of the bush’. The pioneer woman, as depicted in the Australian national legend, is loyal, loving, hard-working (for, as a pioneer woman, she does not have the luxury of being ornamental as her urban counterparts may), religious, and supports her husband in his endeavours. This thesis will not try to pit a ‘real history’ against an ‘artificial history.’ Instead, it will focus on deconstructing the forces of social memory that have created this lasting image of pioneer women, and will examine the various energies and tensions around the creation of the national social memory which is so dominant around these women.

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Between 1854 and 1862, Coventry Patmore was writing his book, *The Angel of the House*, a collection of poems that projected the dominant Victorian notion of idealised womanhood. The ideal espoused by Patmore was a loyal, pious, self-sacrificing ideal of femininity, and encapsulated the paradigm of Victorian notions of perfect womanhood. A more tempered version of Patmore’s view could be found in John Ruskin’s *Sesame and Lilies* (1864), but Ruskin’s work also proffered the notion that women’s main role was to act as the moral guide to the family, and that within that role, the Victorian woman’s ‘great function is praise: she enters into no contest, but infallibly adjudges the crown of contest.’

Those who vocally challenged the status quo of the ideal of women being wives and mothers found that they had their sanity questioned. John Stuart Mill, who produced *The Subjection of Women* in 1869, was one such challenger. Mill’s work, controversial at the time, suggested that because men controlled society at the time, they structured it such that the only ‘respectable’ lifestyle for middle-class women was to choose marriage. Mill asserted that men had created such limited opportunities for women because they were worried that given other avenues, women would not choose a life as a wife. For suggesting ideas that were so deviant from the norm, Mill was accused of immorality and found that his sanity was questioned.

Indeed, the idealised notion of the angel in the house was so prominent in English society that it was almost entirely replicated in Australia as the ideal of colonial femininity. As I have argued elsewhere, the ideal that was held up as the

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3 Coventry Patmore, ‘The Angel in the House’ together with ‘The Victories of Love’, George Routledge and Sons Ltd, London, 1903 (first published 1862)
4 John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies Unto This Last and the Political Economy of Art*, Cassell and Company, London, 1907 (first published 1864), 73
model of femininity in the United Kingdom was transferred and held as the ideal in the Australian colonies, despite the unrealistic idealism that it portrayed; but the ideal was partially revised in recognition of the difficulties that were inherent in the application in colonial society. Although the angel of the bush was the exemplar of womanly traits, she was able to refrain from being entirely decorative: the needs of colonial society were vastly different to the needs of London drawing rooms, and some concession was given to that fact.

Seemingly in contrast, but actually expanding on the ideal of the angel of the bush, was the ideal of the plucky Australian girl. The Australian girl was self-reliant, and less interested in issues of class and status than her counterpart from the Mother-country. She could ride a horse and hold her own in a conversation or debate. In the national memory, the Australian girl is independent and adventurous, but matures into the dependable, reliable Australian woman, as will be demonstrated in Chapter Three (Angels in the Bush: Cultural Depictions) in the discussion of the character Priscilla in Colonial Dynasty. Again, as with the ideal of the angel of the bush, the plucky Australian girl was an idealised notion that did not necessarily represent the reality of the lives of Australian girls; but, like her grown-up counterpart, her romanticisation was warmly embraced in the national psyche. The Australian girl eventually grew up and matured – her feistiness mellowed and her desire for boisterous pursuits waned as (at least in theory) she

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warmly embraced the confines of the restrictive role of angel of the bush. Her childhood headstrongness gave her the tools required to remain calm in the face of adversity on the ever-shifting white frontier. As has been discussed above, the idealised Australian woman was more capable and more independent than her English counterparts through the necessity to adapt to her sometimes-harsh antipodean home: and the childhood vigour of the plucky Australian girl was excellent grounding to face the reality of life in the bush.

This thesis examines a number of types of sources in its examination of the creation of social memory and the changing nature of the creation and understanding of this particular memory in the Australian psyche. Significantly, the thesis will examine the role that non-traditional history sources have played in the transmission of social memory; and the ways that differing powers have worked to create their perspective of the national social memory. Most people do not gain their knowledge of the past through intensive and exhaustive research; instead, they (often passively) take on messages and meanings that they are fed through a wide range of media. Despite the fact that historians may focus on primary sources to gain their understandings, the wider public does not usually access these sources: rather, the information they receive has usually been filtered through the beliefs and values of a variety of people before it reaches them. A national social memory is created without many people being aware that they have been swayed by so many images.

The thesis is divided into eight chapters, plus the introduction and conclusion. Each of these chapters examines the creation, fluidity and impact of that social memory of pioneer women within the national consciousness. It will be demonstrated in these chapters that the energies around the legend of the Australian pioneer woman have changed and adapted to fit with the energies around the widely held beliefs about the Australian past. An underlying theme of whiteness in national self-expression will be shown to be a persistent tension in the national self-expression of the Australian people. This theme of whiteness has
been a very important part of Australia’s social identification, and has crystallised in a variety of forms, from official policy to the national social memory. Seemingly unconsciously, whiteness forms one of the dominant themes of the social memory of pioneer women, although this is seldom articulated: rather, as will be demonstrated through this thesis, it is an undercurrent that proves pervasive through the dialogue.

In the main, this thesis is focused on South Australian women. In its original incarnation, I had planned to focus solely on the lives of women within South Australia. However, upon further research, I found that many of my arguments could be strengthened by examining depictions of pioneer women from across other colonies/states, too. Further, the pioneer women’s legend (upon which the national social memory is based) is not one which changes dramatically across state borders. Whilst the separate colonies may have been settled in vastly different ways, the nature of the social memory of these women is consistent throughout the nation – it is a truly national memory as opposed to a regional memory. Depictions found in New South Wales could have been easily created in South Australia; and Western Australia’s representations mirror those found in Victoria and Queensland. Significantly, Australian people tend to view their identity as Australian over and above state-wide identities, further adding to the cohesion of the national social memory.

Before I begin the thesis-proper, I would like to first clarify the use of the term ‘pioneer women.’ It is a term that I, in equal measures, come back to and shy away from. It evokes a stereotype of a McCubbin painting or a Lawson story which I have elsewhere refuted. But I haven’t been able to find another term which so succinctly covers the women of whom I speak, so I must resign myself to the fact that it is a term to which I must continually return. I use it to cover white, mainly British (or sometimes Northern European) women living in rural areas of Australia in the early days of colonisation. Whilst doing this, I acknowledge both that ‘pioneer women’ of other ethnic backgrounds inhabited
rural colonial Australia (as well as the Indigenous women dispossessed by European habitation); and that by ignoring women of other ethnicities within my work that I, too, reinforce the stereotype to an extent. It is the term used in the national social memory and so it is thus the most appropriate for use here.

But it is the very shortcomings of the term ‘pioneer women’ that exemplify the need for its use. It is an exclusive term, and it does exclude so many women – but it need not. The words in themselves could be so widely interpreted, but because the national social memory is so complete, within Australian society they are not widely interpreted at all. They are very specific and dictated by social memory.

There has already been much written on women’s history, and an examination of this writing must take place to contextualise this thesis within this pedigree. It is difficult to pinpoint an exact date or year that began this influx of women’s history. Although the second wave of feminism of the late 1960s and the 1970s is generally considered the departure point, women had been written about in history for much longer periods than that. However, it was not really until the rise of the ‘second-wave’ feminists that historians became interested in the everyday women of the past, rather than just the extraordinary women like Elizabeth Macarthur and Caroline Chisholm.

Historically, Western history focussed on the great deeds of great men. In most instances, that meant the feats of explorers, statesmen and soldiers as they created the political and military maps that influenced wars, treaties and geopolitical terrain. In this context, women were very seldom considered players on history’s stage, with a few exceptions like Elizabeth I, Catherine the Great and Joan of Arc, all extremely extraordinary women and important for the influence that their actions had on the historically significant men around them as much as for their own lives. Men – and great men, at that – were the only worthies of academic historical study for a very long time.
Gradually, this pendulum began to swing – away from the lives of the great men to the understanding that history could be more fully comprehended by examining the lives of everyman. Historians began to realise that a more complete picture of the past could be gained from not only considering the kings and princes that issued taxes and levies on their subjects; but also how these subjects were affected by these monetary impositions. The exploration of nations was interesting as it pertained to the individual explorers; but more could be learnt if attention was given to the people who risked their luck on trusting what they were told of these explorations and moving to relatively uncharted parts of the world to establish families, farms and settlements. Those who discovered goldfields and presided over them were fascinating – the lives of the men who risked their lives and fortunes on the goldfields, though, gave more insight into what life at the time was like.

In the same way, as recognition was gradually given to the histories of everyman, so it happened that the women of the past were acknowledged as contributing to our understanding of the past. Perhaps the next step will be that some of this recognition is done by our male counterparts – women’s history is still the domain of female historians, showing a devaluing of women’s contributions by male historians who do not deem women’s contributions as a subject worthy of serious contemplation.

A similar progression to that of the histories of men can be seen in the studies of the lives of the women of the past, from the most noteworthy to a history of everywoman. Margaret Kiddle’s 1950 Caroline Chisholm was one of the first sustained studies of a pioneer woman in Australia, and an excellent example of the former. The centenaries of the various states had seen some
attention given to the female forebears of white settlement, but Caroline Chisholm stands out due to the academic training and approach of its author.  

Eve Pownall’s 1959 Mary of Maranoa was another anomalous text for its time, given its subject of women’s history and, significantly, its focus on both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous past. Whilst Pownall focuses on the ‘great’ women of history, she does so whilst acknowledging that these women were the exceptions rather than the norms of their societies. It is important to note that this text was re-published in 1988, the bicentennial year of European settlement in Australia, under the title Australian Pioneer Women, obviously drawing on the connotations of that term.

In 1962, Norman McKenzie wrote Women of Australia. Although concentrating on his contemporaries, McKenzie provided some background history of women in Australia, and lamented the lack of attention given by men to the impact of women of the past. He found that, given the fact that other fields had noticed and illustrated the importance of women in society, even if women did not perform public duties within that society, there was no reason for Australian historians to continue their past trend of ignoring the contributions of females. Despite later criticisms, McKenzie’s work proved to be intuitive, with such changes happening soon after his book was published.

The women of history remained at the periphery of study, however, until the 1970s and the rise of the second wave of feminism which marked a significant change in the ways women were portrayed in history (and the extent to which this

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9 Margaret Kiddle (introduced by Patricia Grimshaw), Caroline Chisholm, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, first published 1950; republished with a new introduction 1990.
10 Eve Pownall, Mary of Maranoa: Tales of Australian Pioneer Women, F H Johnston, Sydney, 1959
12 Norman McKenzie, Women in Australia, F W Cheshire, Melbourne, 1962. McKenzie’s work has been criticised by Anne Summers, who proposed that Women in Australia dealt with a far too limited group of women to have had an impact on other writers. Further, Summers contends that McKenzie isolates women in his text (Anne Summers, Damned Whores and God’s Police, Penguin Books, Camberwell, 2nd edition, 2002, 63).
portrayal took place). From this time, we can see a rise in the history of everyday women.

In 1975, Miriam Dixson first released her classic, *The Real Matilda*, which has become a beacon in the writing of women’s history in this country.\(^{13}\) *The Real Matilda* traces the low standing of women in Australian society back to the convict days of this nation, although Dixson does point out that this was not the case in South Australia, settled as a free colony. Dixson takes strong issue with the fact that in the main, historians – the majority of whom at the time of her writing were men – did not find women serious subjects for history.

It is in *The Real Matilda* that Dixson refers to Australian women as being the ‘doormats of the Western world,’ so low down the social scale does she see them. Predictably, this view had its critics, amongst whom was Patricia Grimshaw, who wrote a reply to the book in *Australian Historical Studies* in 1978. In her article, Grimshaw claimed that to make her point, Dixson had exaggerated women’s subordination in Australian society, and to do so, she had need to rely on historical distortion.\(^{14}\) Dixson herself, writing in 1996, agreed that the view that had been presented in this classic was partially one-sided, but stood by the basic premise presented in *The Real Matilda*.\(^{15}\)

Another classic that emerged in the same year as *The Real Matilda* was Anne Summers’ *Damned Whores and God’s Police*.\(^{16}\) The startling title of this text refers to the place of women in Australian society – they are seen as either saints or whores.\(^{17}\) Summers sets out to begin a reversal of the lack of


\(^{14}\) Patricia Grimshaw, ‘A Reply to *The Real Matilda,*’ in *Australian Historical Studies*, vol 18, April 1978


\(^{17}\) It is interesting to note that this notion is not exclusively Australian – see, for example, James F McMillan’s *Housewife or Harlot: The place of women in French society 1870-1940*, St Martins
comprehension about women’s lives in Australian history; and contends that Australia, and indeed the notion of the family as it exists in Australia, is sexist.

The Real Matilda and Damned Whores and God’s Police both criticised a lineage that devalued and demoralised women as not as important as their male counterparts. Leaders in women’s history in Australia, Dixson and Summers challenged the triumphant national legend that trumpeted equality for men but did not extend this courtesy to women. These decisive works, although criticised by some, were extraordinarily influential in making people reconsider the place that women were given in the national story. This, in turn, encouraged a more critical reading of the national legend and a broader understanding of women’s lives.

Although Summers and Dixon were not the only academics calling on this critical re-examination of the nation’s way of understanding the past, these two women are still seen as paving the way for future academics considering relations between the sexes in Australia’s past.

Rounding out the trio of texts that can be considered to have created a seismic shift in the understanding of women in Australia’s past that were published in 1975 was Beverly Kingston’s My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary Ann.18 Focussing on the work of women, both inside and outside the home, Kingston drew a vivid picture that challenged the idea that women’s contribution to Australian society had been minimal.

Despite the impact of these three works, Summers, Dixon and Kingston were not without criticism, even from within the realm of other women’s historians. Although the texts were ground-breaking in terms of the way that they

Press, New York, 1981, which also uses the juxtaposition of the two female stereotypes to reinforce the position of women in society. Not only is the title strikingly similar to that of Summers’ text, but the basic premise behind the work is very similar, too. The phrase (courtisane ou menagere – housewife or harlot) is taken from Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, a nineteenth century anarchist and is used to illustrate the place of women in French society.

18 Beverly Kingston, My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary Ann, Nelson, Melbourne, 1975
caused a wider critical re-examination of the narrative of Australia’s past in regards to gender roles, Maya Tucker criticised the texts for continuing to present knowledge within the parameters that were dictated by the masculine framework of knowing. She wrote in *Historical Studies* that Summers, Dixson and Kingston had reinforced stereotypes of women created by men by discussing them rather than breaking them completely down.\(^1^9\) Kay Daniels was another prominent academic who criticised their work.\(^2^0\)

Irrespective of such criticisms, the publication of these texts forged the way for a flood of texts on women’s history: texts that sought to find a place for women within the current structure of knowledge, and thus incorporate women’s experiences into the dominant narrative; and those that sought to reshape knowledge and challenge the ways that things were understood at their very core.

Despite the lapse of time and the changing values that have gone with that, women’s history has continued to be a source of tension in some quarters. The 1994 publication of *Creating a Nation*,\(^2^1\) a feminist retelling of Australian history, was one such text to draw criticism. On the pages of *Quadrant*, John Hirst criticised the authors for producing a history that he believed was largely irrelevant because of its narrow view – that is, Hirst thought *Creating a Nation* to be defective history because it studied only the history of women, rather than society as a whole.\(^2^2\) Hirst did not write about his views on what still constitutes the bulk of history: that is, narratives where women’s experiences are, at best, a sidebar or footnote to the dominant stream. Marian Quartly, one of the four authors of *Creating a Nation*, responded to Hirst’s criticisms in *Montage*, writing

Feminist historians tend to assume that paradoxes exist to be explored rather than resolved; that doors are better open than

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\(^{19}\) Maya Tucker, ‘Women in Australian History,’ in *Historical Studies*, vol 17, no 68, 1977

\(^{20}\) Kay Daniels, ‘Women’s History,’ in G Osborne and W F Mandle (eds), *New History: Studying Australia Today*, George Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1982

\(^{21}\) Patricia Grimshaw, Marian Quartly, Marilyn Lake and Ann McGrath, *Creating a Nation*, McPhee Gribble, Ringwood, 1994

\(^{22}\) John Hirst, ‘Women and History: A critique of *Creating a Nation*,’ in *Quadrant*, vol 39, issue 3, March 1995
shut. *Creating a Nation* is offered in this spirit; I regret Hirst is so anxious to deny it.\(^{23}\)

Indeed, Hirst’s argument, and that of so many who have sought to denigrate women’s history, is that women were historically denied power and thus could not be seen to be active participants in the shaping of the past; therefore, their influence should be ignored.

The subjective nature of history writing (in that it is created by historians writing with their own biases and agendas) means that, no matter what sort of history is being written, there remains questions about the validity and ‘truth’ of written history. Despite the fact that history is created by the historian from the sources, most historians continue to believe that they write something that resembles the truth.\(^{24}\) Regardless of postmodern and deconstructionist arguments, most historians still strive to present as balanced and as truthful a representation of the past as they can. Postmodernism and deconstructionism have made historians more aware of the subjectivity of their labour, but the majority of historians still believe that they are able to complete their work, despite these tribulations.

Debates into historical knowledge have not excluded women: indeed, some of the most fiercely argued points have been disputed by women and feminist historians. Somer Brobribb has written that ‘deconstruction hopes to endlessly defer feminism,’\(^{25}\) and there are a number of women’s historians who fear that the centrality of the postmodern thesis – ie, that histories only contains subjective


stories, rather than actual descriptions of past events – undermines the subjection of and discriminations against women in the past.26

Postmodernism and women’s history gained widespread credence almost simultaneously, and the parallelism of the rise of both women’s history and postmodernism can credibly be viewed as symbiotic – that is, the sudden interest in women’s history was responsible for the shake up in thinking and in historiography that, in turn, generated postmodernist thought.

Unlike those historians who feel that postmodern theory denigrates women’s history, there are some who believe that the alternate way of examining history that is integral to postmodernism can be beneficial to the understanding of women’s experiences, and that the ideals of postmodern theory – that is, re-examining how ‘knowledge’ is constructed – are useful in re-structuring history to incorporate women’s experiences. After all, women’s and feminist history has always acknowledged the biased nature of history writing.27

Whilst this acknowledgment has been made in the past, women’s history in and of itself has undergone scrutiny of its own biased nature. Some have queried whether women’s history has traditionally had enough awareness about the differences between the experiences of different women – that is, has women’s

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history acknowledged the differences between different groups of women? Although these differences may not have always been acknowledged, as this chapter will demonstrate, women’s history has moved towards a more inclusive standpoint, away from the exclusive memory of the ‘angel of the bush’.

Women’s history has been instrumental in acknowledging the ties between politics, history and power. This recognition came soon after the beginning of the second wave of feminism as a movement, which had called for a glorious history of women. However, as Linda Gordon notes, ‘As historians, we were soon tired of myth-making … We moved to less glorious and more ambivalent analyses of the past.’ From here, historians were able to step away from the dominant social memory of the ‘angels of the bush’, and look at a more varied, more individual and more interesting picture of the past for women in Australia. Analysis of academic histories within this chapter will demonstrate this trend away from the memory towards the history.

Nevertheless, although women’s history enriches knowledge of the past, it can not make for a ‘complete’ history as no representation of the past depicts that past in its entirety. The past is simply too large to ever be reproduced in its entirety.

Pioneer women in cultural images and in the national social memory are first and foremost depicted and remembered as the mothers of the nation. As Sue Rowley writes, the depiction of woman-as-mother is the least problematic for male artists as this was perceived to be their ‘natural’ role. Most women in the

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30 Sue Rowley, ‘Inside the Deserted Hut: The Representation of Motherhood in Bush Mythology,’ Westerly No 4, December 1989, 76. See also Kay Schaffer, ‘Henry Lawson, the drover’s wife and
nineteenth century in Australia fulfilled this ‘natural destiny’ in wives and mothers. But situating these women within a family unit and then assuming cohesion with that group neglects to recognise that these units were not always cohesive, and the battles being fought outside the home were often being fought inside the home, too.  

Central to the emphasis on family and motherhood was the notion of race; and most specifically, of (white) women being the mothers of the nation – ‘skin/colour [is] a signifier for culture.’ When considering late-nineteenth century attitudes towards motherhood, the two cannot be detached. Whilst gender differences and racial differences are related but different, within this context the link is very strong. The ideal of motherhood was closely entwined with contemporary ideas on race. In fact, most dialogues on race did not specify that they were referring to the ‘white’ race only, as such was deemed superfluous. Discussions on motherhood focussed on the concept of women breeding a white Australia. A fear was held that ‘if the British population did not increase fast enough to fill the empty spaces of the empire other [races] would.’

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35 Susan Sheridan, *Along the Faultlines: sex, race and nation in Australian women’s writing 1880s-1930s*, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, 1995, 113
37 Anna Davin, ‘Imperialism and Motherhood,’ in *History Workshop*, issue 5, spring 1978, 10
Maternity Allowance reinforced the idea that the only desirable type of mothering was *white* mothering – the allowance ignored all other women.\(^{38}\)

Motherhood gave women a visible place within the Australian tradition – as mothers, they were seen as having a ‘purpose,’ a role within colonial society.\(^{39}\) Not only useful as the symbolic nation,\(^{40}\) motherhood gave women an imperative within the discussions of ‘populate or perish.’\(^{41}\) Women were able to help white men fulfill their colonial dreams by producing the colonizers of the future.\(^{42}\) They gave birth to a nation and to dreams. The discourse of motherhood meant that race was far more important to mothering than class,\(^{43}\) thus effectively (in theory) invalidating class distinctions.\(^{44}\) *All* white women could aspire to be mothers, hence resulting in their valuable input into the Empire. Whilst white men dreamt of colonial glory, women could integrate themselves into such dreams with notions of being the mothers of the colonizers.

Our understanding of the lives of women in the past has increased exponentially in the past thirty years: from a romanticised view of women as the helpmeets of the idealised pioneers, we have broadened our view to consider the realities rather than the romances of the past. However, the notion of the noble white pioneers sculpting the Australian outback is a powerful one which many writers have picked up on and which is still widely embraced in the community. It is part of our national mentality, something that is evoked alongside the spirit of

\(^{39}\) Jan Pettman, ‘Australia and the Global Future,’ in *Social Alternatives*, vol 9, no 2, 1990, 34
\(^{40}\) Barbara Holloway, “‘Women’ in federation poetry,” in Susan Magarey, Sue Rowley and Susan Sheridan (eds), *Debutante Nation: feminism contests the 1890s*, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, 1993, 150; see also Margaret Anderson, ‘When Australia Was a Woman – Images of a Nation,’ in Margaret Anderson (ed.), *When Australia Was a Woman: images of a nation*, Western Australian Museum, Perth, 1998, 8
\(^{41}\) L Gordon, ‘Race Suicide and the Feminist Response,’ in *Hecate*, vol 1, no 2, 40
\(^{42}\) Claudia Knapman, ‘Reproducing Empire: exploring ideologies of gender and race on Australia’s Pacific frontier,’ in Susan Magarey, Sue Rowley and Susan Sheridan (eds), *Debutante Nation: feminism contests the 1890s*, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, 1993, 130
\(^{44}\) Sheridan, *Along the Faultlines*, 115; see also Davin, ‘Imperialism and Motherhood,’ 14
the ANZACS when trying to call upon the ‘real’ Australia. Writers such as A B ‘Banjo’ Paterson and Henry Lawson, those stalwarts of Australian writing, knew the potent force of the pioneer and drew on it regularly. Historians, too, have drawn on the idea of the pioneer, whether as an abstract concept or a reality. The pioneer legend is, however, like so many Australian narratives in that, for a long time, it was an unchallenged masculine domain. Historically, the Australian pioneer legend has been (re-)imagined in a very similar vein to the United States overland trail experience. As with earlier retellings of the overland trail experience, the pioneer legend embraced the ideal of the pioneer man whilst ignoring the fact that the experience was often a family experience.  

Central to the Australian pioneer legend, however, was the popular notion of ‘mateship’: and, as Judith Wright has noted, ‘The “mateship” ingredient in Australian traditions was always and is necessarily one-sided: it left out of account the whole relationship with woman.’ Since the rise of women’s history, however, the pioneer legend has been both challenged as unrealistic; and used to incorporate a feminine perspective into the understanding of the past. To understand these changes and challenges, though, one must first appreciate the evolution of the understanding of the pioneering past.

In his article, ‘The Australian Legend,’ Michael Roe listed a collection of traits which he believed could be attributed to the Australian pioneer, which in his view was a romantic ideal rather than a reality. The list included the traits which the ‘type’ suggests belonged to the men who made white Australia: hardworking, loyal, anti-establishment, stoic and self-confident, to name but a few. Roe believed that the reason that some clung so tightly to this ideal was to forge a truly Australian identity, but Roe argued that there had been so few who had fitted the ideal that they could not be taken as representative of the nation ‘type’.

This was not a view shared by all. The following year, an essay by DJ MacDougall appeared in which MacDougall wrote, ‘Australians are no longer [my emphasis] a race of hardy pioneers, but the pioneering traditions did not die and are fading slowly.’\textsuperscript{48} Within the same collection was an essay by Russell Ward entitled ‘The Social Fabric’. Ward put forward the theory that while the pioneer may not have been the ‘average’ citizen of Australia, the ideal put forward by the pioneers was that of the desired citizen, as the pioneers and the bushmen were considered the ‘most Australian’ of all the nation’s residents. Ward maintained that ‘there is convincing evidence that many, if not most … Australians were pleased to think they resembled their respective frontiersmen.’\textsuperscript{49}

It was this opinion that Ward expanded upon in his seminal work on the subject, \textit{The Australian Legend}.\textsuperscript{50} This book examined why and how the national legend was established, travelling in a linear fashion through the convicts, gold rushes, bushrangers and so forth. He judged that the legend grew from the notion that truly ‘Australian’ traits were born in the bush. Throughout the text, Ward took to task others who did not believe that the pioneer was not a potent notion throughout the nation’s history by pointing out that ‘The average … Australian is not the same as the typical … Australian.’\textsuperscript{51} As one would expect for the time, Ward focussed on the Australian male and ignored the Australian female.

Graeme Davison’s article ‘Sydney and the Bush’ put up the theory that the reason for the popularity of the pioneering ideal was that it was so far from the reality of the majority’s urban lives that it appealed in a ‘grass is greener’ sense to the masses who in turn embraced it as a reality.\textsuperscript{52} J B Hirst developed this

\textsuperscript{50} Russel Ward, \textit{The Australian Legend}, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1958, 196  
\textsuperscript{51} Ward, \textit{The Australian Legend}, 235. Ward’s emphasis  
\textsuperscript{52} Graeme Davison, ‘Sydney and the Bush: an urban context for the Australian legend,’ in \textit{Historical Studies}, vol 18, no 71, October 1978
argument in his article ‘The Pioneer Legend.’\textsuperscript{53} Through this article, Hirst explored the notion of the classlessness that is dominant in the pioneering legend. As well as citing popular writers (such as Lawson and Paterson) as perpetuating the legend, Hirst also identified pioneer villages as adding to the legend as they did not provide visitors with social constructions around the portrayed ideal, a point also raised by Donald Horne in \textit{Money Made Us}, in which he argues that the pioneers are the creation of a greedy tourist market.\textsuperscript{54}

What all of these (male) writers did, however, whether arguing for or against the legend, was to demonstrate that the legend (or social memory) did exist, that it was a male memory, and that it was subject to tensions of differing views. Despite the different points of view that the authors presented, there existed points of commonality between them – they were interested in the notion of the pioneer as a male phenomenon; and they were interested in the idea of a ‘common man’ pioneering man. And despite its criticisms within academia, as Graeme Turner noted in 1994, ‘If the “Australian legend” has lost most of its credibility with the critics and historians who once helped disseminate it, it still has its supporters within the wider community.’\textsuperscript{55}

In contrast to the ‘everyman’ approach of the texts of the traditional Australian legend, many of the texts that deal with pioneering women deal with the ‘tall poppies’ of colonial society – the Bussels and the MacArthurs and the like. In many instances (which will be examined in Chapter Two: Authentic Memory) these texts drew on an idealised past which has long dominated the Australian social memory.

However, academics have challenged the ideal of the ‘angel of the bush’ that sits firmly in the national social memory. Amongst these challengers was

\textsuperscript{54} Donald Horne, \textit{Money Made Us}, Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1976, 16
\textsuperscript{55} Graeme Turner, \textit{Making It National: Nationalism and Australian Popular Culture}, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1994, 9
Elizabeth West, who challenged the notion that women on the colonial frontier smoothed race relations. West contends that rather than acting compassionately and sympathetically to the plight of the Indigenous Australians, white women were racist and uncaring, a consequence of the patriarchal society which worked for the oppression of both women and Aboriginals.

Dixson also examined the frontier experience in *The Real Matilda*, and found that many women – particularly wealthier women – enjoyed the breaking-down of traditional class barriers that they experienced whilst ‘pioneering.’ However, Dixson contends that it was the frontier experience that shaped the notions of the status of women in the Australian psyche - and that status was a ‘profound unconscious contempt for the Australian woman that pervades the Australian ethos.’

Judith Godden’s ‘A New Look at Pioneer Women’ put forward the notion that the pioneer women’s legend ‘has been good propaganda – bad historiography.’ Godden found fault with the notion that the memory simply ignored women who did not fulfil the ideal of the pioneer woman; and contended that people assumed that the legend was a reality because the reality itself was so hard to ascertain. Additionally, Godden pointed to the fact that the women who kept records were those of the upper classes, who on the whole could best conform to an ideal, and who accepted the male-defined boundaries of how women were supposed to behave. Further, Godden put forward the contention that women who survived on the outskirts of white civilisation without males were ignored because an acknowledgement of them would have been an acknowledgement that women could survive without the protection and assistance of men. Godden wrote the

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56 Elizabeth West, ‘White Women in Colonial Australia,’ in *Meanjin*, no 13, 1977
57 Dixson, *The Real Matilda*, 180-1
58 Dixson, *The Real Matilda*, 179
59 Dixson, *The Real Matilda*, 188
60 Judith Godden, ‘A New Look at Pioneer Women,’ in *Hecate*, vol 2, no 2, 1979, 19
‘history of pioneer women must acknowledge that not all women could or did triumph over adversity’ if it was to move beyond mere legend.\(^{61}\)

Although Godden’s article moved away from the idealised version of the past, Marilyn Lake criticised Godden for perpetuating the myth by suggesting a cohesion within pioneer women that meant that they could be considered as a grouping at all.\(^{62}\) Lake reasoned that the definition of pioneer women focussed too strongly on the women’s proximity to the bush rather than looking at their real-life circumstances. Indeed, despite the fact that Godden was in some ways refuting the legend of the pioneer woman, she was herself working within the pre-defined parameters of the accepted language (and thus, to an extent, the social memory) of the legend.

Despite the fact that records about women who were not famous or wealthy were not created or have not survived until the twenty-first century does not mean that it is impossible to write the histories of these kinds of pioneer women. By using a wider range of sources, it is possible to provide a more complete picture that may jar the traditional picture, but tells us significantly more about the past. Marilyn Lake’s article, “‘Building Themselves Up with Aspros’” illustrates an alternative use of sources to broaden our understanding of the pioneer past.\(^{63}\)

Lake uses court documents to show the often harsh reality of life on the land for pioneer women, presenting the story of ‘Mrs X’ who was filing for divorce and whose story would not have been found in the celebratory stories of the national social memory. Despite writing of pioneer women in that article, however, Lake actually used the essay to challenge the entire notion of ‘pioneer women’ as a defining category, postulating that the term itself was nonsensical when one gave

\(^{61}\) Godden, ‘A New Look at Pioneer Women,’ 12


\(^{63}\) Lake, “‘Building Themselves Up With Aspros’”
consideration to the broad spectrum of women and experiences that it encompassed.

Lake’s challenge to the notion of ‘pioneer women’ reflects the changes in understanding of women’s history; and also demonstrates how these changes in understanding have not been fully reflected in social memory. Within the national social memory, these women have continued to be viewed as one cohesive entity despite the challenges of historians such as Lake; and Lake’s argument reinforces the earlier point regarding my need within this thesis to return to the term: social memory embraces the notion of the cohesive collective of women that can be surmised in a phrase.

Although the female convicts and ‘convict’ women (wives of male convicts) were in their own way pioneering, the national psyche has not recognised these early white women inhabitants of the Great Southern Land as pioneers. Some would, of course, become pioneers as they left the penal settlements, either on a ticket-of-leave or as emancipists, but their days within the penal settlements form part of another social memory, that of our nation’s convict past. The women of this memory differ dramatically from the women of the memory of the pioneers. In *The Women of Botany Bay*, Portia Robinson wrote,

> Despite their very real involvement as the first European women to settle the Australian bush, these convict women and ex-convict women did not become part of the legends and mythology of the bush.64

In *Botany Bay*, Robinson goes on to write of the re-working of convict men in the popular imagination (or the national social memory) into victims of a cruel system – a re-working that did not encompass their female counterparts. While the pioneer women of the national social memory are held up as paragons of virtue, Robinson insinuates that the women of Botany Bay have instead been relegated to

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the status of whores. Robinson’s observations of the popular imagining of the convict past demonstrate that the nuances and contrasting aspects of human experience and history are not reflected in social memories which flatten, simplify and stereotype the past.

In *Australia’s Founding Mothers*, Helen Heney also focuses on the women of Botany Bay, but does not focus solely on convicts. Instead, she embraces many of the ‘tall poppies’ of the settlement, and in doing so, is able to position the story of Botany Bay within the lineage of the acceptable pioneering trope. This is quite an ambitious text, but does not delve deeply into the race relations of the era. For example, Heney writes of a sketch showing a naked, hurt, self-conscious Indigenous woman being observed by three officials undertaken by one of the early white, male officials in the colony, ‘It is an excellent summary of their official relations with their dusky citizens, the representative Aboriginal girl unfortunately not sharing their benevolent but naïve satisfaction.’

She does not delve more deeply into the iconography of the Aboriginal woman as observed figure; or the obvious sexual connotations within the historiography of a naked, helpless woman being watched by a group of three (officially-clad) men. In neglecting to address these deeper issues within her text, Heney makes her text the poorer for it.

It is within this lineage of examining the lives of the women of Australia’s past that this thesis sits. However, unlike previous histories that have sought to examine the realities of the lives of pioneer women, or that have sought to examine the similarities and differences between popular understanding and reality, this thesis instead looks at how the popular understanding has been created, the tensions and changing energies surrounding it through time, and how the social memory created has adapted to remain relevant to its audience through the passage of years.

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By examining a wide variety of sources – from museums to family histories, from gravestones to short stories – I will demonstrate how the social memory of Australia’s pioneer women has been ubiquitous and the understanding that it portrays is insidiously fed to the wider community. Some of the sources considered in this thesis have not been examined in their role of creating the social memory of pioneer women; others have been reflected upon but not within the context of a far-ranging exploration of the changing energies and shifting tensions of the Australian national social memory of pioneer women. But as Paula Hamilton and Paul Ashton demonstrated, the wider community gains their knowledge of the past from such a myriad of sources that we must consider all of these sources as valid historical tools.66

The relationship between the sources and the dominant national social memory is a symbiotic one that can at times appear to be paradoxical: do the sources create the social memory; or does the social memory beget the sources? The sources in the main (with the exception of some records created by pioneer women themselves and, to a certain extent, gravestones) have been created using the parameters of the pioneer women’s legend as the framework: thus they can be seen to be products of the dominant social memory. By being created within these parameters, though, they reinforce the stereotypes of the legend and can therefore be seen to be perpetuating social memory.

The relationship between sources and social memory can thus be seen to change. There remains a positive feedback loop between the sources considered in this thesis and the social memory of pioneer women itself: the sources are created within the social memory and from there, they become feeders of the social memory.

66 Paula Hamilton and Paul Ashton, ‘At Home with the Past: initial findings from the survey,’ in Paula Hamilton and Paul Ashton (ed.), Australians and the Past, St Lucia, API Network and UQP, 2003. The other essays that make up this collection extrapolate on this argument.
The first chapter of this thesis examines social memory as a cultural phenomenon, and looks at the ways in which our understanding of social memory have evolved and moulded as societal expectations have changed. This chapter will demonstrate how the wider community uses social memory to create their understanding of pioneer women and their lives, and how issues of race and class have been submerged by the Australian notion of egalitarianism which permeates the national cultural psyche. To conclude, Chapter One will examine the link between social memory and folklore and the ways collective knowledge shape the legends of our past.

Chapter Two: Authentic History studies the ways in which popular history texts have explored the role of pioneer women, and how this has changed throughout time as historical understanding has transformed. As will be demonstrated through this chapter, the writers of popular history, perhaps insidiously, are seemingly constantly informed by the national social memory. Whilst academic historians have reacted against this, popular historians have either consciously worked with it or unconsciously been framed by it.

Cultural depictions form the basis for examining the pioneer woman social memory in the third chapter. The contests of the understanding of the past that prevailed in the 1890s form the basis of this research, which demonstrates firstly that many of the dominant cultural depictions that we have of pioneer women were actually created not by their contemporaries but by people who were drawing on the social memory of their own society; and how these images have permeated current social memory of pioneer women. I will demonstrate that the contests of memory that exist today are not new contests; that they also exist in some of our most iconic depictions of white women on the land.

In Chapter Four: Pioneer Women in Museums, I examine a more recent portrayal in museums, which provide vivid displays in the contests of the popular social memory. In most cases, museums can be seen to reflect the reality of the
past as the majority of visitors see it – but for those who do not hold the dominant values of the day, museums are conflicting and conflicted sites.

The fifth chapter, Memories in Stone: Pioneer Women and Memorials, observes the ways in which pioneer women have been remembered and are presented in memorials around the nation. Unlike museums which can respond to changes in attitudes and values, memorials are created to last and thus can create opposition that can wax and wane through time. Memorials around Australia, even those that are created in celebration of the women of the past, do not necessarily depict women in high regard.

Following from depictions in memorials, I take a more personalised look at memorialisation in Chapter Six: Saying Goodbye, in which I look at gravestones as memory markers. Gravestones provide personal but still very public sites of memory; and, like other forms of memory sites, they are contested sites, offering shifting images of the lives of early white rural women.

Family histories make up the subject of the seventh chapter, following in the personalised vein of the previous chapter. Through a study of a number of family histories, the dominant themes and narratives will be explored to demonstrate both how social memory is perpetuated in family histories; and how social memory informs the compilation of family histories. Local histories, which might be considered essentially public versions of family histories, will also be looked at in this chapter: for, as historian Chris Healy has observed, ‘the most powerful public historical narratives of Australian social memory date from the colonial period,’ and it is this social memory that has been created and recreated in local histories. Whilst other forms of history have tried to expand on this base, local histories revel in this period and the social memory that surrounds it.

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67 Healy, *From the Ruins of Colonialism*, 5
The eighth and final chapter focuses on the writings of pioneer women themselves, allowing them a chance for self-expression and self-identification. Further to this, the chapter will examine the types of women who kept written records of their lives, and the sorts of women whose records were kept; and, thus, how social memory is informed by the selective nature of sources.

As this collection of chapters shows, our knowledge of the past comes not only or even predominantly from the histories created by trained professionals. Instead, societies are bombarded with images from a variety of sources – most not traditional historical sources – and derive their understanding from this myriad of origins. While each source is influenced by its creator, each perception of that source is influenced by the values of those observing.

History and memory are close sisters, and can happily exist simultaneously. However, historians preparing histories of any sort need to understand that they are separate entities and need to be treated accordingly. History and memory both inform our understanding of society, but in entirely different ways.

Memory of the past in and of itself is not important to communities, but communities contextualise memory into relevance by relating it to their contemporary understandings. By doing so, the past is seen not so much as a far off place, but rather as a bastion of comfort and understanding about one’s place in the world. Similarly, as Tessa Morris-Suzuki has written, history is as much about our identification with the past as it is about the past as it actually was. In her book, The Past Within Us, she writes of communities’ identification with the past, and how commemoration of that past brings who we are in the present into focus. As she points out in this thought-provoking text, contemporary media means that societies get their sources of history and past from a variety of sources, many of which will be examined in this thesis. As she implores, we need to ensure that we
are taking in these messages about the past, but we are doing so consciously and
with consideration.  

The past is often considered an immutable truth; things were as they were
and whilst further research may expand our knowledge of how they were, it will
not change the reality of the past. However, the past as we know it is constructed
in the present, and as such, is susceptible to the shifting energies of values,
understandings and our sense of self. Interpretations of past events change as the
value-set of the audience transforms; and how meaning is constructed from
sources created in the past similarly comes under pressure.

The sense of Australia’s pioneer women held by the wider community has
been solidly constructed by a national social memory – not by the writings of
academics who have challenged the romanticised notion of a great and glorious
past. That social memory has indeed derived from sources that as historians, we
may not think to consider. It has come from walks around graveyards; paintings
that are so iconic that they have imprinted on our national psyche; and stories
handed from one generation to the next and reproduced in family histories. And as
the holders of these stories and legends have changed through time, so too have
the notions of Australia’s pioneer women.

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68 Tessa Morris-Suzuki, The Past Within Us: media, memory, history, Verso, London and New
York, 2005, particularly 232
CHAPTER ONE

Social Memory and Pioneer Women

Memory is another form of reality after all.

- Susan Fromberg Schaeffer

Pioneer women form an integral part of the Australian women’s narrative. These hardworking mothers of the land are valorised, honoured and mythologised in a national story which, for many years, ignored the country’s female forebears. When this trend of ignoring women in the nation’s history was challenged, pioneer women provided a group with whom twentieth century women could identify and hold on to but which also did not threaten the dominant narratives. In a history which seemed devoid of women worth remembering (with a few notable exceptions, such as Caroline Chisholm, who herself projected and stylized the patriarchal view of women in Australian society), these nameless ‘pioneer women’ were a group who could be celebrated. In a national dialogue which habitually celebrated the group over the individual, the group of nineteenth century women who left the urban centres of colonial Australia to ‘open the interior’ with their husbands provided a group to be exalted in the history of white Australia.

What some people fail to realise when considering the dominant portrayal of pioneer women is that they are drawing on a tradition of social memory, rather than history, to reclaim their foremothers – and that the social memory of Australia’s pioneer women is one that is as much about forgetting as it is about remembering. The study of social memory is integral to understanding how societies view their past and hence themselves. Within this chapter, both the link between history and memory, and memory and historical construction, will be examined.

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70 ‘The Anzacs,’ ‘the pioneers,’ ‘the diggers,’ ‘the men of Eureka’ are all examples of this.
Both history and social memory are constructions of the past, but are different entities and approach the past in different ways. But the differences between the two are not central to this thesis, and will not be explored in these pages. Instead, this thesis will look to a variety of sources to examine how social memory is constructed by these sources; and how the sources are constructed by social memory. It will not seek to resolve the ambivalence in the nature of the relationship between history and social memory.

Social memory is the way that a collective consciousness remembers the past: in this instance, the role of white women living on the ‘frontiers’ of white settlement in colonial Australia. It is an interpretation of the past, re-understood in the present. It speaks closely of the attitudes that groups have to their past, and therefore to their present. It is the shared knowing of what has gone before that is often so ubiquitous that people are unaware that they are taking in messages about the past. And with all memories, there is a great deal of forgetting. These silences also speak of how the past is comprehended.

The pioneer legend is an Australian legend into which women could be easily incorporated. Comparable to most Western nations, the majority of celebrated myths and histories in Australia’s history have celebrated the (white) man. Pioneer women were heavily incorporated into this celebratory narrative in the 1930s, as Australia and its states came to celebrate various anniversaries of white settlement.\(^\text{71}\) It was a legend that could be stretched to fit women, unlike other dominant legends of Australian history, such as the Anzac legend. The pioneer legend, up until this point, had celebrated the white male in his quest to open and tame the interior of the Australian continent. Women had, to a large extent, been invisible in this version of the narrative. However, they were not entirely absent from this celebratory story of how the bush was conquered, as in

\(^{71}\) Ann Curthoys, ‘Mythologies,’ in Richard Nile (ed.), The Australian Legend and Its Discontents, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 2000, 20
the case of Henry Lawson’s ‘The Drover’s Wife.’ As with the normal contests and flux of social memory, though, it was not until forty years after the myth-makers of the 1890s that the pioneer woman became a widely celebrated figure, and claimed her place in the Australian consciousness. With this acknowledgement came recognition in the form of monuments erected around the nation to celebrate the lives of the pioneer women (and which will be discussed in further depth in Chapter Five: Memories in Stone).

The pioneer woman in this narrative (and those that have followed), was an idealized white woman who complemented the romanticized version of the male pioneer. Drawing on the images presented in the stories of Lawson and Banjo Paterson, on the paintings of Frederick McCubbin and S T Gill, this pioneer woman was a two-dimensional figure who did not disturb or question the overriding Australian story. The celebrated figure of the pioneer woman was a devoted wife and mother, who brought up her white children in the Christian way. Australian pioneer women were (and still are) remembered in a glorified, idealized manner. Evoked as loyal, religious, hardworking, loving, uncomplaining, reasonably self-sufficient wives and mothers, the lives of Australia’s foremothers’ are remembered in a simple, limited way that robs them of their individuality and forces an uncomplicated memory on to a complex group of women. This basic ideal presents pioneer women in a very limited world, positioned within a society that determines their place based on the men around them. Such a world is far too simple to have ever existed in reality. History, particularly feminist and women’s history, may have done much to challenge this simple account: but social memory, which is influenced by so many other factors apart from historiography, continues to embrace the idealised world of the Australian pioneer legend. Though shifting energies around the creation of social memory have meant that it has had to

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72 Importantly when considering this woman in the context of a woman in the Australian narrative, it is worth remembering that the attributes given to and celebrated in the wife are those traditionally associated with the masculine – she is hard-working, self-sufficient, stoic. This story is examined in more detail in chapter two, ‘Angels in the Bush.’

73 The importance of the whiteness of such women in the Australian context is examined later in this chapter, and is a theme that runs through a number of the other chapters within this thesis.
respond to the tensions around the creation of this interpretation of the past, the social memory of pioneer women has adapted and been contested and remained relevant through time.

Women in the Australian story are often represented as a ‘lost past,’ ‘nostalgically perceived and romantically constructed.’ However, the memory of the white women in Australia can be at odds with the dominant patriarchal view of ‘the frontier,’ which paints a triumphant picture of life on the edge of European civilization – often far from the reality for the white women who joined them there. Whilst history may take into account the dangers and perils for women (both black and white) living on the edge of European civilization, social memory excludes (or overlooks) such unpleasantness. It is in this embracing of the positive aspects of the past and the rejection of the negatives that the contests of social memory are clearly displayed: while for many people the triumphant narrative of the pioneer legend reflects their reality, for others it is deeply at odds with their truth.

The literature which examines the relationship between history and memory, and the way that memory impacts on history (and vice versa), has flourished in recent years (much of this literature has been touched upon in the Introduction of this thesis, and more is examined within later chapters). Within this literature, one can find writers who discourage the study of social memory, and those who champion the study as a way of better understanding the ways that societies interact with their pasts. None would deny, though, that a recognition of social memory is needed in today’s historical studies as a compelling, if not convincing, way of scrutinizing history and society. And as Chris Healy has noted, history is

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rarely the sole or even the most important way that people understand the past – so often, social memory takes that pre-eminent role.\textsuperscript{76}

Since the 1920s, when French sociologist Maurice Halbwach first suggested the notion of ‘collective memory,’\textsuperscript{77} it has become commonly accepted that ‘memory’ is not necessarily an individual act. In fact, it has become widely understood that communities have ‘memories’ which may not be individually remembered by anyone within that community: ‘memories’ of a time before anyone within that community was born. This practice of ‘remembering’ things that one has personally not experienced goes by a number of labels, including: national memory; social memory; cultural memory; communal memory; and, of course, Halbwach’s own description – collective memory.

Some have claimed that the use of terms such as ‘cultural memory’, ‘communal memory’ or ‘social memory’ by historians undermines the differences of history and memory.\textsuperscript{78} It is not suggested here that the differences do not exist – they very clearly do. But studies of memory don’t just tell us about the past – they tell us how those in the present perceive their past, and thus themselves. Consequently, while many histories written in the past forty years have dealt with issues such as frontier conflict in Australia, the fact that there are still many within Australian society who choose to ignore (or ‘forget’) such incidents tells us less about the past these people are forgetting, and more about how such people perceive their current situation.

Social memory very clearly does not represent the past as it actually was (and nor does history, it should be added), and some have even claimed that ‘memory only reminds one of the continued and endless separation from [the]
past. However, memory is a performed act, and it is very clearly performed within the present. It provides a sense of the past in the present, and looks towards the future.

Many writers have noted that memory is often a form of propaganda that is used to achieve a sense of cohesion or conflict. Memory can also be contentious as it can be seen in a number of ways. When considering the example of pioneer women, for some people, the idea of ‘devoted wives,’ who are willing to do anything to support their men, is a positive element of the myth. For others, though, the idea of women who are willing to sacrifice everything for the happiness of their men-folk is something to be rejected, or an aspect of discord. This same element can unify people who see it as an example of (positive) family values; or it can divide people, who see it as an example of a deeply misogynistic society where the needs of the men were to be considered first and foremost. Even the divisive nature of memory, though, can act to unify groups – those who reject the positive interpretation can unite in their displeasure.


As Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith have noted, ‘Feminist studies and memory studies both presuppose that the present is defined by a past that is constructed and contested.’ What we know about the past has been constructed: by historians, by writers, and by those constructing social memory. Not everybody agrees with a single vision of the past. But both memory studies and feminist studies acknowledge this diversity and variance in beliefs – perhaps more than historical studies, which seek the definitive truth, do.

Throughout this thesis, the tensions and shifting energies around the creation of Australia’s social memory of pioneer women will be examined. In turn, the relationships between how the past is viewed from different angles will form an aspect of this thesis. The range of opinions on the relationship between history and memory range from the notion that history is official memory, to the idea that history and memory are two very disparate disciplines which may, from time to time, come together, to the concept of the two areas being entirely separate. History and social memory are both about our interaction with the past in the present. Both are constructed after the event; and both are selective in the elements that they promote. There is no doubt that history and social memory are not the same thing – but they are close cousins.

Social memory differs from individual memory in as much as to have a social memory, a person does not need to have any actual individual recollection of an event – the recollection that is important is that of society. Individuals then create their memory based on images and information. This ‘postmemory’, as

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83 Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith, ‘Feminism and Cultural Memory: an introduction (Self Portrait (Ellis Island)),’ in Signs, Autumn 20001, vol 28, issue 1
84 See, for example, Paula Hamilton, ‘The Knife Edge: debates about memory and history,’ in Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton (eds), Memory and History in Twentieth Century Australia, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994, 12
85 See, for example, Henry F May, Coming to Terms: a study in memory and history, University of California Press, Berkley, 1987, x
86 See, for example, Gedi and Elam, ‘Collective Memory,’ 41
87 Susan Engel, Context is Everything: The Nature of Memory, WH Freeman Company, New York, 1999, 150
Marianne Hirsch refers to it, is an imagination rather than a recollection. Edmund Blair Bolles writes in *Remembering and Forgetting* that ‘Remembering is an act of imagination,’ and ‘Remembering is a creative, constructive process.’ Although Bolles writes of individual memory, the same can be said of collective memory. Social memory exists between individual memory and simply knowing about events that happened in the past. Australians of today have never met ‘pioneer women’ such as the ones presented in ST Gill’s works, but these women are ‘known’ to Australians. It is ‘known’ what their lives were like, what they were like, not only – and very rarely – from history, but from social memory. During our lives, we have been presented with this ‘social memory’, in the form of cultural depictions, museums and family histories, so many times and with so few alternatives that they have become part of the Australian social memory and the way that we understand the past.

Matthew Steward has described sites of social memory as incidents where ‘the forces of fiction and history meet with such focussed power that they have become the stuff of self-defining national myth.’ Although Stewart writes of Gallipoli, the same could be said of any social memory which is embraced by a large percentage of the population. Yes, there were white women on the ‘frontiers of civilization,’ but, no, not all of them fit into the idealized mould that is popularly remembered. However, these two points have come together to create the myth of the pioneer woman, who struggled but overcame adversity to forge a better life for those who followed and who is not the stuff of self-defining national myth. Aspects of reality and aspects of the imaginary can be found in this, and other, sites of social memory.

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90 Engel, *Context is Everything*, 147
91 Matthew Stewart, ‘Gallipoli,’ [review] in *History Today*, vol 53, issue 1, February 2003, 45
Although focussed on a bygone time, social memory is very firmly situated within the present. Recollections that focus on ideals that are no longer relevant are forgotten by the group (or, in some cases, reshaped – see below). An example of this can be observed within the Australian context by examining Empire Day, first celebrated in 1905. At its height in 1915, Empire Day had been renamed a number of times in the 1950s to try and regain its waning popularity. In 1967, Empire Day was replaced by the Queen’s Birthday celebration, which is itself experiencing declining support within contemporary Australian society. Social memory appropriates certain aspects of the immense past, moulds them to fit with a certain ideal within the present, and claims them. When looking at pioneer women, note that the ideal as perpetuated in, for example, a Lawson story or a McCubbin painting, and taken on as the epitome of these women in the past, is a late nineteenth-early twentieth century ideal of womanhood. The independence and self-reliance that may be found to be illustrated in a twenty-first century museum display are not the aspects of the memory that were emphasised in earlier depictions. The basic facts stay the same – white woman on the edges of European civilization – but the focus changes to suit the needs of the present. A memory that lasts through generations can not be static and must withstand contests of understanding.

Identity is a major force in the construction of social memory. By celebrating the foundation myths of a nation, people within that nation are drawn

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93 For a full description, see Stewart Firth and Jeanette Horn, ‘From Empire Day to Cracker Night,’ in John Arnold, Peter Spearritt and David Walker (eds), Out of Empire: the British dominion of Australia, Mandarin, Port Melbourne, 1993, 127-148.
94 Maureen Moyhagh, “‘This History’s Only Good For Anger”: gender and cultural memory in Beatrice Chancy (1. National Countermemories),’ in Signs, Autumn 2002, vol 28, issue 1; Mona
together by the seeming interconnection of their experiences, and the experiences of their forebears. By celebrating the memory of pioneer women, modern Australians can claim connection with a celebratory version of the past that they feel that they can be proud of. The attributes ascribed to Australian pioneer women are positive characteristics that, by embracing the social memory, can be seen as indicative of the Australian character. She has a pleasing character which, in turn, is seen to be reflected down through the ages.

The depiction of pioneer women, and the social memory that surrounds them, is a firmly entrenched stereotype. Stereotypes ‘force a simple pattern upon a complex mass and assign a limited number of characteristics to all members of a group.’ 95 Women, in the Australian national legend, are assigned to opposite ‘roles’: damned whores or God’s police; 96 good mother or bad mother. 97

The role of motherhood, and most significantly white motherhood, was and remains an integral component in the national social memory of pioneer women. Motherhood gave women a visible and legitimate position within the national narrative; and the more white mothers that there were, the more white babies could be born to populate the continent (as was discussed in the Introduction). Throughout time, motherhood has remained a role for pioneer women that could be embraced and celebrated.

For a long time, women were simply not remembered in western societies, and thus the ways in which they themselves remembered were different from how

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96 Summers, Damned Whores and God’s Police
97 Bird, “’Mother, I won’t never go drovin’’”, 41
men remembered. Not focussing on the exterior, women’s memories focussed internally, on personal truths rather than public stories. Thus, much of the Australian social memory of pioneer women focuses on the private and the domestic aspects of these women’s lives: as mothers, homemakers, wives, daughters and helpmeets. These aspects are also amplified within the national consciousness as these aspects fit easily with and do not threaten the dominant narrative of the Australian male whose stories are central to the Australian dialogue.

Social memory is a socio-political construction that has vigorously rejected certain aspects of the past. In so doing, those who embrace the social memory can use it to be comforted and coddled by their beliefs about the past. As a result, there are many who are alienated by the social memory of Australian pioneer women, and who contest the reality that is there presented. However, social memory is malleable and remains so in order to survive. Once contestations become widespread, memory embraces these changes and moulds itself to accommodate the reality that is being pursued. The independence of Australian pioneer women provides an example of this within the Australian context: in recent years, this has become an important virtue in women and popular histories and museum displays (discussed later in this chapter) have taken on this characteristic in their depictions of pioneer women.

On issues of race and ethnicity, the pioneer legend is largely silent.\textsuperscript{100} Because the pioneer legend is largely silent on these issues, though, does not mean that it is an all-encompassing legend. The legend is, in fact, markedly exclusive. The silence is not to do with these issues being taken as a ‘given,’ but to do with these issues (within the context of the popular social memory) not being considered. The inclusivity that is sought in history is actively rejected in social memory,\textsuperscript{101} and nowhere more so than in this particular popular legend.

Jane Haggis, in her article ‘The Social Memory of the Frontier,’ has examined the traditional lack of interest in the Aboriginal peoples’ experiences in the national social memory and the histories written of this nation’s past (although, in the past three decades, this has been rectified, at least in part, in history). She theorises that this conventional lack of attention to the Indigenous peoples in Australia is not due to a conscious decision, but an ingrained cultural bias in society that ‘whitens out’ the Indigenous people from the dominant dialogue.\textsuperscript{102} In the same way that women’s history has for so long been silenced in narratives of the past, Indigenous’ voices have been ignored and forgotten. Aileen Moreton-Robinson calls this the ‘invisible white standpoint,’\textsuperscript{103} where ‘whiteness remains the invisible omnipresent norm.’\textsuperscript{104}

The term ‘pioneer women’ within the context of the national social memory (and the way that it is used within this thesis) is not the all-encompassing title that the broadness of the term may suggest. Instead, the ‘pioneer woman’ of the Australian social memory is in fact a very limited title. Within the Australian

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Curthoys} Ann Curthoys, ‘Expulsion, Exodus and Exile’ in White Australian Historical Mythology,’ in \textit{Journal of Australian Studies}, June 1999, which refers specifically to the creation of the pioneer legend; and J B Hirst, ‘The Pioneer Legend,’ \textit{Historical Studies}, vol 18, no 71
\bibitem{Nora} Pierre Nora, ‘Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire.’ \textit{Representations}. Vol. 0, Issue 26, Spring 1989, 8
\bibitem{Haggis} Jane Haggis, ‘The Social Memory of a Colonial Frontier,’ in \textit{Australian Feminist Studies}, vol 16, no 34, 2001, 92
\bibitem{Moreton-Robinson} Aileen Moreton-Robinson, ‘Troubling Business: difference and whiteness within feminism,’ in \textit{Australian Feminist Studies}, vol 15, no 33, 2000, 343
\bibitem{Moreton-Robinson2} Aileen Moreton-Robinson, \textit{Talkin’ Up to the White Woman: Indigenous women and feminism}, University Queensland Press, St Lucia, 2002, xix
\end{thebibliography}
social memory, the term ‘pioneer women’ covers European women (usually of Anglo-Celtic extraction) living in rural or frontier areas of Australia. As the ‘frontier’ continually changes, so too do the areas being ‘pioneered.’ As I have explained, by using this definition of ‘pioneer women,’ I am aware that I am also reinforcing the stereotype to an extent. But when examining social memory, it is this very stereotype that is taken as true. The social memory remembers the stereotype, not the diversity of the women who lived in the bush in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Australia (and twentieth century, when one refers to parts of northern and central Australia). Thus within this thesis, the term ‘pioneer women’ will not be used to cover an ethnically diverse, multinational group of women, but used within the parameters of the social memory definition.

Settlement by whites of the Australian continent (comparable with colonization of other parts of the world by whites) is as much about forgetting as it is about remembering. For foundation stories to take hold, the sullied parts of history are forgotten so that a celebratory legend can unite the people. The social memory of pioneer women in Australia is a highly romanticized image of what life was like for women in colonial Australia, which acts as a founding myth and thus connects (white) people within the nation.

Like remembering, forgetting is a purposeful process meant to contribute to a group’s identity. By forgetting undesirable aspects of the past, groups reinforce the aspects that they wish to remember and exalt, thus providing a desirable and cohesive image of the past. There is too much that happened in the

past for it all to be remembered, but collective forgetting is not only about arranging memories in order of importance, with the least important surrendered to oblivion: indeed, it is often important aspects of a group’s past which are relegated to the void of the disregarded.

Within the Australian social memory, aspects of colonisation which have been largely forgotten (although these acts of forgetfulness seem to be being slowly rectified) include frontier violence, rape and murder of the Aboriginal peoples of the land, dispossession, and the ‘marauding white men’\textsuperscript{107} who posed a great threat to women of all origins. Extended further, the limited ideal of the Australian pioneer woman is evidence of the nature of active forgetting in the national psyche. The roles and attributes that are typically remembered in the pioneer women – mother, wife, Christian, white, loving, loyal – mean that those women who do not fit into the limited classification of what a ‘pioneer woman’ is, are forgotten. By proscribing an ideal of pioneer women, those who do not fit into that ideal are forgotten.

The social memory of the pioneer woman limits our understanding of these women and the diversity of their lives. If this memory is pervasive, a community only considers and remembers the lives of a small percentage of the pioneers of our past. We are remembering some, but a whole lot more are forgotten who would not (could not) fit the ideal. Single mothers, childless wives, Chinese, Aboriginal and Jewish women are some of the many examples of women who lived on the edge of European society, and who in practice may have been pioneering women, but are overlooked in that Australian social memory.

The reasons for forgetting so many women of the past are varied and complex. As stated, one reason is that there is simply too much in the ‘past’ for everything to be remembered. Another is that as a nation, Australians have a view of who they are, and some of the diversity that actual pioneer women offer to the

\textsuperscript{107} Term taken from Lake, ‘Australian Frontier Feminism,’ in Gender and Imperialism
picture of history does not fit with that notion. The Chinese in Australia offer a case in point of a reality that clashes with the view of a ‘white Australia,’ as do the Aboriginal people who lived on the land before Europeans were even aware of the existence of the continent. Further, offering different images of pioneer women challenges other notions – for example, a successful single mother on the land shows an example of independence, which is at odds with the notion that women are reliant on men to prosper in colonial societies. Many intricate aspects of identity, including race and sex roles, are interrelated with social forgetting, as much as they are with social memory. The term ‘pioneer women’ evokes such a specific woman in the Australian imagination: white women living in rural areas of Australia. This evocation of a phrase has a flipside, too – it nullifies the Indigenous women dispossessed by the European invasion of the land and similarly ignores women of other ethnic backgrounds inhabiting rural colonial Australia. The term ‘pioneer women’ has become so all-encompassing that it encourages Australians to forget even as they remember.

The pioneer legend in Australia is the quintessential white story. Not only does it encapsulate what is meant by ‘white’ within the Australian context, but it acts as a foundation for the white stories that follow, an inheritor of the tales of the ‘Great White Explorers’ who claimed and named the landscape. It is a narrative that is used to claim inheritance of the land and the culture, from which a social memory has evolved that validates the settlement of Australia by Europeans and the dispossession of the traditional owners. The pioneering legend is so celebratory that it dismisses competing and contrasting voices.

Not only does the pioneering legend forget the realities of dispossession and race relations on the land, though: it consciously forgets the realities of the lives of the women that it seeks to speak for. The social memory of pioneer women, and the sources from which much of this memory has grown, persistently present a memory in which the women of Australia’s past forged into the unknown with their men for love. In fact, Evans’ ‘Women of the West’ explicitly states ‘For love
they faced the wilderness." Cultural depictions, museums, books, family histories and the social memory of our nation conveniently ‘forget’ a very important factor about pioneer women devotedly following their husbands into the deep, dark Australian bush – for these women, there was no real alternative. If a woman married a man who chose to try his hand at ‘pioneering’, in nineteenth century society, a woman had very little choice but to follow her husband. Devoid of the monetary ability to support herself, and without the social support to do as she wished, the nineteenth century woman was very much subject to the whim of her husband (and provider). So, instead of the romantic version presented and remembered in the national memory of a woman who would happily forsake all for love, the reality for the pioneer woman was that, in the majority of cases, she had little choice. This reality, though, is forgotten and subsumed by a romanticised version of the past.

With competing voices of remembering and forgetting, there are constant and continual shifting energies around the creation of social memory. Memory, like other forms of ‘knowing’ what happened in the past, undergoes change and revision as time and society changes. David Lowenthal has written, ‘Contrary to the stereotype of the remembered past as immutably fixed, recollections are malleable and flexible; what seems to have happened undergoes continual change.’ Likewise, W Fitzhugh Brundage has noted that for a social memory to be lasting, it must be able to adapt and change to suit the present it is being recalled in.

The past can never be fully known in the present – all that historians can seek to achieve is an interpretation of how things may have been (and this cannot be completely assessed because who is able to judge whether an interpretation is

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108 George Essex Evans, ‘Women of the West’ (poem), line 4 (see Appendix One)
correct now that – by its very nature – that past has disappeared?). With that, understandings of the past are subject to review and change through time. Similarly, social memory is also subject to contestations and changes in understanding. Through social memory, though, these contestations are more organic and more restrained than they are in history: they grow slowly as society evolves and as value-sets change.

As social memory evolves, so too does folklore, and in many ways, folklore is a subset of social memory. The processes for the creation of both social memory and folklore is the same: while ‘the folk process is forever saving, adapting, inventing and rejecting’\(^{111}\) it is also ‘best understood as a historical continuum, a continuing and infinitely flexible tradition in which the forms may change but the process remains the same.’\(^{112}\) As social memory can be understood to reflect how people view the present and themselves within that present, ‘folklore reflects the ethos of its own day, not of an era long past.’\(^{113}\)

Thus, we can see that the stories of folklore are the stories of the national social memory. Indeed, the following folk legend that Bill Beatty tells in *A Treasury of Australian Folktales* presents a classic story with all of the elements of the national social memory of pioneer women:

In the 1880’s a teamster left his wife and children on his selection in the New South Wales district of Narrabri for two months’ season of wool carrying in Queensland. He left enough provisions to last his family until he came back, but floods prevented his return and soon the family were starving. The mother decided to get her three children, one a three-months-old baby, to the township of Narrabri. She hoped the two older

\(^{111}\) June Factor, *Captain Cook Chased a Chook: Children’s Folklore in Australia*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, 1099, 19

\(^{112}\) Graham Seal, *The Hidden Culture: Folklore in Australian Society*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1989

children, one five, the other three, could walk while she carried the baby. But a quarter of a mile from her home the children were both tired of walking in the heavy black soil. So she carried them one by one; left the baby with the oldest child, took the second so far as she could still see the others, then put it down; returned for the baby, and made a third trip for the eldest child. When the mother and children were picked up, just out of Narrabri, the mother was unconscious; she did not know how many days and nights the eleven mile trip had taken. In all, she had walked sixty-six miles carrying children thirty-three miles of the way. Mother and children were all cared for in the township, and all recovered.

Importantly in this story, the husband is absent through no fault of his own – he had prepared the family for what was coming, but due to uncontrollable, unforeseen circumstances, they are left to perish (if not for the work of the mother) in the Australian bush. The dominant social memory of pioneer women is demonstrated in this folk legend; as is the flexible construction of masculinity which is examined in more depth in later chapters of the thesis.

However, whilst the social memory of Australia’s pioneer women is overriding positive, there remain contests of memory. In A Treasury of Australian Folktales, Beatty also describes a folkloric story which fits with the idea of the single, ambitious woman of the Australian bush being hard, vicious, and cruel. The idea of white women being the real force of racism in the colonisers’ groups, is described by a number of feminist historians, including Jane Haggis. Although this is usually manifested in the form of sexual jealousy or

114 Bill Beatty, A Treasury of Australian Folk Tales and Traditions, Ure Smith Pty Ltd, Sydney, 1960, 28
115 See Jane Haggis, ‘Gendering Colonialism or Colonizing Gender?: recent women’s studies approaches to white women and the history of British colonialism,’ in Women’s Studies International Forum, vol 13, no 6, 1990, 105; see also Margaret McGuire, ‘The Legend of the good fella missus,’ in Aboriginal History, vol 14, no 2, 1990, 124. These women argue that within some sectors, the loss of the Empire has been imagined as a result of racist white women whose sexual jealousies contributed to the breakdown of race relations throughout the Empire.
snobbery towards the Indigenous people in the discourse, the story of Isabella Mary Kelly recounted in Beatty also demonstrates the cruelty of the single white women. In the stories of Kelly, which Beatty describes as ‘probably embroidered in the process [of telling] – but in the main, undoubtedly true,’ 116 Kelly is presented as a woman guilty of flogging convicts and slaughtering the local Aboriginal population. Her wrath at the world is said to have stemmed from being jilted by her groom at the altar. 117 This folk tale fits with a number of elements of memory: the ambitious woman who is absolutely ruthless in her pursuits; the idea that a perfectly normal woman is turned into a murderous villain after heartbreak; and the notion that a woman striking out on her own is abnormal. In Beatty, we find both the romanticised vision of the pioneer woman of social memory; and the demonized memory of women who do not fit with the ideal of colonial womanhood. But the Australian social memory stretches to fit both women – the dichotomy of ‘damned whores’ or ‘God’s police’, as examined in the Introduction, allows for these contestations of understanding to take place within the one narrative.

The stories that are passed down through the collective consciousness form our folklore. Folklore is one manifestation of social memory,118 in that it takes what is ‘known’ through social memory and builds on it is such a way that the ‘knowing’ can be exhibited through the popular tales. In both Australian social memory and folklore, women are not central figures, but ‘bit-players,’ support to the males of the stage of the past.119 Folklore, in the same way as the social memory of pioneer women, is traditional and conservative in outlook.120

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116 Beatty, A Treasury of Australian Folk Tales and Traditions, 159
117 Beatty, A Treasury of Australian Folk Tales and Traditions, 159-64
118 In his article, ‘The Decline and Rebirth of “Folk Memory”,’ Guy Beiner uses the terms ‘folk memory’ to describe social memory. With this in mind, the statement above rings true. (Guy Beiner, ‘The Decline and Rebirth of “Folk Memory” in the Late Twentieth Century,’ in Eire-Ireland: a journal of Irish Studies, fall-winter 2003, vol 38, issue 3-4, 7
119 ‘Folk heroes and heroines,’ in Gwenda Beed Davey and Graham Seal (eds), The Oxford Companion to Australian Folklore, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1993, 130
Social memory is not a poorer sister of history with regard to negotiating and comprehending the past. Rather, it is a different way of interpreting the past. To gain a complete picture of the past, a variety of angles, sources and interpretations need to be used. It is only when this occurs that a multidimensional vision of what has gone before can be achieved. Furthermore, by examining how a society views its past, we can best understand how it views itself in the present.

When considering the past, many people only believe that which they find palatable. Social memory is a materialization of these wishes and desires about how the past played out. It promotes a remembrance of the past while it simultaneously and actively rejects some aspects of that past. If the negative aspects of the nation’s past are remembered too much, they raise questions which many would prefer not to consider. For instance, by remembering the dispossession of the Aboriginal peoples of Australia (and the many wrongs perpetrated against them), today’s Australians would have to consider what this means for the nation today, an issue that many are not willing to consider. A version of the past which celebrates a peaceful settlement of the land is ‘easier’ to digest.

But these tensions of remembering versus forgetting are in a constant state of flux. As society’s values change, so too does the dominant social memory. Memory is malleable and constantly changes to suit the needs of those who are promoting it. In turn, these shifting energies create tensions around the creation of social memory which are exacerbated by the very fact that memory is constantly shifting and changing; and the fact that not everyone will be soothed by the one telling of the past.

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121 As evinced by the debates surrounding Keith Windschuttle’s *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History*. 
Perhaps the memory of pioneer women has become, for many, the ‘truth’ which official history seeks to be in that it is so ubiquitous in the wider community. If history is ‘official memory,’ then it could be argued that in the case of pioneer women, the memory has transcended the unauthorized, the provincial, the communal, and is the only version now available for many. The general public’s social memory of pioneer women is so ingrained and so completely accepted that the academic historian is unable to successfully challenge these assumptions within the wider community. Historians may very well present their work for general consumption, work which challenges the views of the romanticized colonial woman on the land, but the Lawson stories and the various museum exhibitions that retell the quixotic myths are the images and ideas that stick with the general public. For many, many Australians, the social memory of pioneer women is ‘the truth.’
CHAPTER TWO

‘Authentic Memory’: History Books as Memory Source

‘History is probably our myth.’

- Michael de Certeau

Previous chapters have focused on the relationship between history and social memory in direct regard to the case of pioneer women: this chapter focuses on the depiction of pioneer women within the ‘history books.’ As the concept of ‘memory’ has been discussed extensively in the previous chapter, this chapter will elaborate by also examining the concept of ‘history’ with particular reference to the nature of historical knowledge in Australia in the beginning of the twenty-first century, placed against wider debates on historical knowledge. It will then look at the ways that popular histories have been formulated within the framework of historical knowledge, and how they have been informed by the dominant social memory of Australia’s pioneer women.

History and memory, whilst both deeply concerned with the past, have traditionally been considered disparate disciplines (as was demonstrated in the previous chapter). It is interesting, however, that history and memory often speak the same vernacular, recount the same discourse. Often, the social memory and history are so closely entwined that it is hard to distinguish where memory ends and history begins.

There are parts of knowledge about people and their nations which are deeply ingrained in both the national and the personal psyche. In Australia, the Anzac legend is so deeply rooted in the national identity that it is hard to extrapolate fact from fiction, and personal ‘knowledge’ about the events and aftermath is a part of being Australian. Such is also true with the Australian

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frontier stories, which although being somewhat ‘taken over’ by the Anzac legend, define for many what it means to be Australian. Within this context, it can be hard for the historian to disengage themselves from the nationalist discourse which is so prevalent in the Australian identity. Chris Wickham ascertains ‘Historians often simply take the framework of reference of national images of the past for granted, and conduct their investigations so much inside that framework that they contribute very strongly to its reproduction.’123 With this statement in mind, this chapter will examine whether historians writing popular histories of the Australian ‘frontier’ and of Australian pioneer women do indeed frame their works (unconsciously) within the romantic legend which has been dominant for so long.

History is considered the verifiable, the concrete, the authentic – history is ‘the truth.’ Memory, on the other hand, is not ‘the truth’ per se, but rather pieces from the past that a society has selected to recollect. Debates surrounding history and memory are long and complex. History, as is conventionally understood, is our construction of past events: How, then, does memory differ? Isn’t memory, too, just a construction of the past? From where do the differences start and grow? As Pierre Nora wrote in ‘Between Memory and History’:

Memory, insofar as it is affective and magical, only accommodates those facts that suit it; it nourishes recollections that may be out of focus or telescopic, global or detached, particular or symbolic – responsive to every censorship or projection. History, because it is an intellectual and secular production, calls for analysis and criticism. Memory instills remembrance within the sacred; history, always prosaic, releases it again. Memory is blind to all but the group it binds … History, on the other hand, belongs to everyone and no-one, whence its claim to universal authority. Memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images and objects; history binds itself

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strictly to the temporal continuities, to progressions and to relations between things. Memory is absolute, while history can only conceive the relative.  

By its very being, memory is exclusive, selective and romanticised. It draws from the past, but takes only the most appealing morsels on which to feed. History, though – at least in theory – strives for objectivity and completeness, and derives its power through its detached neutrality. Whereas history tries to be as objective as is possible – and must, to remain relevant – memory is both able and has to be subjective. Memory, by its very nature, must be exclusive.

Because they both deal with events of the past, history and memory are often confused, and debate about the precise nature of each is an old debate. History has been referred to as ‘the official memory a society chooses to honour,’ and indeed, there exists persuasive evidence that both memory and history can be changed when they no longer suit the present. By many, history is viewed as cultural representation; and history, like memory, is what the historian chooses to include (or remember). David Lowenthal has written, ‘whereas memory is seldomly consciously revised, historians deliberately reinterpret the past through the lenses of subsequent events and ideas.’

Ideally, history avoids the exclusivity that memory thrives on, but this is not always the case. Due to the overwhelming nature of the past, not everything that

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124 Nora, ‘Between Memory and History,’ 8-9
happened can be included in a written report. Thus the exclusions made by historians do take on, to an extent, the resemblance of memory, and the selections that go on in that process.

Within Western societies, history has played and continues to play a number of roles. These uses, past and present, are succinctly catalogued by Michel Foucault: ‘memory, myth, transmission of the Word and of Example, vehicle for tradition, critical awareness of the present, the decipherment of humanity’s destiny, anticipation of the future, or promise of a return.‘ Others have written of their very similar points of view (although perhaps not as poetically). Whilst history is about the past and how it unfolded, it is not just about the final conclusion – it is also about how that conclusion was reached by the historian.

Social memory, on the other hand, does not require or request any introspection – in fact, in order to be persuasive, social memory actively discourages this sort of contemplation of its own genesis. The selectiveness that breeds the legends embraced by social memory means that the undesirable parts of the past are simply ignored, while that which is celebrated is magnified.

This selectiveness which is a product of social memory can be seen displayed through the pages of many popular histories. As will be demonstrated in this chapter, most popular histories of Australia’s pioneer women are markedly exclusive and the writers (in the main) write within the proscribed confines of the dominant national social memory.

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Despite the overt selectiveness of social memory, though, it is widely acknowledged that history, too, is provisional and partial – and that refers to all histories, be they academic or popular. What is known of the past is inescapably shaped by the present; and the ways in which it is recalled are done so within the boundaries of modernity. Further, that which we know about the past in the present is only fragmentary. The nature of historical knowledge, and the creation of history from the ‘facts,’ are also susceptible to dual or multiple readings – viewed from different perspectives, the same facts can be ‘read’ in different ways.129

Writers of history need to be aware that they are visible in their text, no matter how they strive for invisibility. Historical events themselves are value-neutral, but it is the way that the writer uses them within their text that changes this. History is not history as it actually was, but rather a textual discourse representing a story of what happened.130 Thus history, in much the same way as memory, is a selective, subjective practice.


History and the creation of a community’s history is very much a cultural practice. The histories common within the Western world are based firmly within the cultural norms and mores of Western thinking and attitudes. In that context, it is not surprising that women and their lives should have been considered unworthy of recognition within the realm of historical studies for so long – this fact simply mirrored the wider reality that women themselves were not considered as important as their male counterparts.

The pioneer story has also proven fertile ground for those writing popular histories. The national imagination embraces the notion of the white pioneer, and this embrace has been reflected in the number of popular histories devoted to the subject.

As was discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, the 1970s marked a turning point in the examination of the lives of the Australian pioneer women, and indeed all Australian women. Historically, the lives of women were considered unworthy of scholarly attention, and the lives and deeds of women were considered insignificant in terms of human achievement: history recorded the feats of the likes of explorers, politicians, kings and soldiers, realms all confined to

men. However, from the early twentieth century, there was a gradual building of interest in the lives of women, and indeed of the lives of all people who may not have shaped the massive events of history in terms of signing treaties or winning wars; but whose lives shaped the past in more subtle, nuanced ways.

For women’s history, this culminated in the second wave of feminism of the 1970s. This decade marked a decided shift in the way that women were viewed in society in general, and thus also how their contributions to the past were considered. Not only did women become more regular subjects of historical study, but academics sought a more complex understanding of their lives: rather than glossing over women’s lives and romanticising the past, historians wanted a history that reflected the past more accurately. In some instances, this meant accepting unpalatable realities about both the women and the men of the past; in others, it required historians to critically re-examine what was known to be ‘the truth’ and contextualise it within a different framework.

In earlier writings, the pre-eminence of men as the explorers, the politicians, the decision-makers who ‘made’ history had rendered women’s place in history unimportant. However, as the twentieth century progressed, and there was an awakened interest in the histories of women, there came a need to ‘find’ women in the past who could be considered worthy of being placed in the pages of history. In the pioneer women of the nineteenth century, many writers found women who could ‘fit in’ to the dominant male discourse and thus claim a role in Australian history. The image that these writers projected was a romantic vision to complement the patriarchal narrative of the whites successfully taming and controlling the harsh Australian bush.

The ‘second wave’ of feminists (and those who have followed) have challenged this romantic view of the colonial past, daring people to remove the rose-coloured glasses through which the nineteenth century has commonly been viewed in this country. A darker, more realistic portrayal of the life on the land has
been presented by academics of varying agendas. However, this more realistic presentation of the past seems to have remained firmly within the ivory towers of academia. For the general public, as popular histories show, the romantic vision of the gentle-but-strong pioneer woman remains the dominant account.

Until this crucial turning-point in the writing of women’s history, the Australian pioneer women had been largely confined to the pages of generic popular histories of the white frontier; and had been widely romanticised into the idealised ‘angels of the bush’. With the greater analysis of the past that has grown since the 1970s, though, academic histories have challenged the idealised narrative of the white frontier of Australia (as was discussed in the Introduction to this thesis and which will be examined in various forms throughout other chapters).

Not all histories published about pioneer women since the 1970s have chosen the critical-analytical approach to their work, though; and this has been most significant in the production of popular histories. Eve Pownall’s *Australian Pioneer Women* continued the triumphant angle presented in texts through the 1970s with her reproduction of her earlier text.131 Alison Alexander’s *A Wealth of Women*132 and Susanna De Vries-Evans’ *Pioneer Women, Pioneer Land*133 maintained this positive vein. Other popular histories continued to work within the boundaries of the accepted social memory of the day.

Eve Pownall’s book, published firstly as *Mary of Maranoa: Tales of Australia’s pioneer women* and later as *Australian Pioneer Women* provides an example of how popular histories were, in a lot of ways, uninformed by changes happening within academic understandings of the past. Pownall’s book was first published in 1959; since then, it has reappeared quite regularly, including in 1988, the year white Australia celebrated the bicentenary of white occupation of the

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132 Alison Alexander with Prue Torney-Parlicki, *A Wealth of Women: Australian women’s lives from 1788 to the present*, Duffy and Snellgrove, Potts Point, 2001
nation. Despite the transformations in academic literature of the lives of pioneer women during this period, Pownall’s book was reproduced on each occasion largely unchanged. It is hard to think of another academic discipline where, after a time of such flux, this might occur.

Pownall’s text focussed on the extraordinary women of the past, only briefly touching on the more common woman’s experiences. In its original, 1959 publication, this was in keeping with other histories written about women, not just the popular: however, by its later imprints (and particularly by 1988), this tendency had shifted from being standard in academic women’s histories to being stock-standard in popular women’s histories. Academic historians, whilst still interested in the lives of the ‘tall poppies’ of the past, were also examining the lives of ‘everywoman’ and contextualising the past within the realities of their existence; and were questioning the use of the term ‘pioneer women’ to cover a wide range of women with disparate life experiences.

In considering Pownall’s text, the reader must at all times remember that it was originally written well before the second-wave of feminists were asking serious and hard questions about how the women of the past should be considered and understood. The 1950s in Australia was a quite conservative period, and women’s histories were rather rare. In that respect, Pownall’s work was quite innovative in that it dealt with a group who were traditionally forgotten in the history books. However, her story was a triumphant story, a narrative that extolled the virtues of women for the fact that they lived on the land, and in this regard, she worked within, rather than challenging, the dominant social memory.

The text showed the continuation of the veneration of pioneer women that was prevalent before the writing of Mary of Maranoa and that has continued in popular histories since. In the preface, Pownall wrote that pioneer women ‘were lighting the first beams of civilisation in the wilderness;’¹³⁴ whilst the front cover

¹³⁴ Pownall, Mary of Maranoa, preface
to the 1959 edition noted ‘This account of Australia’s early settlement effectively demolishes the myth that pioneering was exclusively a male trait.’ Despite claiming that the text offered a rethinking of the pioneer legend in Australia, since the centenaries and bicentenaries that had been celebrated around the nation a few decades earlier than publication, there had been a fairly wide recognition that ‘pioneering’ as it was understood in the national social memory had been undertaken by both men and women (Chapter Five: Memories in Stone looks at a number of the monuments that had been erected prior to the publication of *Mary of Maranoa* that celebrated the contributions of white pioneer women). Although Pownall’s work was uncommon in that it was a sustained examination of pioneer women in Australia’s history, it was also very much informed by the dominant social memory.

Pownall’s attitude towards race relations is one area in which it can be seen how clearly she was informed by the dominant social memory of the day. As with so many other theatres of social memory, popular histories often draw on the importance of the ‘first white woman’ in a certain area or to do a certain thing, and this is an aspect that is also brought out in Pownall’s text. Although Pownall did not explain the significance of being the first white woman to do something or to enter an area (and the significance, although not explicit, was that the first white women were able to produce the first white babies to populate an area – this aspect of the popular social memory is examined in further detail throughout this thesis), she was conscious of the importance on some level and highlights these women – and thus her writing sits within the dominant narrative without being overt about the point. Pownall also drew on the idea that ‘where there were white women, the aboriginal woman was better treated,’ drawing on the ‘God’s police’ role often

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135 The term ‘theatres of memory’ is commonly used to describe platforms for memory. It was popularised in its current meaning by Ralph Samuel, although it had been used before. (Ralph Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, Verso, London, 1994).

136 Pownall, *Mary of Maranoa*, 59

137 Pownall, *Mary of Maranoa*. preface
ascribed to white women on the frontier and the image McGuire would discuss in ‘The Legend of the Good Fella Missus’ in the 1990s.  

In a strain divergent from popular histories being written at the time, Pownall explored the history of Aboriginal women, too. Indeed, the first chapter is entitled ‘Stone Age Women’, and whilst the general language used through the chapter is condescending, Pownall managed to keep her writing rather factual. This exploration of Aboriginal culture is one area in which Pownall diverged from the popular social memory: in 1959, the pioneer woman of the national legend was a white woman; and hence the inclusion of the lives of Aboriginal women in a book on ‘pioneer women’ sits outside the dominant narrative.

Throughout the book, Pownall referred to the powerful, exceptional women of the white frontier to build her narrative, although she acknowledged that these women were the exceptions rather than the norms. First written in the 1950s, though, Pownall did not have a tradition of women’s history to draw upon and thus was in many ways herself pioneering in this field. The re-publication of her text nearly twenty and then thirty years later, and the way that the book could be interpreted in these changing times, illustrates the shifting energies around the publication of women’s history, and these different readings demonstrated the changes that were felt by the academy but not widely acknowledged by the writers (and publishers) of pioneer women’s history.

Both Alexander and De Vries-Evans rued the fact that a more complete history of pioneer women would be desirable, but was not possible: De Vries explained in her introduction that she had planned a broad study of pioneer women but realised that, in her words, ‘the more I researched the more I realised that I was looking through the eyes of some of the outstanding women of Australia at that time. The women I chose to put into this book were … “tall poppies”.’

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139 De Vries-Evans, Pioneer Women, Pioneer Land, 9
text therefore focused on women such as Mary Penfold of the South Australian wineries; the Bussell sisters of Western Australia; and Elizabeth Macarthur, a pioneer in the New South Wales’ wool industry.

De Vries-Evans has made a career out of writing about the women of the frontier of white settlement in Australia. And indeed, she has been quite successful in promoting a very particular brand of Australian history: one that comforts, conforms and raises few questions. As well as Pioneer Women, Pioneer Land, she has produced Great Pioneer Women of the Outback\textsuperscript{140} and Strength of Spirit,\textsuperscript{141} both of which focus on pioneering life: in addition, she has produced a number of other women’s histories that continue in this triumphant strain although they are not necessarily confined to the ‘pioneering days’.

Although De Vries-Evans chose to focus on the extraordinary pioneer women, she is not the only author of popular history to do so. Many of the popular histories focus on the lives of extraordinary pioneer women, forgetting their more ordinary sisters. Of course, it is much easier from a research point-of-view to consider the shining lights of a society, for it is the highest echelons of society that leave the most complete records of their lives (the many reasons for this are examined in depth in Chapter Eight: Forget Me Not). And it is also true that the past is simply too large to ever be reproduced in its entirety, and thus all writers of the past must make choices about what to include and what to exclude. However, the effect created by the emphasis of popular historians on these extraordinary women is to make them appear as the norm: without competing voices and stories in popular histories, these women become representative of pioneer women on the whole. In this way, it can be seen that not only are popular histories informed by social memory, but they in turn inform social memory: these ‘tall poppies’ of the past were more likely than their more ordinary counterparts to fulfil the ideal of ‘the angel of the bush’. Thus, by relying completely on these women to paint the

\textsuperscript{140} Susanna De Vries-Evans, Great Pioneer Women of the Outback, Harper Collins, Pymble, 2005
\textsuperscript{141} Susanna De Vries-Evans, Strength of Spirit: Pioneering women of achievement from the First Fleet to Federation, Millennium Books, Alexandria, 1995
picture of the women who lived on the boundaries of white civilisation, popular histories contribute in some way to the perpetuation of the dominant social memory whilst also being informed by it. And, despite the fact that a lot of the popular histories that focus on pioneer women put in a disclaimer (of sorts) that they are conscious of only writing about an elite selection of pioneer women, this disclaimer does not do much to counteract the fact that they perpetuate the myth.

Alison Alexander’s popular text, *A Wealth of Women*, was published in 2001 to celebrate the centenary of Australia’s federation. Commissioned by the Commonwealth Office for the Status of Women, *A Wealth of Women* was funded by the National Council for the Centenary of Federation. It is within this context that the book must be considered – the Howard Coalition Government was in power at the time, and the writing of this book as a commissioned work within that landscape is noteworthy for a number of reasons.

Importantly, the Howard Coalition Government (with Prime Minister John Howard central in the debates) was a vocal agitator in the so-called ‘history wars’ and ‘cultural wars’ that were waged through the latter half of the 1990s and the early 2000s. The Prime Minister took it upon himself to push for a celebratory version of the past, in which white achievement and success was central. Knowing that he was unable to dismiss all negative aspects of the nation’s history, he tempered his narrative to reflect a plausible but ultimately triumphant version of the past. *A Wealth of Women* reflected this tempered but fundamentally celebratory narrative. In the introduction, Alexander wrote that pioneer women were the ‘traditional heroines, working with their menfolk to carve out a

142 Alexander, *A Wealth of Women*, front piece
143 For discussion of this see, for example, Mark McKenna, ‘Different Perspectives on Black Armband History,’ Research Paper 5, Politics and Public Administration Group, 10 November 1997, Parliament of Australia Parliamentary Library; Patrick Bratlinger, “Black armband” versus “white blindfold” history in Australia,’ in *Victorian Studies*, vol 46, no 4, Summer 2004; Doug Munro, ‘Review – The History Wars’ in *Journal of Social History*, vol 40, no 3, spring 2007; Stuart McIntyre (and Anna Clark), *The History Wars*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2004. In *The History Wars*, McIntyre writes of Prime Minister John Howard that ‘he does not defend the Three Cheers school … and he does allow some of the … faults … but his balance sheet of Australian history remains “one of heroic achievement”.’ (McIntyre, *The History Wars*, 138)
livelhood in a harsh land.\textsuperscript{144} She acknowledged the rosy view taken of pioneer women, noting:

There has been something of a cult of the pioneer in Australia and most in a celebratory way, so the stories [she writes of are] probably too rosy; many women found harsh circumstances overwhelming and there were cases of suicide and murder, but there were many cheerful stories as well.\textsuperscript{145}

But despite this acknowledgement, and despite the fact that Alexander did point to some of the more unpleasant aspects of the past, in the main her text reinforced the celebratory version of the past. Rather than seeking to challenge the dominant social memory, Alexander worked closely within its parameters to create her text and her version of the past.

Furthermore, the Coalition Government was deeply conservative on issues such as gender and race relations. This is a feature of \textit{A Wealth of Women}, with women painted very much in the style of idealised femininity; and issues of race (such as the importance of the first white woman in an area) touched on in a similar vein.

As a politically commissioned work, when approaching \textit{A Wealth of Women}, one must consider the political climate in which it was produced. Unlike other works that are written because the author feels the need to tell a particular story, or has identified an aspect of the past that has been ignored, Alexander was appointed to write a text that the Government of the day wished to see produced. The organic nature of writing and the imperative of the author are lost in such circumstances when authors work for other entities. This is not to discredit Alexander’s credentials as a writer – indeed, she is a trained historian and has written widely on a number of subjects. But, like any professional commissioned to produce a work, Alexander would have been hemmed in by the way she

\textsuperscript{144} Alexander, \textit{A Wealth of Women}, vii
\textsuperscript{145} Alexander, \textit{A Wealth of Women}, 19
presented the past in much the same way as a curator of a museum exhibition is expected to present a vision that is not necessarily their own; or an artist works to a brief when designing a monument and must accept that their idea may not show the past how the commissioning body does (both of these tensions will be examined in the chapters on museums and monuments respectively; with regards to monuments, the desire of artist Alex Koloszy to create what he felt was an accurate depiction of the tensions of the past was ignored by those commissioning a work for the Jessie Street Gardens in Sydney. Further examination of this commission can be found in Chapter Five: Memories in Stone). As might be expected, the resulting work is one that does little to challenge the dominant social memory of the times.

Significantly, whilst the experiences of Aboriginal women were included in *A Wealth of Women*, they were not integrated into the main narrative stream of the text. Instead, two chapters were dedicated to the lives of Aboriginal women in Australia. This has the effect of relegating them to a footnote, a mere sidebar to the dominant narrative of the nation’s past. Alexander fleetingly mentioned Aboriginal women elsewhere, but did not fully integrate their lives into her history of the wealth of women of Australia’s history.

In the research for the text, Alexander collected stories about the foremothers of everyday people from the descendants of the women. Common themes identified include hard work, independence, cheerfulness, generosity and strength. As Alexander writes,

> This is obviously how many people want to see their ancestors.
> This book cannot study the millions of women who have lived in Australia, but only those whose lives are recorded, the stories people have chosen to remember. There must have been women who were impractical, selfish or whingeing, but people do not
talk about them. To a certain extent this is a selected characterisation of Australian women.\textsuperscript{146}

And indeed it is. With no further analysis of the narrowness of the sources used, Alexander launches into the history of women in Australia. Her acknowledgement of the above-quoted passage demonstrated the way that the text draws on social memory to create the narrative of the history; rather than challenging social memory, Alexander worked with it as an integral part of understanding the past.

*A Wealth of Women* drew on many of the traditional aspects of the social memory of Australia’s pioneer women, with the themes of hard work, independence, cheerfulness, generosity, strength and reliance featuring strongly. The ‘God’s police’ role of women is yet another traditional aspect of the national social memory that Alexander honed in on, writing ‘Women could demonstrate courage and fortitude at a time when communities were rough and police forces still being formed.’\textsuperscript{147} Like many before her, Alexander did not question the limitations of positioning women in these narrowly defined roles of womanhood.

However, despite all of the positive aspects of the past that Alexander focussed upon, she also drew on some of the more negative aspects of frontier life. One such example that was mentioned a few times was problems arising from ‘unsatisfactory marriage,’ which Alexander wrote ‘happened to many families, from poor to wealthy.’\textsuperscript{148} Despite this recognition, though, when commenting on individual marriages, Alexander often qualified the statement by writing, for example, ‘At any rate, they had seven children’\textsuperscript{149} to determine the ‘success’ (or lack thereof) of marriages. Birth rates as a determiner for marital success seems to be a narrow criteria for success. Alexander also briefly touched on issues such as dispossession, abortion and infanticide, and cruelty within marriage.

\textsuperscript{146} Alexander, *A Wealth of Women*, ix
\textsuperscript{147} Alexander, *A Wealth of Women*, 38
\textsuperscript{148} Alexander, *A Wealth of Women*, 39
\textsuperscript{149} Alexander, *A Wealth of Women*, 26
These negative aspects do not detract from Alexander’s strong ties to social memory, though. In fact, rather than refuting the national social memory of the early twenty-first century, by including these negative aspects, however briefly, Alexander actually strengthened her connection to the dominant narrative of the popular social memory. It is understood, even by those who view the pioneering past in a very celebratory fashion, that not everything that occurred on the frontier was positive. The present social memory acknowledges some negativity in the frontier narrative: but the balance-sheet of the past is weighted to the triumphant.

The popular histories that have been discussed thus far have all been widely produced, widely disseminated texts. However, there are some smaller produced histories that follow many of the qualities of popular histories in terms of production, style and the like, although they may not have been as widely distributed as others. *Country Life in Pioneer South Australia* by Judith Brown is one such example.  

As with other popular history texts, Brown presented a proud and successful past in which the pioneers of South Australia overcame all manner of adversity with a positive and happy attitude. Rather than focussing on women specifically, though, Brown focused on pioneering overall and relegates the retelling of women’s past to just one chapter. As with Aborigines in *A Wealth of Women*, Brown did not integrate women into her general narrative but pushed them into one chapter as a periphery to the major ‘history’ of pioneering South Australia; and illustrated the fact that, even in the 1970s, in popular histories women were often consigned to an aside of history, rather than a major player in the past.

Brown painted the pioneer women of South Australia in a very celebratory light when she referred to them. Of pioneer women in general, she questioned:

One wonders whether many of these women emigrated because they had tremendous fortitude or whether they developed it from

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150 Judith Brown, *Country Life in Pioneer South Australia*, Rigby Ltd, Hong Kong, 1977
living in the country ... There were few jobs that they could not turn their hand to.\textsuperscript{151}

This passage illustrates how Brown worked closely within the confines of the national social memory: her picture of pioneer women is one informed by a celebratory pioneering legend that does not question the validity of the illustration.

It is a very specific woman whom she imagined as the ‘pioneer woman’: chief amongst the struggles that she referred to for women who were living on the edges of white civilisation, was the inability to find good ‘help’ or, in more dire circumstances, having to do their own manual work themselves. The struggles of women who worked as servants, or who could not afford servants, were not mentioned. This goes further to promoting a very specific type of ‘pioneer woman’, and in doing so, Brown subtly encouraged readers to forget any women who do not fulfil her presentation of pioneer women.

Other texts position women so closely to the men in their lives that it is impossible to extract their stories from the stories of the men in their lives. \textit{Remembering the Past, Promoting the Future}\textsuperscript{152} is one such text. Compiled by the Women’s Pioneer Society of Australasia (a group of female descendants of mainly male pioneers which formed in 1928\textsuperscript{153}), \textit{Remembering the Past} focuses on the stories of male pioneers, and male pioneers with impressive pedigrees at that. Involvement with the highest echelons of government or royalty is common for the pioneers depicted in this book. When pioneer women were discussed, their lives were so closely entwined to their menfolk that it is impossible to separate them. However, by entwining the lives of women with men so closely, \textit{Remembering the Past} demonstrates the fact that in the national social memory, the lives of women are always linked to men and that men have traditionally taken

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\textsuperscript{151} Brown, \textit{Country Life}, 74
\textsuperscript{152} The Women’s Pioneer Society of Australasia, \textit{Remembering the Past, Promoting the Future: Celebrating the 75\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the society}, The Women’s Pioneer Society of Australasia Inc, Sydney, 2004
\textsuperscript{153} Graeme Davison, \textit{The Use and Abuse of Australian History}, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, 2000, 90
\end{flushleft}
the more important role in the national memory; and indeed, the text on the whole works closely within the confines of the Australian pioneering legend.

Likewise, local histories (which in many ways are in fact simply public versions of family histories and as such will be dealt with in detail in Chapter Seven: A Pioneer Woman in Our Past) use the framework of social memory to formulate the positioning of their narrative. Even more so than mainstream popular histories, local histories use the language and the structure of social memory to produce their texts. Speaking to an audience that is less likely to be receptive to a questioning of the status quo than most, local histories – which are the popular histories of communities and groups – comfort the readers with what is ‘known’ through a region’s social memory.

Whilst a number of these texts fall into the trap of presenting an overly positive presentation of the past with an outstandingly coherent array of women studied, Jennifer Isaacs’ *Pioneer Women of the Bush and Outback* is successful in presenting an overall portrayal whilst retaining its accessibility.\(^{154}\) Simply written and richly illustrated, *Pioneer Women* is a broad-ranging text that focuses on the everyday from a number of cultural and racial perspectives, reflecting the diversity of the lives of women in the years after European settlement. It is easily accessible to all readers, and yet covers more aspects of women’s lives than some of the more academic histories. It does not resort to heavily worn clichés of social memory to explain the past. Early in the text, Isaacs explained her rationale for the production of *Pioneer Women*: whilst there were a number of texts on pioneer women being produced at the time of her writing (the book was first published in 1990), ‘none deals exclusively with the lives of ordinary women.’\(^{155}\) Isaacs wanted to give these ‘ordinary women’ a voice in the popular history books.


\(^{155}\) Isaacs, *Pioneer Women*, 9
Pioneer Women not only went beyond the general aspects of women’s history covered in popular history books. Isaacs went so far as to suggest that Aboriginal women were responsible for the establishment of contemporary Northern Territory society.156 Whilst some of the other popular history books that deal with pioneer women acknowledge Aboriginal influence on society, they do not go as far as Isaacs does in Pioneer Women. Within the popular social memory, the influence of Aboriginal people is marginalised – not so in Isaacs’ work. Isaacs managed to incorporate a more subtle narrative into her text whilst still producing a popular history: and whilst she did not write within the confines of the national social memory, she creates an accessible text that goes further than the normal.

Despite the areas in which Isaacs’ text stands out from the majority of popular history texts, there remain areas in which she, too, worked within the framework of the national social memory, with her language often reflecting the language of the social memory of pioneer women. One graphic example of this is her use of the term ‘battlers in bonnets’157 to describe pioneer women – a very evocative term drawing heavily on the national social memory.

Furthermore, many of the unsavoury aspects of Australia’s past or the difficult-to-reconcile aspects were only touched on in Pioneer Women – although the relationships between white and Aboriginal women, the slavery of Islander women on the sugar fields of Queensland, and the isolation and loneliness of pioneer women was mentioned in the text, none of these aspects was examined in depth. Additionally, when referring to the dreariness of frontier life, Isaac instilled her writing with the aspects of the pioneering legend: she noted that ‘many tasks were no doubt mundane and repetitive,’ yet there was an ‘individual urge to conquer difficulties or even excel.’158 It seems that even popular histories that manage to break partly free from the confines of the national social memory are drawn to some aspects of it and create their narratives within this familiar

156 Isaacs, Pioneer Women, 184
157 Isaacs, Pioneer Women, 9
158 Isaacs, Pioneer Women, 39
framework: indeed, their very popularity means that they must appeal to the broadest range of readers, and the broadest range of readers subscribe to the notion of the pioneer women’s legend. Thus, the histories reflect this understanding and belief about the past.

Historians, be they writing popular accounts of the past or challenging known orthodoxies through vigorous academic research, create a narrative in which to position their view of past events and therefore produce a representation of the past rather than the past as it actually was. Of course, in every case this is an artificially constructed narrative as the past itself does not follow a linear fashion that is easily adapted to the writing of histories. And in constructing a narrative, the author must choose what to include and what to exclude – although not to the same extent as memory, history is selective as there is too much ‘past’ for everything to be included.

When popular histories are being written, decisions about inclusions and exclusions for the narrative must be made. With most popular accounts, the author chooses to include the aspects of the past which soothe the reader; and exclude the events that are uncomfortable or make the reader question their own truth. Readers like to believe that they are part of an unblemished lineage that can claim a celebratory narrative. In the main, popular histories work within the confines of the popular social memory to present a past, and reject aspects of the past that have not been adopted in the wider society’s imagination.

As Maurice Mandelbaum has written, in academic histories, the narrative structure of normal stories is not completely appropriate. The structure of storytelling does not allow for the nuances of the past and the subtleties of the line of reasoning that the author is following. But for popular histories, ‘we cannot help but embrace storytelling if we hope to persuade readers of the importance of our

subject.\textsuperscript{160} The subtleties and nuances that the academic historian must confront are not integral to the popular history, which embraces the narrative structure and the story-telling elements of the past.

History is interesting as a discipline in that it has widespread appeal and accessibility to the general public. Unlike other professions where learning and study are deemed to be prerequisites for the practice, history and the writing of historical accounts are undertaken by a wide array of laypeople. In turn, those who read history books are not necessarily historians or those with a deeper understanding of the discipline: instead, in many cases those who seek history books seek them as entertainment. As can be expected by histories that are written with such audiences in mind, popular histories largely conform to the dominant social memory. When people are seeking entertainment, they do not want to have their fundamental truths undermined, and authors must be conscious of that. Thus, writers of popular history write within the popular memory and at the same time they promulgate the memory and give it credence – for what is written in the history books is surely ‘the truth.’

As has been demonstrated throughout this chapter, authors of popular histories seem to have been largely unaffected by the work of feminist historians in the past thirty-five years that challenged the popular social memory of Australia’s white frontier and the women who inhabited it. Instead, those who undertake the writing of popular histories were, and continue to be, informed by the dominant social memory of the day. Whilst the work of the academy has in some ways filtered out to challenge the Australian social memory, the work created by popular historians continues to present a comforting, non-confronting image to its readers.

The past is a much friendlier and easier to navigate place when it does not challenge our preconceptions. It is easier to enter the past when we know what we

\textsuperscript{160} Cronon, ‘A Place for Stories,’ 431
will find there. The writers of popular histories invite readers into this friendly, welcoming past by working within the popular social memory. Popular histories do not challenge widely held beliefs and do not ask readers to expand their personal truths.

That which is considered unpleasant in history often has it as its fate to be dismissed as untrue by the general public. The recent ‘History Wars’ which have raged in the opinion and editorial pages of Australian newspapers (as well as through journals, books, and television debates, to name but a few of the stages on which the argument has been fought) show this so clearly: a ‘nice’ history is clearly more palatable to the general public than a history which makes people question themselves and where they have come from. History which does not satisfy the audience for whom it is being written (whether in comforting them, giving them a sense of belonging, or reinforcing their beliefs) will have as its outcome to be dismissed as untrue. In the case of the pioneer legend, this means that narratives which present a less than romantic interpretation of the past are (at least for the moment), destined to remain within the realm of academic histories.

The persistence of the pioneer women myth in popular history is an indicator of the tenacity of the legend’s construction. Whilst the myth has been challenged and deconstructed by academic historians, it remains an integral part of the histories that are read more broadly by the public. The legend adapts and shifts to suit the readers of the day, moving with the fluidity of memory and the understanding of the past.
CHAPTER THREE

Angels in the Bush: Cultural Depictions

_The writers of a time hint the mottoes of its Gods._

- Walt Whitman

Australia’s pioneer women were idealised as ‘angels in the bush’, drawing on a comparable English ideal of women in the nineteenth century of ‘angels in the house’. This basic ideal – and early ‘memory makers’ of such an ideal – can be found in cultural depictions. In these depictions, pioneer women are presented in a very limited world, positioned within a society that determines their place based on the men around them.

The examples that will be examined within this chapter were produced in the years preceding World War One, the majority in the 1890s. The 1890s were a time when artists and writers were consciously forming a historical memory of Australia. As Australia headed towards the twentieth century and federation, the colonies’ creative minds produced images of pioneering Australia that have since become firmly entrenched in the national memory and myth. It is mainly from this huge store of colonial images and depictions that this chapter draws.

In his article, ‘The Vision Splendid,’ Richard Waterhouse examines how social memory was used in creating popular memories of the bush and the past. Waterhouse believes that popular culture created towards the end of the nineteenth

161 quoted in _Popular Culture: An Introductory Text_, Jack Nachbar, and Kevin Lanse (eds), Bowling Green State University Popular Press, Bowling Green, 1992, 4


and during the beginning of the twentieth centuries showed a longing for times past.\textsuperscript{164}

In the end, how Australians envisaged the Bush resulted not just from what the Bush made of itself, nor just what the city made of the Bush, but from complex, and ever evolving interchanges between urban and rural culture.\textsuperscript{165}

Urban and rural ideas and images of the bush (and the people who called it their home) came together to form a fusion of conceptions of what life was like ‘in the past.’ Extending from Waterhouse’s thesis, it can be reasonably assumed that while the images presented in cultural depictions may have not been realistic, they did affirm a kind of ‘truth’ for people of those times. The memory was a fusion of both reality and legend.

These images were not produced by artists who were contemporaries of Australia’s rural pioneer women – by the 1890s, for most of Australia, the pioneering era had ended. What these artists were producing were historical paintings. The creations of Evans, McCubbin and Lawson were held up as how women were supposed to have been, how they were supposed to have acted – the inherent moral suggesting that if women did not behave as such, then they were stepping outside of their societal role. Presumably, although these examples were historical in subject, they would have had some impact on rural women and their beliefs about what it meant to be a ‘good’ woman in the context of the Australian bush. Such cultural constructions (and later social memory) defined the roles of women in rural contexts in limited terms.

The 1890s were seen as an integral decade in the shaping of Australian culture: both Vance Palmer and Russel Ward have written extensively and influentially of the legend of Australia’s past that was invented in this decade.\textsuperscript{166}

\textsuperscript{164} Waterhouse, ‘The Vision Splendid,’ 24
\textsuperscript{165} Waterhouse, ‘The Vision Splendid,’ 31
\textsuperscript{166} Palmer, \textit{The Legend of the Nineties}; Ward, \textit{The Australian Legend}
The creation of writers and nationalists, the legend was contrasted to the urban life which most Australians experienced at the end of the nineteenth century. The writers of the times were consciously shaping beliefs about what it was to be a ‘true Australian’. Setting the pioneers up as the heroes of the national story, the writers idealized their recent past and ignored the lean times of their present situation. In the legend, Australia’s pioneer women were seen as mothers, and idealized within this mould if they were recognised at all. Although the ideal of ‘True Womanhood’ was not as strong in the bush as it was in the cities, and Australia’s bush heroines were considered rather self-sufficient, the notion that pioneer women endured extreme situations with an innate sense of feminine duty and were reliant on men was perpetuated. Whilst the legend of the 1890s has been maintained, though, it was not necessarily accurate. Pioneer life was often degrading for women, and in the national legend such women were seldom remembered as individuals. As a general rule, the isolation and hardship that Australia’s pioneer women endured was glossed over, leaving them as the willing and cheerful participants in the opening up of the bush: while the attitudes of the 1890s continue to colour the national social memory, they have also been disputed.

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167 Roe, ‘The Australian Legend’; Davison, ‘Sydney and the Bush’
169 The phrase ‘True Womanhood’ comes from Barbara Welter’s article, ‘The Cult of True Womanhood’ (Barbara Welter, ‘The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860,’ in American Quarterly, vol 18, no 2, part 1, summer 1966). In the first footnote, Welter explains that this a term used by women themselves in the mid-nineteenth century to define the ideal woman. Whilst Welter refers specifically to the United State, it is a phrase that is transferable to the ideal that existed in not only that country, but also Australia and the United Kingdom in the same period.
171 Christopher Lee, Turning the Century: Writing of the 1890s, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 2002; Lake, ‘“Building Themselves Up With Aspros’
172 Godden, A New Look at Pioneer Women
173 Work has been done refuting the ‘Australian Legend’ as is popularly perceived: for example, Susan Magarey, Sue Rowley and Susan Sheridan (eds), Debutante Nation: Feminism Contests the 1890s, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, 1993; and Richard Nile (ed), The Australian Legend and Its Discontents, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 2000.
The Australian bush legend is a masculine legend which traditionally ignores the women of the Australian bush. The Australian character is conventionally believed to have been shaped by white interaction with the bush. The bush legend glorifies and romanticises the pioneering European male, who is presented as a roaming, independent character, sometimes on the wrong side of the law. In the national psyche, personalities like Ned Kelly (a bushranger) and Clancy of the Overflow (a character in a poem by A B ‘Banjo’ Paterson) are seen as archetypal bushmen. Loyal, nonchalant, self-reliant, stoic and egalitarian, the qualities of mateship and misogyny permeate the ideal of the bushman. Growing out of the legendary democracy of the 1850s goldrushes, and maturing in the ANZAC legend, the bush legend traditionally afforded little room for the women of the nation.\textsuperscript{174}

As Australia’s national identity was being formed in the lead-up to Federation, issues of race and gender were being teased out. The importance of a white nation was at the fore; and the masculinity of the Australian psyche was prevalent. Throughout the cultural depictions created during this time period, these aspects can be seen clearly.

Popular culture is instrumental in the creation and perpetuation of social memory. Popular culture uses the same images, again and again, until the viewer becomes indoctrinated with the implied meaning and the memories that they show become the audiences’ memories of the past.\textsuperscript{175} The myths of national character are created in popular culture.\textsuperscript{176} Hence, the bush ballads of Lawson and Paterson exemplify the ‘Australian spirit’; the films of outlaws make them national heroes.

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\textsuperscript{174} See, for example, Russel Ward’s \textit{The Australian Legend}, which examines the pioneer legend in depth but excludes discussions of women within that narrative.

\textsuperscript{175} An example of this can be seen in Alistair Thomas’s article ‘Unreliable Memories? The Use and Abuse of Oral History,’ in \textit{Historical Controversies and Historians}. In this article, Thomas illustrates how a ‘digger’ has made an event that he could not possibly have witnessed into his own memory, after hearing of it on the radio and from others, and from seeing depictions of the event (Thomas, ‘Unreliable Memories,’ in William Lamont (ed), \textit{Historical Controversies and Historians}, UCL Press, London, 1998, 30).

\textsuperscript{176} Peter Goodall, \textit{High Culture, Popular Culture: The Long Debate}, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, 1995, 93. See, also, Curthoys, ‘Expulsion, Exodus and Exile,’ 318.
fighting an unfair system; and the romanticized paintings of Frederick McCubbin typify the pioneer woman. And whilst these images and notions are created within the pre-defined limits of the national social memory, they work in a symbiotic relationship with the memory: they perpetuate the notions of the memory that they reproduce.

The representations of the ‘pioneer woman’ in different cultural forms, affect social memory in a variety of important ways. Throughout this chapter, many different kinds of images will be examined and considered. One thing that will come through with startling clarity is that the images and memory of pioneer women, whether aimed at the highest or the lowest echelons of society, are intrinsically the same – class is not a factor in either the depictions or memory.

Some of the examples that will be discussed in this chapter are amongst the best known depictions of pioneer women in popular culture, considered today to be some of our finest examples of colonial art. Others are obscure, forgotten by all but a few, even (some may argue) badly formed. But they are wide ranging, and give a survey of the available examples. As will be demonstrated, in the main they provide a narrow view of the life of Australian pioneer women.

An illustration of the narrowness of this view can be seen in the way that women’s work is presented. Although history has shown that pioneer women in

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177 See, for example, various cinematic depictions of Ned Kelly’s story, or Breaker Morant.

178 This is not always the case with regards to social memory. Take, for example, the differing memories of the Depression as they are recalled by different strata of society: for the well-to-do, the Depression was remembered as something they ‘wouldn’t be seen dead talking about….’(Dame Elisabeth Murdoch, Women’s Day, 13 June, 1977, quoted in N Wheatley, ‘All the Same Boat?: Sydney’s Rich and Poor in the Great Depression,’ in V Burgmann and J Lee (eds), Making a Life: A People’s History of Australia since 1788, McPhee Gribbe/Penguin, Victoria, 1988, 224). For this level of society, they remembered life continuing as it always had. People belonging to lower classes, though, remember the Depression as hard times. However, the difficulty of these times for the lower classes often has a positive side in peoples’ memories, as times when communities pull together. (D Potts, ‘A Positive Culture of Poverty Represented in Memories of the 1930s Depression,’ in Journal of Australian Studies, no 26, May 1990, 3-14)
rural Australia often did manual work alongside their male counterparts, in colonial painting, this reality was not depicted. Instead, the women in these paintings were shown as wives and mothers, and as contributing in these two ways only (the ways that this framing, in turn, framed men as husbands and fathers will be examined in later chapters of this thesis). Despite the fact that the ‘cult of True Womanhood’ never had the same influence in rural areas as it did in urban areas, (and the influence that the ideal wielded anywhere is debateable), it is this sort of ideal which is both presented in the visual culture of the nineteenth century and recollected in the Australian social memory. The nature of the social memory of pioneer women means that the nation remembers them — and they are remembered in such a way in cultural depictions — that they cannot become individuals who separate themselves from the abstract, because we only remember the abstract.

Cultural depictions like the ones that will be examined in this chapter positioned women within a patriarchal society, and reinforced the domination of men. Paintings and other cultural depictions reinforce the societal ideals of an era. - McCubbin, Lawson and the like were not simply producing images that appealed to them, but images they were aware would appeal to a wider audience. The ideas, images and beliefs shown would not alienate the viewers or readers. However, whilst art does reflect the ideas of an age, it also reinforces and

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181 Waterhouse, ‘Australian Legends,’ 219
183 Broude and Garrard, ‘Introduction,’ 141; see also Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits*, 8
directs such ideas. "The Women of the West" and Plain Living did show contemporary attitudes, but like other such representations, they also reinforced such notions - and thus reinforced the symbiotic relationship between the sources and the national social memory.

Within groups, an intentional decision is made about what should be forgotten and what should be remembered. Like a memory, an artist makes conscious decisions about what to include and what to exclude. They only show us a part of what they see – not an accidental choice, but a thought-out, deliberate move. Such choices, as feminist research has shown, ‘reflect the dream worlds or vested interests of male artists and their patrons.’ The national social memory of Australian pioneer women is thus influenced heavily by these ‘dream worlds’ and ‘vested interests’ of the male-dominated society within which they were produced; and reflects, like all forms of social memory, a contested, contestable version of the past.

Male artists were not simply painting or writing about their own personal ideal of the ‘angel in the bush,’ though – they were responding to a wider societal pressure which called for such representations. Almost all of the writers who created the ‘bush legend’ were urban men, providing an antithesis of urban life. Whilst some of the examples examined in this chapter were, at their time of production, high culture, popular demand for reproduction has seen this status altered. Therefore, it can be seen that there was a general desire within society for the production of such images.

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188 See Claud Cockburn, Bestseller: the books that everyone read 1900-1939, Sidgwick and Jackson, London, 1972, 5
189 Daniel Abramson, ‘Make History, Not Memory: history’s critique of memory, ‘ in Harvard Design Magazine, Fall 1999, no 9, 1; Lownethal, ‘Preface,’ xi
191 Broude and Garrard, ‘Introduction,’ 2
192 Davison, ‘Sydney and the Bush,’ 192
193 Anne-Marie Willis, Illusions of Identity: the art of nation, Hale and Iremonger, Marrickville, 1993, 28
Many writers have written on cultural depictions and the representations of women therein. Patricia Stubbs writes in the introduction to *Women and Fiction* that novels show women and men how women are expected to behave within society, and, as such, limits women’s belief in their own abilities.\(^{194}\) Stubbs writes that image that we see often presupposes the reality and, in turn, becomes that reality. She writes in the introduction to *Women and Fiction*,

> No matter what part in society individual women in fact play, traditional images focus on their domestic and sexual roles. This has the effect of continually limiting women’s notions of themselves and their possibilities; it undermines from within. For images are not an innocent pictorial guide to reality, a neutral mental shorthand which helps us recall the outside world. We certainly use these simplified ideas of how people and things ‘really are’ to make sense of our experience in the world; but this is an essentially subjective process. So far from helping us to perceive a supposed ‘reality’, it in fact creates this reality from within.\(^{195}\)

Similarly, Sue Rowley does not so much contest the use of popular culture as a source but how women are depicted in it.\(^{196}\) Rowley believes that the problem with the depiction of women is that women’s work is magically transformed into child-bearing in popular culture. Kay Schaffer validates this point by using Lawson’s tale (‘The Drover’s Wife’) as an example.\(^{197}\) Although women did work on the land in Australia, this is not what we are presented with in early cultural depictions.\(^{198}\)

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\(^{195}\) Stubbs, *Women and Fiction*, ix

\(^{196}\) Rowley, ‘Inside the Deserted Hut.’

\(^{197}\) Schaffer, ‘Henry Lawson, the drover’s wife and the critics.’

Through cultural depictions, women are assigned a very limited number of roles: these women are shown as wives, mothers, and/or daughters. Consequently, it is in these roles that these women are remembered in Australia: these women are generally remembered by whom their husbands/fathers/sons were.\(^{199}\) As the evidence below will show, this positioning of women was presented, reinforced and consolidated in cultural depictions, flowing on into the national social memory.

However, not all cultural depictions conformed to the ideal, and it is telling that those that did not, rarely gained widespread acceptance. An example of this can be seen in the work of Alexander Schramm, an artist whose works were not appreciated in the nineteenth century. Schramm was a well-established artist in Germany before his migration to South Australia in 1849, and the young colony of South Australia anticipated the arrival of such an artist. Upon arrival, though, Schramm soon fell out of favour. Schramm did not endear himself to the population as might have been expected – his interest in the local Indigenous people ostracized him from polite society, who found his interest improper and unfathomable.\(^{200}\)

Schramm’s painting, ‘A Scene in South Australia,’\(^{201}\) painted around 1850, is an interesting piece for a number of reasons, and illustrates a depiction of both pioneer women and race relations outside of the norm. This painting shows an amicable meeting between a group of Aboriginals and a German family. The interest in this painting from the perspective of the depiction of pioneer women springs from where Schramm has placed the German man and the German woman in this piece: the man is situated closest to the house, holding the baby, while the woman is involved in discourse with their visitors. The husband takes the position that is the place of the wife in many colonial paintings, putting her further into the

\(^{199}\) See particularly the chapters in this thesis “A Pioneer Woman in Our Past: family histories’ and “Authentic Memory”; history books as memory sources’


\(^{201}\) Currently housed in the Art Gallery of South Australia.
world and bringing him into the feminine space of the home. (For a more traditional representation of gender placing see, for example, John Longstaff’s ‘Gippsland, Sunday Night’ [1898]202). Furthermore, the positioning of two Indigenous people between the woman and the home push her further into the public sphere. Other interesting points about this painting are that the family is German – as pioneers are usually depicted as being of British descent (although one can assume that this was due to Schramm’s own background) – and that the woman does not seem at all fearful of her dark visitors, as pioneer women in popular culture are inclined to be.203 This is not a typical depiction of pioneer women, and although this sort of placement when visitors were around may have, in fact, been a constant reality, social memory of pioneer women would have them placed inside the house, nursing the baby. The woman’s lack of apprehension at the fact that she is surrounded by Indigenous people also does not gel with the traditional depiction of such women. Two other white figures feature in the painting – a young woman and a child, who are seated to the side. The young woman’s part in this dichotomy is ambiguous: daughter, sister, friend, or maid? Her function in the scene, though, is not central.

Created in the 1850s rather than the influential 1890s, it may be that Schramm’s work is so disparate from other depictions because unlike the legend-makers of the 1890s, Schramm was depicting a reality rather than romanticising a past. Schramm’s work has become more popular in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as acceptance of black-white relations has grown, and as the notion of women as autonomous, self-reliant people in their own right has gained recognition. The transformation from unpopular artist to reproduced artist demonstrates the fluidity of the national social memory; and the way that the memory changes and adapts as views of society change.

202 Currently housed in the National Gallery of Victoria
Unlike Schramm, Frederick McCubbin was much-revered in his lifetime, and his paintings have remained popular. McCubbin’s iconic 1904 painting, ‘The Pioneer’ is one of the celebrated images in the Australian cultural tradition of ‘pioneer-woman-as-mother.’\(^{204}\) It is only in the second panel of this three panel work, though, that the woman is presented as a mother. This second panel, however, is the largest and possibly the most identifiable to the wider public as the image of rural pioneers. It is this panel – the one of the woman-as-mother – that resonates in the national social memory to the extent that many believe that the final panel represents the husband grieving at his wife’s grave. In fact, it is the grave of the father. This can be ascertained by the passage of time shown in the progress of the city in the background – the man who attends the grave is simply too young to be the man from the second panel. Thus, with only one grave presented and the passage of time considered, one may assume that it is the grave of the man – it was far from uncommon for women’s graves in the colonial period to go unmarked.\(^ {205}\) A critic in *The Age* wrote of the woman-as-mother ‘The figure has the same lithe elegance of before [in the first panel] … The new life and the child have paramount claim on her energies.’\(^ {206}\) Apart from wife-and-mother, the viewer of this painting does not gain any other insight into this woman: this is her in total in McCubbin’s eyes. And it is in and from this iconic work that pioneer women are remembered. From no point in this triptych is there the suggestion that the wife may have helped with the clearing of the bush from the first panel: the man is obviously the worker, whilst the woman is the nurturer. For the public of the day (and subsequent generations) this painting provided an unproblematic site of memory. It is little wonder that reviews of the day responded favourably.\(^ {207}\)

The name of this painting and the way that it is referred to is an example of the changing and fluid nature of social memory. In places, it is ‘The Pioneer,’ suggesting that only the man in the painting is a pioneer – reviews of the day

\(^{204}\) Currently housed in the National Gallery of Victoria  
\(^{205}\) See chapter in this thesis, ‘Saying Goodbye: Gravestones as Memory Markers’  
\(^{206}\) ‘Art,’ *The Age*, Wednesday 16 August 1905, 6  
\(^{207}\) ‘Art,’ *The Age*, Wednesday 16 August 1905, 6; ‘Art Exhibition,’ in *The Age*, Friday, 22 April, 1904, 8
called the painting ‘The Pioneer’\(^{208}\), as does the National Gallery of Victoria, where the painting is now housed. However, it is now sometimes erroneously referred to as ‘The Pioneers,’ reflecting a belief that both the man and woman were pioneers. Although ‘The Pioneer’ is the title that was given to the painting by McCubbin, and was accepted at the day, the incorrect use of the title ‘The Pioneers’ now shows that both the male and female of the painting have come to be considered the pioneers of the bush.

Although not always in such detail, mother-depictions abound in the Australian cultural tradition, and particularly in representations of rural women. The role of mother (and, of course, wife, as unwed mothers are forgotten in the national memory) is rendered time and time again in cultural depictions of pioneer women: in Samuel Sidney’s *Gallops and Gossips in the Australian Bush* (1854); Gordon Stables’ *From Squire to Squatter* (1888?); Rolf Bolderwood’s *Plain Living* (1898); McCubbin’s ‘Home Again’ (1884), ‘The Bush Burial (or, The Last of the Pioneers)’ (1890), and ‘On the Wallaby Track’ (1896) (three paintings reproduced in the following pages); Alexander Schramm’s ‘A Scene in South Australia’ (1850); John Longstaff’s ‘Gippsland, Sunday Night’ (1898); and in the vast majority of Barbara Baynton’s stories in *Bush Studies* (1902). This list is but an example of the plethora of cultural depictions in which one sees pioneer women presented as wives and mothers in Australian art and literature.

When younger women are presented in cultural depictions of pioneer women, they are presented as loving, loyal daughters, and thus, this is how they are remembered. Of course, all young women were daughters to a father, but in the national memory, not only are they daughters, they are totally devoted to their fathers and brothers, and in the case of the mother being dead (or absent – presumably dead), these young women often take on attributes in the home that are generally considered the wife/mother’s role. This is demonstrated in *Paving

\(^{208}\) See, for example, ‘Art,’ *The Age*, Wednesday 16 August 1905, 6; and ‘Art Exhibition,’ in *The Age*, Friday, 22 April, 1904, 8
Petrel, the daughter of David Cleeve, the headman of a group of whalers who operate off the Bluff at Victor Harbor, takes over the role in this social dynamic as the ‘woman of the house.’ Not only does she look after her father, but also after the other whalers who work with him.  

Similarly, in The Man From the Outback, Edmund Duggan and Bert Bailey’s 1909 play that was warmly received by its Melbourne audience, not only does Mona Maitland, the play’s heroine, look after her father, but is also instrumental in keeping her father’s property successful.

Even when a wife/mother figure is present in cultural depictions, daughters often take on home duties to make the lives of the menfolk in the family more comfortable. In Rolf Boldrewood’s Plain Living, Linda and Laura Stanforth ‘turned themselves into cooks and laundress [sic] for weeks at a time’ when the family’s farm was not as prosperous as in other times. The girls, with their mother, also make sure that they have a nice meal prepared and that they look attractive for their father when he returns home, so as to make him happier about the family’s situation.  

Likewise, in Mary Grant Bruce’s A Little Bush Maid (1910), Norah (much younger than the Stanforth sisters) knew, by the time that she was eleven, ‘more of cooking and general housekeeping than many girls grown up and fancying themselves ready to undertake houses of their own.’

The Gundagai Times recorded in 1896: ‘Is it not a fact, admitted by every clever observer, that the true Australian Gentlewoman, courteous, modest, refined, with unaffected manners, is not to be found in the cities but in the country?’

This sentiment – of the daughters of the Australian bush being lovely creatures –

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209 Newland, Paving the Way
210 ‘The Man From the Outback,’ in The Age, Monday 3 May 1909, 11; ‘Man From the Outback,’ in The Argus, Monday 3 May 1909, 9
211 Edmund Duggan and Bert Bailey, The Man From the Outback, National Library of Australia, MS 6304
212 Rolf Boldrewood, Plain Living: a Bush Idyll, MacMillan And Co, London, 1898, 3
213 Boldrewood, Plain Living, 8-9
214 Mary Grant Bruce, A Little Bush Maid, Ward, Lock and Co, London, 1910, 15
was expressed over and again in the cultural depictions of the day. In *From Squire to Squatter*, we see this manifested in Etheldene, whose mother dies when she is a baby. Stables writes,

> this little child had been such a little bushranger from her earliest days that her present appearance, her extreme beauty and gentleness, made another of those wonderful puzzles for which Australia is so notorious.\(^{216}\)

Etheldene is presented as every bit as ladylike as other women in cultural depictions, but this femininity is seen as all the more special because she has not had the social conditioning of urban life. This can be tied into the idea of race discussed earlier in this chapter – as a white woman in the bush, Etheldene’s nature triumphs over the harsh conditions in which she lives. Women such as Etheldene are remembered as being ladylike, lovely and refined despite the fact that they are without the influence of other women, or society at large. It is an *innate* sense of womanhood that they possess. Petrel from *Paving the Way*, Mona from *The Man From the Outback*, and the pioneer women presented in colonial paintings also possess this intrinsic femininity. Thus, what is presented and remembered is that these women were not conditioned by society to be ‘angels of the bush,’ but were born with the inherent capabilities, which in itself is a racial construct, as it is generally only white women who are presented in these texts as being born with this sense of femininity. By-and-large, other women (and specifically Aboriginal women) are denied this femininity unless they are ‘civilised’. Accordingly, femininity is shown as a racialised construct as much as it is gendered one.

Another of the most principal positionings for women in cultural depictions and the national social memory was as wives. In the ‘natural order’ of pioneering societies, women in social memory were not only wives, but they were ‘good wives’. The one real exception to this is found in the depiction of pioneer life presented by Barbara Baynton, who is dealt with later in this chapter. As will be

\(^{216}\) Stables, *From Squire to Squatter*, 209
shown, though, the Australian social memory has for a very long time forgotten
depictions such as Baynton’s in favour of the more commonly accepted version –
that is, the version in which women’s misery in pioneering societies is repressed in
favour of the vision of such women happily forsaking all to make their husbands
more comfortable. Unmarried women are also forgotten in the memory of our
pioneering past. In this model, these women are willing – and happy – to give
up everything and everyone who is dear to them to support their husbands in their
pursuits. Cultural depictions reinforced the idea that this sacrifice for their
husbands was not only the respectable, right thing for women to do, but it was also
the instinctive, desirable course of action that good wives would wish to follow.
In turn, this notion of the pioneer woman as ‘good’ wife has coursed into the
nation’s social memory, and is a strong component of the memory of such women.
The ways in which cultural depictions rendered what it meant to be a good wife to
a colonist husband were varied, but basically pointed to the same conclusion: good
wives were the ‘angels of the bush.’ This idealization is central to the social
memory of pioneer women.

A strong component of both the portrayal of wives in cultural depictions of
pioneer women and in the social memory of such women is the representation of
them as comforters to their husbands on the hard frontier of the Australian bush.
They are responsible for making life on the frontier of white settlement more
inviting, more home-like and more relaxing for their men folk, although the
extreme dilemma of their own situations – often being the only white woman in
the area, and at the mercy of any number of insalubrious characters – is not fully
depicted. Although the isolation of such women’s lives is presented at times, this
just adds to their idealization: presenting women who lived a harsh life, but who
were happy and content to do so for the betterment of Australian society. The
notion of the pioneer woman as refining force in settlement societies is a popular
one in the Australian social memory.

217 Godden, ‘A New Look at Pioneer Women,’ 2
In Samuel Sidney’s *Gallops and Gossips in the Bush of Australia (or, Passages in the Life of Alfred Barnard)* (1854), both the refining and cultivating nature of women in the bush are evinced. After Alfred Barnard, the hero of the novel, spends his first day as a bushman in the Australian bush, he stops at the home of a family who come from the same area of England as he is from. The mother and daughters of the family put on a feast, and Alfred (as narrator) comments: ‘I never was a good hand at describing eating, and should not have remembered this, if it had not been the first repast that gave me a notion of how comfortable people could be in the bush if they tried…’ Alfred later tells the reader that

A bachelor’s station in the Bush, or even a bachelor’s farm, is generally a wretched place. Founded to make money and nothing else, decency and comfort are little cultivated … But on stations of married squatters, or where small settlers of a good sort have settled, either on grants or purchases, as dairy and grain-growing farmers, a very different sight is presented, - wives and gardens, children and green vegetables, improve the fare, the scenery and the society. Jem Carden, a sympathetically rendered ex-convict who goes in to business with Alfred, expresses to Alfred that while preachers and teachers are needed in the bush, ‘…it is virtuous wives who rule us most.’ Jem goes on to say that it is such virtuous wives who make the difference between life in the bush being miserable and delightful. Both Jem and Alfred are presented as characters whose views are to be trusted, and both of these characters reinforce the notion that pioneer women in their roles as wives primarily make life more comfortable for their spouses.

*Paving the Way: a Romance of the Australian Bush* (1893), written by Simpson Newland, also demonstrates the civilizing influence of women in pioneer

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219 Sidney, *Gallops and Gossips*, 95-6
220 Sidney, *Gallops and Gossips*, 70; Sidney’s emphasis
societies. When Roland Grantley, the novel’s protagonist, sets up a home on the Darling, Mrs Darly, the housekeeper, gives the home feminine touches sorely missing on the station of a bachelor.\textsuperscript{221} She becomes a favorite on the farm: ‘Ever ready to render any assistance in sickness, or in the thousand ways a true woman can, she gained the respect and esteem of the rough bushmen.’\textsuperscript{222}

Various other cultural depictions reinforce this notion of women making frontier life more comfortable for men, such as George Essex Evans’ 1902 poem ‘Women of the West,’ which states ‘The hearts that made the Nation were the Women of the West,’\textsuperscript{223} and John Skinner Prout’s 1843 painting, ‘A Boundary Rider’s Home,’\textsuperscript{224} which is discussed below in further detail, and which shows a very primitive settler’s home where the wife has obviously gone to a lot of effort to make the home more comfortable despite the family’s strained circumstances. This notion of the woman working hard to make life more comfortable for her husband, and the bush more refined, is a recurring theme in both the cultural depictions and the memory of these women.\textsuperscript{225}

Pioneer wives in cultural depictions and in popular memory, work hard in the home to make the lives of their husbands more comfortable. In Rolf Boldrewood’s 1898 novel, \textit{Plain Living: A Bush Idyll}, when the farm of Harold Stamford of Windahgil comes in to financial difficulty, his ‘delicate, refined’ wife Linda had ‘worn herself well-nigh to death, supplementing the details of household work, when servants were insufficient, or, indeed, not to be procured!’\textsuperscript{226} Linda and her daughters also prepare a lovely dinner and dress nicely for Harold’s arrival back to the home at the end of the day so that his unhappiness at his financial problems will be lightened by a happy home.\textsuperscript{227}

\textsuperscript{221} Newland, \textit{Paving the Way}, 247
\textsuperscript{222} Newland, \textit{Paving the Way}, 249
\textsuperscript{223} George Essex Evans, ‘The Women of the West,’ 1902, line 28
\textsuperscript{224} Currently housed at the State Library of New South Wales, Mitchell Library (1843)
\textsuperscript{225} Richard Waterhouse, ‘Australian Legends,’ 219; See also West, ‘White Women in Colonial Australia,’ 56
\textsuperscript{226} Boldrewood, \textit{Plain Living}, 3
\textsuperscript{227} Boldrewood, \textit{Plain Living}, 8-9
in the novel, Linda and Harold’s daughter-in-law, Rosalind, happily acts as housekeeper for one month for Rosalind’s husband, Hubert, when no other servants can be secured. This happy adopting of duties to which they are unfamiliar is an integral part of the memory of these women doing whatever they can to make pioneer society more comfortable for their husbands.

In *Gallops and Gossips of the Australian Bush*, an old convict wants people to know that bush men are ruled by ‘virtuous women.’ The paintings that have already been discussed show women making life more comfortable for their menfolk: the home is remembered as the civilized, virtuous site in the bush. In some cultural depictions, we are presented with a world that is very simple. One such example is John Skinner Prout’s ‘A Boundary Rider’s Home’ (1843). This, unlike many other depictions, is not a heroic depiction of pioneer life; and this realism in Prout’s work can be seen to be directly related to the fact that this painting provides an earlier depiction of pioneer women, created well before the romance of the 1890s. Prout shows a very basic home, with one room, where the sleeping area is separated from the living area by a blanket strung from the roof. However, the industrious, homely nature of the pioneer woman is also showcased in this picture: note the plates arranged decoratively on the mantelpiece, and the page from the *London News* hung on the wall. Despite the family circumstances, the wife makes the most of what she has. Such women are remembered as bringing comfort, civilization and solace to the bush.

Frederick McCubbin’s 1884 ‘Home Again’ offers one of the very few representations in cultural depictions of a woman working hard for herself. The painting depicts a young wife and mother who believes that she has been widowed, and so has taken on outside work to provide for herself and her child. This painting offers an example of how a young working woman can remain respectable – the home that she keeps is not being neglected due to work, and

228 Boldrewood, *Plain Living*, 299
229 Sidney, *Gallops and Gossips*, 70
230 Currently housed in the National Gallery of Victoria (1884)
most importantly, one is led to believe that she is working out of necessity rather than choice. Generally, pioneer wives in the Australian social memory are not remembered as having worked outside the home, although this was often the case. The lack of cultural depictions which represent this reality emphasises the fact that such women are commonly forgotten in the national tradition.

In the Australian social memory, pioneer women bravely and happily follow their men-folk into the depths of the Australian bush. This is mirrored in cultural depictions, which, by and large, work within the parameters of the national social memory. Whilst reflecting the social memory, cultural depictions can likewise be seen to be part of a symbiotic relationship with the social memory that they reflect: their ubiquity in the Australian psyche means that they, in turn, contribute to the social memory of pioneer women. In From Squire to Squatter: a Tale of the Old Land and the New, Gordon Stables’ 1888 hero/adventure novel, Sarah (the wife of Bob, the hero’s closest confidante) ‘came right away into the Bush with her “little man,” and took charge of the cooking department on the station, when it was little, if any, better than simply a camp, with wagons for bedrooms, and a morsel of canvas for gentility’s sake.’ 231 Likewise, in Plain Living, Rosalind will not hear of the suggestion that she wait at her father’s home until her marital home in the bush is made more comfortable, preferring instead to follow her husband Hubert to their property, despite the primitive conditions with which she is faced. 232 McCubbin’s painting, ‘The North Wind’ (1891) 233 depicts a woman facing a very rudimentary future, whilst Evans’ poem ‘Women of the West’ explains how pioneer women gave up everything for love. 234 Continually reinforcing the sacrifices that pioneer women made to venture to the frontier of Australian society, cultural depictions and the national social memory also continually reinforce the notion that the women who made such sacrifices made them for love.

231 Stables, From Squire to Squatter, 241
232 Boldrewood, Plain Living, 298
233 Currently housed at the National Gallery of Victoria (1891)
234 Evans, ‘The Women of the West’
McCubbin’s triptych, ‘The Pioneer’, can also be examined as an example of pioneer women making great sacrifice for love. Again, this painting gives the viewer an image of a woman who gave up much to be with her man, but gave it up willingly. When remembering our pioneer women, this is often the image that comes to mind. It gives us a narrative from the early days of colonizing until the days when pioneering has passed. The dense bush of the first panel gives way to the illuminated home of the second which in turn is replaced by a bustling metropolis in the third. In August 1905 an article in The Age said, ‘The face of the young woman shows that she is strong enough to be chastened by the quiet half hour of personal sadness. The onlooker is sure that she will soon be settling about her duties with the blithe wifely spirit of the pioneer woman.’

So we see, as early as 1905, this ‘remembering’ of our pioneers going on in the press.

In the Australian cultural tradition, the archetypal mother who has sacrificed much for love is the woman in Henry Lawson’s famous short story, ‘The Drover’s Wife’. The woman is depicted as one of the very few enduring women in the Australian legend, and her self-sacrifice, resilience and unwavering (although undemonstrative) love for her children are important markers in the social memory of pioneer women. As Delys Bird has written, the story ‘valorises both the ideal of stable family life and the figure of the woman who is the perpetrator and guardian of that stability.’ Apart from ‘Wife’ in the title, and ‘Mother’, this woman is afforded no identity of her own – her existence is tied intrinsically to her reproductive capabilities.

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235 ‘Art’ in The Age, Wednesday, 16 August, 1905, 6
236 Kay Schaffer has written extensively on ‘The Drover’s Wife.’ For her interpretation of this story in the national tradition, see Women and the Bush (Kay Schaffer, Women and the Bush: forces of desire in the Australian cultural tradition, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988) and her essay in Debutante Nation (Kay Schaffer, ‘Henry Lawson, the drover’s wife and the critics,’ in Susan Magarey, Sue Rowley and Susan Sheridan (eds), Debutante Nation: feminism contests the 1890s, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, 1993).
237 Schaffer, ‘Henry Lawson,’ 202
238 Delys Bird, ‘“Mother, I won’t never go drovin”’: Motherhood in Australian Narrative,’ in Westerly, No 4, December 1989, 42
239 Schaffer, ‘Henry Lawson,’ 204
Although quite a brief tale, the reader is able to gain quite an in-depth, vivid idea of the drover’s wife. Presenting snippets from her life, Lawson gives the reader enough detail that she is not only a believable character, but one with whom the audience can empathise. The reader learns that the drover’s wife (although still with living children and thus an ‘active’ mother) has lost a child whilst she has been alone in the bush: ‘She rode 19 miles for assistance, carrying the dead child.’ Two of her children had been born in the bush, one with the help of a local Aboriginal woman. These events – and instances like these were often facts for Australian pioneer women and can be found retold in any number of histories on Australian frontier life – resonate strongly in the national social memory. Australian pioneer women are not only mothers, but mothers who suffer and sacrifice in the very act of being mothers.

Through ‘The Drover’s Wife’ we are given an ideal of the pioneer woman, one who easily fits into the national tradition, and, accordingly, the Australian social memory. She is heroic, battling fires and floods whilst her husband is absent: but it is ‘four excited bushmen who arrived in the nick of time’ who control the fire, and son Tommy who ‘worked like a little hero;’ and on her own, the drover’s wife cannot save the dam during the flood: ‘There are things a bushwoman cannot do.’ Further, it is the dog, Alligator, who eventually catches the snake that menaces the family throughout ‘The Drover’s Wife,’ although the drover’s wife does kill the reptile. Despite her circumstances, she tries to bring up her children respectably, tidying the children and herself for a long walk every Sunday although, ultimately, they have nowhere to go. Her actions are that of a woman who does not resent her situation: ‘She seems content with her lot. She

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241 Lawson, ‘The Drover’s Wife,’ 238
242 Lawson, ‘The Drover’s Wife,’ 238
243 Lawson, ‘The Drover’s Wife,’ 238
loves her children, but has not time to show it." The drover’s wife is the mother of the Australian social memory.

However, not all writers of the 1890s sought to romanticise the pioneering past. Barbara Baynton’s collection of short stories, *Bush Studies* (1902) offers a version, very different to the rule, of women as wives and mothers (and also a differing interpretation of bushmen to the dominant pioneer/hero model). As Dale Spender has written, Baynton’s stories have been long ignored in the national memory because they ‘could not fit the mould of men.’ When her story ‘The Chosen Vessel’ was first accepted for publication in the deeply masculinist *Bulletin* in 1896, the story was retitled ‘The Tramp’, and cut and refashioned in such a way that the sexual repression which is such a dominant feature of the tale was suppressed. Bruce Bennett suggests in *Australian Short Fiction* that there may be evidence, in the form of critical and historical attention in recent years, to indicate that Baynton’s work has ‘belatedly “arrived” on the Australian literary scene’, but for a very long time, the reality which was presented in Baynton’s short stories was a forgotten one.

Baynton did not see the pioneering days through rose-colored glasses. Having lived as a pioneer woman herself, she saw the land as, at times, haunting and beautiful, and at other times, cruel, and the people who lived on it as brutish and hard (particularly the men). Unlike so many others who were consciously idealizing Australia’s rural yesteryear – and yet had themselves never experienced the harshness of the land and its people – Baynton intimately knew the landscape and the people of whom she wrote. Whether out of vengeance for her past or as a catharsis to it, she presented a morbidity others did not chance. Although not autobiographical as such, *Bush Studies* was very much the stories of Baynton’s

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244 Lawson, ‘The Drover’s Wife,’ 240
247 Bruce Bennett, *Australian Short Fiction: A history*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 2002, 80
Baynton’s direct, blunt style in *Bush Studies*, avoiding adverbs and adjectives, gave the stories in the book an authentic feel that spoke candidly to the reader. Whilst generally realistic in content, Baynton did not shy away from the gothic completely, and was not averse to using symbolism to further enhance her position. However, the threats to the women in Baynton’s work were more genuine than the threats to women presented in the works of her contemporaries. Motherhood, men, and the bush all menace the women of Baynton’s work. For some, the tendency of Baynton to portray reality too closely was too confronting, and A G Stephens, literary critic and Red Page Editor for *The Bulletin*, felt that for an Australian audience, Baynton’s work was simply too outspoken.  

It was true that in a period where not romanticizing the bush was seen as ‘un-Australian’, an author who took her revenge on the bush by presenting it as ‘never … a genuinely desirable home for women’, Baynton’s presentation was far outside the norm in that the women could not save themselves, and the men were far from the heroes who would be needed to save them.  

*Bush Studies* was first published in 1902, although it was written in that defining decade: the 1890s. When it was first published, the collection consisted of six stories. Two more stories were written and added to later versions of the book, but it is these original six tales with which I am concerned. The first story in *Bush Studies* was ‘A Dreamer,’ in which a young pregnant woman struggles against an unforgiving storm to visit her mother before the birth of her child. In this story, it is not those who live in the bush who prove hostile to the young woman’s journey, but the landscape itself. As the young woman struggles in the

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249 Bruce Nesbitt, ‘Literary Nationalism and the 1890s,’ in *Australian Literary Studies*, vol 5, no. 1, 1971
storm from the train station to her mother’s home, she dreams of their reunion and imagines her mother calling to her through the wind. Fear and unfamiliarity with the landscape keep pushing the young woman back from her mother’s home, and the safety and security that the home offers the young woman. When she does arrive at her mother’s home, the young woman is greeted by another woman, as her mother has died.

In ‘A Dreamer,’ the themes of maternity and death constantly recur, and one cannot but be struck by the implications of this juxtaposition of the two. As the young woman leaves the train station (alone) a mother bird cries a warning. Whilst moving towards the maternal home, she feels the baby she is carrying shift for the first time, and feels ‘motherhood awakened’\textsuperscript{251}: this is quickly followed by the opening of the sky to the frightening splintering of lightning. The scene of the cows with their calves is positioned against the ‘violence of the thunder’. As the young woman crosses the river, the willows planted by her mother wind their way around her neck. It is a fallen tree that snags, and ultimately saves, the young woman’s life. Maternity and mortality are closely intertwined throughout ‘A Dreamer.’

‘Squeaker’s Mate’ follows ‘A Dreamer’ in \textit{Bush Studies}. This story has received more critical attention than the first tale, although interpretations of it have been disparate. Patricia Grimshaw has reasoned that the depiction of a man and a woman working alongside each other shows how completely men accepted women as equals in the Australian bush.\textsuperscript{252} Sue Rowley has also written of how this story cuts across traditional notions of men’s and women’s work, although she also stresses that at the end of the story, the ‘natural order’ of antipodean pioneering life is restored when the ‘mate’ is incapacitated and becomes reliant on Squeaker.\textsuperscript{253}

\textsuperscript{251} Barbara Baynton, \textit{Bush Studies}, Angus and Robertson Publishers, London, 1980 (first published in 1902), 47
\textsuperscript{252} Grimshaw, ‘Women and the Family in Australian History’
\textsuperscript{253} Rowley, ‘Things a Bushwoman Cannot Do’
The ‘mate’ of the story is Mary, who is not named until the conclusion of the tale. Her partner, Squeaker, is a lazy, shiftless man who relies on Mary to do the majority of their work as loggers. Whilst chopping down a tree, Mary is paralysed, and in the aftermath, Squeaker takes a younger woman as his lover and leaves Mary on her own in another hut near the main home. The revolting Squeaker then threatens to burn down Mary’s hut if she draws attention to herself. The ‘unnamedness’ of the central woman for the majority of the narrative, combined with the ultimate fact that she is given the name of the Virgin, gives Mary universality. She is not one woman who is denied her own identity or who is vulnerable to an unscrupulous man, but all women.

Mary is ‘not a favourite’ with the women of the area – in fact, they ‘pretended to challenge her right to womanly garments,’ although their husbands thought ‘that she was the best long-haired mate that ever stepped into petticoats.’ The relationship presented in ‘Squeaker’s Mate’ is a disordered bond, where traditional notions of women’s and men’s work are revised and rewritten. Mary is given what are traditionally considered and remembered as ‘male’ attributes: she is strong, independent, hard-working, uncomplaining and stoic. Squeaker, on the other hand, has all the characteristics that are traditionally assigned to women: he is gossipy, shallow, flighty, and when they work, it is Squeaker who is in charge of the more domestic chores. But Baynton knew that gender did not define duties on the land to the extent that the myth-makers would like to have believed. ‘Squeaker’s Mate’ is one of the only cultural depictions of the era that shows a woman ‘working’ in the traditional male sense of the word.

‘The Chosen Vessel’ is the final tale in Bush Studies, and is perhaps the most haunting of all the tales. It was also the only one of the stories published before 1902: in a slightly altered version, it appeared in The Bulletin as ‘The Tramp’ in 1896. In the revised version, as mentioned above, the sexual oppression

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254 Baynton, Bush Studies, 54
of the narrative was minimised, making the emphasis of the story shift.\textsuperscript{255} The change in the title also shifted the emphasis from the woman to the man as being the central figure.

As it appears in the original version of \textit{Bush Studies}, ‘The Chosen Vessel’ is the story of a young bush woman left alone with her baby whilst her husband is away working. One day, a swagman stops by their home and asks for food. She does not trust him, so before going to bed that night, puts her mother’s brooch and food on the table, thinking that this will placate him when he makes his inevitable return. Instead of taking these offerings, though, the man tries to get to where the woman and her child hide. On hearing an approaching horse, the swagman hides, and the woman rushes with her baby towards the horseman. The horseman, Peter Hennessey, does not stop, although he sees the woman. This act leaves her alone with the ‘swaggie’. The raped and murdered woman is found the next morning by a boundary rider. The horseman, we learn, is a religious man who believes that the ‘white-robed figure with a babe clasped to her bosom’\textsuperscript{256} is a vision from God, rather than a woman in dire need of assistance. Believing that he may be a ‘chosen one,’ he tells his priest and soon learns the horrifying reality. The role of mother in ‘The Chosen Vessel’ transcends death: the young woman puts herself in danger to save her child, calls to Hennessey in her child’s name, and is found by the boundary rider still holding the child. The swagman takes away the woman’s life, but not her role as mother.

The predicament of women alone in the bush in \textit{Bush Studies} is never sugar-coated, least of all in ‘The Chosen Vessel.’ Baynton’s threats to the young woman in this tale are not metaphorical: she is raped and when she struggles against her attacker, she is killed. No vague, emblematic menaces are exhibited in Baynton’s works, but instead the all-too-real dangers to bush women demonstrated. For a generation which was used to exalting the attributes of the bushman (and for

\begin{footnotes}
\item[255] Knight, \textit{Continent of Mystery}
\item[256] Baynton, \textit{Bush Studies}, 138
\end{footnotes}
generations after, who did the same), this was a stark contrast to the norms of cultural depictions.

The young woman’s husband – although absent – is presented as far from her ‘natural protector.’ Rather, despite his absence, the reader still gains the impression of a cruel man who cares little for his young wife or her legitimate fears. The story opens with the woman moving a tethered calf ‘to bed’, and the narrator informs the reader that the young woman was afraid of the calf’s mother. Her husband, though, in the past, had laughed at this fear, and made his wife run at the cow brandishing only a stick. When she had expressed her fear at being left alone, ‘he had taunted and sneered at her.’ Baynton’s own husband had been absent for the birth of their first child, leaving Baynton to risk the dangers of childbirth on her own. She knew the fear of being isolated as a woman in the bush. She knew that husbands – despite laws that gave them great control over their wives, in return for being their wives’ ‘protectors’ – did not always live up to the role society expected of them. She did not gloss over this fact in Bush Studies.

The men of ‘The Chosen Vessel’ have no redeeming features. The absent husband is presented as a cruel, uncaring man. The swagman takes advantage of a woman in a vulnerable position. Hennessey is too superstitious to see what is right in front of him. And the Catholic priest whom Hennessey tells that he has had a vision, uses his sway as a man of the cloth to persuade his congregation to vote for the man in an election that would best service the priest’s needs. These are not the men of the bush legend, but the reality of the bush at its worst.

The other three stories that make up Bush Studies are ‘Scrammy ’And’, ‘Billy Skywonkie’ and ‘Bush Church.’ In these stories, too, we are presented with a less romantic vision of the pioneering life of Australia than in the dominant

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257 Baynton, Bush Studies, 132
images and depictions that were being created in the 1890s. ‘Scrammy ’And’ features another murder, but this time the victim is an elderly man, alone (as in ‘The Chosen Vessel’) in a hut. It is greed, though, rather than lust, that instigates this murder. Greed features again in ‘Bush Church,’ a story that seemingly has no point but to demonstrate human foibles. ‘Billy Skywonkie’ is infused with the coarse lust of the boss of the station, who advertises for a housekeeper but expects a lover and is dissatisfied with the young woman who arrives believing that the job is a legitimate housekeeping position.

In ‘Scrammy ’And,’ despite the fact that the characters are male, the reader is still presented with motherhood: it is because of the birth of a child that the man is left on his own in the bush, with only his dog for company and protection (incidentally, it is Mary’s dog in ‘Squeaker’s Mate’ who defends her against Squeaker). Like ‘The Chosen Vessel’, in ‘Scrammy ’And’ Baynton exhibits the terror of isolation in the bush, and the violence of those who inhabit its space.

‘Billy Skywonkie’ has parallels to both ‘The Dreamer’ and ‘Squeaker’s Mate’ in that in all three stories, town women are thrust into rural settings and become embroiled in what Baynton presents as the inevitable destiny of such women: in none of these stories is there a fairy-tale ending for the women who venture into the bush. Like the other women in Bush Studies, the woman in ‘Billy Skywonkie’ is denied her own identity, defined only by her gender.

The brutality of bush men towards their women is displayed in ‘Bush Church,’ manifested in the character of Ned Stannard. Ned, the reader is informed, had a reputation for ‘flogging his missus,’ and ‘had tried to force his example on the male community by impressing upon them his philosophy, that it was the proper thing to hit a woman every time you met her, since she must either be coming from mischief or going to it.”259 Comparable ideas can be seen expressed by the absent husband in ‘The Chosen Vessel,’ Squeaker, or a variety of other

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259 Baynton, Bush Studies, 115
male characters who are presented in *Bush Studies*. As Baynton so openly showed, the bushman was not necessarily the ideal he was generally presented as in popular artistic or literary portrayals, or remembered as in the national memory. When Baynton’s work is viewed in the wider context of her life, her desire to refute orthodox ‘history’ and the urban-created, masculinist Australian legend is not only reasonable, but one may consider it inevitable. Living in a society which venerated the Australian pioneer man and the ‘glorious’ past in which he mythically existed, it is obvious why Baynton felt the need to both explore and explode the past. Unlike so many others, Baynton had *lived* the tough outback life and knew that, particularly for women, the outback was not some sort of idyllic wonderland, but a lonely, desolate landscape in which women were vulnerable to the whims of men: men who were not necessarily like the heroic creations of the bush balladeers, but often desperate, cruel men who took out their frustrations on the women who accompanied them to the edge of European civilization.

More common and popular than Baynton’s vision by far were the idealised residents of the bush. Not only are pioneer women presented and remembered as mothers, wives and daughters, but also as possessing a number of characteristics which help complete the idealisation of these women. One such characteristic presented and remembered is benevolence. This can be seen manifested in such characters as Mrs Stamford in *Plain Living*, and Mona in *The Man From the Outback*. In *Plain Living*, we learn of Mrs Stamford’s generosity when Rosalind Dacre, a recently-arrived British emigrant to the bush, wants to become involved in the community. The narrator informs the reader that Mrs Stamford

> had various humble friends and pensioners, all of whom she helped, after a fashion, which encouraged them to be industrious and self-supporting; others again received advice in the management of their families, the treatment of their children, and the choices of trades for their sons, and service for their daughters. In a number of humble homes, and by all the neighbouring settlers, this gentle low-voiced woman was
regarded as the chatelaine of the manor, the *good angel*\(^{260}\) of the neighbourhhood, the personage to who all deferred, whose virtues all imitated at a distance …. All things were done silently, unobtrusively; no one spoke of them, or seemed to think them other than matters of course.\(^{261}\)

The very wording of this passage reinforces the notion that some actions and attributes were intrinsic to a ‘good’ woman – the fact that Mrs Stamford puts herself out for her fellow settlers is seen as a ‘matter of course.’ Likewise, in *The Man From the Outback*, Mona is caught out in a storm when she goes to attend the sick child of an acquaintance.\(^{262}\) Although she is caught in the storm, she sees no need for a fuss to be made over her, as she was simply doing what needed to be done.

Self-reliance is another quality attributed to pioneer women. The Australian pioneer woman, although not completely independent, is remembered as being more capable than her English or urban counterparts.\(^{263}\) This trait has been displayed in ‘The Drover’s Wife,’ when we see the wife/mother fighting fire and flood, and staying vigilant in her wait for the snake. The narrator also informs the reader that the wife is used to being alone, once having spent 18 months with only her children and dog; and that she has had to deal with a mad bull, pleuropneumonia in the cattle, and swaggies who wish to take advantage of a woman alone in the bush.

Additionally, this ability to look after one’s self is extended, in that within a number of depictions, pioneer women also look after the men around them. *Paving the Way* and *From Squire to Squatter* offer examples of this: in *Paving the Way*, Petrel shoots and injures an Aboriginal man who is threatening the life of

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\(^{260}\) My emphasis; note the reflection of the ideal of angelic womanhood

\(^{261}\) Boldrewood, *Plain Living*, 231-2

\(^{262}\) Duggan and Bailey, *The Man from the Outback*, Act Two: Scene One

\(^{263}\) Rickard, ‘National Character and the “Typical Australian”,’ 20
Roland, the novel’s ‘hero.’\textsuperscript{264} Petrel, while very feminine, is still able to ‘pull, steer, or sail a boat with most men.’\textsuperscript{265} When Archie tries to show off to Etheldene on horse-back in \textit{From Squire to Squatter}, she has to save his life.\textsuperscript{266} This follows Etheldene’s involvement in a cattle muster, in which she manages to get a troublesome bull back into the muster, despite Archie’s fears for her safety.\textsuperscript{267} Neither Etheldene nor Petrel needs to be rescued by the males in their lives.

Whilst Australian pioneer women were the ‘angels in the bush’ in cultural depictions, they also were moulded into the ideal of the Australian girl, discussed in the introduction to this thesis. The Australian girl was self-reliant and rather independent, and matured into the reliable Australian ‘angel in the bush’ whose feistiness mellowed as she matured.

Sometimes, however, pioneer women are presented as needing rescue. In \textit{The Man from the Outback}, Mona confronts the cattle duffers who have been stealing from her father’s property. Her safety is threatened, and she requires saving by one of the male characters in the play.\textsuperscript{268} Whilst these two differing points of view may appear to be at odds with each other, they are in fact complementary: Australian pioneer women are remembered as reasonably self-reliant, but not totally independent. At times, the pioneer woman can hold her own, but at other times, needs to rely on men. This sentiment found in cultural depictions is reiterated in the national social memory.

Pioneer women were presented in the main national cultural narratives and subsequently remembered in Australia’s social memory as being ‘angels of the bush.’ They make life better for their menfolk, and bring civilization to the bush.

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\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{264} Newland, \textit{Paving the Way}, 40. Roland’s status as ‘hero’ is more than a little ambiguous – he does not have the normal ‘heroic’ qualities of such a character, although he does possess some of the attributes generally associated with such a character.
\textsuperscript{265} Newland, \textit{Paving the Way}, 72
\textsuperscript{266} Stables, \textit{From Squire to Squatter}, 266-7
\textsuperscript{267} Stables, \textit{From Squire to Squatter}, 260-1
\textsuperscript{268} Duggan and Bailey, \textit{The Man from the Outback}, Act Two: Scene Three
\end{flushright}
Newland writes in *Paving the Way* about the European pioneers who will be remembered for shaping the nation.

Among them were not only the strong and steadfast men to lead them on, but fragile gently nurtured women who encourage and sustain them. All honour to the pioneers who dared and did so much, for never have so few done more in all the brilliant annals of British colonisation.\(^{269}\)

In passages such as this, the reader can see the way that creators were consciously shaping the past. Newland’s passage is not only an aspect of the novel, but a call that the pioneers be remembered in a very specific, romanticised fashion.

Those creating cultural depictions of Australia’s pioneer women in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were, generally, presenting what were commonly accepted depictions of these women. Typically, these depictions of women idealised and de-individualised such women, presenting only a glorified abstract, an illusion of the ‘angel in the bush.’ The very few artists and writers who chose to reach outside of the idealised mould for their images of pioneer women for a very long time received no effortless standing in the cultural tradition of the nation, whilst those who did perpetuate the myth of the ‘angel in the bush’ obtained a comfortable position in the Australian cultural tradition. The pioneer women that Australia chose to remember fitted in to the role of ‘God’s police,’ and were represented accordingly. Later, when the last of the rural pioneers had passed on, the dominant images that the Australian public had to draw upon were these fanciful portrayals, thus reinforcing the established social memory.

The relationship between cultural depictions and social memory was a symbiotic one. Whilst in earlier generations, the social memory of pioneer women was portrayed in cultural depictions, for later generations, the cultural depictions helped to create and reinforce the social memory. Thus, the cultural depictions and

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\(^{269}\) Newland, *Paving the Way*, 370
social memory of Australia’s pioneer women are irrevocably entwined; and have informed later depictions of pioneer women in other sites of memory.
CHAPTER FOUR

Pioneer Women in the Museum

*Museums claim to show the past as it really was – they re-present the past.*

- Gaby Porter

Museums of different forms can be found throughout the world, depicting the natural world and human achievement. Within Australia (and other countries which celebrate pioneering legends), the pioneer woman takes her place in a number of such museums, from the national level to the local, privately owned museum. Within these contexts, she is routinely celebrated as an eminent part of the Australian past, whose material culture is displayed as an example of how the intrepid white women of the bush coped with the remoteness and primal simplicity of their new homes. In this regard, she differs little from the many similar interpretations of such women in other manifestations in material culture of social memory.

The bulk of museums that depict pioneer women can be seen to be drawing upon the social memory of the imagery that dominated the 1890s and 1900s. In fact, one of the most prominent displays of pioneer women in Australia’s museums can be seen at the Queensland Museum in a display which takes its name from the 1902 George Essex Evans poem, ‘The Women of the West’ (see Appendix One). As that connection suggests, the link between the ideal espoused in Evans’ poem and the exhibition are closely entwined; and this is a feature that recurs in other museums around the nation. The idealised, self-sacrificing woman of the paintings and literature of the late nineteenth century pervades the depiction of reality of life on the ever-shifting frontier in twenty-first century museum displays.

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Yet, despite this seeming rigidity of adherance to past perceptions of pioneer women, the underlying narratives of these women’s lives within the museums continue to be re-shaped and re-negotiated. Further, when one considers the feedback and creation of museums, it can be seen that there are real contests of the past that are being fought within the confines of exhibitions.

This chapter is divided into various sections which will consider a number of different museums, of assorted types, and then bring them back together to consider the similarities and the differences between how the social memory of pioneer women is expressed in these differing theatres of social memory. A national museum, a state museum, a local museum and a private museum will be examined as to how they perpetuate or explode the myths of the pioneering memory of Australia.

As will be shown throughout this chapter, the popular memory of pioneer women most often prevails in the museums of Australia, be they small or large. Eager to tap into the popular sentiments surrounding European achievement across the nation, and hence keep attendance numbers up, curators and managers create exhibitions which reflect prevalent sentiment and seldom create widespread controversy with their displays (although the storm surrounding the National Museum shortly after its opening is an exception to this rule which will be discussed below). As James Gore has written, there is a growing recognition that museums are integral to the formation of national identities. Museums perpetuate stories which reinforce existing beliefs, comforting visitors in their beliefs of the past; but in turn, this means that they are contesting the past for those who do not hold the same belief system.

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As with other modes of social memory, for museums to remain popular, they must change the stories that they tell, to appeal to the contemporary market. Museums create memory; they promote remembering; and they shape memory. Throughout this chapter, I will examine how different museums that present images of pioneer women work towards creating a specific memory; how they promote memory through their displays; and how they shape the public’s perception, and thus the national social memory, of pioneer women.

Museums contextualize ourselves and our experiences, and, more broadly, our collective memory of the past. Seldom do museums display exhibits that differ from the dominant narrative, and in that way, they soothe and comfort the minds of (the majority of) their visitors; and although current museums may strive to be forums for discussion, those that present images of pioneer women promote little discussion for all but a few dissenting voices.

The manner in which museums present exhibitions provides us with a narrative structure into which the presented knowing is positioned. This narrative differs from institution to institution, and between curators of exhibits. The strength with which the narrative is presented also differs from place to place; and the structure of the narrative can differ significantly. For example, the Lady Nelson Discovery Centre in Mount Gambier provides a very clear, strong narrative structure: the exhibition on Indigenous history begins with a simple-to-follow timeline, which intermarries Indigenous and non-Indigenous (but not only European) milestones to give one a sense of how the history and pre-history of the area align with other significant events around the globe. The “spectreversion” of Christina Smith (discussed in further depth below) follows on in this clear narrative structure.

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272 This has been widely discussed. See, for example, Susan A Crane, ‘Memory, Distortion and History in the Museum,’ in History and Theory, vol 30, no 4, 1997; B Trofaenko, ‘Interrupting the Gaze: On reconsidering authority in the museum,’ in Journal of Curriculum Studies, vol 38, issue 1, February 2006; M L Semmel, 'The Museum as Forum: A funder’s view,' in The Public Historian, 1992
Other museums – and this is particularly the case in local history museums – follow a much less clear narrative. Such museums often simply group like-items together, with little or no explanation to contextualize their inclusion. In such instances, the visitor is left to implement their own narrative to explain the material culture on display. Such narratives may therefore have little or no connection to the actual exhibits, or the narrative the curator sought to portray. The danger for museums when a clear narrative structure is not presented is that visitors may take away little or no understanding of what has been viewed, perceiving the exhibits as interesting curios and antiquities, rather than parts of a greater whole.

In such instances, the aims of the museum are rendered redundant, and instead, very little is conveyed or learnt. It could convincingly be argued that in such circumstances, no deeper learning was desired by those who created the exhibition in the first place: rather, they simply intended to showcase items from the past – often the material culture of their forefathers and mothers.

Historically, an interpretation of the past that did not call for questioning by its audience was accepted: the past was as it was, and therefore only one telling was possible. However, this understanding of how the past is interpreted is now widely discredited and outdated; and similarly, museums which attempt to present a definitive truth can, themselves, appear outdated. In Elizabeth Carnegie’s essay, ‘Trying to be an honest woman,’ Carnegie attributes this plurality in museums in part to the emergence of women’s histories within exhibitions, a similar point to the one made by Andrea Witcomb in *Re-imagining the Museum.*

That said, to avoid an infinite number of confusing presentations, curators must decide on an interpretive thread to follow, but then create an interesting,

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complete presentation – in which the thread should not be closed to personal interpretation and questioning by visitors. Many museums rely on an implied narrative to bring about this coherency.

The controversy surrounding the displays of the National Museum of Australia illustrates how museums which attempt to display a plurality of understanding, and which do not conform necessarily to the dominant national social memory, can create controversy. As the NMA was in its final stages of planning, criticisms came to the fore, beginning with those of David Barnett who noted in a memo that it was his belief that the role of museums was ‘to present history, not debate it,’274 demonstrating a belief that there existed one definitive Australian history. From Barnett’s initial criticism, much discussion ensued with the main issues of disagreement revolving around the displays of Indigenous peoples and their history; and what some felt was the under-representation of the achievements of the (white) Australian past.275 On one side stood those who believed that there was a ‘truth’ in history that could be discovered and displayed, and thought that the museum was biased against what had been the celebratory national narrative that had dominated the national psyche; on the other, those who thought that historical truth is subjective, and whose belief was that there was celebratory aspects of Australian history, but there were also parts of the nation’s history that were to be grieved. The debate culminated in a report which

274 Quoted in MacIntyre and Clark, The History Wars, 192
concluded that the museum did not contain the systematic bias which some felt was prevalent in the national institution.

Significantly, the narrative structure adopted (or not adopted, depending on one’s viewpoint) was one of the aspects of the National Museum of Australia that was heavily criticised. In itself, the museum could be taken to celebrate the differences of the past and interpretations thereof, with the plurality of the past resulting in differing understandings. However, the Carroll Report, undertaken in 2003, came to the conclusion that the Museum should focus on singular narratives, and seek one unifying theme – suggesting a belief that the ‘historical truth’ was available and accessible. This recommendation was made in spite of the fact that, even without a clear narrative structure, 91 per cent of visitors were either ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ by the experience that visiting the Museum offered.

This high satisfaction rate was at odds with the recommendation of the Carroll Report. It was also at odds with Zahara Doering’s review of museum-goers, which found that visitors expect a clear narrative and only one viewpoint on display when they visit a museum. This may point to the conclusion that whilst in theory people like the idea of a single narrative, in practice, they are very adept at understanding the intricacies on display and forming a narrative thread for themselves based on their own understandings of the world. Additionally, the readings that people take away from museums may not be the ones that were

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277 John Carroll (Chair), Review of the National Museum of Australia: Its exhibits and public programs, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2003, esp, 66-71

278 Mathew Trinca, ‘Museums and the History Wars,’ in History Australia, vol 1, no 1, 2003

intended by the curator due to people’s personal baggage when viewing museums,²⁸⁰ so it may well be argued that trying to adopt one clear narrative may well be an exercise in futility.

The Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections, commonly known as the Pigott Report, after the inquiry’s chair P H Pigott, is regarded as a watershed moment in museum history in Australia.²⁸¹ Commissioned by the Whitlam Labor Government, it was the Pigott Report that proved the catalyst for a rethinking of museums in Australia. The Report outlined the parameters for the NMA, which did not eventuate until 2001, despite much work being completed on the structure of the institution in the interim; and, significantly, lamented the lack of history expertise found amongst curators of the time.

Museums have been defined as:

A building or portion of a building used for the storing, preservation, and exhibition of objects considered to be of lasting value or interest, as objects illustrative of antiquities, natural history, fine and industrial art, etc; an institution responsible for such a building or collection. Also, a collection of objects in such a building²⁸² and, as such, it seems perhaps too much to ask that museums present any sort of narrative. But the role of the modern museum has moved far beyond this narrow definition, and they now provide tangible examples of the past within a broader narrative structure.

²⁸¹ P H Pigott (Chair), Museums in Australia 1975: report of the Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections including the report of the Planning Committee on the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia, Canberra, 1975.
The Pigott Report sought to define the parameters of what a museum was, indicating that the committee did not see the definition as necessarily self-evident. The ways in which museums operate were broadly defined, and the Report included the definition of the International Council of Museums:

*Article 3 – A museum is a non-profit making, permanent institution, in the services of society and its development, and open to the public which, acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits for the purpose of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of man and his environment.*

Further to this, the Report identified that museums should educate, satisfy and arouse curiosity, ‘give play to the magic provided by the rare or unique object,’ and attempt to ‘improve the quality and variety of messages which that art-form is most fitted to send forth.’

The role of the museum is one that has long been debated. Randolph Starn has put forward the argument, and put it quite convincingly, that while history writing and museums seek to do the same thing – that is, gather and interpret the past – museums can legitimately be seen to be presenting ‘more history, more affectively, more of the time, to more people.’ Many have seen museums (particularly national museums) as being integral to shaping national character. Thus their significance lies not only in demonstrating the past; but also in transmitting social memory.

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283 Pigott, *Museums in Australia*, 6
284 Pigott, *Museums in Australia*, 6
286 See, for example, Department of Arts, Sport, the Environment, Tourism and Territories, *What Value Heritage? Issues for Discussion*, Australian Government Printing Services, Canberra, 1990, 49; Michael Gore, ‘Representations of History and the Nation in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand,’ esp 11
As much as museums tell us about the past, they can be seen to reflect the present simultaneously. This can cause debate and criticism, as it is now known that there are many historical ‘truths’ and there are multiple ways of ‘reading’ the same exhibition. The contests of knowledge and what constitutes people’s reality is clearly demonstrated in these debates. Not only is the notion of multiple narratives an issue in presentation of museums, but as ideas change in certain fields, it is important that museums are able to change with these ideas – what is given as a certainty today may be challenged and dismissed tomorrow (and not only by a select few but by society as a whole).

Andrea Witcomb has written that the introduction of women into the narrative of the pioneer legend was a turning point in the understanding of the past. The ‘introduction of other narratives into the conventional pioneer story … highlighted the fact that pioneer history was a form of narrative … which could be told differently.’ As Witcomb states, this revelation opened up the idea that narratives could be widened, and challenged the assumption of a ‘true’ version of the past.

288 Thomas F Gieryan, ‘Balancing Acts: science, Enola Gay and the history wars at the Smithsonian,’ in Sharon Macdonald (ed.), The Politics of Display: museums, science, culture, Routledge, London and New York, 1998, 198; Urry, ‘How Societies Remember the Past,’ 54; in her article ‘Memory and Museology,’ Naomi Stead writes that museums can and should avoid this (Naomi Stead, ‘Memory and Museology: Denton and Carler Marshall’s Anzac Hall hovers enigmatically in the shadow of the Australian War Memorial. Naomi Stead explores the project and the tensions between museum and memorial,’ in Architecture Australia, vol 91, issue 1, Jan 2002). Stead is not the only one to argue as such, and much of the debate around the NMA followed a similar theme (see below).
290 Witcomb, Re-Imagining the Museum, 99
In her guide to museums and history curatorship, Gaynor Kavanagh writes that museums are needed by people to help define who they are, whilst concurrently presenting a view of this past that is relevant to the viewer’s present. Like other theatres of memory, museums help to identify who we are and where we fit within society - but not everyone will agree with the identifications made by museum curators. Whilst museums generally draw on the mood of the wider society, there are those who do not agree with the wider mood – as will be demonstrated in the contentions around the depiction of the ‘Women of the West’ exhibition.

Whilst visitors to museums may be unaware of the politics behind the exhibitions and displays they are viewing, there is, most definitely, political influence behind all displays, and theorists have noted this imperative. Like all people presenting histories, curators and museum directors have personal biases that are presented through their exhibitions and there are ever-shifting energies and tensions around the creation of social memory which, in turn, follow into museum depictions. In some cases, this bias may encourage them to present views which conform to social memory; in others, their bias may cause them to buck against the dominant view of the past. Whichever is the case, there is no doubt that museums – despite the fact that they may be seen solely as vehicles for historical

291 Gaynor Kavanagh, History Curatorship, Smithsonian Institute Press, Washington, 1990, 4
objects which in and of themselves do not reflect prejudice – present views that are subject to their creator’s bias as much as any other presentation of the past.

It is not only bias that is presented in exhibitions, though – directors and curators, compiling these museums and displays, come to them with their own levels of social memory, too. Museums become repositories of social memory,\(^\text{294}\) with the objects becoming the conduits of that memory.\(^\text{295}\) Concurrently, social memory is reinforced not only by the items that \textit{are} displayed, but also by the ones that are \textit{not}.\(^\text{296}\) As with all aspects of social memory, collective forgetting is as important as collective remembering; and exclusions from exhibitions work are effective tools of cultural amnesia. It is most important that historical artefacts and material culture be left as close as possible to its original state to allow it to reflect the past as accurately as possible.\(^\text{297}\)

Local museums, some of which will be examined in more depth below, are an area where, in general, the presentation of social memory over and above the presentation of history is at the fore. The ways in which material culture is displayed in these museums is used to reflect social memory,\(^\text{298}\) and because these museums, in the main, did not come into existence until the second half of the twentieth century, enough time had passed between the pioneering period and


\(^{298}\) Chris Healy, ‘History and Collecting: museums, objects and memories,’ in Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton (eds), \textit{Memory and History in Twentieth Century Australia}, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994, 34; Shar Jones, ‘Local Museums: Questions and problems,’ in P O’Farrell and L McCarthy (eds), \textit{Community in Australia}, Community History Program, University of New South Wales, Sydney, 1994, 58
these museums’ conception that it was possible to romanticise that past, this, in turn, has led many local history museums to reflect ancestor veneration rather than history within their displays.

Like other spheres of memory and packaging the past, be it through commemorative monuments, history books or the like, museums have long been the domain of male achievement. Within museums, this presentation of male achievement has been interspersed with the curios of colonialism, botany and zoology, collected and compiled through the eyes of white men. Within that context, the role and position of women (even white women) has been traditionally marginalized almost to the point of non-existence. Indigenous women from around the globe have been an exception to this rule, although their inclusion was based on anthropological interest rather than anything else; and the desire to study ‘primitive races’ before they ‘died out’, at that.

As society has moved forward, and the position and achievements of women have become better understood, this positioning of the female within museums has likewise shifted shape into a more complete depiction and illustration of the human experience. However, masculine bias, which was for so long dominant in museums, has made the presentation of women’s history very difficult.

This shift in focus has been as slow and laborious as the general shift of attitudes towards women throughout society. Indeed, in many instances women’s achievements have been celebrated in museums created for that specific purpose, rather than incorporating a narrative of female achievement and contribution into existing narrative structures.

299 Gilbert, *History, Memory, Community*, 131-2; see also Graeme Davison, ‘The Use and Abuse of Australian History,’ in *Australian Historical Studies*, vol 23, no 91, October 1988, 70
300 Linda Young, ‘Resisting the Trivial: Women’s work in local history museums,’ in *Australian Museum’s Journal (Out of the Box: A special edition on women in museums)*, 1993, 32
301 Margaret Anderson and Andrew Reeves, ‘Contested Identities: museums and the nation in Australia,’ in Flora E S Kaplan (ed.), *Museums and the Making of “Ourselves”*: the role of objects in national identity, Leicester University Press, London and New York, 1994, 113
Existing structures have, at times, worked to marginalize the role of women within communities. The delineation of fields of endeavour and industry often presented in museums and exhibits has proved a double-edged sword in the depiction of women’s contributions to society: ‘work’ and ‘home’ have historically been presented as two totally separate spheres, which on one hand provides a sphere of one’s own for women’s history (within the home); whilst on the other, it devalues and misrepresents the value and impact of ‘work’ which was actually done within the ‘home’. Home and work have seldom been as clearly separated as they often appear within museums (and, in fact, within many other historical depictions, including some history books).

Museums based in and around historical homes have provided one of the consistent places for women’s history to be displayed, but even this theatre of memory has not been devoid of masculine bias in depictions. Historical homes reinforced the idea of the home being the realm of women and their influence; whilst the outside world was the realm of their husbands, fathers, brothers and sons. What these historical home museums have traditionally failed to do, is to demonstrate how women were shackled to the home by the extreme demands put on them by maintaining homes in the Australian colonial period. These homes have given women some visibility, but it is not a visibility or a place that has often been critically examined by those creating the displays. Further, by showing these homes as examples of ‘typical’ colonial homes, they tend to alienate the experiences of women who would not or could not live up to the ideals presented within. They perpetuate an ideal of the ‘angel of the bush’, the white mother and

302 Elizabeth Carnegie touches on this in ‘Trying to be an honest woman,’ 59; likewise, Linda Young stresses the need for working women to be included as ‘normal’ parts of the historical landscape in ‘Resisting the Trivial,’ 33. Additionally, see Gaby Porter, ‘Putting Your Home in Order: representations of women and domestic life,’ in Robert Lumley (ed.), The Museum Time-Machine: putting cultures on display, Routledge, London, 1988, 102-127

303 See Marilyn Lake, ‘Historical Homes,’ in John Rickard and Peter Spearrit (eds), Packaging the Past? Public histories, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1991; also Alison Russell, ‘Against the grain: interpreting women’s lives through historical exhibitions displayed in South Australia,’ thesis submitted for the degree of MA at Flinders University of South Australia, Department of Archaeology, 2004; Linda Young, ‘House Museums in Australia,’ in Public History Review, vol 3, 1994
wife who ‘civilised’ the Australian outback. Thus the historical museums intensify and exemplify the ideals of whiteness of the pioneer legend, while rarely critically examining their own place in this self-perpetuating narrative.

Museums in and of themselves provide us with explicit bastions of a colonial past which follows through into how we view the present. The remembering done in the museums of Australia – and indeed those in other parts of the post-colonial world – are situated firmly within the realm of Western cultural practice. The memories presented are white memories: either re-imaginings of the white past; or re-imaginings of an appropriated past which is presented through the lens of white experience.

In the vast majority of cases across Australia, the depiction of the pioneer legend and the depiction of colonial European life completely avoid the dispossession of the Aboriginal peoples and the cruelty with which Australia’s indigenes were treated in too many instances. The story is a white story and Indigenous stories (and those of other ethnicities) become no more than interesting sidebars to the major narrative. As Linda Young has written,

Aboriginal people present a … difficult case to reconcile into the record of Australian national identity, because they are still here and they are still dispossessed. The pioneer legend lives on among people who cannot tolerate the thought that their privilege, their heritage, derives from murderous foundations.

To that, it can be added that the social memory that dominates many museums and exhibits simply structures the pioneer legend and the story of Aboriginal experience as two independent narratives, neither reliant on the other for

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305 Linda Young, ‘The pioneer in the museum: foundation, myth and popular culture in collections and presentations,’ paper given at *Australian Collections, Australian Cultures: museums and identity in 2001*, Museums Australia’s Sixth National Conference, Manning Clarke Centre, Australian National University, 25 April 2001
completion. All too conveniently (and all too often), the depiction of non-whites in Australian museums is treated as a completely different narrative strain to the main narrative of white colonialism.

This is a feature of museums that pertains even to non-Anglo European pioneer women. During 2002 (the first year of my PhD candidature), Mr John Bower of the Lobethal Heritage Farm (LHF) approached my supervisor seeking a heritage manager to prepare a catalogue of the museum’s material culture, a permanent exhibition and an interpretive tour to be used by tourists. After an initial meeting with my supervisor, Bower, and other investors in the property, I undertook this task, which culminated in an exhibition that opened on 25 May 2002, and a catalogue/workbook that ran to over 300 pages. It was an interesting experience that provided practical insight into the preparation and work that goes into museum work, and as well as an understanding of the ways in which historians must sometimes work within the frameworks of social memory in order to prepare exhibitions.

I became increasingly aware of the pressures placed on curators to yield to other forces in the presentation of history and the tensions that can arise from differing understandings of the past. Whilst I had my own opinions with regards to the history that should and should not be included in the presentation, this did not always conform to the vision of the LHF owners who, ultimately, had final say. Bower was, himself, a keen amateur historian, and had very explicit views of the sort of history that should be included – or, rather, the version of social memory that he was keen to promote.

The aims of the exhibit were to provide an overview of German emigration to South Australia, and to contextualize the narrative of the Nitschke family who farmed the land on which the gallery/museum was situated. Under that umbrella, it was aimed to present the European history of the land, whilst also conveying the story of the Nitschke family who arrived on the land in 1854, and farmed it for the
following four generations. My brief was to provide a broad overview of the farm, German migration to the colony of South Australia, and explain the motives for the Nitschkes’ move to the Lobethal area. There was to be an emphasis on family history and life on the farm, explaining who lived there, what did they did, and why they were significant in the broader scheme of South Australian history. The LHF owners suggested that their significance was that they provided an example of the ‘normal’ German migrant family in the colony in the mid-nineteenth century.

So, the normalcy of the Nitschke family was one aspect that was to be emphasized in the presentation, painting the family as a kind of ‘everyman’ of German migration. In this way, the story of the Nitschke family could be superimposed onto the story of any German migrant family in the same era, moving from the realm of history of one family to the social memory of a community.

By focussing on the commonality of the Nitschke family’s experience, the owners of the LHF defined their desire to present, in the main, social memory rather than history. This effectively erased the uniqueness of the history of the Nitschke story, and the broad brush stroke approach meant that at times, generalisations had to be relied on to convey the narrative.

In addition to the ‘everyman’ story that the owners of the LHF wished told, they also desired that an emphasis be placed on the material culture and stories of the Nitschke family. However, as with any such collection, limitations were placed by the material culture that had been preserved – that is, although there was a relatively large collection from which to choose, that which had been preserved had been kept by various family members for specific reasons, and that collection may not have been representative of the women themselves who lived on the farms. Only some things can be kept from the past, and this again influences the depictions of women (and all others) in museum exhibitions. The women’s
material culture on-site at the LHF was relatively varied, from the personal (hair combs, jewellery and the like), to the functional (sewing equipment, cooking utensils and spices), to a combination of both (blankets hand-stitched from patches of older blankets that could no longer be used). Furthermore, the space provided for the exhibition was minimal, and therefore, the exhibit could only provide a very select snapshot of the material culture contained within the Lobethal Heritage Farm’s archives.

The resulting exhibition was a combination of those items that could be universalised in the pioneer women’s experience (as the owners of LHF wished) and those personalised items of the Nitschke family which I included to emphasise the individuality of those whose history was being displayed. I selected items that reflected the very personal for these women (such as hair combs and a plait of hair from one of the sisters) and the work-life of the women, too (such as farm equipment and items that had been made utilising recycled farm materials when money was scarce on the farm). I hoped that by combining the personal and the work-life of the Nitschke women it would work to demonstrate the complexity of women’s lives – that is, the personal and the public could not be separated into two narrative streams; additionally, the theme of a German migrant family, itself, challenged the Anglo-centricity of most exhibits.

All in all, I was relatively happy with the final product (as were the proprietors of the Farm), but I was acutely aware of the limitations of the exhibition that arose from differing views of the past by different stakeholders, the confines of the space allocated to the display, and the boundaries put in place by the very fact that not everything from the past can be kept – and that means that some prioritisation of what is worth saving and what is worth remembering can be considered arbitrary by those who have gone before. Further, an expunging of the past can take place by those who wish aspects of the past forgotten in such circumstances, by a simple disposal of items. More than anything else, my experience at the Lobethal Heritage Farm informed me of the restrictions and
difficulties for curators creating such exhibitions, particularly when the subject of that exhibition (in this case, pioneer women) is the object of a vast amount of cultural baggage with a predefined dominant social memory firmly attached.

Sovereign Hill in Ballarat, Victoria, is both an open-air museum and a historical recreation focussed on the mid-nineteenth century gold rush that transformed Australia’s history. Along Sovereign Hill’s main street is a miner’s cottage, decorated by the local branch of the Country Women’s Association in a very traditional and homely style. As Michael Evans has written, the decoration ‘expressed [the CWA’s] assumptions about the surroundings of the pioneer women of the district.’ Historical records indicate that the cozy and homely interior of the cottage were in fact a long way from the reality for women on the goldfields, yet this very comforting display is presented as the reality for women on the fields. The historical reality for the majority of the women on the fields was glossed over in a reassuring depiction of the social memory of what reality had been.

It is this ‘glossing over’ of the past, by the broad brushstrokes of social memory, which sometimes makes it difficult to untangle the reality from the ideal, of the depiction of women and their experiences in Australia’s past, particularly for the general public who attend museums and expect to be educated about life in the past. And from that knot of fact and fiction, our society, as a whole, has created a version of the past which is at once comforting and largely untrue, ignoring vast tracts of what occurred in the past.

Of course, there may have been some cottages on the Victorian goldfields like the one that the CWA ladies envisaged for Sovereign Hill. But this was not the reality for the majority of dwellings on the goldfields. Within the realm of an open-air museum, a more critical examination of life for women on the goldfields

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306 Michael Evans, ‘Historical Interpretation at Sovereign Hill,’ in *Australian Historical Studies: Packaging the past? Public histories*, vol 24, no 96, April 1991, 144
would have been far more educational for visitors. The CWA is known for being a rather conservative organisation, and their choice to show a conservative representation that comforts rather than confronts should be seen as consistent with that organisation. By selecting such a depiction of women on the fields, Sovereign Hill missed an opportunity to explore a more complex and more compelling narrative: the museum chose a stroll down social memory lane rather than investigating the more diverse and confronting reality, coddling rather than challenging.

The ‘Women of the West’ Exhibition at the Queensland Museum presents another version of the white pioneer legend: this time, the pioneering narrative of rural Queensland. A medium sized exhibition, ‘Women of the West’ consists of a series of tableaux showing a campsite; a kitchen scene; a goat and cart depicting work; a bush christening; and Aboriginal labour (consisting of a woman and child preparing a meal behind the bush christening scene, assumedly for consumption by the priest and family at the conclusion of the christening). ‘Women of the West’ is an interesting, visually pleasing exhibition that has proved very popular with visitors to the Queensland Museum.

The Comments Books that were placed in the exhibition provide evidence of how the exhibition was received by those who visited it. Time and time again, the entries note how the exhibition brought about happy memories in those that attended: ‘Brought Back Memories – WONDERFUL’ 307; ‘Precious memories and GOOD LIFE STYLE’ 308; ‘Hard but proud days’ 309; ‘A touch of nostalgia’ 310; and ‘Thank you for restoring memories.’ 311 These remarks show a deep and enduring sense of empathy for what pioneer women went through and how they lived their lives. But whilst there may have been some who had vague personal memories of what the colonial days were like– the earliest of the above comments was written

308 Comments Book, 5 June 1995
309 Comments Book, 24 December 1995
310 Comments Book, 26 January 1996
311 Comments Book, 22 February 1996
in May 1995 – what is being demonstrated on the pages of the comments book reflects social memory rather than personal memory.

For the majority who attended and took the time to write in the Comments Books, the consensus is that the exhibition either truthfully depicts how they personally remembered pioneering life to be; or that it truthfully depicts how they imagined pioneering life to be, sculpted by popular memory. In fact, mainly the exhibition provides an example of the social memory of pioneer women in Australia – and this museum exhibition once again demonstrates the symbiotic relationship between the sources examined in this thesis, and the dominant social memory of pioneer women. The ‘Women of the West’ exhibit clearly illustrates the social memory of pioneer women; and at the same time, it reinforces that social memory to visitors.

However, there exist some dissenting voices from visitors in the Comments Book that demonstrate the tensions in understanding the past. A visitor from Brisbane wrote, ‘Good, yet mainly focuses on white women, what about migrant women (Chinese women??),’\(^{312}\) while another visitor also asked why other non-Anglo settlers were not depicted.\(^{313}\) One visitor wrote

> I was truly offended at your depiction of Koori woman [sic] in the outback. “Bridging the gap between the 2 cultures” yeah right. How about mass genocide? I guess I’m in Queensland after all.\(^{314}\)

Similar comments about the nature of the exhibition and its treatment of Aboriginal society were made by Meredith Mullner, who found it to be a ‘Limited, one-sided and patriarchal view of women’s role in Australian History,’ and who noted that no mention was made of ‘mass rape of Aboriginal women [or] sexual violence of women in isolated rural areas.’\(^{315}\) More on the theme of the exclusion

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\(^{312}\) Comments Book, 20 May 1995  
\(^{313}\) Comments Book, 14 June 1995  
\(^{314}\) Comments Book, 24 October 1995  
\(^{315}\) Comments Book, 7 January 1996
of sexual violence in the exhibition can be found in the entries of William X, and of another visitor, who wrote to voice his/her agreement with William X’s points. William X asks the museum to ‘Do some better research please,’ angrily asking

Why is there nothing about ‘black velvet’ – using aboriginal women as ‘comfort women’ by white graziers. How shallow white culture is when you wrap it in a convenient cover of white domestic lives … bullshit, Black women wore [sic] treated as slaves by whites, under payed [sic] and abused.

However, these voices which dispute the depictions to be found in the exhibition are heavily outweighed by those who supported and found comfort in the displays.

The pioneer legend itself is as much about forgetting as it is about remembering. For so long, the convict past of most of the colonies was seen as a blight on white history, and therefore, this past was forgotten in favour of a more celebratory past of the pioneers. In her paper, ‘The pioneer in the museum,’ Linda Young explains this, and hypothesises that whilst the explorers of the Australian landscape proved the popular alternative, the pioneers were further embraced due to their democratising nature: practically anyone could claim a link with a pioneer, but in most cases, any links with the well-known explorers were tenuous at best.

The comments from people who visited ‘The Women of the West’ exhibit bear this out – visitors could claim a link to the pioneer past, and seek comfort in its recognised narrative. On the whole, their social memory was not challenged and therefore, their assumptions about themselves and their rightful place in a white heritage were likewise unchallenged. It was those who were challenged – who questioned the lack of non-white voices, or the violence against Aboriginal women – that were affronted by the depiction of a very familiar story.

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316 Comments Book, 23 July 1995
317 Comments Book, 23 July 1995
318 Young, ‘The pioneer in the museum’
Those who wrote the dissenting comments contested the narrative of the dominant social memory of the Australian pioneering legend. Their reasons were two-fold: the dominant memory did not sit with their own personal truth about the pioneering days of Australia; and, therefore, they possessed different ‘memories’ (or a different social memory). Although not the dominant social memory, the social memory of loss and dislocation are important narrative threads in some corners of Australian society. Although they are not embraced by the majority, they are the social memory of those who look to the colonial past not as a time of triumph and celebration, but rather as a time of loss and discontent.

For those who enjoyed ‘The Women of the West,’ the inclusion of a brief segment of the display dedicated to Aboriginal labour apparently conveyed enough of the diversity of Australian experience to address any feelings of guilt that they may have otherwise experienced. This is seemingly in keeping with current notions of the Australian past: people acknowledge that the Indigenous people were dispossessed, but do not want to be confronted with the reality of that dispossession.

‘The Women of the West’ presents an historical narrative, but it is a limited, selective narrative that can be seen to be moulded by the social memory of the white pioneers of Queensland. Indigenous dispossession that allowed for white pioneering is touched on briefly, but only briefly. Whilst the exhibition has been principally positively received, the dissenting negative responses show that it does not show the truth as some visitors see it.

The Lady Nelson Discovery Centre is situated in the south-east of South Australia in the rural city of Mount Gambier. The construction of the centre was a part of the 1986 Jubilee 150 celebrations in the state.\textsuperscript{319} The Centre covers environmental history, and merges both European and Aboriginal histories of the

\textsuperscript{319} Pamphlet, ‘Come Adventuring: The Lady Nelson, Mount Gambier, SA,’ The Lady Nelson Discovery Centre, Mount Gambier
area surrounding the famous Blue Lake. The jewel of the Centre is the spectravision theatre presentation, in which an electronically-created vision of Christina Smith tells the story of the local Buandig people.\footnote{The name ‘Buandig’ is spelt various ways. Popular versions include Booandik; Buandik; and Buandig. The spelling used here is taken from \textit{Aboriginal Australia (Map)}, compiled by David Horton. 3rd ed., Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Distributed by the Australian Surveying and Land Information Group, Department of Industry, Science and Resource, 2000.} Smith, with her husband James, was determined to convert the Buandig people to Christianity, and to provide better conditions for the Buandigs. The Smiths established a home and school for Aboriginals in Mount Gambier, and after James’ death in 1860, Christina continued to work with the Indigenous peoples of the area. In 1880, she published \textit{The Booandik Tribe of South Australian Aborigines: a sketch of their habits, customs, legends, and language.}\footnote{Pamphlet, ‘Christina Smith and the Booandik: ‘People of the Reeds,’ The Lady Nelson Discovery Centre, Mount Gambier; Mrs James Smith, \textit{The Booandik Tribe of South Australian Aborigines: a sketch of their habits, customs, legends and languages; also: an account of the effort made by Mr and Mrs James Smith to Christianize and civilize them}, E Spiller, Adelaide, 1880 [reprinted by Paperworks, Naracoorte, 2001, in facsimile edition]}  

Jane Haggis, in her article ‘The Social Memory of a Colonial Frontier,’ wrote of the Discovery Centre  

This exhibition is quite remarkable in terms of its powerful depiction of Aboriginal presence in this land in terms of longevity, culture and history, and in its critical view of the impact of settler colonialism. I do not know of another rural (or indeed urban) museum that so graphically depicts the story of conquest. The lynchpin of this is the figure of Christina and her words.\footnote{Haggis, ‘The Social Memory of a Colonial Frontier,’ 93} 

And indeed, it is through the figure of Smith that the real tragedy of the Buandig people is expressed. From the narrated voice of Smith’s writings, the visitor is told of the destruction of the local Indigenous population, whose lands stretched from the Glenelg River to Beachport, and some thirty-miles inland.
Unlike so many other museums, the Discovery Centre tells the story of the destruction of the Indigenous people, although the only chance that the Buandig are given to ‘speak’ for themselves is through the intermediary of Smith.\textsuperscript{323} The use of the ethereal figure of Smith, though, and her writings, provide a softening effect, and work to create a much more palatable memory, where the ‘civilising’ forces of the white woman on intercultural landscapes are at the fore.\textsuperscript{324}

Through the spectravision, the voice of Smith describes her disgust that certain Europeans hunted the Indigenous peoples in retribution for killing stock. She expresses her fear that the Buandig people will be forgotten. From this seemingly sympathetic standpoint, though, she then goes on to paint a picture of a rather savage group of people, where the men are cruel to their wives, and where women routinely kill their own children. By doing so, Smith’s work as a missionary is safely entrenched in the notions of the white woman civilising the frontier\textsuperscript{325}, and her part in the local social memory remains intact. Her part in the story of settlement can be constructed as positive, and celebrated as such.

\textsuperscript{324} Haggis discusses this in some detail in ‘The Social Memory of a Colonial Frontier,’ 96
\textsuperscript{325} Much work has been done on missionaries. This includes, but is not limited to, Penny Brock, ‘Aboriginal Families and the law in an era of assimilation and segregation 1890s-1950s,’ in Diane Kirkby (ed.), Sex, Power and Justice: historical perspectives of law in Australia, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1995, 133-49; Richard Broome, Aboriginal Australians: black responses to white dominance, 1788-2001, 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed., Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest, 2002; Tony Swain and Deborah Bird Rose (eds), Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions: ethnographic and historical studies, Australian Association for the Study of Religions, Bedford Park, 1988; Caroline Olivia Mary Laurence, Aboriginal Identity: the contribution of a mission home, a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of a Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Geography, University of Adelaide, November 1984; Hans Joachim Schmiechen, The Hermannsburg Mission Society in Australia, 1866-1898: changing missionary attitudes and their effects on Aboriginal inhabitants, Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honours in History, University of Adelaide, 1971; R M Gibbs, The Aborigines, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1974, especially 79; Felicity Jensz, The Moravian-run Ebenezer mission station in north-western Victoria: a German perspective, Thesis submitted for the Degree of Masters of Arts, Department of German and Swedish Studies, University of Melbourne, 2000; Graham Mitchell Townley, Missionaries, Mercenaries and Misfits: service relations in the administration of remote Aboriginal communities in the Western Desert region of Australia, Doctoral Thesis, University of Western Australia, Department of Anthropology, 2001; Knapman, White Women in Fiji, especially 133-4 and 19-23.
Smith fails to identify her own part in the destruction of the Buandig, and the main failing of the Discovery Centre is that it, too, fails to overtly acknowledge the part that missionaries such as Smith played in the devastation of Indigenous communities on intercultural frontiers. The part played by Smith in the dislocation of the Buandig is dismissed in signage in the museum by stating that she ‘may’ have ‘unwittingly contributed’ to their dislocation: within a postcolonial world, the failure of the Discovery Centre to grant this truth is piercingly apparent.

However, within popular social memory, this aspect of intercultural contact is forgotten. Smith, and missionaries such as her, were as active in their desire to destroy traditional Aboriginal society as were those who farmed the land. Unlike many of the settlers who wanted the Indigenous population completely removed, though, missionaries were content to see just their culture gone. Within social memory, and the Discovery Centre, this is constructed positively (and, when compared to slaughter, can be construed as just that) but in actuality, those who sought to destroy traditional societies were just as devastating to the Buandig and other such groups, in the long run. The Discovery Centre can construct Smith as a celebratory figure in the local history of Mount Gambier because the Australian popular memory fails to acknowledge the catastrophic affect that denying people their culture has on their society.

Overall, though, the Discovery Centre should be recognised as presenting a relatively thorough examination of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal history of the south-east of South Australia; one which goes a long way to confronting a difficult shared history of the land. It may not traverse the full spectrum of Indigenous dislocation and dispossession, but within the context of museum representation, and compared with others like it, the Discovery Centre’s efforts are laudable.

In mid-2004, I visited the Jamestown National Trust Museum, an archetypal local history museum in the mid-North of South Australia. Like so many of these
community museums, this one was mainly concerned with the actions and deeds of the European forefathers of the district. Women’s, Indigenous and children’s history was dealt with cursorily. The one exception to this was the emphasis on Frederina Humphris, whose story was recounted in the ‘Prominent Citizens’ display.

Despite this depiction of a female voice in the narrative, Frederina’s early life was not related at all – the first detail given was that on 3 March 1864, Frederina married Edmund Humphris at her parents’ home in McLaren Vale. Almost 20 per cent of the information under Frederina’s display, following the details of her marriage, was devoted to recounting the business dealings (predominantly failings) of her husband. The rest of the display focussed on the success of the Aerated Water Factory that Frederina took over and ran following her husband’s death in 1882.

Frederina’s story was presented in the context of other businesspeople (of whom all others were men), and her actual life was only dealt with fleetingly. Frederina’s success was easy to incorporate into the museum’s narrative because her success was the identifiable success usually associated with men. No other women’s stories were given, although there was a small display of irons, linen and wedding photos which one can guess suggested the ‘women’s realm’ of history.

Whilst visiting the museum, I spoke with the woman working there that day. She asked what I was studying, and I explained that I was researching pioneer women in Australia expecting her, as many local historians are wont to do, to begin waxing lyrical about her female forebears. Instead, this woman explained quite authoritatively, and perhaps a touch condescendingly, that I was wasting my time – she was categorical in her belief that early in European settlement, women had very little to do with ‘progress’, instead focusing on housework, having babies and sometimes helping their husbands on the land. When I tried to push the point
with her, I was dismissed out of hand and told that women did not really contribute to early European settlement in Australia.

It was particularly interesting to hear what an elderly, white Australian woman considered contributing to the foundation of European society, and how that consisted of a model that devalued the place of women within that society. Despite ample evidence that women were in fact quite active on the land, most particularly when their husbands were away, this woman chose not to remember that part of the past. Additionally, the stresses of running a colonial home, or giving birth in harsh circumstances, did not rate as significant. Casually, this woman diminished the role that white women played within early European settlements.

The view was that white men created the district’s history. It was a view that was displayed throughout the museum and was reinforced by the woman working there that day. Indeed, this particular style of interpreting the past was accepted as the norm until the very recent past; but it was surprising to see it operating in the twenty-first century, even within the realm of a local history museum. If the social memory of the pioneering past can be seen to embrace a simple version of the Australian past, the Jamestown National Trust Museum took this to another level, reverting to an even earlier version of the pioneer social memory – one where only the masculine version of the legend is considered.

Regional museums were a specific focus of the Pigott Report. Through the Report, the Committee identified a number of issues relating to local museums, and a number of issues that such museums should bear in mind in their presentation of the past. These issues included the lack of staff expertise (in either museum practice or history), and the lack of information kept on record of various items held within collections. Despite the lapse of time since the Report was written and tabled and today, it seems that many local history museums still struggle with the same issues that confronted provincial museums in the 1970s.
The ways that history and heritage intersect are best seen in local museums. The display of everyday objects is, in many cases, a homage to heritage over history, and as David Lowenthal has written, ‘heritage means that we save a whole lot of stuff that probably does not warrant saving.’ 326 This use of heritage has further exacerbated the issues in presentation in local history museums as historians were not engaged with the rise of the heritage industry, thus meaning that the two streams – which in so many ways are closely linked – did not come together as they may have to the benefit of each.327

The Pioneer Women’s Hut in Tumbarumba, New South Wales, is another example of how outside interpretations of what is valuable, and worthy of retelling and remembering, contribute to the final production. Wendy Hucker, curator of the Hut, has written of the community insistence that the word ‘pioneer’ be included in the title of the museum; and the grappling of the wider community with the idea of a museum that celebrated the everyday past, rather than the celebratory, famous past.328

Focussing on average women and their experiences in rural Australia, the Hut was founded in 1985 (three years shy of the much-celebrated centenary of white colonisation of Australia) and is run by volunteers. Hucker’s experience demonstrates the community compulsion to depict a very specific type of pioneer woman who is tightly governed by the community’s social memory of Australia’s past.

As such, Hucker had to contend with her own desires for the end product whilst engaging the wider community in her project to ensure the success of the

327 Judy Wing, ‘History and Heritage: Process and problems,’ in Public History Review, vol 5-6, 1996-7
final product. Today, the Hut is embraced by the local community and promoted as a local site of interest, but one has to wonder if this would have occurred had the word ‘pioneer’ been left from its title.

The National Pioneer Women’s Hall of Fame, situated in Alice Springs, opened in September 1994, and is an example of where historians and curators have been given reign to create a complex, intricate history of pioneer women, not encumbered by the social memory entwined with the term – albeit whilst retaining the title, ‘pioneer’. This museum differs from other museums that celebrate the memory of pioneers in that it takes the notion of pioneers considerably further: in the Pioneer Women’s Hall of Fame, pioneer women are not necessarily white women living in the bush in times of early settlement but women from different backgrounds, who are significant and celebrated as pioneers in their chosen area, from the arts to aviation.

The NPWHF rejects the popular interpretations of the social memory that is evoked by the use of the words ‘pioneer women’ by expanding and diversifying that term, and not relying on the connotations of the phrase to frame the exhibition’s content. The Hall of Fame’s collection policy explains the museum’s definition of ‘pioneer women’ thus:

A pioneer woman is considered any woman who is a pioneer in her chosen field; referring not only to the traditional meaning of the word - a colonist, explorer or settler in a new land but to anyone who is an innovator or developer of something new. This means that we should not only commemorate those women who were the early settlers in Australia, who battled through considerable hardships; but also those who have attained pioneering achievements such as the first women doctors, lawyers, aviators etc.

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329 I visited the National Pioneer Women’s Hall of Fame in 2004. The museum has since relocated (in March 2007) to the Old Alice Springs Gaol.
The NPWHF seeks to commemorate the achievement of all Australian women - not just white Europeans but also those from Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and ethnic backgrounds.\(^{330}\)

The National Pioneer Women’s Hall of Fame does not only venerate the European women who lived on the outskirts of white settlement – nor does it seek to. Rather, it looks to contextualise all women’s experiences into a broad understanding of what it means to be a ‘pioneer.’

‘Ordinary Women, Extraordinary Lives’ is the permanent exhibition that makes up the bulk of the Hall of Fame’s display, and covers the fields of academia, medicine, law, veterinary science, architecture, public service, politics, telecommunications, the film industry, aviation, the arts, the church and sport. Some space is given to the more common version of the pioneer women’s story – ie, white women on the outskirts of European settlement – under the ‘Women’s Work’ and the ‘Women at the Heart’ exhibitions.

It can be seen that the NPWHF presents a diverse history, one that does not rely on social memory and the evocations of the use of the term ‘pioneer women.’ By diversifying the term in this manner, the NPWHF provides one of the broadest examples of the history of pioneer women.

The reaction to the NPWHF reflects this diversity of presentation: ‘A superb presentation covering all facets of Australia’s women’; ‘Excellent – a real celebration of women’s determination!’; and ‘It’s a place that you can see real pioneers. Wonderful, it makes you realise how hard women work!’\(^{331}\) The lack of emphasis on memory – which was so prevalent in comments about the ‘Women of the West’ exhibition – demonstrates how the two exhibitions were differently understood and approached by visitors.


Given what we know of the responses to other museums from visitors, though, there must be some who visit Alice Spring’s NPWHF and feel disappointed that it does not wholly and solely encompass the particular definition of pioneer women that is depicted elsewhere. Indeed, it could reasonably be assumed that there are some who leave frustrated that they do not see that which they expected.

Pioneer women and their depiction in Australian museums of all types is complex and multilayered, dictated by a number of different factors. However, it is impossible to escape the social memory of pioneer women that visitors bring with them when they visit such exhibitions, and the connotations that are evoked by the term. Further, curators have to tread the line between presenting their truth, the truth of their employer, and the truth that will engage their viewing public. This can indeed be a fine balancing act, and one that may impede a more complex telling of their pioneer legend and European settlement of the land from being told.

Museums have a duty to present as thorough a history as possible, but are confined by the space in which to present it, perhaps more so than any other theatre of memory. Where history books have the capacity to present in much detail, museums have to get as much information as possible in as short a space as possible – too much information and visitors will simply tune out. That said, museums can, and should, present complex narratives for their visitors, and the museums covered in this chapter cover a broad spectrum of styles and narratives. Those that are the most successful are the ones that offer the broadest interpretations, and that address as many aspects of the past as possible – the ones that play not on social memory but on a broader understanding of what life was like in the past.
Museums provide sites where curators and audiences negotiate the cultural memories of a society. Social memory is not a static thing: in fact, it differs (even slightly) from one person to the next. Thus museums offer locations for the negotiations of the past to be verbalised and examined; and most museums demonstrate the popular myths of the nation’s past. It is in these exhibitions that the pioneer women’s legend is illustrated.
CHAPTER FIVE

Memories in Stone: Pioneer Women and Memorials

Stone gives a false sense of continuity, a deceptive assurance of life.

- Lewis Mumford

Monuments and memorials provide permanent sites of memory. In embedding abstracts, ideals and individuals in a concrete form, they provide societies with sites to evoke memory and to contemplate remembrance. Monuments and memorials to pioneer women take on a variety of forms, from the traditional (the Petrie Tableau situated in front of the Brisbane Town Hall, erected in 1988), to the woman-specific (the Pioneer Women’s Garden in Adelaide), to the personal (the tombstones that signify the final resting places of such women across Australia and which will be examined in the following chapter).

Where museum exhibitions are portable and impermanent, and can change and shift with public sentiment, monuments are created to stand the test of time. They are permanent memory-markers that, rather than responding to shifting energies, are instead interpreted differently as the audience changes.

The following two chapters will examine both traditional monuments and memorials, as well as somewhat less conventional forms of public monument in the form of memorial grave markers. Thus, I will analyze how both strangers and families remembered pioneer women.

Monuments act as both markers (or signs) and prompts for social memory and as prompts for individual forgetting. Once something has been cast in

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monument form, the need for individual memory decreases to some extent.\textsuperscript{333} The responsibility of each person to remember diminishes as the memory becomes the responsibility of the society. The simple fact of a monument being in place does not mean that the community will necessarily remember the event or person that the monument commemorates, though. In many ways, creating a monument displaces memory, making it fixed in a location to which it can have limited ties.\textsuperscript{334} For example, ‘pioneer women’ are popularly accepted as being rural women and yet Adelaide, Melbourne and Perth all have memorials to these women (as will be discussed below) within city perimeters.\textsuperscript{335}

Yet this seeming displacement can also have a settling effect on memory. By placing memorials in capital cities, urban communities are bound with a rural memory, an idyll of the rural past. Kirk Savage writes

Monuments serve to anchor collective remembering, a process dispersed, ever changing, and ultimately intangible, in highly condensed, fixed, and tangible sites. Monuments embodied and legitimated the very notion of a common memory, and by extension the notion of the people who possessed and rallied around such a memory.\textsuperscript{336}

Hence, whilst the memory may become displaced, more importantly, the monument can bind the group doing the remembering. By memorializing a memory, it becomes the acknowledged, proper, and to the wider community, the \textit{true} memory. For those who wish to remember, the transposed nature of the monument from the site of the occurrence is not an issue.

\textsuperscript{333} Young, ‘Memory, Countermemory and the End of Monument,’ 62
\textsuperscript{334} Daniel Bindman, ‘Bribing the Vote: eighteenth century monuments and the futility of commemoration,’ in Adrian Forty and Susanne Küchler (eds), \textit{The Art of Forgetting}, Berg, Oxford, 1999, 96; Young, ‘Memory, Countermemory,’ 59
\textsuperscript{335} Rosalind Krauss discusses this displacement of monument in \textit{The Originality of the Avant-garde and other modernist myths}, MIT Press, Cambridge MAS, 1985, 280
Another function of monuments can be to stir memory, causing those who view them to recall those people immortalised in stone.\footnote{Françoise Choay, \textit{The Invention of the Historic Monument}, (translated by Lauren M O'Connell), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, 6} However, like all prompts for social memory, this is not a personal remembrance that is evoked but an image construed by the monument and all other prompts for social memory that exist (and which have been examined through this thesis).

Further, monuments act as the embodiment of remembrance. Perpetuating external memory, they are the expressions of the cultural dialogue that is social memory.\footnote{Peter Tonkin and Janet Laurence, ‘Space and Memory: a meditation on memorials and monuments: Peter Tonkin and Janet Laurence contemplate the potential of the contemporary monument in a world fascinated with memorialising,’ in \textit{Architecture Australia}, vol 92, issue 5, Sept-Oct 2003; Savage, ‘The Politics of Memory,’ 130; Daniel J Sherman, ‘Art, Commerce, and the Production of Memory in France After World War One,’ in John R Gillis (ed.), \textit{Commemorations: the politics of national identity}, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1994, 186} As with all forms of social memory, ‘Constructing a memorial is a conscious act of choosing to remember certain people and events, and by implication choosing not to remember other people and events.’\footnote{Tim Cole, ‘Turning Places of Holocaust History into Places of Holocaust Memory: Holocaust memorials in Budapest, Hungary, 1945-95,’ in Shelley Hornstein and Florence Jacobowitz (eds), \textit{Image and Remembrance: representations of the Holocaust}, Indiana University Press, Bloomingdale, 2003, 272} In this case, a conscious act of choosing to remember an abstract ideal of pioneer women has been the overriding norm, whilst an equally conscious forgetting of individuals has taken place. This can be ascertained by the fact that memorials which celebrate individuality, whether that is in the form of individual women or those groups of women who act outside the norms of societal expectations, do not exist.

There are various reasons why societies choose to erect monuments and memorials to certain people and events. One important reason is the way it can be an expression of the society’s identity\footnote{Choay, \textit{The Invention of the Historic Monument}, 138} – by memorializing certain aspects of the past, the society is also claiming them as a part of their future. Another important reason for such memorialization is to try and hold on to those things that, by their very nature, cannot be kept: in this case, memories. W Fitzhugh Brundage has
written, ‘Because memories are transitory, people yearn to make them permanent by rendering them in physical form. By erecting monuments or marking off sacred places, groups anchor their memories in space and time.’\textsuperscript{341} The quickening pace of change in the nineteenth century, following the Industrial Revolution, was an important catalyst in the increase in the number of monuments being erected from that point onwards – a fear was held in the community that if memory was left to its own devices, and not set in stone, it would be lost.\textsuperscript{342} So great was the increase in creating monuments in that century that a word was created to express it – \textit{statuomanie},\textsuperscript{343} meaning literally, a mania for statues. This was intensified in colonial regions, where there was also the added incentive of ‘creating history’ – creating a solid, identifiable, European cultural heritage.\textsuperscript{344} Nineteenth century secular monuments were to the memory of men, though – according to K S Inglis, who has studied memorials in Australia in some depth, the one notable, noticeable distinction was Queen Victoria who, as sovereign leader, was the exception to the rule in Australia that fame (and therefore the right to be immortalized in stone) was a male prerogative.\textsuperscript{345}

Monuments and memorials were not only created to celebrate the past, though: they were also created as celebrations of the present. The monuments that have lasting meanings are ambiguous in their representations – not only do they speak of the past to the present, but they remain relevant in the future (although, of course, the ways in which they are read change with time and society). They can withstand the contestations of their depictions through time. But because of this need to speak of the past in the present and future, monuments and memorials can

\textsuperscript{341} W Fitzhugh Brundage, ‘No Deed But Memory,’ in W Fitzhugh Brundage (ed.), \textit{Where These Memories Grow: history, memory and Southern identity}, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 2000, 8
\textsuperscript{342} Savage, ‘The Politics of Memory,’ 130
\textsuperscript{343} Sherman, ‘Art, Commerce and the Production of Memory,’ 187
\textsuperscript{344} Simon Cameron, \textit{Silent Witnesses: Adelaide’s Statues and Monuments}, Wakefield Press, Adelaide, 1997, ii
be subject to controversy. Monuments and memorials present only one version of the past, and therefore exclude the memories of many. Which memories to include and which to forget can create contesting ideals of remembrance and hence what should be included in the memorial.

Monuments and memorials that present images of women in Australia can be criticised not only for presenting merely one version of memory, though, but also for vastly under representing women in general, and this is indeed the case across the Western world. Official urban markers – not only monuments and memorials, but also street and suburb names – diminish the visibility of all women in Western society. However, there are not as few monuments to women in Australian society as one may imagine – but rather than taking ‘centre stage’ as monuments to men tend to do, monuments to women tend to be not so obvious, tucked away, as they often are, from the mainstream of daily living.

When women are presented in monuments, in Australia and other comparable nations, it is often as abstracts, rather than as representations of individual women. Frequently, these abstract ideals that such women represent are ideals far removed from the reality of most women’s lives. For example, traditionally the emblem of the woman has been used to signify justice and/or liberty – for many years justice or liberty for women was not a political and legal reality. Even when women are presented as abstract ideals, such as ‘chastity’ or ‘virtue,’ they are often partially exposed, with one or both breasts revealed. This display of the female form figures the female as an object of desire and observation. Further, women can be presented as abstracts of an ideal of men, such as in ‘The Spirit of Botany,’ a monument to the memory of Sir Joseph Banks, in

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346 Tonkin and Laurence, ‘Space and Memory’; William Gass, ‘Monumentality/Mentality,’ in *Oppositions*, 25, Fall 1982, 183; John Bodnar, ‘Public Memory in the American City,’ 74
347 Davison, ‘The Use and Abuse of Australian History,’ 58; Elizabeth Munson, ‘Walking on the Periphery: gender and the discourse of modernisation,’ in *Journal of Social History*, vol 36, issue 1, Fall 2002
Bankstown, New South Wales. This monument depicts a woman gazing at a leaf and, despite the absence of Banks himself, this is the largest monument to his memory.\textsuperscript{350} An absence of women depicting symbols in a society is considered to demonstrate that the society undervalues women, but the reverse is not necessarily true: that is, even if a society has many monuments which depict women as abstract ideals, it does not follow inevitably that women are highly valued in that society.\textsuperscript{351} Even societies that do seemingly acknowledge women in their culture, do not necessarily value them.

Australian monuments, when they do represent women, tend to display them in relation to men.\textsuperscript{352} This is very common – in depicting women, history books commonly describe a woman in relation to her husband, whilst cultural depictions repeatedly show women as ‘Mr –’s wife.’ This is extended in monuments and memorials, which also frequently place women as wives/mothers. Monuments to pioneer women especially present their subjects as wives and mothers, rather than individuals in their own right. Even ‘important’ women are represented in monuments in these two roles. Like her American counterpart,\textsuperscript{353} the Australian pioneer woman is an anonymous figure in monument.

Much of our understanding of the presentation of women in monuments comes from Chilla Bulbeck’s ‘National Register of Unusual Monuments,’ produced in the late 1980s as a project endorsed by the Australian Bicentennial Authority.\textsuperscript{354} This undertaking examined monuments that not only depicted the white, middle/upper class men of the majority of monuments throughout Australia, but also workers, women and Aboriginal people. The table below

\begin{itemize}
\item Michael Hedger, \textit{Public Sculpture in Australia}, Craftsman House, Roseville East, 1995, 67
\item Warner, \textit{Monuments and Maidens}, xx
\item Chilla Bulbeck, \textit{The Stone Laurel: of race, gender and class in Australian memorials}, Cultural Policy Studies, Occasional Paper No.5, Institute of Cultural Policy Studies, Division of Humanities, Griffith University, 1988, 14; Bulbeck, ‘Women of Substance,’ in \textit{Hecate}, vol 18, no 2, October 1992; Gillis, ‘Memory and Identity,’ 10
\item Dixon Wecter, \textit{The Hero in America: a chronicle of hero worship}, Ann Arbor Paperbacks, Ann Arbor, 1963, 477; Bulbeck, \textit{The Stone Laurel}, 2
\item Figures examined here are reproduced in Bulbeck, \textit{The Stone Laurel}, 15
\end{itemize}
illustrates the breakdown of these monuments. The register was the outcome of work by local Bicentennial Community Committees.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Monuments</th>
<th>Number of Monuments</th>
<th>Percentage of Monuments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monuments to Women</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>24% of all monuments examined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monuments to Men</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>76% of all monuments examined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monuments to Pioneer Women</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>33% of all pioneer-dedicated memorials; and 38% of all monuments dedicated to women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monuments to Women in Community Service</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27% of all memorials dedicated to women</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Chilla Bulbeck, National Register of Unusual Monuments

As is shown, monuments to men far outweighed monuments to women. It is noteworthy that it is in the category of “pioneer” that women were by far the most represented.

The preponderance of monuments to pioneer women does not reflect the overriding achievements of these women over other women in Australian society. Instead, what this predominance illustrates is how women in Australia are remembered. Pioneers are seen as the wives and mothers of European society - this image of them in the national social memory is an easy one, one that does not conflict with the dominant discourse of the ‘white man as hero.’ Women can be viewed as being alongside their men in the role of wife/mother, without interfering with traditional male/female spheres of influence. The role of ‘pioneer women’, as it is traditionally understood, interferes least in the national discourse. It is therefore the most uncomplicated, and, in the period of construction of most of these monuments, the least contested, memory to recall.

The Petrie Tableau, situated in front of the Brisbane Town Hall, is an example of the overriding norm of depictions of pioneer women in monuments. In

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355 Bulbeck, *The Stone Laurel*, 15
356 Bulbeck, ‘Women of Substance’
the Tableau, the women are presented as passive participants in the state’s history: Mary Petrie, the wife of the man on horseback, hands her husband, Andrew, a drinking bottle whilst their daughter, Isabella, watches submissively. The pioneering spirit of the men is emphasized: Andrew is on his way to explore; we are told that Tom, who is shown playing with Aboriginal children, recorded, as an adult, a classic document of Aboriginal tribal life; whilst we are also informed that John, the other son portrayed in the Tableau, went on to become a leading engineer and Brisbane’s first mayor. The men in the Tableau are active, not only in their immediate actions, but also in their futures. Whatever became of the passive women, the plaque does not indicate. In this memory, it is very obviously the men who are the trailblazers. The wife/mother and daughter are simply the support cast to the male actors on the stage of colonial history.

Within the Tableau, the Petrie women are given a status similar to that of the kangaroos which are featured below the main scene. They are observers of history rather than participants in their own right – much like the convict, who we are told observes the scene, ‘recently freed from his shackles by Petrie.’ The role of observer rather than participant is a common theme in the Australian narrative – men did the deeds that secured the nation whilst the women, at best, played a supporting role. Although the popular social memory of today focuses more on the actual participation of pioneer women, this participation is still seen as supporting male actions rather than acting independently.

This positioning provides an interesting juxtaposition for women: traditionally the observed figure, through art and the like, within the realms of historical studies and understandings of the past, the female assumes the position of the observer. Rather than being watched, the female is relegated to the position of watching what is going on around her and being a passive participant. However, herein lies the paradox: when depicted in art as the observed body, women are presented as passive beings; but likewise, whilst being the observers of historical happenings, they are also passive beings.
The Central Australia Pioneers’ Memorial in Alice Springs is another example of a traditional memorial which combines the efforts of both men and women in its memorialisation. An enclosed rotunda with seating and a water fountain (no longer accessible to the public), it has an original plaque which reads

**THIS MEMORIAL WAS ERECTED**

**TO THE MEMORY OF**

**JOHN ROSS**

**MEMBERS OF THE OVERLAND TELEGRAPH LINE EXPLORATION AND CONSTRUCTION PARTIES 1870-2**

**AND**

**ALL PIONEERS OF CENTRAL AUSTRALIA 1870-1920**

The memorial was unveiled on 17 September 1955, and restored in 1994. A newer plaque explains that the design of the horseshoe is in recognition of the help of horses in the opening of the interior, whilst the water fountain was used to symbolise the need of water in exploration.357 Within the awning of the monument, brass plaques memorialising various individuals and groups are nailed to wooden inserts. Amongst these plaques are ones to ‘Rev and Mrs C Strehlow, Hermannsburg,’ ‘Mrs J Breaden, Mrs E Kempe,’ and ‘Commemorating Pioneer Women, Alice Springs District, Donated by CWA Alice Springs Branch.’ Further plaques (which go into more detail) commemorate the work of Lewis Bloomfield, Lutheran Workers in Hermannsburg, and ‘the Beasts of Burden.’ For the women, though, they are either very briefly named (most often as part of ‘Mr and Mrs X ’), or presented as a collective as ‘Pioneer Women’ of the ‘Alice Springs District.’

The way in which the efforts of horses and men are celebrated within this memorial, whilst the women are marginalised and dealt with only cursorily, is indicative of traditional frontier memory. The Central Australia Pioneers’

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357 ‘Central Australia Pioneers Memorial,’ information plaque, McDouall Stuart Branch of the National Trust of Australia (NT)
Memorial recognizes that – yes – there were women in the early days of the district, but these women were wives. The impact of women personally on the settlement is subsumed by their impact as the helpmeets of their husbands. Thus, the predominant stereotype – the prevalent memory – of pioneer women as wives and mothers is perpetuated in both this memorial, and the Petrie Tableau.

Whilst both these monuments emphasise the deeds of the male players in the past, they also consign the females of the past to a position level with, or below, animals. In the Petrie Tableau, the kangaroos featured at the base are much more visible than the women who feature above (interesting, too, is the bearing of the kangaroos as compared to the women – whilst the kangaroos stand tall and face those who pass by, the women are turned inwards to the male players in this history); and in the Central Australia Pioneers’ Memorial, a design was purposefully selected to emphasise the importance of horses in the areas history, and emphasis given to that on the explanatory tablet, whilst the contribution of women is somewhat hidden under the awning on the memorial. The motif of the woman as the beast of burden, as typified in Henry Lawson’s iconic short story, ‘The Drover’s Wife,’ is submerged in both of these memorials as the women of the past are downgraded to a position below that of actual beasts of burden. Unwittingly, both monuments give a vivid illustration of the status given to women in a nation that venerates the deeds of its men; and both illustrate how Australia’s social memory, when not focusing specifically on women, places women in roles which can be seen as supportive at best; and invisible at worst.

The Pioneer Women’s Monument (1988) in the Jessie Street Gardens (Sydney) is another example of a very traditional depiction of the pioneer woman memorialised. The monument, built to coincide with the bicentenary of white settlement of Australia, was designed by Alex Koloszy, and depicted a woman

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358 In her article, ‘Frontier Feminism and the Marauding White Man,’ Marilyn Lake writes of how horses were often more highly valued in the Australian psyche over and above the role of women (Marilyn Lake, ‘Frontier Feminism and the Marauding White Man,’ in Richard Nile and Henry Reynolds (eds), Australian Frontiers: Journal of Australian Studies, no 48, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1996)
holding the hand of (what is meant to presumably be) her son on her right, whilst
cradling a toddler in her left arm. The inclusion of the two children in the
monument was in line with the brief put out by the Australasian Women’s Pioneer
Society, which was responsible for the erecting of the monument.

The woman of the monument stands tall, meeting the world face on. She is
captured as if in action, and grasps protectively at the children in her charge. In an
article written for the unveiling of the monument, which appeared in The
Australian, Margaret Carter wrote:

Kolozy has created a mixture of gentility, resourcefulness and
toughness, characteristics of those pioneer women of the past
who survived floods, fire, pestilence, childbirth and often
impossible conditions they had to endure.359

Carter’s assessment of the monument draws heavily on the standard understanding
(and thus social memory) of pioneer women; and indeed, Koloszy’s monument is
closely aligned with the national memory of pioneer women.

In her article, ‘Examining the Myth of the Pioneer Woman,’ Jemima
Mowbray has written of the conception of this monument, and the decisions made
by the Society as to the final design.360 Mowbray recounts that Kolozy originally
submitted two designs for consideration, with the design that was ultimately
chosen clearly being Kolozy’s second choice. The sculptor’s first preference was
for a design in which the woman still held the babe-in-arms, but in her right hand
in place of her son, she held a rifle by her side. This design was firmly rejected by
the Society. Mowbray writes of the decision:

The rejection of Kolozy’s ‘first preference’ by the Pioneer
Women’s Society tells us a great deal about who [the pioneer
woman] is not. At a simple description, the mythic Pioneer

359 Margaret Carter, ‘A Bronzed Tribute to Those Who Paved the Way,’ in The Australian, 25
November 1988, 10
360 Jemima Mowbray, ‘Examining the Myth of the Pioneer Woman,’ in Eras, edition 8, November
2008 (http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/eras)
Woman is courageous and capable, perhaps a little wearied, but nurturing and always maternal. She is not a woman who carries a gun. Her task is that of ‘civilising’, the work of heart and mind. When her struggle manifests itself physically, which it does not often do, it is with nature, not with any person that could be faced with a gun.

As Mowbray’s passage shows, the dismissal of Kolozsy’s preferred design illustrates both the social memory of pioneer women at play, whilst it also illustrates the active forgetting, or social amnesia, that similarly dictates the community’s understanding of the past.

Monuments and memorials in other cities and towns throughout Australia do not necessarily celebrate the life or actions of a particular person but, rather, the ideals and abstractions that people project. An example of this is seen in the war memorials which adorn a central position in Australia’s capital cities and small towns – the memorials are not to remember a particular soldier, but the ideal of the Australian soldier sent to fight on foreign soil. Whilst particular memories may be imbued into the memorials by certain people, the monument itself remembers the abstraction rather than the concrete. Such is the case with the pioneer women’s memorials and monuments that can be found throughout Australia. The Pioneer Women’s Garden in Adelaide, the Pioneer Women’s Memorial Garden in King’s Domain, Melbourne, and the Pioneer Women’s Memorial in King’s Park, Perth do not evoke the memory of particular women in the various states’ histories, but stir up a recollection of a stereotyped woman who is deemed representative of all.

When writing of the Pioneer Women’s Garden of Remembrance in Adelaide, Chilla Bulbeck notes that the ‘only point of personal recognition on a day dedicated to women as a collectivity’ was the placement of a bunch of flowers

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361 War memorials do, however, usually contain the names of those people from the community who were sent away to fight – customarily as many names as those creating the monument can find. Once people directly connected to those names move away, though, the idea of the abstract reinforces its importance.
in memory of Edith Chaplin on the day of the unveiling (in 1936) of the statue of the pioneer woman.\textsuperscript{362} The sculpture in the garden was created by Ola Cohn, with much support for a memorial dedicated to the women of early South Australia.\textsuperscript{363} Although the ideas behind the planning of the memorial cannot be known at this point (for the planning ideas are sealed below the monument to be unearthed in 2036\textsuperscript{364}), public reaction can be, and is, known: the Madonna-like statue was unpopular with the general public, who remembered pioneer women as much more hard-working and much less serene than the Cohn’s vision.\textsuperscript{365} Cohn wanted a timeless woman who represented “the spirit of womanhood capable of giving birth to a nation”. The coarse, “unladylike” hands represented “the power and strength of a symbolic woman”.\textsuperscript{366} Overall, Cohn’s pioneer woman did not reflect the popular memory of such women – despite the gesture of the coarse, ‘unladylike’ hands that represented the reality that those viewing the monument knew to be true – and, as such, was an unpopular site of memory at the time of its creation.

This initial reaction to Cohn’s depiction is an interesting counterpoint to the idea of the angel in the bush, the idealized version of the female living on the edges of European settlement that has been the dominant concept in the depiction and understanding of pioneer women. As Graeme Davison has written, at the time of unveiling, people remembered actual women who had lived the pioneering life on the edges of the white settlement, and remembered what they (and their lives) were like. An idealized, Madonna-like figure did not sit with that reality. However, as personal connection to pioneering passed, and thus did personal recollections, the more idealised and romanticised model became entrenched in the national social memory, unencumbered by the fact that she did not reflect the reality – those who had lived her life, or known people who had, no longer existed to challenge the myth.

\textsuperscript{362} Bulbeck, \textit{The Stone Laurel}, 17
\textsuperscript{363} Bulbeck, \textit{The Stone Laurel}, 17
\textsuperscript{364} Cameron, \textit{Silent Witnesses}, 114
\textsuperscript{365} Davison, “The Use and Abuse of Australian History,” 63
\textsuperscript{366} quoted in Cameron, \textit{Silent Witnesses}, 117
It is worth noting that whilst Cohn chose to present a romanticized version of the pioneer woman, she also chose to include ‘unladylike’ hands to represent the presented woman’s strength. One would think that the majority of viewers would not take the time in studying the figure, or look in as much detail as would be required, to notice this nod to the harshness of life for women living on the land. In this way, the inclusion of this aspect is too subtle to put across the message that Cohn claimed to be presenting in a public monument. The public reaction to the monument bears this out – they did not find that the monument presented enough of the struggles of women on the land and thus contested the depiction. For those who contested the idea presented in the monument, Cohn’s image was too glossed: it was a romance that they did not recognize. But all social memories evolve over time, and the romance of Cohn’s image has, in the wider public’s imagination, superseded the contests that existed around this image when it was unveiled.

Cohn’s sculpture provides a site of contest not only for those women who remembered the reality, and did not see it projected in Adelaide’s Pioneer Women’s Garden, though. Such a depiction is contested in that the notion of the white, idealised, benign woman is one which does not sit well with all. The anomaly between the depiction of the righteousness of the white woman on the land and the reality, as some view it, demonstrates yet another way that popular social memory – and in this case, race – can prove a site of contestation.

The memorial in Melbourne to pioneer women, situated in King’s Domain, is an interesting case study, not only in the memorial itself, but in the way that it came into being and the invisibility of women that it perpetuates. The Pioneer Women’s Garden was part of the state’s centenary celebrations in 1934. As in Adelaide, the Women’s Centenary Council thought that it would be appropriate to have a memorial solely to the memory of the state’s pioneer women. The garden was established on ground gifted by the Victorian Government for the purpose.
Two plaques are displayed in the garden: one, commemorating the opening of the garden by Sir Stanley Argyle, the Premier; the other, to honour the pioneer women of Victoria.367

Another interesting point in regard to this memorial – which, in form, takes a very traditional appearance – is how money was raised for the establishment of the gardens. Some of the funds were raised by the compilation and sales of a Centenary Gift Book, which apparently ‘sold like “hot cakes”.’ ‘Sheets of Remembrance,’ which cost one shilling apiece, and were inscribed with the donor’s name or that of one of their female ancestors, funded the creation of the garden. These sheets were then placed under the sundial in the garden, the names of thousands of people hidden. The exact number of these sheets is unknown. Thus not only does this memorial fail to acknowledge individual women in the state’s history, but it also hides the names of those women who memorialized their foremothers. However, the details of how the council came to get the garden established are, likewise, buried in the garden, but these details are due to be unearthed in 2034, Victoria’s white bicentenary.368

This penchant for ‘hiding’ the details of creation of these monuments demonstrates that in the 1930s, the creators of the monuments were imbued with a strong sense of the future as they looked to the past. They believed that the social memory that they were presenting in a physical form would persist, and remain relevant for future generations. The persistence of the legend shows that they were probably correct.

The memorial to pioneer women in King’s Park, Perth is another example of pioneer women being remembered in urban settings. The design of the sculpture ‘places a bronze figure set onto stones, into a pool with water jets of increasing

367 ‘Pioneer Women’s Garden,’ in Argus, June 10 1935, 4
height. The intention is to symbolize the “courage, strength and tenderness” of a mother and child as they move through “bushland of surging jets towards destiny”.

This ‘destiny’ was represented in the final water jets, symbolizing enlightenment. Subscriptions began after

The idea was conceived by the CWA [Country Women’s Association] who felt that the pioneer women of Western Australia (who had worked so long and arduously under the most difficult conditions, to help build the State to its present proud position) should be honoured and permanently remembered by posterity.

The memorial was dedicated in 1968. Subsequent authors have written about the conservative message of the fountain – it homogenizes the experience of settlement by displacing and disposing of the unpalatable ‘facts’ of settler society. The motif of the mother and child successfully masks the Aboriginal experience of dispossession and violence by showing settlement as a peaceful, family-oriented activity. Memorials such as the Pioneer Women’s Memorial in Kings Park forget the parts of history which are unpleasant to remember (such as dispossession).

Furthermore, by presenting such homogenized displays of womanhood and settlement, the Pioneer Women’s Memorial acts to discount the experiences of Aboriginal women as mothers, subtly reinforcing the notion that motherhood was the prerogative of the white woman. Throughout the time of European settlement in Australia, white motherhood has been celebrated. The concept of maternity being central to a woman’s identity has not traditionally been extended to non-white mothers, though. Indeed, the celebration of motherhood in the Australian psyche has been more to do with populating the nation with white (preferably male) babies

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369 Michael Hedger, Public Sculpture in Australia, Craftsman House, Roseville East, 1995, 19
370 Rotha Meadowcroft, ‘Pioneer Women’s Memorial,’ in The Countrywoman of WA, March 1965, 39
371 CWA Subscriptions Brochure, ‘The Story of the Fountain’
than it has been an honouring of femininity and maternalism. Monuments to pioneer women, particularly those that included the depiction of children, emphasized the (often unspoken) notion that race was a central issue in motherhood.

In writing the editorial for *The Countrywoman of WA* (the CWA journal) after the official dedication of the memorial by Sir Douglas Kendrew (the Governor of Western Australia at the time), Norma Moore wrote:

The British race – down through the centuries – has always been inspired. Inspired to dare – to do – to fight – sometimes against great odds and, so, to triumph in the end. The inspiration and the leadership has usually come from men, but there are sometimes in our history when this leadership has come from women…

One can well imagine those early days of the Swan River Settlement. No-one could have gained out of this great task of development without the support of the pioneer women. They gave up all that was home to share the lot with their menfolk, and so establish for us what we cherish today. To sleep in tents, to build new homes, to raise children, and to give their Christian background and faith that helped their menfolk in the appalling difficulties that had to be faced.

The aim of the fountain was ‘to honour all pioneer women,’ and indeed, in this way, the Western Australian memorial to the state’s foremothers was unique. Despite Moore’s insistence on a British, Christian memory of mothers and wives, others involved in the creation of the fountain, and the honour roll that went with it, were more interested in an inclusive memory of all pioneer women of the West.

To complement Western Australia’s Pioneer’s Memorial Fountain, a memorial roll of pioneer women was created. When the roll first went on display

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373 Norma Moore, ‘Editorial’ in *The Countrywoman of WA*, February 1968, 2
374 M J Goyder, ‘Pioneer Women’s Memorial Fountain,’ in *The Countrywoman of WA*, March 1965, 39 (original italics)
in 1978, 3,900 names were included.\textsuperscript{375} In writing of the roll in 1968, by which time 2,500 names had been recorded, Helen Wilson wrote

The list is not limited to the wives of early settlers, but includes nurses, midwives, boarding-house keepers and others who played a vital part in pioneering the outback. Although the majority of these were white women, our original Australians have not been forgotten.\textsuperscript{376}

Whilst the memorial may have remembered a very traditional view of pioneer women – that of white mothers – the complementary roll encouraged an expanded memory of pioneer women, beyond the traditional, exclusive memory.

This is a fine aim in a public memorial, and these kinds of aims should be acknowledged as such. However, it must be asked how much of this aim translated into reality. In visiting the Pioneer Women’s Memorial, does the memorial convey this sense of inclusiveness desired by those who sought it? It would appear that the aim is lost in the presentation. As described above, the issues of settlement and the impact of dispossession on the Aboriginal peoples is not conveyed through the Memorial; nor is the diversity of backgrounds of women coming to live in Australia adequately addressed. Instead, one is presented with the standard, uniform memory of pioneer women – white mothers who fulfill a very defined role in the national memory.

Monuments that remember women as wives and mothers can be seen as having a double effect: remembering pioneer women as wives and mothers, similarly places men as husbands and fathers. This is in opposition to the ideal of the bush legend, the ‘lone hand’ who lives on the frontier, basking in his independence\textsuperscript{377} - a role which was encouraged and advanced through the pages of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[375] ‘Roll records pioneer women,’ in \textit{West Australian}, Wednesday December 13, 1978, 53
\item[376] Helen Wilson, ‘Memorial to Pioneer Women of WA,’ in \textit{Australian Country Magazine}, September 1968, 99
\item[377] Marilynn Lake examines this ideal of male independence in her article, ‘The Politics of Respectability: identifying the masculinist context,’ in \textit{Historical Studies}, April 1986, no 86, 116-31 (reproduced in Susan Magarey, Sue Rowley and Susan Sheridan (eds), \textit{Debutante Nation:}}
the popular *Bulletin* journal. Thus, in the placement of women as wives and mothers (a conventional setting), men are similarly domesticated (an unconventional setting). By restricting women to such limited roles, the men themselves become, by default, confined in complementary roles – when domesticating women, the monuments also domesticate the men. This can be seen as paralleling such placements in cultural depictions and museums, which have previously been discussed.

The Australian masculine ideal was, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an oppositional ideal, seen as being in opposition to various ‘others,’ from women to Aboriginal people. Complementary to the oppositional nature of the ideal was the idea that the company of men was preferable to the company of women (culminating in the essence of ‘mateship,’ the idea of male friendship which is considered nationally defining in Australia) and that the ‘bush’ was the place for ‘real’ men, away from the hassles of family and intergender relations. Nor did the egalitarianism, which plays such a large part in the ideals of the bush legend and notions of mateship, extend across the sexes in popular mythology, or, of course, across the racial divide.

In this dynamic of the ideal of the independent man, ‘family’ was a feminine space, a gendered ideal. Whilst a masculine hero of the 1870s may have been

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*Fair Enough: Egalitarianism in Australia*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 1994, 148


family-minded, a masculine hero of the turn-of-the-century dismissed such concerns as ‘womanly.’ \(^{380}\) Anne McClintock has written

A paradox lies at the heart of most national narratives. Nations are frequently figured through the iconography of the familial and domestic space … Nations are symbolically figured as domestic genealogies. Yet…since the mid-nineteenth century in the West at least, the family itself has been figured as the antithesis of history. \(^{381}\)

Thus, while the family and the home were central to the notion of the building of a nation, the ideal of manhood was based on the ideal of mateship, which rejected the home and family as the concerns of only women.

Concurrent to the masculinist focus on ‘mateship’, feminism was in its ‘first wave’ in the 1890s when the writers of the Bulletin and other such organs were creating the powerful myths of the Australian bush. And whilst feminists of the 1890s were typically interested in ideals such as women’s suffrage, more practical issues, such as making marriages safer for women, were of more pressing need. A central tenant of this argument was that the home was the proper ‘sphere’ for women, \(^{382}\) but, as Marilyn Lake has argued, this emphasis of the feminist movement was portrayed in the Bulletin as ‘wowserism,’ with women wanting men to behave in a proscribed manner which was believed to inhibit fun. \(^{383}\) It provided more fodder for the Bulletin’s emphasis on a masculinist narrative, with women being seen as encroaching on men’s fun. Scant regard was given to the fact that the feminist argument focused around safety.

\(^{380}\) Murrie, ‘The Australian Legend,’ 68; Crotty, Making the Australian Male, 138

\(^{381}\) Anne McClintock, Imperial Leather: race, gender and sexuality, Routledge, London and New York, 1995, 357


\(^{383}\) Lake, ‘The Politics of Respectability’
The ideals of the masculinity which were born on the pages of the *Bulletin* in the 1890s, extended into the twentieth century, and past the First World War – if anything, the battlefields of Europe reinforced the idea of men and women being separate, and of women having no idea of what it meant to be ‘man.’ Monuments which were created positioning women as wives and mothers, then, did what women themselves could not in real life – they positioned men in society in relation to women, rather than the norm of women being positioned in relation to men. The legend of the Australian pioneer woman presumes the presence of a man as a husband and father. Thus it can be seen, that not only were memories of women limited by such monuments, but the memories of men were, too.

Windows provide another illustration of memorialisation, particularly with church groups. The Pioneer Women’s Window in the Canberra Baptist Church, for example, was unveiled in 1975 to mark the anniversary of the church. The window illustrates Jesus’ visit to Mary and Martha. Whilst Mary sits at Jesus’ feet, Martha serves food. Although dedicated to ‘pioneer women,’ the window reflects the Christianity of the placement rather than the women it salutes. The choice of this scene from the scriptures, though, to represent the work of pioneer women is in itself an interesting decision. The viewer may ask whether the window reflects the roles of women and men in pioneering Australia – that is, that women were there to worship the pioneering male who took on an almost Messiah-like role in the national legend. It is worth considering that from all the available stories from the Bible, the one deemed most relevant in celebrating the works of pioneer women is one in which the women are worshipping or serving the (central) male.

The Rockingham Museum (WA) is a local, community-based museum which has also sought to memorialize pioneering through the form of a stained glass window. The museum received a bicentenary grant for the work, which was installed in 1988. Based on an actual photograph, it depicts families picnicking.

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near Whale Lake (outside of Rockingham). The depiction is separated into three groups of people, two in the foreground and one in the background. In the first, two women and two children are placed around a picnic setting; in the second, two women, one man and a child sit together as if in conversation; and in the third, which is central but in the background, two men and two women stand together, clasping hands.

Although not specifically aimed at memorializing the women of the past, the window is curious in the realm of such displays in that it is the women who figure most prominently and make up the majority of the characters. Of the nine adults, only three men are portrayed; and two of the three children displayed are boys. Significantly, it is the figure of a women, on the far left of the window, who stands taller than all other figures, watching over the events in a position that would, within the artistic norms and traditional social memory, be filled by a male. Instead, the male figures are shown with their backs to the scene in the background, or holding a cup of tea and conversing with two women and a child (in itself a very ‘feminine’ positioning).

In the memorial window at the Rockingham Museum, the male pioneer plays a secondary fiddle to the female pioneer. It is she who forms the majority of the players; it is she who overlooks the scene; and it is she who looks directly into the gaze of the viewer. In this way, the Rockingham Museum’s stained glass window offers a unique presentation of the pioneer woman and her positioning against her male counterpart.

The emphasis of the centrality of the man in the Australian national narrative is demonstrated in a memorial which exalts the criminal male whilst ignoring his female victim. The memorial, which is situated in ‘Fry’s Clump,’ just south of Balaklava in South Australia, is an example of an individual pioneer woman who is completely forgotten in stone. The plaque on the large stone reads (in part):
THIS MEMORIAL WAS ERECTED
IN THE BICENTENNIAL YEAR
SO ALL MAY KNOW THAT
THIS AREA OF NATIVE SCRUB IS CALLED
“FRY’S CLUMP”
AS PIONEER PASTORALIST ROBERT FRY
IS SAID TO HAVE MURDERED HIS WIFE
HERE IN JANUARY 1850
FIVE MONTHS LATER
HIS REMAINS WERE FOUND NEAR BY

Not only is the murdered woman denied the equal status with her husband as a pioneer, but she is also denied her name, simply remembered as Fry’s wife. Graham Jaunay’s register of outback graves in South Australia, which lists in some detail the particulars of those whose information can be found, only notes that she was possibly Amelia Fry (nee Beard).\(^{385}\) All that is remembered of this woman, in both the monument and the official records, is a shadow of a woman who cannot be fully acknowledged.

Monuments which are erected to the memory of specific pioneer women, generally focus on the women who were the ‘first white women’ either in an area or to do something in particular. For example, monuments exist to the memory of Mary Seymour, the first ‘white’ girl on Kangaroo Island (this ‘racial claiming’ of an Aboriginal woman will be discussed in more detail below), and to Eliza Fraser, the ‘first’ white woman to spend an extended time with Indigenous Australians. The importance of the first white woman in an area lies in her breeding capabilities. Once women were introduced into an area, the colonizers became, in effect, a self-sustaining population – the women were able to breed the white male colonizers of the future. Memorializing the first white women in an area was important because these women signified the fruition of the colonizing men’s

dreams.386 The introduction of white women into an area meant, too, that the fear of other races taking over was minimized.387

Mrs Watson and Eliza Fraser are two white women in Australian history who, despite being very different, are both remembered in memorial form. Mrs Watson (note that this is always how she is referred to – Mary, her own name, is forgotten in the social memory surrounding her ordeal) is remembered as an ideal of the pioneering woman in Australia’s white history. She was the first ‘white’ woman on Lizard Island in Queensland – a fact that finally led to her death at sea. The monument which memorialises her memory, erected in the late nineteenth century, is in Cooktown, and the £165 that it cost was raised by public subscription.388 The inscription on the memorial includes a poem which reads

FIVE FEARFUL DAYS BENEATH
THE SCORCHING GLARE
HER BABE SHE NURSED
GOD KNOWS THE PANGS THAT
WOMAN HAD TO BEAR
WHOSE LAST SAD ENTRY SHOWED
A MOTHER’S CARE
THEN – “NEAR DEATH WITH THIRST”

The memorial was used at one time as a water fountain so that everybody in need of hydration could find it. A special tank, to make sure that water was always available at the fountain, was installed.389

The story of Mrs Watson fulfills the popular social memory of pioneer women. She was a woman who ultimately sacrificed her life in trying to protect herself and her child, all the while maintaining her love and devotion – and

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386 See the section in ‘Chapter One: Social Memory and Pioneer Women,’ ‘Elements of the Legend.’
387 This fear is discussed in Davin, ‘Imperialism and Motherhood,’ 10
388 Bulbeck, The Stone Laurel, 16
Christian beliefs – in the face of terrible adversity. Further, the reason for her eventual predicament was because she followed her husband to the edge of white settlement.

The Watsons’ place was the only white settlement on Lizard Island in 1881. Mrs Watson’s husband was a trader, who left the island for work, leaving behind his young wife with their baby and two Chinese servants. Sometime after the husband’s departure, one of the Chinese men was killed by the Aborigines of the island. In fear, Mrs Watson departed the island with her baby son and her remaining Chinese servant in a large cooking pot. They survived for about a week, but eventually died of thirst. The bodies were later found, along with a diary kept by Mrs Watson. Women and children followed Mrs Watson’s funeral procession, which ‘can be taken as an indication of the friendship Mrs Watson had engendered, the sympathy felt for her trying ideal, and the pride in the heroism of a member of their sex.’

As a turn-of-the-century writer noted, ‘the inscriptions on [the memorial] are so vague as to merely arouse curiosity without affording information.’ He (for, indeed, the tone of this work suggests that the author was male) also records in Mrs Watson: a Cooktown Heroine, that Mrs Watson’s story should remind men how wonderful and pure women are, thus highlighting philosophies of ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity.’ Therein lies the appeal of Mrs Watson’s memory – she reinforces the idea of the pure white woman who eventually sacrifices all.

Eliza Fraser is another example of a ‘first white woman’ who has become part of the wider national social memory, although hers is not the positive memory

391 Stephens, ‘Mrs Watson,’ 2
392 Unattributed, Mrs Watson: a Cooktown Heroine: one of the saddest of all the sad tales of the sea, Port Douglas and Mossman Record Company, c1900, 1
393 Unattributed, Mrs Watson, 1
of Mrs Watson. Eliza was shipwrecked in the early nineteenth century, but a monument to her ordeal was not created for more than 150 years. She ‘became known as the first white woman to encounter Aborigines in the wild, so to speak.’\textsuperscript{394} It may be that this lag in time between event and memorialisation was due to Fraser, unlike Watson, not fulfilling the nineteenth century popular memory of pioneer women. In contrast to Watson, who was remembered as an exemplar of her sex, Fraser was remembered, for a long time, in a very negative light.

Eliza’s husband was a shipping captain on a Scottish ship, the \textit{Stirling Castle}, which was wrecked off the southeast coast of Queensland. Although seven other people survived the wreck, it was the story of Eliza – who spent 52 days with Indigenous peoples on Fraser Island, and was eventually rescued by a convict (or two – the stories differ) – that caught the public imagination and became embedded in the national memory. But, in later selling her story, and not living the discreet and modest life expected of women in her position, Eliza lost favour with those who initially supported her.\textsuperscript{395}

Kay Schaffer, whose book \textit{In the Wake of First Contact}, deals with many of the stories that circulate around Eliza’s occurrences, notes that it was once Eliza was on the island that her race took consequence: she was ‘represented as a civilized white woman amongst the savages.’\textsuperscript{396} Despite the importance of her ethnicity, it is overridden in the social memory by the fact that she failed to live up to the ideal of the Victorian lady, or the ideal of pioneer women in colonial Australia: as Schaffer writes, by selling her story, Fraser lost the sympathy from being a victim of Aboriginal cruelty (as that was how it was seen at the time), to – almost – the role of ‘damned whore,’ to borrow Anne Summers’ iconic phrase. Consequently, Fraser was not remembered as someone worth memorializing, and

\textsuperscript{394} Kay Schaffer, \textit{In the Wake of First Contact: the Eliza Frazer Stories}, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, 1
\textsuperscript{395} Bulbeck, ‘Women of Substance’
\textsuperscript{396} Schaffer, \textit{In the Wake of First Contact}, 38
it was not until 150 years later – when notions of propriety had changed drastically – that Fraser’s saga was memorialised.

The experience of the memorialisation of Eliza Fraser demonstrates the shifting nature of social memory, and the contested understandings of the past. Social memory is not static; instead, it possesses a fluidity which allows it to respond to societal values, as was clearly shown in Eliza’s case.

Mary Seymour’s grave has a different significance, sitting between public and private memorial.³⁹⁷ Rebe Taylor writes in Unearthed that Mary, who died in 1913 at the age of 79, was not afforded a tombstone until the late 1980s. It follows, then, that those who erected the headstone had no personal memory of Mary on which to draw. The plaque on the headstone erected at this time stated that Mary was the ‘first white girl born on Kangaroo Island.’ Her Aboriginal heritage was also acknowledged: the plaque read that she was the daughter of a ‘Tasmanian full-blooded Aboriginal,’ but the wording of Mary as the ‘first white girl’ suggests that the white heritage invalidates Mary’s Aboriginality. The colonial memory of the triumphant whites resonates in the wording of the plaque.

Mary’s Aboriginal heritage was reclaimed by her great-great grandson who retrieved Mary’s memory for the family. By chiseling off the original plaque and replacing it with one that embraced Mary’s Aboriginality, Mary’s descendant rejected the colonial memory of white domination. The plaque on Mary Seymour’s grave on Kangaroo Island provides examples of both active forgetting and active remembering through monuments and memorials. Peter Tonkin and Janet Laurence theorize that ‘monuments which articulate official memory often have their fate to be toppled or to become invisible, to be melted down or crushed.’³⁹⁸ In this case, the official colonial memory of European ethnicity which

³⁹⁷ All information of Mary’s life, death and memorials contained here is taken from Rebe Taylor, Unearthed: the Aboriginal Tasmanians of Kangaroo Island, Wakefield Press, Kent Town, 2002, 162-74. The analysis of the ways of remembering and forgetting are my own, taken from information in Taylor.
³⁹⁸ Tonkin and Laurence, ‘Space and Memory’
has been so over-archingly suppressive (although that word has negative connotations which colonizers themselves would shy from) was destroyed, albeit in a quieter fashion than toppling or crushing. The ‘fictive sameness’ of the white racial identity that was imposed upon Mary was lifted with the removal of the misleading plaque.

Mary’s ‘claim’ to ‘whiteness’ is based around racial identity as a ‘socio-historical construct.’ To become a memorable figure in the Australian story, Mary had to be ‘converted’ to whiteness, for in the national psyche the ‘Australian girl’ was always white. However, historically, whiteness has been a fluid social composition, which allows for changes in meaning and interpretation. During Mary’s life, her Aboriginality invalidated her ‘whiteness,’ but over time, her ‘whiteness’ invalidated her Aboriginality. In her own lifetime, she was seen by government officials as ‘the very last of [the Tasmanian Aboriginal] race,’ which had ramifications on her eligibility for government support in South Australia as a resident of that state. Not only was she a ‘Tasmanian Aboriginal,’ but her ‘general’ Aboriginality also impacted on her suitability to receive government assistance: had she been considered ‘white’ in life, where her forebears originated from would have had little bearing on her eligibility for assistance. Those without direct connection to Mary-the-woman (as compared to ‘Mary-the-idea’, as she was presented in the monument) chose to remember her in

399 Caffyn Kelley has written about the fact that white racial identity is an historical creation, based upon what she calls a ‘fictive sameness.’ (Kelley, ‘Creating Memory, Contesting History,’ in Matriart, vol 5, no 3, 7-8)

400 Jane Haggis, Susanne Schech and Gabrielle Fitzgerald, ‘Narrating Lives, Narrating Whiteness,’ in Journal of Australian Studies, March 1999; ‘White’ as a racialised category has been subject to much critical academic attention in recent years. See, for example David R Roediger, Towards the Abolition of Whiteness: essays on race, politics and working class history, Verso, London, 1994, 12; and Amira Proweller, ‘Shifting Identities in Private Education: reconstructing race at/in the Cultural Centre,’ in The Teachers College Record, Summer 1999, vol 100, issue 4, 777: Both of these authors discuss the fact that ‘white’-as-racial-grouping is a traditionally ignored, invisible delineation. As Coco Fusco has noted, ‘To ignore white ethnicity is to redouble its hegemony by naturalizing it’ (quoted in Roediger, Towards the Abolition of Whiteness, 12).

401 Joe L Kincheloe, ‘The Struggle to Define and Reinvent Whiteness: a pedagogical analysis,’ in College Literature, Fall 1999, vol 26, issue 3

402 Pearce, ‘“The Best Career is Matrimony”’

403 Timothy Walker, GRG 29/3/280/1894, State Records, South Australia, quoted in Taylor, Unearthed, 163.

404 Taylor, Unearthed, 162-4
a specific way, which their predecessors could not, because of their cultural assumptions about what it meant to be white – those with direct connection to Mary-the-woman chose to remember her in a specific way which rejected the claim to ‘whiteness’, which had posthumously been thrust upon Mary.

The monument erected at the Klemzig Pioneers Cemetery in metropolitan Adelaide claims to ‘perpetuate the memory’ of pioneer Lutheran refugees who fled areas of (what is now) Germany to escape religious persecution (the cemetery was originally part of a country village – since the expansion of Adelaide’s metropolitan area, though, the village and cemetery have been included in the greater Adelaide area). In the naming of some of these people, and subsequent German Lutheran migrants to South Australia, the only woman those creating the monument believed worthy of remembrance was Augusta Zadow, the lone female name memorialized. Whilst not discounting the importance of Zadow – the first female Factory Inspector in the colony, and an active trade unionist and suffragette – the fact that all other women are forgotten on this monument is telling. Zadow’s success, and the reasons she was remembered, were due to her accomplishments in traditionally male-centred worlds (unions and business). Whilst other women within the German Lutheran community would have been successful in their chosen spheres, Zadow is the only one whose accomplishments are deemed worthy of remembering. It is success in the male sphere that is celebrated and remembered.

Those who created this monument chose not to value the contribution of most women within their community, instead focussing on a masculine memory of the past. In doing so, they could find only one woman who fitted this masculine model, and therefore, she was the only one celebrated. A more inclusive memory of the past, and a broader understanding of the contributions of community members, would surely have seen more women recognized in this monument. However, the creators chose to focus on an interpretation of the past that believed that only public deeds (that is, male-centric deeds) were worthy of remembering.
As Christine Bold, Ric Knowles and Belinda Leach have written, ‘hegemonic memorialization is often about active forgetting – individualizing and remembering on behalf of communities.’

Monuments dedicated to the memory of pioneer women actively forget (and emphasize such forgetting of) the lives of many, many real women. The reality of the lives of a majority of pioneer women is forgotten in the romanticised memories in stone which adorn Australian cities. Official monuments do not encourage the viewer to remember pioneer women as individuals. Instead, as viewers, we take along our cultural baggage, our knowing of pioneer women, and superimpose such remembrances on the monuments and memorials.

To this end, public monuments to pioneer women also focus on communal forgetting, and encourage viewers to overlook those who did not fulfill a very proscribed role in settler society. On the whole, the monuments erected to pioneer women do not encourage an inclusive understanding of their realities and their lives.

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405 Bold, Knowles and Leach, ‘Feminist Memorialising and cultural countermemory’
CHAPTER SIX

Saying Goodbye: Gravestones as Memory Markers

IN LOVING MEMORY OF

ANNA MARIA ...

A COLONIST OF 63 YEARS

- Laura Cemetery

As with other memorials to women, graves can provide sites where social memory is stirred. When viewing a headstone, even when one has no connection to the person it commemorates, a memory can be aroused: a headstone which tells of a mother losing a number of small children evokes an image of the Australian pioneer woman who did it hard in the unforgiving bush. Although the woman is not known personally, the plight of such women is firmly entrenched in the national memory.

Gravestones are not a familiar source for historians, and the social memory that they portray is one that has not traditionally been considered. However, gravestones are one of the sorts of social memory sources that are all around communities and thus contribute to the understandings of the past. Throughout the course of this research, I visited a number of graveyards situated in both rural and urban locales (the urban graveyards originally formed village graveyards that have since been swallowed by the expansion of urban Australia). The cemeteries differed in size from quite large to containing only a few marked graves. The gravestones and cemeteries discussed in this chapter do not represent all of the cemeteries visited; but the gravestones discussed represent monuments that can be seen as representative of their type. The examination of gravestones as markers and prompts for social memory, is an innovative examination of the past.

Headstones are unique as public memorials in that they are, at their inception, very private. They are chosen in a time of grief and mourning, but
endure long after the pain has subsided and those doing the grieving are themselves being mourned. The fact that these memorials start off as private, but develop into public, history, gives us, as historians, a distinctive glimpse into private memorials. And we soon learn that dead women do tell tales.

However, whether gravesites are public or private memorials is ambiguous—‘the line between private and public memorials is not decisively drawn.’\textsuperscript{406} One could assume that they begin as private, but become public. They express personal sentiment, but display it within an open setting. Thus they have a dual reading available. Traditionally, ‘historians have universalized rather than particularized the mourning experience,’\textsuperscript{407} resulting in a general understanding and analysis of monuments not as personal, individual expressions, but as pieces to a larger whole.

The differences between those which are recognized as public memorials, and grave markers, are intrinsic in their type. Grave markers are usually created very shortly after the passing of the person;\textsuperscript{408} public memorials are generally created years after the event they memorialize, or the person they recognize, has died. Where gravestones are designed and erected by those with a direct connection to the person, those who create public memorials do not, as a rule, have a direct connection. For private gravestones, the tensions of remembering and forgetting are personal; for the public memorial, they can often be political and seek to address a wider issue or agenda.

Further, as markers of memory, the contested memory on gravestones is fundamentally different from public memorials. The contests that exist at creation are personal rather than public, and are informed as such. People are invested in the memory created, and can reap their own rewards if that is a positive memory.

\textsuperscript{406} Gilbert, History, Memory, Community, 20
\textsuperscript{407} Damousi, The Labour of Loss, 2
\textsuperscript{408} This is not always the case – some graves go unmarked for years until they are identified with a gravestone – see below for further discussion
While there may be personal motivations for the creation of public memorials, the direct connection to the motivation does not exist, and therefore the tensions around creation are essentially distinct.

There is one sort of gravestone that can be viewed more as public memorial than private memory maker, and that is the gravestones that are erected many years after the person has deceased, often by the descendants of the person and often as part of some sort of commemoration, such as a family reunion or a significant anniversary of the family’s arrival in Australia. In these circumstances – and such gravestones can be found in all areas of Australia, from large metropolitan cemeteries to tiny rural church graveyards almost forgotten – the direct personal connect has been cut, although there remains that private link.

Mary Seymour’s grave, discussed in the previous chapter, is an example of how private gravestones can convincingly be viewed as public memorials, particularly when erected years after the passing of the person memorialized. As was demonstrated in ‘Memories in Stone,’ the contestations of memory are often fought the most vigorously when fought years after the fact. The reality can become blurred and, in the case of Seymour, a romanticised, politicized, social memory can take its place. Although distortion may occur when gravestones are erected directly after the passing, with the more time that passes, the more opportunity there is for this distortion to occur and the more that the past is viewed through rose-coloured glasses, rather than accepted for the reality that it was. Had Seymour’s great-great grandson not been aware of the racial claiming that had taken place with his forebear, Seymour may have been forever immortalized as the ‘first white girl’ of Kangaroo Island.

Graves, and the monuments and memorials that mark them, are a veritable feast of information for the historian:

It has often been said that dead men tell no tales. Like many old sayings this is not entirely true, for graves can tell us a great deal
about our past … for the researcher they offer a wealth of information about the aspirations, sacrifice and trauma that marked the lives of our forebears.  

The importance of memorializing almost every death, no matter what the station of the person in life, became an imperative in the nineteenth century. The continual quickening of change in society meant that, more than ever, people felt the need to hold onto the past, in this instance with memorializing the death of their family members – around the same time that there was an increase in honouring people and events in public monuments and memorials. For in both the public and the private spheres, the need to cling to what was perceived to be a disappearing continuity with the past was judged vital. Coincidentally, when examining the representation of women on headstones, it is relevant to note that it was in this period of the rise of general headstones, that there was also a resurgence in the depiction of ‘death’ as an abstraction as female.  

Memorializing graves gave communities an opportunity to place the past life into the wider context of the local dialogue, letting the memory of the deceased become a part of the provincial social memory. Nations and communities felt the need to leave traces of their dead through graves and inscriptions – lasting memory sites which could claim significance in the social recall.

However, despite the fact that graves and cemeteries can act as memory sites, it should be reiterated that monuments themselves – including gravestones – cannot prolong memory as such. If a society chooses to forget a person, a tombstone can easily be ignored. On the other hand, criticism can be (and has

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409 Bruce Simpson and Ian Tinney, Where the Dead Men Lie: tales of graves, pioneers and old bush pubs, ABC Books, Sydney, 2003, viii
413 Bindman, ‘Bribing the Vote?’ 96
been) also leveled at grave memorials for perpetuating the memory, or creating a new memory, of someone best forgotten.\footnote{414 Bertram Puckle, \textit{Funeral Customs: their origin and development}, T Werner Laurie Ltd, London, 1926, 253} But as those who grieved came to terms with the loss of a loved one, whether judged memorable or worth remembering by the wider community, they constructed memorials in ‘attempts to confront the problem of death in society.’\footnote{415 Phillip Rahtz, ‘Preface,’ in Harold Mytum, \textit{Recording and Analysing Graveyards}, Council for British Archaeology, York, 2000, xvi} Thus, for the bereaved, gravesites provide memory sites, an actual, physical place that they can visit in order to remember. Memorials to the dead are not always about grief,\footnote{416 John Dargue, ‘More to Grief Than Granite: arboreal remembrance in Australia,’ in \textit{Journal of Australian Studies: The Beautiful and the Damned}, no 64, 2000, 187 and 195} however – the status of the family, the memory those left behind wished perpetuated and their genuine feelings towards the deceased, were all expressed in these monuments, as were the contests around these emotions.

All sites of memory are also sites of contestation, and this echoes through the stone monuments erected to commemorate the lives of women who have passed on. As has been shown throughout this thesis, and is indeed a reality of all studies of the past, there is simply too much that has happened in the past for everything to be remembered. However, how the decisions about what is to be remembered and what is to be forgotten are made, is where the shifting priorities of memory come into play.

The ways in which some pioneer women are remembered or forgotten on gravestones is a telling indicator of how those they left behind wished them to be recollected. But for many pioneer women, no memorial remains at all to remind people of their lives. Whether this was due to conscious forgetting on the part of their families, or the fact that there was no-one to remember them, or that there was no means to remember, will be examined below. How the monument was to be worded and what form it was to take was commonly a cause of much deliberation. Considering the lasting memento of a life, often those who
remembered were conscious of portraying a desirable memory in stone. This is evinced by the months of correspondence between Annie Gull (nee Dempster) and Julia Barker that ‘dwelt upon the design for the headstone of the grave’ after the death of Julia’s child in 1862.\textsuperscript{417} Obviously, much consideration was put into the presentation of memory in this case. Others, such as the grave in Koolunga Cemetery that reads

\texttt{In loving memory of} \\
\texttt{Margaret Fuller} \\
\texttt{died March 31 1889 aged 30 years}

present a much simpler, more modest memory. The sparely worded memorials far out-number those which offer many details.

But while these simply worded gravestones outnumber those with more detail, the remembering and forgetting that takes place, and the contests around this, do not necessarily occur at the point of creation. For the people choosing the wording on gravestones, in some cases it is true that the decision to limit the wording on stones is probably reflective of personal relationships. However, in other cases, the limitation is more to do with following the societal norm of memorializing death – in the main, gravestones do not tend to offer a lot of detail about the deceased, and individuals’ decisions to follow this lead do not necessarily have a bearing on the reality of the relationship.

However, the social memory that is stirred by headstones is a much more complex entity than simply leaving out details. Social memory feeds off the expressions of the past, and builds from them its own meanings. It uses cues from its landscapes to create its reality, and thus, headstones that were erected in the beginning with little detail, because that was the most common thing to do, become examples of erasing the realities of the lives of pioneer women and promote the notion of societal forgetting.

\textsuperscript{417} Rica Erickson, \textit{The Dempsters}, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1978, 76
In the previous chapter, the ways in which social memory was conveyed through public memorials was examined – and in those cases, the creators were aware that they were ‘marking history’ through the erection of statues, gardens, windows and the like. However, the families who raised the tombstones on the graves of their loved ones had much simpler motivations – they grieved and wanted to mark the life of those who had passed.

In this way, it can be seen that the stone and metal monuments which dot the Australian landscape – through city cemeteries, country graveyards, and in some cases, graves in the middle of lonely paddocks – are not consciously drawing on the same heritage as publicly erected, abstract monuments. The drive, in the creation of tombstones, is much more primal than the drive in the creation of public monuments. However, like the public monuments follow a tradition, gravestones also act (although unwittingly in this instance) as the prompts to social memory.

Although families erecting gravestones presumably did not experience the same outward impetus, as did those erecting public memorials, to conform to the dominant societal ideals, there was nonetheless pressure to present an image that perhaps did not reflect reality. As the guardians of memory, those who chose the design of gravestones would have undoubtedly felt the desire to show their deceased in a positive light.

In this way, however unconsciously, gravestones were influenced by social norms and ideals, and were fed by these as they feed social memory. The dominant social memory has grown out of what were the nineteenth century societal ideals: the transformation from social norm to social memory occurred because the social norm reflected the idealization of womanhood in colonial times. This unrealistic idealisation has been romanticised and moulded through time into a societal ‘knowing’ of the women who lived on the edges of white settlement.
Families whose women fulfilled, in part (and it would have been ‘in part’ as the model was in itself so prescriptive that no woman could fulfill it in toto), the ideal of the ‘angel in the bush’ used these publicly erected memory-markers to perpetuate the ideal which they had tried to achieve in life. For families whose foremothers’ lives did not fulfill the ideal, these gravestones could be used to project an aspiration of gentility. Women were the ‘gentle forces’ of the frontier and their memory could easily be directed to portray this idealized gentility through the monuments they created: families could be seen as being conscious of creating a memory within a predetermined ideal.

Whether gravestones consciously seek to portray an idealized stereotype or a real picture of the woman whom they remember, most do not offer a lot of detail of either the lives or deaths of those that they commemorate. A tombstone in the Beltana cemetery in the Flinders Ranges gives more detail than many tombstones. It reads:

IN MEMORIAM

ANNE JOHNSON
DEARLY BELOVED WIFE OF W. JOHNSON
AGED 32 YEARS
WILLIAM JOHNSON
AGED 7 YEARS AND 6 MONTHS
ANNE JOHNSON
AGED 5 YEARS AND 5 MONTHS
BERTHA JOHNSON
AGED 3 YEARS AND 6 MONTHS
AGNES JOHNSON
AGED 2 MONTHS AND 2 WEEKS
WHO WERE ALL ACCIDENTALLY BURNED TO DEATH ON 15 DECEMBER 1881.
MAY THEIR SOULS REST IN PEACE
SINCE WE CANNOT TELL TO-DAY
WHAT TO-MORROW’S DAWN MAY BRING,
SAVIOUR, DRAW OUR HEARTS AWAY,
FAR FROM EVERY EARTHLY THING;
MAKE US IN THY SERVICE STEADY
ALWAYS FOR THY COMING READY.
ERECTED AS A MARK OR RESPECT
BY T. PEARCE.

Despite the details given, though, there still exist gaps in memory. For example, it is not mentioned on this headstone, nor on any other gravestone in the relatively small cemetery, why T. Pearce erected the headstone – or even who T. Pearce was, for that matter. As Geoffrey Hartman has written, ‘stories are the perennials of time, and outlast … steel, brass and marble.’ The stories which would perpetuate the narrative of the Johnson family can only be guessed at from the fragments of memory in stone. The meanings of memorials – both traditional and personal – change as people die or move on. While we cannot know today the whole of the story behind this headstone, meaning is retained in that the stone memorial reinforces the impression of the hard life of the Australian pioneer woman. The meaning has changed from memorializing the tragic death of one woman and her children to become emblematic of the difficulties of women of the bush. When one views the stone, one gets the sense that T. Pearce felt the passing of this unfortunate family keenly, and sought to convey that, on this memorial – but his story and their story is subsumed by the greater social memory and feeds that memory in turn. Anne Johnson transforms from the individual into the stereotype.

Occasionally, women are afforded the title of ‘pioneer,’ a practice which is generally far more prevalent in the descriptions of their husbands or sons. In the

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Koolunga cemetery in South Australia, Jesse Button is recorded as a pioneer on his headstone, whilst his wife Ellen is not. The Chesson headstone, however, more unusually gives the details of both Thomas and Sarah (including Sarah’s maiden name), and the dates and places of their births, as well as information on how they both arrived in the colony. In Melrose, the Bastian grave records both husband and wife as pioneers, whilst the Michael headstone notes that James Michael was a pioneer, and Mary Michael, his wife. In Nairne, the Gum headstone gives full details for both sexes. Many more headstones note that the man was ‘a colonist for X years,’ whilst the woman was simply his wife. Far more exceptional is the grave in Laura which reads (in part)

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
ANNA MARIA
BELOVED WIFE OF
THE LATE
ROBERT M’NEIL
DIED AUG 31ST 1910
AGED 82

A COLONIST OF 63 YEARS

The idea of a woman being a colonist in her own right is not reflected in the majority of headstones in rural graveyards. And indeed, while many women were ‘pioneering’ without the support of husbands (for example, Frederina Humphris whose story was examined in Chapter Four: Pioneer Women in the Museum), this is not reflected in the memory of these women – they are remembered as wives. Thus Anna Maria M’Neil’s grave offers an alternative site of memory from the norm.

As was argued in the chapter on monuments, and elsewhere through this thesis, the framing of women as wives and mothers acts to inherently frame men as husbands and fathers, and acts as a foil to the dominant narrative of the ‘lone hand’ which has permeated the national narrative. In some ways, the idealization
of women into these two roles actually created a paradox in the national legend, in that the two narratives have almost run concurrently: the men have lived a solitary life on the land, unhindered by the burdens that a family would bring; whereas women have fulfilled the role of wives which necessitates a narrative in which men are husbands.

It is through this framing that the shifting energies and changing tensions around the creation of social memory are clearly demonstrated. Both narratives have been popular, and to some extent, both remain popular. But, over time, the storyline of the ‘lone hand’, so popular through the pages of the *Bulletin* (and examined in Chapter Three: Angels in the Bush), has been overridden by a more familial account which reflects the general rise in the status of women in Australian society. Rather than being viewed as hindrances or ‘nagging wives,’ the importance of family life, a realisation about the support of women on the land, and a change in ideas about family, has seen a more domesticated memory of the Australian white frontier usurp the previous ideal. Whilst the individuals may not be memorialised and remembered, the social memory has been broadened in recent times to include the family unit.

This broadening of the social memory is a result of the rise of women’s history and the status of women within the wider Australian community. Furthermore, the role of woman as wife and mother is central to the social memory of pioneer women; and thus the inclusion of the family unit within the national social memory is integral. If women are to be imagined as wives and mothers, then a solid family unit is required to ensure the feasibility of this aspect of the memory.

But, as with all aspects of the pioneering social memory, the family unit on the Australian frontier that is memorialized and remembered, is the white family; and the memory prompts that exist for Australia’s pioneering past are prompts for recalling a white past. As with traditional memorials, the importance of the first
‘white’ woman in an area is occasionally emphasized on a headstone. Such is the case with the memorial to Ann Bacon (nee Batten), from Cornwall, who is buried with her husband, son and daughter-in-law in Melrose. Ann died in 1872 at the age of 55. Part of the tombstone that marks the grave reads ‘First European woman in northern districts.’ Whoever the first European man was in the area, his grave is not marked as such. But to be the first white woman in the area was important, whilst not necessarily in actuality, but symbolically. The importance of white women, which is frequently presented in public monuments, is thus shown to be important to the family, too. Not only was Ann Bacon an important person to her family, but she also symbolized the hopes and dreams of the white community who colonized the nation.\footnote{See both the ‘Introduction’ and ‘Angels in the Bush: Pioneer Women in Cultural Depictions’ chapters within this thesis for a wider, more complex reading of the role of white women as mother’s of colonial dreams.} Another example can be found in the Riverton cemetery at Annie Darby’s grave. The inscription reads:

HERE RESTETH
ANNIE DARBY
THE FIRST GIRL OF WHITE PARENTS BORN IN RIVERTON,
SHE CHRISTENED THE ORIGINAL BRIDGE OVER THE GILBERT
AND WAS THE DAUGHTER OF JOSHUA AND MARY DARBY
AND WIFE OF THOMAS T. LUCAS
DIED AT AUBURN
MAY 21\textsuperscript{ST} 1874

Interestingly, Annie is not presented first and foremost as a wife but as a daughter. This is comparable to the memory of Mary Seymour presented on her grave, and again, the ‘whiteness’ of the parent(s) is given the emphasis. Another grave in the same graveyard does much the same thing, presenting Marie Kamenka as the ‘Second daughter of C. Domachenz,’ whilst also memorializing her husband,
Christian Kamenka further down the stone. However, unlike in the Darby case, the (supposedly) non-Anglo Marie is not racialised on her graveside memorial.

As has been demonstrated through this chapter and indeed this thesis, the role of women as mothers is one of the central tenents of the social memory of pioneer women, and this is, as one would expect with a narrative so closely entwined with themes of race, naturally limited to the white mothers of Australia, (as are all aspects of the social memory). A constant refrain in the national social memory is the white woman who loses her children to the harshness of the Australian landscape, both literally (with the popular ‘lost in the bush’ motif that permeates the national consciousness) and figuratively (in that the very harshness of life on the land takes the lives of children). This loss of children has become a common feature in the national social memory. It illustrates the resilience and strength of the Australian pioneer woman, whilst simultaneously positioning her in the role of loving mother.

Mourning, and the associated traditions that accompanied it, was largely the domain of women in nineteenth century Australia.⁴²¹ Seldom is this so graphically illustrated as it is in the grave of Alice Hincks, buried in the Laura town cemetery. The headstone reads:

IN AFFECTIONATE REMEMBERANCE OF
ALICE MAUD
THE YOUNGEST AND BELOVED DAUGHTER OF
H & C HINCKS
WHO DIED AT STONE HUT 21⁸TH NOV 1888
AGED 10 YEARS & 7 MONTHS

“Precious Darling, she has left us

left us yes, for evermore:

⁴²¹ Pat Jalland, Australian Ways of Death: a social and cultural history 1840-1918, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 2002, 7 and 129
But we hope to meet our loved one on that bright and happy shore”

**ERECTED BY HER LOVING MOTHER**

There are a myriad of possible reasons why the death of Alice was memorialized by her ‘loving mother’ and not her ‘loving parents.’ Alice’s father may have predeceased her, or may have died before the memorial was erected. The impression that one gets, though, when observing this memorial, is that her mother deliberately chose to remember her in this public way, whilst her father did not. From this memorial, we do not get an impression of how pioneering women were remembered, but how they themselves remembered. The poem on the gravestone shows a mother deeply grieving the loss of her daughter. It can be surmised that the relationship was a close one.

But, while the memory displayed shows the remembering of a pioneer woman, rather than the way she herself was remembered, the image it presents is a feeder to current social memory. The loss of children for pioneer women is an integral part of the memory of such women. Despite improvements over the century, by the 1880s only 90 per cent of children lived to twelve months; 82 per cent lived to see their fifth birthday; and only 78 per cent lived to adulthood. In spite of these rates, parental affection was still high: parents mourned their children with as much grief and heartache as parents today, despite knowing that there had been a strong possibility that their child would predecease them.

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423 This point is contentious amongst scholars. There is a school of thought that believes that parents were wary of becoming too emotionally invested in their children for fear of losing them (see, for example, Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1979, 651-2; or Phillipe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood*, Cape, London, 1962). However, others have challenged this view, stating that there is little support for such a position (see, for example, Jalland, *Australian Ways of Death*, 73; Anne Laurence, ‘Godly Grief: individual response to death in seventeenth-century Britain,’ in Ralph Houlbrooke (ed.), *Death, Ritual and Bereavement*, Routledge, London and New York, 1989, 71; Elizabeth Roberts, ‘The Lancashire Way of Death,’ in Ralph Houlbrooke (ed.), *Death, Ritual and Bereavement*, Routledge, London and New York, 1989, 206; Patricia Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996; and Linda A Pollock, *Forgotten Children: parent-child*
Gravestones throughout rural Australia illustrate the frequency of childhood mortality, emphasizing the memory of the bush being ‘no place for a lady.’\textsuperscript{424} Not only was the bush a hard home for women, but the isolation meant that it often claimed their children.\textsuperscript{425} Sisters Caroline Augusta (23\textsuperscript{rd} July 1871-2\textsuperscript{nd} January 1873) and Caroline Augusta (29\textsuperscript{th} May 1874-30\textsuperscript{th} May 1876) are both buried in the Riverton cemetery with their father James Hill Bowcher. Mary, wife of James and mother of the young girls, died in 1932, 24 years after her husband and half a century after her two small daughters with the identical names. The recollection of the hard life that pioneer women endured is reinforced by these monuments to their children.

Another important feature of the memory of pioneer women is the idea of a woman surrounded by a horde of children, and in fact, families in Australia in the colonial period generally had well over seven children,\textsuperscript{426} with rural families commonly being larger than their urban counterparts.\textsuperscript{427} Within these large families, often the mother died with many children left to mourn her or, alternately, for the women who lived into old age, it was not uncommon for a woman to bury a number of her children who predeceased her. A vivid example of this is the Spratt grave in Melrose – Thomas and Margaret Spratt are buried with

\textit{relations from 1800-1900}, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983, particularly pages 124-42). From my own archival experience, I agree with the latter – that parents did form close attachments to their children, and were devastated by their loss.

\textsuperscript{424} Several authors have stressed this including, but not limited to, Rose Deborah Bird, ‘Nature and Gender in Outback Australia,’ in \textit{History and Anthropology}, vol 5, no 3-4, 1992; Schaffer, \textit{Women and the Bush}; Curthoys, ‘Expulsion, Exodus and Exile’; and Marilyn Lake, ‘Frontier Feminism.’

\textsuperscript{425} A number of writers have examined this overarching image of the bush ‘taking’ children. Although this is most commonly expressed through the ‘lost-in-the-bush’ narratives, the death of a child is still significant. See, for example, Schaffer, \textit{Women and the Bush}, 52-61; Peter Pierce, \textit{The Country of Lost Children: an Australian Anxiety}, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999; and Janice Newton, ‘Domesticating the Bush,’ in \textit{Journal of Australian Studies: Australian Frontiers}, no 49, 1996. The ‘lost-in-the-bush’ theme is sometimes expressed in headstones, too, such as the grave at Prince Alfred Mine for Florence Jane Boothey, who was ‘Lost in the Bush on her 5\textsuperscript{th} birthday, 11-12-1885 // and found with her little dog // on 17-12-1885.’

\textsuperscript{426} Ellen McEwen, ‘Family History in Australia: some observations on a new field,’ in Patricia Grimshaw, Chris McConville and Ellen McEwen (eds), \textit{Families in Colonial Australia}, George Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1985, 189

four of their children who predeceased them. Margaret died in 1926 at the age of 86, 61 years after the death of her son, William, in 1865.

As has been discussed above, contestations of remembering versus forgetting are fought through all theatres of memory, and this is a reality that extends to gravestones. Issues of remembering and forgetting are contested, either consciously or unconsciously, through the way that those selecting the gravestones, choose to memorialize the deceased, on the gravestone. In turn, these contests then flow into social memory. Like all the other memory prompts discussed throughout this thesis, gravestones at once promote remembering and forgetting, and provoke those viewing them to draw on their (social) memory to paint a broader picture than that which is provided by the gravestone. Additionally, the gravestones add to what is ‘known’ by the viewer.

Often, the death of a wife goes unmarked by a stone or brass marker. The deaths of men were deemed as more important in a society where women were viewed as helpmeets rather than people in their own right. Not only is this the case in cemeteries, but the tendency to forget the deaths of women flows on into cultural depictions. Lesley Fitzpatrick points to the absence of women’s deaths depicted in Australian artwork: women were ‘considered insignificant and unworthy of recording.’\footnote{Lesley Fitzpatrick, ‘Secular, Savage and Solitary: death in Australian painting,’ in Kathy Charmaz, Glennys Howarth and Allan Kellehear (eds), The Unknown Country: death in Australia, Britain and the United States of America, MacMillan Press, London, 1997, 23} In Australian paintings, ‘Gender roles are polarized: men die and women grieve for them.’\footnote{Fitzpatrick, ‘Secular, Savage and Solitary,’ 22} This is amply demonstrated in Frederick McCubbin’s painting ‘The Last Pioneer’, in which a woman stands by the grave of her husband, grieving his passing. The framing of the scene suggests to the viewer that the deceased husband was the ‘last pioneer’ of the title, leaving his surviving wife in almost a state of limbo – if he was the ‘last pioneer’, where did that leave her?
‘The Last Pioneer’ can be compared with that most iconic of McCubbin’s paintings, ‘The Pioneer’ examined in Chapter Three: Angels in the Bush. As with ‘The Pioneer’, the female figure is presented as the support for the man rather than a pioneer in her own right. Her presence in both the painting and the bush is justified in her role as wife and mother.

The popularity of these paintings, and the depictions of women therein, demonstrates the shifting energies around Australia’s social memory. As was discussed in the earlier chapter, despite commonly being referred to as ‘The Pioneer’ at its time of creation, that painting is now often called ‘The Pioneers’. The energies around the understanding of the pioneer past have changed so that both the individuals are seen in that role. ‘The Last Pioneer’ has not enjoyed the same recognition as ‘The Pioneer’, and this may be because, while there can be ambiguity in the roles of the men and women (and both can be seen as being ‘pioneers’ in ‘The Pioneer’), there exists no ambiguity in ‘The Last Pioneer’ – the man was the pioneer and the woman was not. As the cult of the pioneer woman has surged, a picture that dismisses the role of women in pioneering does not fit with the accepted social memory of the white frontier.

Graveside memorials in rural Australia not only reflect the hardships of pioneering life on women, which is so central to the social memory of these women – they also indicate the value such women were given, and mirror the status of the memory of women in much of this nation’s history. A grave site situated in the McLaren Vale cemetery, in one of South Australia’s famous winegrowing areas, illustrates the transposable nature of women within the pioneering period. Within the fenced enclosure sits one headstone, for John Gribble, and his two wives, Mary (who died in 1866, aged 52 years [note: the

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430 Both Anne Summers in Damned Whores and God’s Police and Miriam Dixon in The Real Matilda have commented on the undervaluing traditionally of women within Australia, with much of the emphasis of women’s importance being placed on their position as wives and mothers. Since their work in the mid-1970s, other women’s and feminist historians have taken up this argument, which suggests that the input of women in other areas is undervalued because their main task is seen to be as wives and mothers.
gravestone is very damaged, and the exact age of Mary is hard to decipher] and Ann (who died in 1874, aged 60 years). On this headstone, although being separately named, the women are presented as Gribble’s two wives, and remembered as such. Any individuality is lost in a site that remembers them both simply as Gribble’s partners.

A further example of this can be found in Gladstone (SA), on the grave of William Coe, who is buried with wives Sarah and Annie Edith. Whilst Annie lived to an old age, well into the twentieth century (as can be ascertained from the dates given on the stone), Sarah died a middle-aged woman before the turn of the twentieth century. She was a pioneering woman. But she, too, loses her own identity except for that as Coe’s wife. An additional example in the same cemetery sees George Flavel buried with two wives, and a daughter from the first union. Simon Aunger, in Koolunga Cemetery (SA), appears to be buried with his three wives (Eliza Rose, Eliza Ann, and Lavenia), but on closer calculations of dates, it becomes clear that the two Elizas must have been married to a son (or sons) of the Simon Aunger in the grave. The impression of the graves, though, from a casual glance, is that these three women shared their husband. It seems that these women are, in their places on the stone, interchangeable.

With women often dying young in the Australian bush, it is both understandable and expected that the widowers they left behind would remarry. The fact that this regularly happened is not pondered nor judged here. What is worthy of consideration, though, is the fact that these women are lumped in together, identified solely by the man whom they married, perhaps never having met each other in life. But together they lay, for eternity, one expects on their husband’s wishes. Individuals forgotten; wives remembered.

One stunning example of a woman ‘forgotten’ on a tombstone can be found in the Laura Cemetery, in South Australia’s mid-north region. The headstone of John Thomas Close reveals that Close died in 1896, at the age of 42, and was
buried with his two infant daughters. The glaring absence of Close’s wife is highlighted by a large blank in the middle of the headstone. There are a number of reasons that Close’s wife’s name could be missing from the headstone: she may have moved from the area and been buried elsewhere; she may have remarried and been buried with her other husband; she may have decided after she had mourned that she did not wish to be buried with her husband and children. But for the person reading this memorial, it appears that Mrs Close was simply forgotten. Her life, which was to fill the blank between her children and husband, remains a void. Presumably Mrs Close arranged the headstone for her deceased husband and infant children: leaving the void was her way of determining where her memory fitted in. Without further research into what became of this woman, it appears telling that her memory seems not to have fitted in anywhere – rather, it is forgotten.

Another similar example of a ‘missing woman’ is in the Gordon cemetery, north of Quorn, in the Flinders Ranges. Gordon was originally surveyed in 1879, but now only the ruins remain in one of the Mid-North’s many ghost towns. Within the small graveyard of Gordon (where many of the graves are simply marked with crosses that read ‘RIP’) is a double grave with only one headstone. The memorial reads:

IN LOVING MEMORY
OF
ROBERT HARVEY
DIED JANy 16TH 1893
AGED 73 YEARS

As with the Close headstone, there are a number of possible explanations as to why the wife (for one assumes that the second space was for her) has no headstone (if indeed she is buried in Gordon at all), but the overarching sense is that she, too, is another forgotten pioneer woman in the harsh climate of the Flinders landscape. The double grave with the single headstone is a common occurrence in bush cemeteries: George Lawry in Koolunga also appears to lie alone, as do many other
pioneer men in rural cemeteries. White Range cemetery, one of the two graveyards of Arltunga goldmines in the Northern Territory, contains the remains of twelve souls, of which only eight (all male) graves are memorialized. Whether the women were in fact buried alongside them and not memorialized, or moved on and are memorialized in another place, is not the point: here these women have been forgotten. In the broader context of the national social memory, pioneer women are often left out, blanks in the wider cultural dialogue.

Often the study of graves can leave us with more questions than answers. Although those who erected the monuments obviously wished some memory to be preserved (whether the memory was grounded in reality or not), often the ways in which the remembrance is expressed mean that, without further explanation or information, the memory can be lost, diminished or distorted. Once those who directly remembered the person who lies beneath the memorial have themselves passed on, the memory evoked by the gravestone dissipates. Instead of remembering Mary Tilbrook of Koolunga as an individual, we read that she shares a gravesite with her husband and four children who predeceased her. Consequently, we then evoke an abstract memory of the pioneer woman who suffered much in the opening of the Australian interior.

Overall, and on a very basic level, it can be seen that pioneer women are in one of two camps – simply remembered or forgotten. Some gravestones do offer a wider memory of such women, most notably in the naming and individualizing aspect of the nature of such memorials. But those who are remembered are usually remembered simply: as anonymous mothers and wives. The complexity of their lives, struggles and diversity of experiences is simply not reflected in traditional monuments and memorials.

Despite the fleeting nature of personal memory, social memory has an enduring nature, supported by its ability to mould to the contemporary needs of society. When society viewed women’s role in Australian society as that of wholly
the helpmeets of their husbands, the ‘true’ pioneers, their gravestones (and other memory-prompts found throughout society) could be interpreted as supporting this wider view. As attitudes to gender roles have changed and evolved through time, so, too, has the social memory of pioneer women, and thus their gravestones can be read differently – viewers can focus on their strength and resilience at coping with the deaths of multiple children; or their role as pioneers in their own right. In this way, societies hold onto a past that has slipped from its grasp.
CHAPTER SEVEN

‘A Pioneer Woman in Our Past’: Family Histories

‘A family history is grounded in life. It is not just about people, it is people, for today’s lives become tomorrow’s history.’

- Paul J Gersch

Both families and societies try to hold on to memories which are, by their very nature, ephemeral. They do this by recording family trees, writing family histories, and holding reunions: these concrete forms of the fleeting offer reassurances that there exists some continuity with the past. Family histories provide researchers with a valuable insight into the lives of everyday people. Unlike so many histories, these records are concerned with the ordinary citizens who make up society, rather than the exceptions who, for whatever reason, gain some level of celebrity. They also provide the historian with an opportunity to examine how families wish themselves and their forebears to be remembered, or forgotten. Within this chapter, I will examine both how pioneer women are remembered within their families and presented in family histories, and I will also look at the importance of memory and history in the construction of group (family) identity. From there, I will examine local histories which, in many ways, are public versions of family histories.

The ways in which pioneering women within the family are remembered, and thus presented, in written family histories, are as disparate as the women themselves. In some, they are given the most cursory of mentions as wives or mothers, not really a part of the family, but marrying either into or out of it; whilst in others, they are shown to be individuals with their own stories to tell. This chapter will look at the range of ways families remember their pioneering women, and compare and contrast the wide variety of depictions offered. One of the family

historians whose work will be examined later in this chapter – Honour Burcher in *Pioneers and Their Better Halves* – actually states in her introduction that she had planned initially to write only about her female forebears, but had found it impossible not to write also of the men in their lives.\(^{432}\) Strangely (but perhaps all too predictably), other historians have not had the same problem doing the reverse: that is, many family histories practically exclude women. And the authors – as will be shown – do not feel that it is necessary to justify such a position, such is the ingrained notion of some of the women of the family being unimportant.

Noeline Kyle’s *We Should’ve Listened to Grandma*, written in 1988 (and thus well after the second wave of feminism had brought women’s studies to the fore) is one of the very few texts that deals with how women are remembered and presented in family histories. In this instructive text, Kyle testifies to the belief by some family historians that women are not ‘real’ members of the family. She writes,

> There has been no attempt in the past to highlight or show differences that might exist if tracing women [through research for family history] instead of men. On the contrary, texts appear to go to great pains to discourage research on women ancestors. Well known texts suggest that female surnames need not be repeated on family trees (for greater clarity presumably for the more important male names), that females do not belong to the “family” but simply marry into it, and in general place greater emphasis on the line of descent from father to son.\(^{433}\)

This trend – even taking into account the influence of a patriarchal society – is even more astonishing when Kyle gives the figure of more than 75 per cent of all people conducting genealogical research being women.\(^{434}\) Despite the fact that so many women write these histories, as Kyle writes, my figures show, and as will be

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\(^{434}\) Kyle, *We Should’ve Listened*, 6
further exhibited in this chapter, the female family historian often forgets the women who went before her.

The reason for the majority of genealogists being female may be, as Graeme Davison proposes, that women are ‘the customary nurturers and keepers of family tradition.’ Feminist historians have criticized family histories for presenting the family as a like-minded, concurring unit in which the usual struggles for power do not exist. Feminist historians suggest that family historians ignore the gender/power struggles that exist in society in favour of presenting a marital partnership in which no power struggles exist, in which there is a consensus between the men and the women in the family on major decisions. In the majority of histories examined for this research, this rings true – very rarely are power struggles within the family shown (this is particularly true when writing of exceptional women in the family’s past – see below). A significant part of this exclusion of a seemingly large issue in relationships, though, is due to the fact that families’ histories are, in a lot of ways, less history and more memory records. The writers, even if they are writing about people long since dead, are very conscious that it is their forebears of whom they write. For many, it must be a case of not wanting to tarnish the memory of the dead. Family histories are, in some ways, more problematic in their conception than other forms of histories. Often written for family reunions, the writer (or writing committee, as is regularly the case) has to be aware of egos that may be damaged and toes that may be stepped on. Rather than dealing with strangers, the family historian is frequently presenting people that they know intimately – very seldom is the writer of family history not a member of the family about which they write. Thus, one expects the personal bias in such histories is much stronger than in other kinds of histories. When using family histories as sources, then, the researcher must bear this in mind.

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435 Davison, *The Use and Abuse of Australian History*, 81
Family histories are full of secrets, and this has an impact on what is accessible to the researcher who is using these histories as a source. There are some things that family members will not tell each other, let alone a member who is planning to record such incidents in a history for posterity. Not only are there secrets to contend with, though, but also forgotten parts of the family’s past. Family histories tell us not only about the family in question, but also about what is felt, within that unit, to be important enough to remember.

This chapter considers the structuring, writing and remembering involved in the compilation of these texts, solely from the angle of the presentation of ‘pioneer women.’ Whilst some texts briefly consider the representation of women in general in these histories, this chapter exclusively considers the presentation of nineteenth century women living in rural settings, and their presentation in family histories.

When I first began with the subject of pioneer women for my PhD thesis, I planned to look exclusively at German women in South Australia, urged on by my interest in my own family history. In those early days of refining a subject, the theme of social memory was not a consideration in my research; however, as I refined my subject, it became clear that social memory was integral to my narrative, and that my study would need to be widened to Australian pioneer women in general, rather than limited to German pioneer women in South Australia. Nevertheless, a strong German influence remains in this chapter, not only because of my initial interest, but also because of the prolific way in which those of German heritage seem to document their families’ histories. In researching this chapter, I read well over seventy family histories. From that, I chose 37 histories that I believe were reasonably representative of the whole: it is these 37 that will be dealt with in this chapter. These histories were from local, state and university libraries, as well as a few procured through interlibrary loan; from regional archives and museums; and some (unpublished) that were lent to me.

Kuhn, *Family Secrets*, 2
by the families. The selection of the histories read was reasonably arbitrary, concentrating mainly on those that were most readily available. As such, the majority of the histories deal with South Australian families, but each state is represented in some capacity. Of the 37 histories that are to be dealt with, 19 concern families of German descent, whilst the remaining 18 are about families who emigrated from the British Isles. Whilst acknowledging that these two areas are not the sole places from which families migrated to Australia, it is the descendants of the emigrants of those two areas that have been particularly prolific in recording their families’ histories in ways that are accessible to the historian.

In a further breakdown of the division of family histories to be considered in this chapter, twelve were written, compiled or edited by women, with the same number written, compiled or edited by men. In eleven cases, the gender of the compiler is either unclear, or the text was written by a committee comprised of both genders – that is, either only first initials are given, no name is given, or a writing committee is presented as the authors. In two cases, both a man and a woman are credited on the same work as being responsible for that work. A comparable gender breakdown of authors was found in the other histories that were read but will not be discussed within this chapter.

This feeling of belonging to something larger than oneself, a seeking of permanence through remembering the past, is one of the motivating factors in the creation of family history: 438 ‘Family stories give a feeling of continuity, of how the past led to the present, of rootedness and family tradition, and so help to make sense of a complicated and fraught family life in the present.’ 439 A number of things bind a family, including ‘the imperfectly remembered stories.’ 440 The interest in family history increased during the Victorian era, in which people felt a
sense of isolation in the past, and insecurity about the future. Researching and learning of their history gave them a sense of linkage to the past – another of the most important intentions of creating family history. Yet another reason is to give the children of a family a reference point for history by placing them within a wider context of historical knowledge.

Today, the reasons for the writing of family histories are very similar to those of our Victorian forebears – people want an understanding of their history, a sense of knowing where they come from. Like their nineteenth century counterparts, the family historian today can embed themselves in the bigger picture by creating their family history. The social disruption of the change in the makeup of society that encouraged nineteenth century genealogists can be compared to the modern disruptions to family lines caused by ever-increasing divorce rates in Western society. Further, stability is seen by many family historians to be a thing of the past, and compiling family histories gives people a sense of familiarity and constancy.

More so than in most other forms of written history, in family histories one sees the compounding of memory and history. Usually drawing on a wide variety of sources, family histories are formed by

- a collage of written and oral sources, official, personal and even anecdotal memory. It is prompted not just by archival research, but also with the artefacts that even to this day are treasured. And

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441 Jane H Halpert, ‘Homecoming – Retracing My Welsh Roots,’ in World and I, September 2000
442 John Gillis, ‘Making Time for Family: the invention of family time(s) and the reinvention of family history,’ in Journal of Family History, Jan 1996, vol 21, no 1; W Fitzhugh Brundage, ‘No Deed But Memory,’ 3; Trish Armstrong, ‘Exploring Heritage With Children: some original ideas that have motivated children to explore their heritage,’ in Our Heritage in History, Papers of the 6th Australasian Congress on Genealogy and Heraldry, Launceston, Tasmania, May 1991, 1
443 Davison, The Use and Abuse of Australian History, 82
444 This is a recurring theme in the family historian questionnaires that Graeme Davison refers to in The Use and Abuse of Australian History, 82-3.
it shows an intersection between what scholars have called private and collective memory.

Family histories are not usually written by academic historians, who have had training into the ‘correct’ ways in which one should collect evidence, but instead are usually written by those without training, who follow whatever leads come their way in piecing together their lineage. As Lisa Gye writes on her website ‘Half Lives,’ a hypermedia project that examines (amongst other things) memory and family history,

Most family histories are made up of a few disparate ‘facts’ derived from birth, death and marriage certificates, shipping records and other public records where they may exist. And photographs – often the essence of a family’s history. And it is with these artefacts that we weave together our families’ narratives.

The photos, the treasured possessions, the ‘facts’ all come together to make history and memory. We live in a society in which objects are seemingly imbued with memory. Possessions take on sentimental importance – not for what they are, but for what they symbolise to their possessor. It is on these memories that the family historian relies so heavily.

If, as Robert F Jefferson and Angelita Reyes (among many others) assert, history is the verifiable whilst memory is that which is not necessarily backed by supporting evidence but which is widely believed, then the most interesting and the most readable family histories are not ‘history records,’ as such, but ‘memory records.’ As is discussed later in this chapter, the family histories that try to stick only to the ‘facts’ to which they can attest, are bland, dry and largely unreadable.

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447 Hamilton, ‘Memory Studies and Cultural History ’
448 Jefferson and Reyes, ‘History Telling at the Kitchen Table’; see also, for example, Evans, ‘History, Memory and the Law’; Weissberg, ‘Introduction’; and Abramson, ‘Make History, Not Memory.’
The history that is bound in this unpalatable form is a useless history – for whilst it may be ‘the truth,’ the fact that this is so dry means that most people will not be interested enough to read it. Another problem that arises when one is seeking to use only ‘truthful,’ verifiable sources for their history making, is that even official, archival evidence can be wrong. It is not uncommon for even the most official document to have been created as deliberately misleading to maintain respectability – for example, false deaths and marriages were recorded on birth certificates in the past to maintain the respectability of a woman for whom having a child outside of marriage could have been social death. The mistakes presented in official documents are not always intentional, though, as my own experience in researching the Schedlich family can attest.

Despite the fact that, in reality, memories recorded in the family story do not actually impact on the history (that is, the verifiable facts) per se, they are important to the author(s). It is the memories, not the history that makes each of the stories unique. In so many, the actual life-events are so similar that they are almost interchangeable. In contrast, memories provide details, such as a candle being melted over the floor on every birthday, despite the family’s hardship, to allow for dancing, that not only make the story ‘come to life,’ but they tell us, as readers, about the family who melted the candles, and the generations after, who remembered this. We can assume that, despite adversity in their new home, the family were fun-loving people who did not let life get on top of them; or, conversely we can assume that such merriment was probably not the norm, if

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449 Helen Doxford Harris, ‘Women on the Goldfields’ in Our Heritage in History, Papers of the 6th Australasian Congress on Genealogy and Heraldry, Launceston, Tasmania, May 1991, 172
450 When my grandfather was a child, his youngest brother (Gilbert Charles) had passed away aged two. My grandfather was not told where his brother was buried, and as my grandfather was approaching the end of his life, and still mourned the passing of his brother, I made it a mission to find the grave for my grandfather. After much searching, I finally found that Gilbert Charles’ surname was documented in the official records as ‘Schadlich,’ a spelling never used by the family. After receiving a copy of the death certificate, I could see where the error had occurred – the flowery cursive of the certificate made the ‘e’ look like an ‘a.’ Such errors (and there are many more besides) as this can make tracing people very difficult, especially for those with surnames more common than Schedlich.
more than one hundred years later, this detail was remembered by members of that family who were obviously not even born at the time.

Memory is integral to story telling within the family. It may be ‘stage-managed’ within the family, but the memory of any group comes under this same sort of pressure. To remain important to the group, though, memory has to be controlled and sometimes altered: ‘Personal memories and public histories matter less than the ways in which our desire shapes and remakes the past in ways that suit us in the present.’ Memory has to be fluid to retain importance for changing generations. It has to be able to adapt and change to the present needs of those doing the remembering. The past is only important so long as it is related to the present. For this to happen, the past, and the ways of recalling it, must be flexible.

Quite a few of the people who wrote the family histories studied were conscious of the fact that they were recording memories, rather than history as such. For example, the authors of the Cohn family history chose the title Tablets of Memory to indicate that they were recording memory, rather than history in its strictest sense. Likewise, in the Peltz family history, author Stella Warner notes that she recorded all the family stories that members ‘could remember,’ and Gordon A Barnett refers to one of the problems, when compiling a family history, being how to extract fact from family legend. Others, however, see themselves contributing to the production of history: early in the Gersch family history, Paul J Gersch writes ‘It is our hope that this book will not just give those whose names appear in it a sense of belonging and a perspective on their place in history, but

453 Kuhn, Family Secrets, 17-9
455 Alan Alexander Cohn, Jack Magnus Cohn and Lawrence Julian Cohn, Tablets of Memory: The Bendigo Cohns and Their Descendants 1853-1989, Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide, 1990, xii
that it will also contribute to the historical records of the community in general.\textsuperscript{458} Similar sentiments are expressed in a number of the other family histories – the wish of the author(s) that their work will contribute not only to their family, but to the wider historical knowledge of the community of which they write. Although some of these authors talk of ‘memory’ or ‘remembering,’ the general feeling of these examples is that they do not consider their work to be about memory, but about history.

This distinction found within the histories leads to an important question: what is more important in these texts – history or memory? Could it be thought that family memory becomes family history through construction? This point relates back to Chapter One, which explored the relationship between history and memory, and examined the difference and similarities found between the two. I would argue that, whilst the tales contained within most family histories do begin their narrative lives as reminiscences, through the narrative transformation into the form of books or booklets, they take on the form of history. Whether they provide ‘good’ or ‘bad’ history is debatable, but the fact that they transform into history is not. The discipline of history has long relied on orally transmitted stories when other forms of documentation have not been available, and whilst this technique has come under scrutiny from certain quarters, on the whole, it is a generally accepted form of historical research.\textsuperscript{459} All oral history collection (as well as memoirs and the like) relies on personal memory to be constructed. The question then is, do family histories present sketches of individuals, or do they draw on a wider national legend to construct the pioneer women in their pasts? This chapter will demonstrate that there can be found a mixture of both methods within family histories – some authors search for the individuals of their family, and compose them as such, whilst others rely on a broad stereotype of what these women may have been like, in a bid to capture their foremothers. The Reichstein family history is a prime example of an author drawing on social memory to colour his picture:

\textsuperscript{458} Gersch, \textit{Of Pioneers and People}, 7
this text gives very little detail about the people of the family’s past in particular, but does give broad brushstrokes about what the past was like. For example, four pages of this text are dedicated to ‘The Pioneer Housewife.’ On these pages, the author informs the reader that ‘the pioneer housewife’s role was a fulltime, satisfying career of many facets.’ He then goes on to draw on the rich tradition of social memory to describe the life of the Australian pioneer woman in general terms. Without being able to reach the individual women of the Reichstein past, Rudolph Walter Reichstein draws on the collective memory to fill in the voids.

Family histories do not only rely on social memory, though – they can be considered as contributing to and shaping it, too. The idea of the Australian ‘pioneer legend’ is integral to the national narrative, and family histories play a large role in perpetuating this aspect of the Australian discourse: they provide the background, the details on which the legend is founded. Family histories often focus on the arrival of the family to Australia, thus integrating their heritage into, and building upon, the legend. Therefore, it could be argued that family histories are integral in the promotion of the idea of the Australian pioneer woman. For that reason, family histories need to be considered, not only for relying on social memory, but in their role of promoting social memory: like the other sources examined throughout this thesis, there is a symbiotic relationship between the sources and the social memory.

In the foreword to ‘Freedom Found’, P H Colliver’s history of the Altus family, the Hon. J W Olsen, MP, writes,

All too often, the men and women who struggled against an often hostile environment are forgotten in the excitement of heritage conservation projects.

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460 Rudolph Walter Reichstein, The History and Family Tree of Johann Wilhelm Reichstein and Johanna Caroline Dorothea Reichstein and Their Descendants from the time of their arrival in Australia 1853-1973: a tribute to our pioneering forefathers 120 years in Australia, privately published by reunion committee, 38

461 See ‘Introduction,’ where the pioneer legend is examined in more detail.

462 Davison, The Use and Abuse of Australian History, 90-1
Unfortunately, the contribution of most of these people is likely to remain unpraised. We remember only the famous; the politicians, architects, engineers, explorers and pioneering pastoralists, but forget the majority whose contribution was neither less significant, nor worthy of praise.

Fortunately, through such avenues as this book, some of those people will be remembered and the value of their contribution recognized.\footnote{J W Olsen, MP, ‘Preface,’ in P H Colliver, ‘Freedom Found’: a history of the Altus family in Australia, privately published, 1982, 5}

A feeling comes away with the reader after finishing a family history which excludes or devalues the pioneer women of the family’s past – Is it that family historians wish to forget, or are they simply unable to remember? Do they consciously exclude the stories of the foremothers as unimportant to the larger dialogue, or is it that these women’s dialogue has been silenced long before, never reaching down through the generations? This is more than possible – for a long time, when researching the past, only the masculine voices were considered, deemed worthy to remember. It is only relatively recently that researchers have come to believe that women, too, have something to add to our knowledge of the past. But sometimes, this acknowledgment comes too late, and the voices are lost in the streams of time, unable to be recovered.

Before going into deeper analysis of the family histories studied, a general idea of these histories should first be given for the reader unfamiliar with the genre. Family histories tend to follow a fairly conventional structure: they provide the reader with a family tree; and they follow those branches (generally) from arrival in Australia to the present day, with varying degrees of detail from text to text – and, in some cases, from person to person within the same text. Family histories also tend to be fairly conventional in their presentation of their colonial forebears: men are husbands and business owners (often farms), and women are
wives and mothers. In the majority of these histories, the women are remembered in pleasant ways, any bad qualities glossed over within the text. Such examples can be seen in the histories of the Bittners, the Döring-Doerings, the Gerschs, the Altus, and the Pechs, to name only a few. Within these examples, one can see the conventional depiction in memory and family history of white women living in rural colonial Australia.

Pioneer women are not always remembered in family histories in a positive light, though. For example, in The Goldstein Story, we learn that Samuel and his wife Jeanie, who were living in Portland at the time, did not enjoy a happy union. Jeanie died at the age of 40, which author Leslie Henderson speculates may have been directly or indirectly caused by Samuel, a manic-depressive alcoholic. However, Henderson then goes on to say, ‘On the other hand she may have been a nagging and unsatisfactory wife and may herself have contributed to Samuel’s emotional instability.’464 The affect on Jeannie of living with a mentally unstable alcoholic is not questioned. Henderson chooses to further the memory of the nagging Australian wife, which, for a long time, was the norm.465 A similar picture is presented in the Martin family history, although in a more exaggerated form than in the Goldstein history: the reader is told that Elizabeth Jane ‘is said to have been very hard, even cruel,’ with stories of her beating children and a kitten, and hanging a dog.466

One family history that I came across in my searching, provided a very different picture from the others studied, and, due to its uniqueness among the collection, I feel that it is worth mentioning in some detail. Robert Lange’s Vorfahren does not claim to be a family history in the same way as the others mentioned in this chapter. It does, however, conform to the style by using a collection of papers and family recollections to draw a picture of his forebears’ lives, in much the same way that other family histories do. Vorfahren’s Auguste

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465 Waterhouse, ‘Australian Legends,’ 208
466 Alfred William Martin, The Martin Family, privately published 1978 (updated 1990), 22
Günther is distinctive in the family memories studied for offering a radically different site of memory to comparable women within other texts. Lange writes

The young Auguste was a really hard case who could handle a bullock team with the best of men, the swearing and all! When soil conditions near the farm were soaking wet from much rain, she would hitch up and deliberately bog-up the public road, then charge passers-by for hauling them out of the bog with her team!\textsuperscript{467}

Lange, unlike the other authors studied, seems to take a perverse pride in the fact that Auguste did not fit any stereotype of the Australian pioneer woman, and in fact, bucks the tradition of the ‘angel in the bush.’ It is interesting to note, that for the reader, Auguste is one of the only women who makes a real, lasting impression – and this emphasis on her difference is perhaps because this history was written in the 1990s, by which stage the social memory of pioneer women (whilst still relatively prescribed) had broadened out to include more aspects of women’s lives. Because Lange does emphasise and celebrate her difference from the norm of the memory of Australian pioneer women, Auguste is an individual worth remembering.

As is often shown in family histories, pioneer women are presented as individuals worth discussing, but this individuality is presented very firmly within established notions and perimeters of ‘womanly duties:’ that is, as wives, mothers and midwives. Lisa Klein has written that motherhood is a key to identity for modern women,\textsuperscript{468} and nowhere is this more the case than in family histories. In many of the family histories, the men are presented in the public realm (whether business, church life, or the like), whilst the women of the family are shown firmly set within the domestic realm (there are a few examples where women are presented in the public realm, but it must be remembered that when this is the


\textsuperscript{468} Lisa M Klein, ‘Lady Anne Clifford as Mother and Matriarch: Domestic and Dynastic Issues in Her Life and Writings,’ in \textit{Journal of Family History}, vol 26, no 1, January 2001
case, these women are single – the idea of a married woman, successful in the public realm, is not examined in these family histories). Even within the family histories that do not concentrate on any other aspect of the family’s women’s lives, who they mother is fundamental. Some histories take this even further, and the only details offered about a woman’s life are who they married and (later) give birth to. Thus, in the Martin family history, the reader learns that Charlotte Martin, who migrated to South Australia in 1850 with her husband Benjamin, did so with nine of her ten children; and that she gave birth to another child once in the colony.\(^{469}\) The Bartram history also offers similarly scanty details,\(^ {470}\) as does the Tunkin history.\(^ {471}\) The reader is told in the Burton family history that Lucy, the daughter of the couple who first migrated to Australia, ‘proved to be an excellent pioneer farmer’s daughter, working with and alongside her parents and brothers, helping to make a home on the virgin countryside of Tungkillo.’\(^ {472}\) In the same way, Lucy Gray’s transcribed family history tells that when the Gray girls were young, ‘they had to do a man’s work as an all girl family other than one boy [sic].’\(^ {473}\) The two Lucys are able to be shown in these family histories as working on the land and these two depictions are firmly entrenched in the social memory: Lucy Burton and Lucy Gray worked to help their families establish themselves as pioneering families in their respective districts, an acceptable reason for women doing manual work within the national social memory. Wives, mothers and daughters prove to be the easiest depiction of pioneer women in family histories, and thus the one to which most writers cling.

The depiction of a rather limited role is not confined to women in family histories, though. Some family histories present more of a family tree than a family history, and within these texts, both the men and the women of the family

\(^{469}\) Martin, *The Martin Family*, 12
\(^{470}\) *The Story of George and Frances Bartram and Their Descendants*, Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide, 1986
\(^{472}\) *George and Harriet Burton Australia 1849: They came from SUSSEX ENGLAND to Tungkillo South Australia*, Bunyip Press, n/p
\(^{473}\) Interview with Lucy Gray, daughter of Elizabeth (Granny) Gray and her husband who lived at the back of Mount Remarkable, transcript, Melrose Archives
are only identified and individualised by their parents, children, and partners. However, whilst the exclusion of both sexes does sometimes occur, there is a preponderance for family histories to solely forget the women of the past.

The image of the pioneer woman acting as nurse or midwife is illustrated in a number of family histories. Tom Chesson’s transcribed family history describes how his grandmother was a trained midwife who helped with Tom’s birth. In the Brock family history, the reader is informed that, due to the distance to the closest doctor, the mother of the family had to act in that role, at one time stitching up a nasty gash with such expertise that barely a scar was left. The Gersh family history, discussed in further detail below, also mirrors this emphasis. Midwifery and nursing are emphasised in these histories (and, correspondingly, in the national memory of pioneer women) because they highlight the maternal and caring nature of pioneer women.

This is an area of the Australian memory in which women are given and give power. Unlike other aspects of the ‘pioneer legend,’ where men are very firmly the control and influence in colonial society, in childbearing and child raising, women decisively have power over life-giving, both directly as mothers, and indirectly as midwives and nurses. Within the family histories, however, this unique power dynamic (of patriarchal society ultimately controlled by the women/mothers/life-givers) is not examined. On the paradox of men controlling society, but women controlling life, the author remains silent. This does not seem like a deliberate omission, though, but an oversight on the parts of the authors or writing committees that compile these texts.

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474 Interview with Tom Chesson, born 17 June 1892. Notes prepared by Rhonda Klemm, Brinkworth Museum.
475 Taylor, The Brock Family History, 32
476 The depiction of pioneer women as midwives and nurses does not only feature in family histories, but is also presented in cultural depictions, history books, and in life writings, all of which are examined through this thesis.
As Nicole Moore has written, ‘maternalism can operate as a feminised figuration of paternalist domination,’ and thus white maternalism gives power and authority to white women over black men and women, reinforcing the paternalist structuring of colonial society. However, maternalism can be viewed from another vantage point: not only as the ‘feminised figuration of paternalist domination,’ but also as a way in which white women can, to an extent, dominate that society for themselves. Whilst not acknowledged in the family histories, men are shown as having the skills to build the nation, but ultimately they do not possess the skills to control the mortality of that nation.

Often, the ways in which family histories contribute to the social memory of the nation is in a somewhat unwitting way – they do not seek to valorise the pioneers of the bush, but present selected snippets which add to the collective memory. The ‘bad’ parts of the past are excluded (or forgotten), and instead only the positive elements of the bygone times are presented. This is a circular problem – the authors contribute to the national social memory by recounting stories which fit within the dominant discourse, but they also are shaped by the national social memory. The national memory of Australia’s pioneering days instructs these authors as to what is important to remember. Thus these authors can be seen as both shaping and being shaped by social memory. The self-sufficiency of pioneer women is an important part of the national dialogue, and the reader is duly informed in The Gum Tree Branches that ‘Mother used to make all the candles in a six mould candle stick container from fat rendered down from the animals killed. Also all rags were cut up for bed mattresses, all the feathers from the fowls killed were carefully dried, trimmed and used in beds.’ Correspondingly, both the Wuttke and the Miller family histories tell stories of the women of Verdun and

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Lobethal walking the produce of the families’ farms to Adelaide in the early days of settlement in those areas.479

In some family histories, the women are presented as having worked alongside their husbands, doing manual labour for a property that is presented as the property and concern of both the husband and the wife. Within these histories, the woman who works is still usually presented in the traditional model of the pioneer woman – the woman works to help the man, whilst the man works to better his own situation. Contained in these stories, a somewhat patriarchal, romantically domestic picture is shown: the woman helping on the farm when things are tough, but working equally hard to keep up the ideal of the pioneer woman. These women are ‘super-women’ – they help farm the land, they pay all the attention that is needed to their children, they contribute to their communities. The reader is informed in the Miller family history that the women of Hahndorf trekked barefoot to Adelaide to sell produce at market, and returned with other goods and two bricks each for the formation of the Lutheran church.480 Essie Wearne’s history tells us that:

Pioneering was no easy task, with washing, mending, ironing, sewing clothes, chickens to feed and animals to care for, gardens to tend, cows to milk, and above all, bearing children. Occasion for relaxing and socialising were provided in going to church, and visiting and entertaining relatives, friends and neighbours.481 Another comparable example is found in the Gersch family history, which is one of the few histories which gives equal space to men and women, whether born into the family or not. Paul J Gersch writes of Johanne Gersch (nee Lutz):

During the late 1870’s and early 1880’s, Johanne helped her husband with the clearing, ploughing, seeding and harvesting.

The younger children were left in the shade of a tree and looked after by the older ones while Johanne completed each circuit of the paddock with the team.

Johanne was a trained midwifery nurse and for many years assisted the neighbouring pioneer women in every possible way. It is said that she ‘never lost a case.’ She was also on call as a local nurse for the surrounding districts.\(^{482}\)

Within the Gersch family history, Johanne (who was born a Lutz) is exalted as an idealised pioneer woman, who cared for her children, the property, and her community. She is presented as an ‘angel of the bush’ and an integral part of the family history. Johanne is a prime example of the dominant representation of Australian social memory’s image of pioneer women. Whether intentionally, or inadvertently, Gersch offers a woman who can be seen as an example of the veracity of the pioneer legend. All these examples can be considered the ones that really, forcefully contribute to the social memory of the nation’s foremothers – comparable to Lawson’s drover’s wife, or Essex Evans’ women of the west, they are the romantic ideal of the angels in the bush.

The difficulties of pioneering, and the braveness of those who pursued a life on the Australian land in the nineteenth century, are emphasised time and time again in family histories. Colin Graetz notes in the Döring-Doering family history ‘an appreciation of the traditions, hardships and personalities of the pioneers;’\(^{483}\) R G Butler calls for a tribute to the achievements of the pioneers in the Wuttke history;\(^{484}\) Jennifer Taylor states in the introduction of the Brock family history that the pioneers of the family can truly be called ‘wonderful;’\(^{485}\) and many, including Iolee Mann in the Trueman history,\(^{486}\) note how hard life was in general

\(^{482}\) Gersch, *Of Pioneers and People*, 36
\(^{483}\) Graetz, *Daring Pioneers*, v
\(^{484}\) Butler, *C A Wuttke*, 3
\(^{485}\) Taylor, *The Brock Family History*, 7
for the pioneers on the land (and, by suggestion, how strong and brave the pioneers of their families were for surviving and triumphing). The impression given by such descriptions is shaped by, and helps to shape, the notion of life on the land in colonial Australia for white settlers. Social memory is both drawn upon to create this image, and reinforced by the image: the relationship between the sources and the social memory is an active two-way process.

Another common memory of pioneer women in family histories is as mothers who either lose children, or die themselves, leaving their children motherless. This was, of course, for so many, a tragic reality in the early days of colonisation in Australia, and permeates the memory of a tough frontier. Stories which illustrate this aspect of the memory can be found in the Altus, the Peltz and the Wuttke family histories. The story of Maria Magdalena Kleinig in the Altus family history is a heart-rending story of the difficulties for pioneer women in Australia: her first babies (twins) were stillborn, and Maria herself eventually died three months after the birth of her last child.487

Both the Peltz and the Wuttke family histories offer not only the tragedy of the loss of the pioneering mother, but also another important part of the social memory of such loss – the father who remarries a woman with the view of her raising his children. This is a recurring motif one sees on grave markers, too – the woman who is almost ‘replaced’ within the family unit. The Peltz family history relies on the reminiscences of Friedrich Wilhelm Peltz to illustrate this point.488 Peltz writes that his wife died in 1859 after the birth of their third son, who was stillborn. Peltz grieves the loss of his wife and son, but writes, ‘As I now am left on my own with two small children … I soon had to consider finding another life

partner. This he does, and in 1864, he married again: this marriage produced eight children, of which three were stillborn. This story, and the many like it besides, illustrate an important part of the national social memory: the dangers of ‘frontier’ life for women unaccustomed to the harsh life of the Australian bush. (The lifestyle of colonial Australia was naturally as foreign to European men as it was to women, but within the national dialogue, the life is seen as being particularly precarious for women and children, further emphasising their reliance on men and their own fragility.)

Within the Wuttke history, it is stated that Anna Rosina died in 1858 at the age of 43, five days after giving birth to a stillborn son. The responsibility of caring for the children fell to the eldest daughter, Johanne Louise. However, Carl Anton (Anna Rosina’s husband) was soon remarried to Johanne Dorothea Zippel, who had come to stay with the family and help with the childrearing and household chores. Butler writes, ’Carl Anton’s young wife needed all the energy she could muster to rear her own family and care for the children of her husband’s first marriage, especially the younger ones who were only a few years old when she took over their upbringing.’ This text, although it adds to the memory of the woman dying young and leaving her children motherless, also enhances the memory of the woman who supports not only her own children, but those of her husband. Johanne Dorothea is firmly entrenched in the memory of the caring pioneer woman. She is equally presented as hardworking: ‘Johanne must have been a tireless worker and she was particularly skilled at scything grass. One summer day … Johanne moved an acre of grass and then gave birth to her eldest child … in the morning.’ For a first-time mother, Johanne appears extremely nonchalant about the imminent arrival of her daughter!

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489 Warner, *The Peltz Family in Australia*, 10
490 Warner, *The Peltz Family*, 11
491 See Schaeffer, *Women and the Bush*
492 Butler, *C A Wuttke Family History*, 16
493 Butler, *C A Wuttke Family History*, 18
494 Butler, *C A Wuttke Family History*, 18
A number of family histories focus on the interaction between the white pioneer women and Australia’s Indigenous people. There is not a comparable depiction of the interaction between white pioneer men and Indigenous people within these family histories: a very real possibility is that the stories of contact between the Indigenous people and the European male are not the sorts of stories that the families wish remembered. In Thalia’s Way, Hetty Laws writes that after the death of Henry Parbery, his wife, Thalia, was very afraid of the local peoples of the district. The Dempster history gives an example of the reason for this fear for white women: the reader is informed that a shepherd’s wife and baby were killed by the local Indigenous people when home alone. However, Laws also notes in Thalia’s Way that some of the local people were Thalia’s very good friends and in later years her sons remarked that they did not know what their mother would have done without the help of the local Aborigines. They constantly brought her fish in exchange for sugar, sweet food and vegetables out of her garden.

Although seemingly conflicting, these two notions are incorporated within the national memory: the ‘treacherous natives’; and the ‘friendly natives.’ The two ideas co-exist within the Australian memory.

The McCallum family history does not focus on interaction, but on whiteness. It states, ‘What a harsh and lonely existence it must have been for sixteen year old Mary, who was reportedly the first white woman among the local farming community.’ The text does not elaborate as to whether Mary remedied this loneliness by mixing with the local Indigenous population, but the fact that her whiteness is emphasised blends with the general social memory.

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495 See ‘Chapter One: Social Memory and Pioneer Women’ for further examination of how certain parts of Australia’s ‘frontier’ history are purposefully forgotten.
496 Laws, Thalia’s Way, 5
497 Rica Erickson, The Dempsters, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1978, 33
498 Laws, Thalia’s Way, 5
499 The McCallum Book Committee, From Heather to Wattle, 207
500 The issue of whiteness within the Australian pioneer legend is dealt with elsewhere within this thesis.
Burcher’s *Pioneers and Their Better Halves* concentrates not on interaction between Indigenous and white women directly, but on the civilizing nature of white women, an important part of the social memory of pioneering life. It is generally accepted that where white women were living, the life was not as ‘rough’ as it might otherwise be, whether in reference to violence (white-white, or white-Aboriginal) or to sexual debauchery (white men to usually unwilling Aboriginal women). Burcher reinforces this notion by stating

Most pioneer women took part as far as possible in whatever their husbands were doing, smoothing the path for them – they had a civilizing effect on early settlements. Men were kinder to each other and to the aborigines [sic] when women were about.501

Burcher, herself, relies on another part of the national memory in this statement – she implies that only white women were in possession of this civilizing effect, which she sees as inherent.

In some families, it is only the exceptional women who are remembered. Such is the case in the Cohn family history, *Tablets of Memory*. Röschen, who was widowed in 1878 and left to raise ten young children, had married her cousin Moritz Cohn in 1860 in Hamsburg, after being promised to him when she was six years old.502 After migrating to Australia, the Cohn family started breweries in Victoria. After Moritz’s death, Röschen continued on as a successful partner in the ever-growing business.503 Interestingly, it is not until Moritz’s death that Röschen is mentioned in any detail – until that point, she too is positioned very much in the background of the narrative. When the central male figure passes, though, she steps forward to fill the narrative void left by him. Such women are remembered because they were exceptional – they succeeded in traditionally male spheres of life. It is worth noting that in *Tablets of Memory*, other women are dealt with very

501 Burcher, *Pioneers and Their Better Halves*, 81
502 Cohn, Cohn and Cohn, *Tablets of Memory*, 41-2
503 Cohn, Cohn and Cohn, *Tablets of Memory*, 43
cursory. Similarly, the life of Anna Altus is brought to the fore in the Altus family history after the death of her husband, Johann. The author tells of how Anna, with five children to support, began a baking business to sustain the family. She was also a foundation member of the Zion Church in the Emu Downs and Robertstown area. Unlike *Tablets of Memory*, though, in *Freedom Found* other women are also remembered in the text. A similar tale of a woman widowed is presented in *Thalia’s Way*: when Henry, Thalia’s husband, passes away, ‘A new era of great loneliness began suddenly for the young widow and her small family. What immense courage and foresight she would need to carry on!’ An impression that is created by these texts is that the author cannot conceive the idea of a marriage containing both a strong husband and a strong wife. Within these texts, it is not until the husbands die that the strength of the women can be explored.

Priscilla Chambers is presented in the Chambers’ family history as an exceptional woman to begin with, and she is given the most detail of the women presented in *Colonial Dynasty*. The reader is told that on the voyage to South Australia in 1837, Priscilla was the only woman on board the ship, and was proposed to, by every man on board, although she declined all offers. The reader is also told that during a particularly violent storm during the voyage, instead of going below deck (as she was expected to), Priscilla tied herself to the mast so that she could fully experience the force of the tempest. However, once the ship arrives in South Australia, Priscilla (and, to a large extent, any female voices) are silenced in the text. Whilst women are mentioned intermittently, the focus of the history becomes the men. The reader meets Priscilla again briefly later in the narrative, to learn that later in life she was good at needlework, an excellent cook, and wholeheartedly interested in the running of her household.

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504 Colliver, ‘Freedom Found’
505 Laws, *Thalia’s Way*, 5
507 Kerr, *Colonial Dynasty*, 40
the pioneer woman – the Australian girl, who is up for adventure; and the Australian wife and mother, who is an ‘angel of the bush.’ In the Kerrison history, the woman who receives the most attention is Alice, who, in 1887 ‘heard that a settlement was to be started in Renmark and persuaded the Chaffey Brothers to allow her to go with them.’ Again, Alice (who is shown as forward-thinking and independent) is virtually silenced in the text by her marriage in late 1889. This relates back to the idea of the authors of family histories being unable to comprehend the idea of a marriage in which the male and female voices are as strong as each other. The cohesion of the family unit which feminist historians criticise (as touched on in the introduction to this thesis) can be seen in such examples.

In many family histories, the idea of the woman being a pioneer was simply by default – that is, the historian does not see his/her female forebears as pioneers in their own right, but as becoming ‘pioneering’ through marriage to a ‘real’ (male) pioneer. This is a common occurrence in the national social memory of the pioneering days of Australia. Such is the case in Colin Graetz’s history of the Döring-Doering family, Daring Pioneers. The title of Honour Burcher’s history Pioneers and Their Better Halves which, as has been stated, was begun with the aim of writing only about her female forebears, is another example of women being pioneers only by association: despite being woman-centric, the very title of the book suggests that the males of the lineage were the leaders whilst the women were the followers.

A very powerful way to show that the writer felt that the women of the family were secondary to the men (at least in the author’s mind) is by a process of exclusion. In a great number of family histories, women are glanced over most cursorily, presented as the wives and mothers of the histories’ central figures. In

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508 Mandi Ann Haynes (nee Kerrison), Kerrison in Tasmania 1835-1985, privately for the family reunion on 3 November 1985, 26
509 This is not just limited to family histories, but is in fact quite a common idea. See, for example, the chapter on ‘Angels in the Bush.’
the Cohn family history, only one woman (Röschen) is described in any detail, whilst the other women are practically ignored. In the same way, the family histories of the Bittners, the Döring-Doerings, the Voight/Vogts, the Chambers, the Finlaysons, the Fitzgeralards, and the Cleggetts all give precedence to nineteenth century men over nineteenth century women (although, admittedly, some of these examples do offer more details than others, and there are plenty more examples of family histories that do exactly the same thing). Some family histories ignore all women of the family, whilst others give details for daughters, but not for wives who marry into the family. Often, though, whilst those women who marry into a family are ignored, the men who marry into the family are not, and receive much the same treatment within the text as if they had been born into the family. A strange trend seems to persist in family histories of assuming that the family would have arrived at the same place that it is today without the help, input or guidance of many of its female members.

Women who are not mothers or wives are problematic to the configurations of histories that only suppose women in these roles. When pioneer women are presented in family histories as being neither wives nor mothers, they are not presented in nearly the same way as other women. For example, in the Voight/Vogt family history, sisters Hulda Bertha and Martha Elizabeth are seemingly remembered in more detail than other women in the history. Upon further examination, however, it is shown that while they are allocated more space in the book than other women in the family, they actually have exactly the same profile printed as each other. The text and photos that follow each of these women’s names are identical. The author even writes that because the two women were so often together, ‘it would be hard to write a distinctly different story about

510 Cohn, Cohn and Cohn, Tablets of Memory
each of them.\textsuperscript{512} Apparently, in this family’s memory, one unattached woman is indistinguishable from the next. Despite the fact that the two women were sisters, and did spend much of their time together, surely their individuality was not completely crushed.

Whilst the idea of the single pioneer woman with no children proved a problem in such family memories as the Voight/Vogt family, in other family histories, remembering nineteenth century rural women at all seems to have proved a challenge. Within the Clegett family history, the emphasis on the public sphere means that pioneer women are largely excluded from the pages.\textsuperscript{513} The Finlayson history is another example of women being forgotten: when considering Helen, the sixth child of Helen and William Finlayson who migrated to Australia, a reasonably full history is given of William Ambrose, who she marries, but no real details are given about Helen.\textsuperscript{514} Likewise, when the history arrives at Hannah, the tenth child, of the two pages allocated to her and her husband, only one-half of one page is allocated to Hannah.\textsuperscript{515}

Overall, the ways in which families remembered their pioneer women was as the national social memory remembered such women. There are some alternatives to the ‘angel in the bush’ ideal that is so prevalent, but where pioneer women are remembered, it is generally in a very positive light. This is clearly demonstrated in many family histories, but never more so than in Burcher’s \textit{Pioneers and Their Better Halves} – when George Shelley died leaving his wife, Amelia, a widow at 35 years old with eight children to bring up, Burcher evokes the dominant social memory of the Australian pioneer woman:

\begin{quote}
All were impressed with her stamina, her courage, and her willingness to accept responsibility. Although strengthened by her faith, these qualities were now to face a supreme test, as she
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{512} Voight/Vogt in Australia 1855-2000, 517-20
\textsuperscript{513} Cleggett, \textit{From Kent to South Australia}
\textsuperscript{514} The Finlayson Book Committee: \textit{Finlayson}, 68-70
\textsuperscript{515} Finlayson Book Committee, \textit{Finlayson}, 98-9
tried to carry on as George would have wished. Her aims were twofold: firstly, to manage and improve the Tumut Plains property, and secondly, to give her children the best possible education.  

Many aspects of the memory of pioneer women are covered in this short section. The passage reinforces the ideal of wife and mother; of Christian and hardworking; of courage and fortitude. It is these qualities which abound in the national social memory; and that proliferate in family histories. The Brock family history is similarly conspicuous in the valorising of pioneer women when the author writes of Anna Maria Brock, ‘She must have had an exhausting time bringing up her children [she had twelve] but, as was the case with many women of the time, she was very strong and resilient;’ and the death of Maria, in the Pech family history, is noted as the ‘end [of] a long life of selfless devotion, love and duty to her family.’ The symbiotic nature of the relationship between national and personal memories deepens.

Where families often compile family histories to mark an anniversary or milestone, when small towns celebrate similar anniversaries and milestones, it is not uncommon for the local historical group or one enthusiastic resident to undertake the task of writing the history of the area. These histories are written in such a way, and generally with such parochialism, that they can be interpreted as public versions of family histories. Local histories use the language and the structure of social memory to produce their texts: as a general rule, they work closely within the parameters of the social memory to create their framework. They also closely mirror the structure and style of family histories, and they are often written by community members with strong familial ties to a district, thereby reinforcing the notion that they are public versions of family histories.

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516 Burcher, Pioneers and Their Better Halves, 101
517 Taylor, The Brock Family History, 47
519 This section will focus on local histories produced in or for rural communities, whilst acknowledging some local histories have been produced for urban communities.
By and large, local histories do not seem conscious that they are contributing to a long lineage of memory-building, or that they are working within the boundaries of social memory. Indeed, one could argue that the definitions used by historians and academics to disentangle ‘history’ and ‘social memory’ are not classifications employed by the wider community, who instead look back simply at ‘the past’. An example of this can be found in Wongan-Ballidu Pioneering Days, in which it is written, ‘In presenting this work … I prefer to call it a Story rather than a History, as I feel it lacks many of the characteristics of true History.’ And despite this seeming distinction, Wongan-Ballidu refers to itself as ‘written history’ on the same page as the abovementioned quote.

These local histories are often written by people with no formal training in the writing of history, and who wish to portray their part of the world in the best possible light. As in family histories, it is uncommon for these histories to pay little more than lip-service to questions of dispossession, although many will write of the local Indigenous people (often as a sidebar and not connected to the wider narrative). They will also often focus on particular families whose stories are significant to the area, thereby reinforcing their similarity to family histories, and on specific buildings.

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520 RRB Ackland (compiler), Wongan-Ballidu Pioneering Days, Service Printing Company, Perth, 1965, iv

521 And, as Gertrude Himmelfarb notes, recording the normal and everyday can work in the form of apologia, particularly when this emphasis on the everyday is presented to the fore of whatever reality might have existed. The example that Himmelfarb provides is the Third Reich: as Himmelfarb states, an emphasis on the everyday life for non-persecuted Germans under the Third Reich which ignores the atrocities of the Nazis makes life under Hitler in the 1930s and 1940s appear almost banal: of course, we know that this is a falsehood. Similarly, an Australian history that focuses on the everyday life of white settlers might be constructed similarly to further marginalise the violence of Indigenous dispossession, forming its own form of apologia for past wrongs. (Gertrude Himmelfarb, On Looking Into the Abyss: untimely thoughts on culture and society, Alfred A Knopf, New York, 1994, 19).

522 Alain Touraine notes this as a marker of modern history studies: the recognition of the personal life as central to public life and understanding (Alain Touraine, Critique of Modernity, (translated from the French by David Macey), Blackwell, Oxford (UK) and Cambridge (MAS), 1995 [first published in French in 1995], 290).
As with family histories, local histories often exalt the pioneer woman (and man) of Australia’s past. This presentation, of an easily identifiable typecast within the national narrative, provides a sense of a shared experience that community members can understand, celebrate and hold.

In local histories, one can see a direct link between history and women. It is not the history that has for so long been taught in schools, the history of explorers, politicians and inventors (or what can otherwise be described as the history of white, middle-upper class men), but of how their lives work. This familiarity with the subject is reflected in the choice of expression in writing these histories. The language used in local histories to describe the pioneers and their works is so common place in recounting the pioneer legend as to have become clichéd and hackneyed: words such as ‘endurance’, ‘brave’, ‘hardworking’, ‘efficient’, and ‘resourceful’ abound on the pages of such texts.

Local histories focus on what has been referred to as the ‘three cheers’ version of Australia’s past, not having swung to a more realistic version (or ‘black armband’ interpretation, as some would have it) as most presentations of the past have been inclined to do. That being said, most local histories are written to commemorate an occasion or anniversary (in much the same way as family histories) – such as the bicentennial of white settlement in 1988; or the jubilee of the same in South Australia in 1986. Further, most of the significant ‘white’ anniversaries which have produced this sort of reminiscing and nostalgia occurred in 1988 or earlier. Within that context, their positive version of the past is not so out of step with other versions of history, both in terms of why they were written and with contemporary histories being produced for a general audience. Local historians should not be denounced for simply being in step with their contemporaries.

However, there is a marked preponderance in these local histories to celebrate the past and the achievements of the pioneers of the locale. Local
histories often focus on the older model of histories – ie, the great men of the area doing great deeds. Similar to family histories, these local histories generally do not examine the impact of events in great depth, and often gloss over any parts of the past that are deemed offensive or difficult to fit into a clear linear narrative.

One example that stands out is *No Place Like Pekina*. Unlike most local histories, *Pekina* is referenced, and in referring to the pioneers, the authors note: ‘These [pioneer] men, women and children weren’t super-human and their lives were probably quite unremarkable’\(^{523}\) – a reflective quote in a genre that paints the pioneers as very remarkable.

Jane Haggis has written

local history is not to be trusted because rural communities in Australia put a great deal of effort into covering up a past of violence and expropriation that was often uncomfortably recent in terms of family and community memory.\(^{524}\)

While forgetting the dispossession of the Aboriginal peoples of the land, local histories simultaneously remember and celebrate the white ‘pioneers’ who were instrumental in this dispossession. The ‘triumphs’ of the whites over the land (and the Indigenous people, although this is usually not explicitly stated) are commemorated in books, memorials, or the preservation of the first European house (or some such relic).

Interestingly, and like family histories, when studying local histories it should be noted that it is not uncommon for no single author to be listed: rather, a compiler’s name will be given, or a committee will be listed. In turn, it can be surmised that this influences the way that a coherent whole is found; for if one voice is too disparate from that of the whole, a disjointed text will ensue. It is integral, therefore, that all voices remain similar, and do not seek to be too


\(^{524}\) Haggis, ‘The Social Memory of the Colonial Frontier,’ 91
different from the general tone of the text. Hence, even if one author did seek to present an alternate voice to the text, the nature of the writing would mean that they would have to be brought back into line. Therefore, when local histories are (as they often are) recording social memory rather than history, it is a widely accepted social memory or understanding that is being displayed.

Further, studying the portrayal of pioneer women within local histories compels the reader to similarly study the circumstances in which these histories are produced. Historically, rural communities have been more conservative and more traditional than their urban counterparts. Within these communities, there is generally a greater entrenchment of traditional views of women, and this is reflected in local histories, which draw on a very conventional model of women and their roles within communities. Pioneer women provide a prime example of the way that social memory is used to comfort and reinforce ideals through the medium of local history.

Many communities can be justly proud of the efforts of some of their foremothers and fathers. However, the wider public should not seek to canonise these people in the national story for the mere fact that they lived on the land.

As much as some histories are framed by remembering, there is much similar framing done by forgetting. This is particularly displayed in local histories, which choose to forget women who did not fulfil the ideal of pioneer women. Further forgetting is prominently featured in these histories, such as the dispossession of the Aboriginal peoples (which is in itself essential if the pioneer legend is to be fully embraced as the founding story of Australian culture). Similarly, in family histories, women whose lives do not fit within the dominant narrative framework are often excluded or only briefly discussed, as if such inclusion would irreparably disrupt the narrative; and the forgetting of unpleasant aspects of the past is used for much the same ends.
It is the coming together of fiction and history that provides societies with their social memories – the stories are based in the past, but clearly reflect the present. And it is in Australia’s family and local histories that we see this most closely reflected. As has been shown, whilst academic histories, and to a certain extent popular histories, have endeavoured to move towards a more realistic version of the colonial past, family and local histories still cling closely to the idealised and comforting images vividly drawn in social memory. This, in turn, reflects the way that, while society as a whole has moved towards an understanding of society (and women’s role in it), rural communities often still cling to a more traditional view of women.

And within that traditional view, women’s voices are often silent or muted. Whatever the reason that women are continually silenced in family and local histories, what we can ascertain from these texts, is that the writers of these texts habitually call on the traditions and stereotypes of pioneer women to frame the foremothers, and that in doing so, they also reinforce the social memory of these women. The symbiotic nature of the relationship means that family and local histories are created, to a large extent, by social memory; and they, in turn, create social memory.
CHAPTER EIGHT

Forget Me Not: Pioneer Women Writing About Themselves

I wish I had more to tell of my grandmothers. It is terrible how much has been forgotten, which is why, I suppose, remembering seems a holy thing.

- Anita Diamant

So far, this thesis has concentrated on how others have worked to create and shape the social memory of the Australian pioneer woman: who she was, how she lived and what she did. This chapter will instead focus on how these women created their own image – how they wrote memoirs, diaries and letters that would be drawn on, by future generations, for descriptions of how life was for women in the colonial era. When compiling family histories and the like, where possible, writers try to draw as much as possible on the ‘authentic voice’ – that is, the voice of the women about whom they write. Diaries, letters, memoirs and such can provide this authority.

In turn, these items have inadvertently played their own role in shaping and perpetuating the legend of the pioneer woman in a way that will be explored below. They have become evidence to be held up to show the veracity of the dominant social memory.

Many of the items discussed in this chapter have now found a much wider audience from whom they were intended: diaries edited and published; or letters to a mother, included in an anthology of women’s voices. A memoir written for future generations of a woman’s family may have been deposited in a state library collection, now available not just to the inner sanctum of the family for whom it was intended, but to anyone who so chooses to read it.

This chapter will be divided into three sections: in the first, the importance of such writings, and what we can learn from them will be examined; secondly, I will briefly take a broader view of women’s writings to serve as a contextual backdrop for these case-studies writings, and to expand the sample size of those considered; and thirdly, I will focus on three specific writings of women who each spent considerable time in South Australia, to observe their presentation of early colonial Australia.

The final part of this chapter will look, in depth, at a case-study model at the writings of three women: Sarah Conigrave (née Price), Mary Emily Susannah ‘Minnie’ Brewer, and Mrs Tom Richards. These three women have been selected because of their settlement, at least for a period, in the then colony of South Australia, and the fact that the three forms used here are comparable but different. Conigrave’s reminiscences were used as the basis for a book, but the manuscript version has been explored here. Brewer’s memoirs are stored in the La Trobe Australian Manuscripts Collection at the State Library of Victoria, although the edited and published version is used in this chapter (for reasons which will be explained below); and Mrs Richards’ diary is stored in its original version in the State Library of South Australia. Conigrave’s writings were meant to be edited and used as the basis for a text that was intended for wider reading; Brewer’s writings were done for her adopted son to get a better idea of her early life; and Richards’ is presented in such a way that the reader gets the impression that she probably did not imagine her diaries ever being read by an audience wider than herself. To a certain extent, these texts were chosen quite arbitrarily, with the intention of examining whether texts chosen as such, and not purposefully selected for their similarities or differences, would demonstrate aspects that have become part of the national social memory. This section of the chapter will demonstrate that, indeed, each of the texts displays the characteristics of their creators that have become integral parts of our national legend.
Whilst women’s own writing offers a vivid and rich source for those writing about the past, there are, as with all sources, immense limitations on these that need to be remembered. Because these women lived in, and wrote of, the colonial era does not mean that their voices should not be subjected to the same critical analysis that one would apply to other sources. To construct women from the colonial period, we must give voice to them and listen to that which they had to say. We must allow them the voice to tell their stories; and we must realise that silence speaks volumes.

Further, as is nearly always the case with sources, the more status and wealth of a family or person, the more likelihood there is to be more known of them, from their own words. In the introduction to Freedom Bound 1, this is succinctly put: ‘Powerful families had a near monopoly on both public and private writing and on the preservation of what was written.’ Thus, in these sources, the voices of what was a small minority of the population are over-represented, creating a biased sample-set.

The wealthy had the luxury of educating their girls (however limited, and at times, frivolous, this education, it did allow these women the ability to read and write). Conversely, for working families, it was necessary for girls to help with the running of the household and the raising of younger siblings, and accordingly, literacy was not given the same impetus it was in more well-to-do households. (In Life Lines, Patricia Clarke and Dale Spender also write of women teaching themselves to read and write, usually using the Bible, in the face of opposition to women being at all educated.) As Lucy Frost wrote in the introduction of No Place for a Nervous Lady, ‘it goes without saying that the voices of many women

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526 Marian Quartly, Susan Janson and Patricia Grimshaw (eds), Freedom Bound 1: Documents on women in colonial Australia, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, 1995, x
527 Patricia Clarke and Dale Spender (eds), Life Lines: Australian women’s letters and diaries 1788 to 1840, Allen and Unwin, North Sydney, 1992, xxii
who lived in the bush during the [nineteenth] century could not write, and their voices are now silent.”528

Additional to the barrier of time was the cost or paper and, in the case of letter-writing, the cost of postage (particularly prior to 1840). Without the luxury of cheap and easily accessible paper on which to write, even those working-class women with the ability to write, did not have the same sort of access to writing materials as their wealthier sisters.

The recognition of the importance of the voices from below (ie, poor and working class histories) is a relatively recent phenomenon in history, acting as another layer to the class bias of women’s writing as source material: when determining whose writing would be kept in archives and libraries, the upper classes experiences and writings were, for a long time, considered the only ones worth collecting. This was compounded by personal senses of entitlement or self importance: for example, whilst it is doubtful that the well-known Bussel family of Western Australia would have questioned if their experiences and writings were worthy of inclusion in the collections of the Battye Library at the State Library of Western Australia, the family of a poor woman in Western Australia at the same time would not have thought to submit her journal, that they discovered after her death, to the Battye.

However, it is not only class bias that colours the selections of women’s writings available for study. An even greater bias within these sources is race bias: the voices written and kept are white voices. The voices of Aboriginal women and women of diverse ethnicities such as Chinese or Greek were either not recorded or not kept.

528 Lucy Frost, No Place For a Nervous Lady: Voices from the Australian Bush, McPhee Gribble, Fitzroy, 1984, 6
This convergence of class and race bias in these sources combines to create a particularly limited sample, and the sources must be approached as such. In no way can they be seen to be representative of women’s experiences in early white settlement. Unwittingly, in their own way, these sources themselves have contributed to the emergence of the dominant social memory of women in colonial Australia. These voices become the ‘authentic voices’ of the period by virtue of being the only ones available, and thus the authentic voice is painted as white, middle class, and conforming to the ideal.

In her essay, ‘White Women and Colonialism,’ Jane Haggis wrote of the emphasis placed on the authenticity of voices of white women in their texts, writing that these texts provide ‘literal accounts of their experiences, authentic and significant in their meaning.’\footnote{Haggis, ‘White Women and Colonialism,’ 47} The foibles of such status, though, are manifold, with some of the limitations having already been discussed. As Amanda Nettlebeck has written, by the time that pioneers were writing their memoirs, later in life, they were very conscious that they were writing within ‘an evolving mythology of national foundation,’\footnote{Amanda Nettlebeck, ‘South Australian Settler Memoirs,’ in Wilfred Prest and Graham Tulloch (eds), \textit{Scatterlings of Empire}, JAS, Creative Arts Review, API-Network, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 2001, 97} and regarded ‘themselves as recorders not only of a fast-disappearing world but also of an authentic foundation history.’\footnote{Nettlebeck, ‘South Australian Settler Memoirs,’ 98} The memoirs and reminiscences of Australia’s pioneer women present a romanticised version of history as they construct a lost past.\footnote{Margaret McGuire attributes this romance to the construction of a ‘lost past’ in Margaret McGuire, ‘The legend of the Good Fella Missus,’ 137}

Other theorists have examined the complications in the use of memoirs, diaries and the like, as texts of authority, and expecting that they speak the whole truth without prejudice. One example of the prejudice found in the writing of women, is that most women writing such texts continue to write within their predetermined ideals of femininity – that is, even when an emotion such as anger was felt at events, the notion that anger from women would be construed as ‘shri...
meant that there were limits to how this emotion would and could be expressed.\textsuperscript{533} The politics of self-definition is at the fore in personal narratives.\textsuperscript{534}

Patricia Clarke and Dale Spender examine the politics of self-definition in \textit{Life Lines}, when they consider the ways in which women used letters, sent back to England, to reinforce the idea that they had not lost any of their ‘refinement’ through living in the colonies.\textsuperscript{535} This emphasis, in letters, of reinforcing the idea that women in the colonies managed to maintain the ideal of the ‘angel in the house’ in turn has the consequence of reinforcing the ideals of the Australian social memory of pioneer women. These women who wrote of conforming to the ideal may, in fact, not have done so themselves, but their sources suggest that they did.

Memoirs are not written as isolated, insulated works closely bound by the writer’s memories of the past. Instead, they are created by people who are conscious of the fact that they are writing for an audience, and are shaped by the creator’s beliefs of what is expected from someone in their position. Rather than being straight reflections on the past, memoirs are shaped by the present in which they are written. In turn, whilst being shaped by expectations, memoirs then are used to generate popular understandings about the past and thus feed the national social memory. They are, thus, the product of, and the feeder for, social memory, situated within a symbiotic relationship between source and memory.


\textsuperscript{535} Clarke and Spender, \textit{Life Lines}, xviii
Diaries, rather than being the domain of the writer’s most personal thoughts and dreams, are often the keepers of the mundanity of life. As sources, they are interesting in that they record things as they happen, but are also limited by that immediacy – the author does not have the opportunity for reflection on the day’s events, or the benefit of knowing the consequences of actions that follow from these events.

While these sources are useful in colouring the lives of Australia’s pioneer women, there are as many limitations on their use as there are with other sources. They are not objective, but in being subjective in their nature, they provide the truth of the experiences for the individual creating them. When being examined, they must be examined with all of these limitations in mind.

Diaries, memoirs and reminiscences provide a very important source of information about the past; and, despite some similarities, letters prove a very different source. Letters were written in the moment, like diaries, but were meant for an external audience, like memoirs and reminiscences. Whilst other forms of writing for an audience wider than one’s self, enjoyed the benefit of hindsight, the immediacy of letters meant that their writers did not have the opportunity to reflect or comment on how events would ultimately unfold. Furthermore, because of their immediacy, letters usually carried the first news of events – both good and bad – to far-off family and friends.

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536 Katie Holmes, *Spaces in Her Day: Australian women’s diaries of the 1920s and 1930s*, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, 1995, ix-x
537 Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail*, 12
539 This is discussed in *Personal Narrative Group, ‘Truths,’ in Personal Narrative Group (eds), Interpreting Women’s Lives: Feminist theory and personal narratives*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1989, 261
Letter writing was an important form of women’s writing in the nineteenth century, and was expected of women.\textsuperscript{540} The importance of letter writing, and the social requirements of it, is demonstrated in the letter from Lady Brisbane to Miss Jane Blaxland, in which Lady Brisbane wrote that after being sick for several weeks, her letters had piled up, which was a source of great discomfort to her.\textsuperscript{541} Letters did not always cover important issues, often only relaying information of day-to-day life, such as the letters from Emily Stone to James Macarthur, whom she would later marry.\textsuperscript{542} Letters often focussed on the positive, and when reading these letters, the idea of the pioneer woman who makes the best of her lot, is reinforced, such as the letter from Anna King to her cousins, in which she advised them to not have too high expectations of living in the colony of New South Wales, whilst noting that she was ‘very happy.’\textsuperscript{543}

Women were also conscious in their letter writing that, because of the distances that their letters had to travel, it was often not worth mentioning certain details as they would be sorted by the time the letter reached its intended reader. Eliza Darling, in a letter to her brother on 24 May 1826, wrote that she was ‘five months on the way to produce a young Australian … I have not mentioned my situation to Mama and Marianne as it would only render them for some months anxious and uneasy.’\textsuperscript{544} The tyranny of distance is obvious in such letters, and one can only imagine how difficult it must have been for a daughter, who was close to her mother, not to share such news.

\textsuperscript{540} This is discussed in Clarke and Spender, \textit{Life Lines}, xviii-xxvi; see also Dena Goodman, ‘Letter Writing and the Emergence of Gendered Subjectivity in Eighteenth Century France,’ in \textit{Journal of Women’s History}, Summer 2005, vol 17, issue 2, 10-11
\textsuperscript{541} Blaxland Family – Various Documents, 1837-1923, State Library of New South Wales, ML Ab50/2
\textsuperscript{542} James Macarthur – Correspondence, etc 1838-1879, ML A2960Mrs
\textsuperscript{543} Anna Josepha King, to her cousins 14 Feb 1840 from Vineyard, NSW advising of the conditions in the colony and enclosing answers in regards to questions on the requirements, advantages, etc, of settling in the colony, State Library of New South Wales, ML AK1/7
\textsuperscript{544} Letter from Eliza Darling to Edward Dumaresq, 24 May 1826, Archives Office of Tasmania (reproduced in Clarke and Spender, \textit{Life Lines})
Hardships in the colonies are also covered in some women’s writings. One such example can be seen in the letter that Anna King wrote to Lord Castlereagh on 24 May 1809, in which she tried to seek assistance in the raising of her children. A widow, Mrs King implored Lord Castlereagh to recommend remuneration for her to help raise her children, as she was deprived the widows’ pension.  

Common, though, in many forms of life-writing is good humour associated with overcoming hardships. In Emmeline De Falbe’s reminiscences, she provided a snapshot of her mother’s life as an invalid:

Never able to share our outdoor life, never complaining, always cheerful and ready for us when able. We all worshipped her, and she was the triumph of mind over matter.

Through this description, Emmeline paints her mother as the typical Australian woman, eager to make the best of her situation and putting her family first. This is a standard trope in the national narrative.

Anna Ey’s memoirs provide an interesting, non-English voice in the reminiscences and writings of pioneer women. The wife of a Lutheran pastor, Anna was born in France in 1839, migrated to Germany in about 1843, and emigrated to South Australia with her family in 1847. Ey’s memoirs provide numerous instances where her experiences can be compared to the dominant social memory. Ey’s mother’s maid married, meaning that the housework had to be done by Ey’s mother. Used to being looked after, this was an uncommon experience for her, and she struggled with the work.  

Ey, herself, mothered a large family of 13 children, six of whom died during child-birth. With her husband often away with preaching duties, Ey was forced to deal with numerous instances of sickness.

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545 Anna Josepha King, Correspondence 1808-1817, State Library of New South Wales, ML A1976
546 Anna Victoria Ey, Early Lutheran Congregations ins South Australia: Memoirs of a pastor’s wife, (translated by Dorothea M Freund), Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide, 1986 (written between 1900 and 1914), 22
547 Ey, Early Lutheran Congregations, v
in her children, on her own.\textsuperscript{548} Throughout her memoirs, Ey remained positive about her lot in life, accepting it with grace. She typifies many aspects of the social memory through her writing, presenting another example of how women who recorded their life were often those whose lives closely resembled ‘the ideal’.

Harriet Daly’s memoirs are another example of memoirs that reflect the dominant social memory of pioneer women. The daughter of the Government Resident of the Northern Territory, Daly wrote of the family’s move to Port Darwin. On the journey, Daly was one of only a few that did not experience seasickness: ‘I was able to minister to the less privileged mortals in this respect than myself.’\textsuperscript{549} In this way, she portrayed herself as compassionate and gentle, as a woman should be. Like others, she wrote of her fear of the local Indigenous population,\textsuperscript{550} a recurring motif in colonial women’s life writings; and she wrote that the first duty taken care of on arrival in Port Darwin was to ‘arrange our small quarters in the most comfortable manner and to make them as homelike as possible.’\textsuperscript{551} However, unlike many pioneering narratives, Daly came straight out and wrote, ‘We did not look forward with any great pleasure to our life in Port Darwin, for from what we could learn it promised to be one of exile, hard work and monotony.’\textsuperscript{552} This conflicts with the standard narrative structure, in which pioneering stories are recalled with a sense of adventure and optimism; and provides a rare glimpse of the trepidation that many must have felt before relocating to isolated posts.

Anne Geddes’ reminiscences offer a more standard take on the pioneering memoir. In 1903, the family settled on the Eyre Peninsula. Geddes wrote that on arriving on their property, they realised that they had ‘left all our comfort behind

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\textsuperscript{548} Ey, \textit{Early Lutheran Congregations}, 73
\textsuperscript{549} Harriet W D Daly, \textit{Digging, Squatting and Pioneering Life in the Northern Territory of South Australia}, Sampson, Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, London, 1887, 12
\textsuperscript{550} Daly, \textit{Digging, Squatting and Pioneering Life}, 45-6
\textsuperscript{551} Daly, \textit{Digging, Squatting and Pioneering Life}, 50
\textsuperscript{552} Daly, \textit{Digging, Squatting and Pioneering Life}, 26
However, the next morning she (and her family) experienced an abrupt change of heart – ‘Suddenly, our hearts seemed to lose the feeling of loneliness, and we seemed to become part of this great pioneering venture, and eager to do our share.’ In writing such thoughts, Geddes firmly placed her family story within the dominant social memory as many reminiscences of pioneer women do, due to the nature of their authors.

Sarah Conigrave’s reminiscences, held in the State Library of South Australia, were originally written at the request of her daughter, Ilsa, who was continually querying Conigrave about her early life on Hindmarsh Island (SA). These recollections later formed the base for *Reminiscences of Early Days*, first published in 1916, with a second edition in 1938.

Conigrave was the daughter of one of South Australia’s prominent pioneers, John Price. The family immigrated to South Australia in 1853, and it is in this year that the reminiscences begin. They cover a variety of topics including, but not limited to, general comments on Hindmarsh Island, long walks, exercise and boating excursions, and Conigrave’s family life. A large section (which often overlaps, as memoirs or reminiscences are wont to do without the benefit of tight editing) is devoted to interactions with the local Aboriginal people (the Ngarrendjeri) and it is the paradoxical nature of the commentary of that narrative stream that constitutes the most interesting thread of Conigrave’s writing.

In her writing about the Ngarrendjeri, Conigrave wrote of the disintegration of Aboriginal culture but did not exclusively blame the Indigenous peoples for the breakdown of their own society. Instead, like Minnie Brewer (to be discussed

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553 ‘Anne Geddes,’ (Pioneering on the West Coast – Koppio), State Library of South Australia, PRG 727/1/3 & 4
554 Reminiscences of Sarah Conigrave, State Library of South Australia, D7938 (L)
555 Patricia Grimshaw and Julie Evans have written that women’s writings on Indigenous populations were considered ‘observations’ rather than anything more substantial. Men’s writing on Aboriginal peoples were given more weight as men’s writing was provided more legitimacy (see Patricia Grimshaw and Julie Evans, ‘Colonial Women on Intercultural Frontiers: Rosa
below), Conigrave placed much of the blame at the feet of white men who chose to pay their Indigenous workers with alcohol rather than cash: ‘It was often, they learnt the white men’s vices’. She described a couple of instances where this created problems between settlers and the local Aboriginal population.

In one instance, a settler had been paying the Ngarrendjeri who worked for him with cash, but then selling them alcohol from his own supplies. The settler went away, leaving his wife in charge of the station. She was approached by Aboriginal men who were used to buying alcohol from the house, but she refused, creating tension between herself and the Aboriginal man. On the return of her husband, a fight broke out between him and the Ngarrendjeri that he employed because of their ‘ill treatment’ and ‘disrespect’ shown to the wife.

Conigrave recorded a further instance where her own brothers choose to pay their Indigenous workers for additional work with alcohol. Conigrave became involved in an argument with her brothers regarding the morality of this decision, but was told to keep away from what was seen as fundamentally a business (and therefore male) decision.

With this issue, Conigrave was able to show a critical awareness of the destruction of Aboriginal culture by the introduction of white vices and cultural norms into traditional communities. However, in this understanding there were still limitations. Conigrave wrote of her own efforts to convert the Ngarrendjeri to Christianity, with no comprehension as to how this in itself contributed to the downfall of Aboriginal society. In this way, Conigrave’s writing is similar to that of her contemporary also living in colonial South Australia, Christina Smith, whose story has been examined in ‘Chapter Four: Pioneer Women in the Museum.’ Like Conigrave, Smith saw the destruction of the Indigenous population as directly related to white invasion, but did not draw the association

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Campbell Praed, Mary Bunndok and Katie Langloh Parker,’ in Australian Historical Studies, 106, 1996, 80).
between her missionary work and that destruction, rather looking to more overt forms of dispossession and dislocation such as violence. In doing so, both women failed to place themselves in the legacy of cultural dispossession that was equally damaging to Aboriginal cultures around Australia.

Furthermore, both women saw their work in a kind of ‘God’s police’ role, and in this way, they used their writings to reinforce their own propriety and morality and therefore their principled superiority to those around them. In this character, Conigrave placed herself firmly within the social memory of Australia’s pioneer women who, within that paradigm, were considered to be a civilising influence on settler societies. As has been explored in the introduction to this thesis, Australian women were either positioned as God’s police or damned whores in the national narrative – the social memory of pioneer women can be seen to be clearly demonstrated in the self-representation of women who identified within the dominant stereotypes.

The language that was employed by Conigrave gives us an indication of some of the more covert messages that she sought to convey in her writing. By relying on the nuance and tone of her writing, Conigrave was able to illustrate her feelings without presenting them blatantly. Take, for example, the following passage in which Conigrave wrote of her interactions with the local Indigenous population:

> Some of the women made up excellent servants, and we became very attached to them – at least, I did. We had a washerwoman who was really a fine character, and nice looking too, which could not be said of all of them …

> A lady settler once said in my hearing, ‘Give them a tail and you have a monkey complete.’ However, Charlotte [the washerwoman] was very nice, and one day I expressed a wish to

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556 Smith, *The Booandik Tribe of South Australian Aborigines*

557 Summers, *Damned Whores and God’s Police*
learn her language which she offered to teach. I thought I was getting on well until the tribe was leaving … when necessarily, my studies ceased, as my teacher went too. I do not think my people missed much, because my jabbering in blacks language, would not have edified them at all.

You will note that, whilst Conigrave showed herself to have an understanding and connection with the Indigenous population, especially the washerwoman, Charlotte, she did not disagree with the derogatory comments made by others on the whole. Instead, she painted Charlotte as an exception to the norm. The passage is double-edged: it makes Conigrave appear accepting and tolerant of the local cultures (which, it must be said, she must have been, to a certain degree, to begin learning the language); but it also provides an opportunity to present disparaging comments which are shown to be the opinions of others but which are not, in any way, condemned by Conigrave.

The same subtle condoning can be seen in Conigrave’s writing of violence directed towards Aboriginal people. When she referred to a neighbour who had remarked that if there was trouble with the local people, he ‘would have them shot them down like crows,’ there is little condemnation. And in an off-handed way she remarked, ‘The blacks at the time greatly feared the white mans [sic] gun, but got well accustomed with it later on,’ without any irony at all.

In these ways, Conigrave fits neatly into an early version of Australia’s social memory of pioneer women: she is the civilising force, working to convert the Aboriginals and to lessen the violence of the frontier; but conversely sanctioning racist attitudes and extreme violence against them. Although horrific comments when read in the twenty-first century, Conigrave’s attitudes would have melded nicely with her contemporaries, slotting her reminiscences firmly within the accepted social memory of the colonial frontier.
Conigrave (and Ilsa, her daughter for whom the reminiscences were recorded) points to one of the issues of writing about one’s past: there is simply too much to include in such a manuscript, and things are therefore disregarded. A letter from Ilsa to Mr Pitt, archivist at the Public Library of South Australia dated 20 September 1940 and included with the manuscript states: ‘[Conigrave] told me she could have recorded much more – but the cost of publishing – made it impossible – it had to be curtailed because of that.’ Reminiscences, then, suffer the same problem as other types of sources – there has been too much happen to record everything, and thus when one approaches such sources, one must be conscious of the fact that there has been an arbitrary prioritising of memories by the creator. Different people put different values on certain aspects of the past, and record or dismiss certain elements based on their views and values.

Through Conigrave’s reminiscences, we also see the male/female dynamic between her parents, and their struggles to come to terms with life in rural colonial South Australia. In the telling of this component of her history, Conigrave drew on the tradition of seeing females, in such situations, as appendages of their husbands and failed to fully demonstrate the difficulties and strains that a move to the colonies would have had on her mother.

Further, Conigrave reinforced the notion of the self-sacrificing wife and mother, whose only concern is for her husband and children, with no thought for herself. Conigrave wrote:

Mama did not like papa being there [on Hindmarsh Island] alone so she persuaded him to sell our house at Walkerville and we all moved to the island and lived in a large tent [while?] the house was completed. We children felt that it was a glorious life, free from school and running almost wild with no companions but black [?illegible?]. To my mamma tho’ it was very different. Never strong and in England always accustomed to servants she now had to cook and bake bread in a camp oven in the open.
Conigrave failed to question the actual impact of such a life on her mother, and women like her, instead referring to ‘papa’s struggles’ when commenting on the difficulties of colonial life. She neglected to critically examine the full meaning of how ‘very different’ life would have been for ‘Mamma’ on Hindmarsh Island, and the impact of isolation from family, friends and familiar life, and in this way, showed an acceptance that for women and girls, their lot would be shared and shaped by the men in their lives, with very little influence from themselves. The Price and Conigrave women are the archetypal pioneer women, who merrily follow their men into the bush to be part of the pioneering legend of Australia.

Conigrave’s reminiscences provide an interesting mix of the public and the private: they were written for her daughter, but with the plan that her daughter would edit and publish them. As such, her voice was probably constrained by the knowledge that the reminiscences would have a reasonable sized audience. Things that may have been included, had they been written with the sole intention of being read by family members, may have, therefore, been excluded.

This inclusion and exclusion in sources can happen for a number of reasons, and must not be ignored when reading these sources. Autobiography is notorious for glossing over aspects of people’s pasts that, on reflection, they wished were not part of their experience. Further, distance and time from events can mean that authors are able to paint themselves in a more positive (and sometimes heroic) light that might not necessarily reflect the truth.

Significantly, when writing about events many years past, writers are dependant on that most delicate of faculties, the human memory. Like social memory, human memory is shaped by time and circumstance, and can change to reflect the present truth far more thoroughly than it does the past reality. Conigrave wrote these reminiscences as an older woman, and although we should not disregard what she has written, we must be very conscious of the shortcomings of such writings.
Although in many ways not fitting the current social memory of pioneer women completely, Conigrave’s writings provide us with a clear example of how a small minority of women and their experiences have been construed as representative of an age. Conigrave’s writings were read by her daughter, but were much more widely distributed through the publication of her book. On balance, her story can be seen as fitting the memory (particularly earlier versions of the memory) and its publication would have aided the construction of the pioneer women’s legend.

The privately published memoirs of Mary Emily Susannah ‘Minnie’ Brewer offer a very interesting example of the presentation of the reminiscences of a woman living in colonial Australia. As an unmarried young woman needing to support herself, Brewer took up a position with John ‘Boss’ Brewer and his wife Elizabeth Geraldine ‘Lizzie’ Brewer, aka ‘the Missus’ working as something of a maid and nanny to their family. Throughout the text, it is obvious that Brewer is in love with the ‘Boss’, which presents in jealousy towards the ‘Missus’ and their domestic situation. On the death of Lizzie Brewer, Minnie and John marry. Brewer wrote the memoirs at the request of her adopted son (although at the end of the text, the validity of this claim to adoption is questioned by the editor, with a feasible suggestion [reputedly supported by family acquaintances] that John Lucian ‘Poss’ Cantrill was the product of an adulterous affair between Brewer and the ‘Boss’ before Lizzie’s death).

Edited by amateur historian Lois Dean, Brewer began writing her memoirs, in 1915 and finished in about 1929. Dean originally presented the parts of Brewer’s memoirs that dealt with her time in South Australia on the ABC South East (South Australia), and decided from the positive reaction to those presentations to compile the full memoirs in a book.

558 Mary Emily Susannah Brewer, Minnie: Memoirs of a Squatter’s Daughter, edited by Lois Dean, privately published, Mount Gambier, 2005
559 Brewer, Minnie, 6
On the back cover of the published version of the memoirs, Dean intrinsically linked Brewer’s writing to a long tradition of the dominant social memory. She wrote ‘Minnie Hunter, slim, fair-haired and active, a lover of bush life, especially in the outback, was surely the perfect partner for a nineteenth century rural pioneer.’ It is worth noting that Dean saw women as the ‘partners’ of rural pioneers rather than pioneers in their own right. The reference to having fair hair contributing to being the ‘perfect partner’ of a rural pioneer, works on a secondary level to subtly bolster the emphasis on whiteness in the Australian social memory; and the emphasis of female physical attractiveness works to devalue the other contributions of women in society.

The introduction to the text written by Dean, unconsciously illustrates the very real lack of agency on the part of nineteenth century women – the introduction to the memoirs focusses on the business deals, the fighting histories, the horse racing and the careers of those men who came before Brewer. Dean’s bias, as an editor, is transparent from the beginning, with a permissive attitude towards the ‘boys will be boys’ mentality that has long dominated the Australian discourse. Her introduction plays into the pioneer legend, with men playing the active roles in the pioneer legend, and women playing secondary, supporting figures. Although these are Brewer’s memoirs, they are placed, by Dean, within the male narrative thread of her forefathers. Dean’s tolerance of a society where women’s agency was secondary to male wishes, is demonstrated when she writes of the marriage of one of Brewer’s uncles, Jack Hunter: ‘Jack was always only too ready to make a bet – even his very successful marriage to Martena Ariola in the Argentine is said to have been the result of a wager!’ The tone of this presentation is jovial, with no unfavourable opinion expressed about the utilisation of women as bargaining chips to be won and lost.

560 Brewer, Minnie, 27-8
This same feeling is echoed in Brewer’s own writing, when she described the fate of Harriet Law, ‘an awful flirt’: ‘The end of her was she was forced into marriage by her mother to old Tom Tilly who was very well off. He took her off to Queensland.’\(^{561}\) Throughout her memoirs, Brewer showed an intolerance of people who display frivolity, and her approval of Harriet being ‘married off’ demonstrates this.

In the introduction to the memoirs, Dean explains that she ‘received advice from [unidentified] professional historians to stick firmly to Brewer’s original text,’ and so most of her changes to the text have been grammatical to clarify meaning. However, Dean then writes,

I have made a few brief cuts in her narrative, particularly in her highly-coloured descriptions of Boss and his domestic problems.
Some members of the family … felt she was rather hard on Lizzie [the ‘Missus’].\(^ {562}\)

Apart from stating that many people felt that Brewer was too hard on Lizzie, no explanation is presented as to why these sections were cut from the published text. Therein lies one of the most significant issues with using published sources to try to find the voices of Australia’s colonial women – the editor is able to remove parts of the text that do not fit with the narrative they seek to present. That said, Brewer’s opinion of Lizzie is quite obvious from the text, which makes one question why Dean chose to remove parts. It was clearly not for fear of the text being repetitive, as the continual references to horse-racing show. Therefore, only assumptions can be made about Dean’s motivation: was it to portray Brewer as less jealous than she actually was? Were there stories of Lizzie that her descendants may have been embarrassed by? Whatever the case in this instance, the editorial intrusion in the text can drastically change the reading of a text, and alter our understanding of those people whom it seeks to portray.

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561 Brewer, Minnie, 116
562 Brewer, Minnie, 79
There are many issues that reverberate in the Australian social memory presented in Brewer’s memoirs. Without going into detail, Brewer briefly touched on the isolation of women in rural settings in colonial Australia. She wrote that her own mother had many friends, but that they lived a long way apart, making socialising difficult, and she also wrote of the difficulties of childbirth when help was often too far away to arrive in time for delivery. Brewer’s own experiences also demonstrate the class movement that women in colonial societies were subjected to, should they be unable to make a suitable marriage – from comfortable middle-class stock, Brewer is relegated to working class by virtue of remaining unwed (during which time she acts as a ‘ladies helper’ to the Missus), but regains her status on her late marriage to the Boss.

It is when writing of childbirth that Brewer’s Victorian sensibilities were most clearly displayed. In the first instance recorded, Brewer was present for the birth of Ada ‘Burri’ Brewer, daughter of the Boss and the Missus. Brewer wrote:

Early on the morning of Nov. 18th Mrs called me up to say she had been taken ill and I must dress and go and call Johnnie Burke and tell him to go as fast as he could for the nurse, Mrs Wells, the only woman about … I then saw Julia, who was older than myself, and thought she might know best what to do, but she threw up her arms, declared she knew nothing about such illness, and shut herself in her room …. All I could think of was to look up Mrs Beeton’s household instructions on all matters … About eleven o’clock a daughter was born.

The words ‘pregnancy’, ‘labour’, or any other words commonly associated with childbirth are not used in the description, rather relying on allusions such as ‘sickness’ and ‘illness’. This was repeated in the birth of Alick Brewer, who was

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563 Brewer, Minnie, 87
564 Brewer, Minnie, 254
565 Brewer, Minnie, 254
born with what Brewer referred to as ‘something’ (his umbilical cord) wrapped around his neck.\textsuperscript{566}

By relying on euphemisms to describe childbirth, Brewer reinforced the ideal of the ‘proper’ Victorian woman for whom some subjects are strictly forbidden. In this, the memoirs of Brewer play into the social memory of such women, and demonstrate the ways in which those lives which were recorded and retained, fit the mould of the ‘angel of the bush,’ who lived in the bush and enjoyed riding race horses (although, of course, not in races) but retained her ladylike traits. Additionally, Brewer emphasized those perceived ‘ladylike qualities’ in both herself and those around her, with multiple references to women being ‘nervous’, ‘delicate’, ‘fragile’ and the like. Many of the women, and those who Brewer liked or admired, present the paradox of the social memory of Australia’s pioneer women, who were gentle but tough; who remained ladies but who were fit for hard life on the land.

Additionally, Brewer showed changing perceptions about what was acceptable for women in the time that she was recording her reminiscences (that is, between 1915-1929). Whilst presenting her Victorian sensibilities quite often, she also wrote, ‘I cared for nothing but horses and riding and was a dreadful tom boy.’\textsuperscript{567}

Throughout her memoirs, Brewer touched on both the issues of class and race many times, highlighting the ways in which these two issues are inextricably linked in such sources and then how they permeated the social memory of pioneer women. In each instance, Brewer showed aspects of class and race as a ‘given’ in her society. In this way, they are shown as underlying aspects of that society, which in turn demonstrates how they unconsciously underline this social memory.

\textsuperscript{566} Brewer, Minnie, 291
\textsuperscript{567} Brewer, Minnie, 99
Brewer often referred to the servants that were employed by both her family and the families of her friends and acquaintances, without any sort of critical examination of the class dimensions behind these relationships. This is clearly illustrated when she wrote of Peter Kelly, a servant who had been with the family, and who had been dismissed. Once a year, Peter would return to the family’s property to do some general maintenance work, ‘and would take nothing for it. He looked at all that was ours as his own.’ Brewer then went on to say that he died at the Benevolent Asylum at an old age: ‘Poor old man, the day of the faithful servants has gone.’ Brewer’s angst at his passing appears more to do with a changing of times and a lack of ‘faithful servants’ rather than real feelings about Peter, himself, dying.

It is not only the class difference between employers and servants which is demonstrated in these memoirs: Brewer’s memoirs present one instance that shows the ‘cultural cringe’ that long existed in Australia, and illustrated the perceived class differences between the English and the colonials. She attended a ball where ‘there were a number of English gentlemen, Army and Navy men, all so nice and so different from most Australians.’ For Brewer, and for most in her social standing, the English remained the ideal to which to aspire.

Dean also briefly touches on the issue of class, in an aside from the editor about Louisa, Brewer’s mother, which reads:

Louisa despite her comfortable middle-class upbringing as the daughter of an Anglican clergyman took to bush life with zest and cheerful determination, proving the perfect wife for a colonial pioneer. True, she did have a devoted, resourceful woman to help her …

This aside has two-fold importance – it demonstrates the assistance that middle- and upper-class women received from ‘the help’ whilst failing to recognise the

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568 Brewer, Minnie, 142-3
569 Brewer, Minnie, 308
570 Brewer, Minnie, 159
importance of that assistance, and it also reinforces the ideal of the pioneering wife who cheerfully follows her husband into the Australian bush. In this way, it pushes the Australian social memory of the bush experience for women.

Throughout her memoirs, Brewer illustrated many interactions with people of ethnicities other than her own, most significantly the Aboriginal peoples who lived in areas that she lived, but also Chinese and Indians who were employed by those she dealt with, mainly the Brewers. Towards the Chinese and Indians she was ambivalent (with the exception of a Chinese cook, employed by the Brewers, who she did not get along with – she wrote that ‘he was always doped with morphine’\(^\text{571}\)), but she has provided us much more detail about her dealings with Aboriginal people.

On the whole, Brewer was relatively positive about her interactions with the Aboriginal people she had met throughout her life, and seemed to have a relatively high level of respect for them and their ways of life. However, although Brewer wrote that she herself enjoyed good relationships on the properties that she lived on throughout her life, she unconsciously painted a negative picture of them when she wrote, ‘Nervous person as I have always been, I never felt the least fear of blacks, I suppose because I had lived so much amongst them as a child.’\(^\text{572}\) By her very wording, Brewer gave implicit consent to such a fear and suggested that such a fear would be understandable – she suggested, by her phrasing, that it would be perfectly normal for a woman such as herself to fear Aboriginal people.

Like Conigrave, Brewer wrote of the problems that the Indigenous population were experiencing with the introduction of alcohol to their communities, and, like Conigrave, put the blame at the feet of the whites who introduced the alcohol.\(^\text{573}\) Despite this admission, and despite the fact that Brewer

\(^{571}\) Brewer, Minnie, 237
\(^{572}\) Brewer, Minnie, 194
\(^{573}\) Brewer, Minnie, 119
shows little time for anyone who indulges in alcohol she was particularly judgmental of Aboriginal people’s actions when they had been drinking.

Brewer also used the typically condescending language of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when writing of Aboriginal people, demonstrated in her references to Tommy, ‘our black boy.’ Despite the fact that Tommy would have been about twenty years older than Brewer, she used childlike descriptions of him. It is this same patronising voice that is utilised when Brewer referred to her mother’s relationship with the Aboriginałs on the family’s station, ‘Kalangadoo’: ‘My mother … got very fond of the poor blacks. She thought the Lubras wonderful, and so useful when taken a little trouble with.’ Without being explicit, Brewer was able to set the whites as the superiors in colonial Australia.

Interestingly, one area that Brewer touched on repeatedly, that does not correspond to the national social memory, is the way in which she related to children. The maternal nature, which is generally depicted as instinctive in women, and particularly ‘womanly women’, is not presented in Brewer’s writings. With children, other than the very best behaved, Brewer did not have time or inclination. She continually referred to the children of Boss and the Missus as ‘the pigs’, and often wrote about beating them when they were poorly behaved. Poor behaviour in children was reflected back on mothers who were not fulfilling their duties, though, and who did not fit into Brewer’s ideals: when Burri cried a lot as a baby, both Boss and Brewer put it down to the Missus’ ‘mismanagement’.

In the dominant social memory of pioneer women, women such as Brewer, were generally enamoured with children, despite that fact that they might have in excess of ten of their own. They might have been stoical in their presentation of feelings towards them, but they loved and appreciated them nevertheless. Brewer was much more discerning in her approval of children who she meets, than is

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574 Brewer, Minnie, 87
575 Brewer, Minnie, 255
generally presented in the social memory: she did not portray herself as particularly maternal.

It is sometimes hard to determine fact from fiction in Brewer’s writing – there were obviously many people that she did not get along with, and this colours her writing. Of course, it is not obvious how much this colours her writing of them, and this is particularly the case with the Missus, of whom her jealousy is clear. As is always the problem with reading memoirs, you learn about both the author and the people that they associate with, through the prism of their experience.

Within the text, Brewer does not come across as a sympathetic character, with her pride always at the fore. Despite this, she in many ways fits the social memory of the pioneer woman of Australia’s past, and in doing so, reinforces the idea that the dominant memory of the past is, in fact, the reality by providing another ‘authentic voice’ that reinforces the ideal.

Unlike the previously discussed works, the diary of Mrs Tom Richards is written in a style that suggests that Richards never foresaw her thoughts being read by the general public. The wife of a local policeman in the 1880s on the west coast of South Australia, Richards’ diary recounts both the interesting events and the mundanity of day-to-day life. Apart from giving an overview of life in rural South Australia, the diary also raises questions about the private versus public self; and the rights of the historian to delve into such matters and blur the line between the two.

Richards’ diary presents a number of issues that can be seen to be reflected in the national social memory. One such aspect that is touched on, that has become more prominent in the memory in recent years, is the isolation of white women on the outskirts of European colonisation, and the impact of this isolation.

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576 D 6462 (L), Diary of Mrs Tom Richards, State Library of South Australia
The isolation of women on the colonial frontier reinforces the idea of self-sufficiency of pioneer women which, since the feminist movement of the 1970s, has become a very important aspect of the legend. Women were often left on their own, placing them in vulnerable situations: from passing strangers and workers from far-off outposts on stations; with child-birth and personal illness to be negotiated alone (as well as children’s illnesses to be dealt with unaided); and the fear of isolation and loneliness itself. In many cases, and in the cases that are celebrated through our national narrative, these women coped with these pressures, and in the vernacular of the social memory, did so stoically and with little complaint. (This aspect of the legend, of course, forgets as many women as it remembers – the women who complained long and loud about their lot in life; the women who committed infanticide in preference to watching their children suffer; the women who went mad with the loneliness; and the women who took their own lives after being abused. This tension of remembering versus forgetting has been discussed in more detail earlier in this thesis.)

Throughout the diary, Richards wrote of her feelings of loneliness brought on by her husband’s absences from their home; and the lack of contact with the ‘outside world.’ On Tuesday 11 July 1881, she wrote,

Busy today, it is our mail day which arrived at its usual time and what we all consciously look forward to yet often dread, the mail once a fortnight and a Schooner now and then are the only breaks we have in that lonely place.

Further, Tom’s work often took him from their home, leaving her with only their Aboriginal worker (or workers? It is unclear from Richards’ writing how many workers that they had employed) for company – a company in which Richards found no companionship, as she continually alluded to throughout her diary.
The companionship of other (white) women was something that Richards valued and wrote of, often.\(^{577}\) Although not always getting along with the white women with whom she socialised, it is obvious that she enjoyed their camaraderie and the break they provided from her day-to-day life. Early in the diary – although the diaries dates do not follow a logical chronology – she noted on Wednesday 7 November 1883, ‘Mrs Roberts and I were talking nearly the whole night’; and again on Friday 9 November 1883, after a string of late nights having stayed up talking, ‘I can’t get up in the morning.’

The women Richards wrote of, were of a similar class to herself, and provided her with both friendship and mental stimulation. These links were very important to the health and welfare of pioneer women, and this is clearly demonstrated in the weight that Richards gave these connections in her diary. Despite the absence of men for long periods, women were able to provide comfort, support and sympathy for the lot of their fellow-women. Richards naturally wrote of women like herself which, in turn, subtly reinforces the social memory of all pioneer women being of a similar class and type of women.

In Brewer’s reminiscences, she implied that a fear of Indigenous people was reasonable, whilst also stating that she herself did not harbour such fears: Richards, on the other hand, was explicit in her fear of Aborigines, and it is a fear she showed to be shared by both men and women in the following passage:

> We saw a large mob of Blacks coming. Tom and William got a great fright thought they were the “Winburra” mob they had been dreading so long … Mrs Higgins told Tom to give them a wide berth but he said no they would not hurt us in the buggy. I never saw blacks travel ready for war before, their bodys [sic] were painted black and shining like Sateen, heads feathered

\(^{577}\) Patricia Grimshaw and Graham Willett have written on the importance of friendships for white women in colonial Australia (see Patricia Grimshaw and Graham Willett, ‘Women’s history: an exploration of colonial family structure,’ in Norma Grieve and Patricia Grimshaw (eds), *Australian Women: Feminist Perspectives*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1981, particularly pages 142-3 and 145).
some with white shavings of wood, each carried three spears … I saw one gun …

By writing such a description, Richards demonstrates an early version of the social memory of pioneer women, in which Aboriginal people were to be feared by pioneering whites. She paints them in such a way that they neatly fit into the tradition of the ‘fearsome natives,’ who were to be avoided where possible. The tract reads almost like an extract from a boys’ adventure novel of the late Victorian period.

She further played into that earlier version of the social memory in regards to ideas about the Indigenous population. Friends of Richards, the Andersons, had adopted a ‘half caste’ girl. Richards wrote, on visiting the Andersons, ‘How very correctly she says Grace. I fear it is a mistake making so much of her.’

Although repugnant to a modern reading, the idea of not ‘making too much’ of ‘half caste’ children was one that enjoyed great currency in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. Such a judgment by Richards would therefore have been seen, in earlier versions of the social memory, as the proper ones of a woman of her situation, thus reinforcing her as an ‘average’ pioneer woman.

Unlike so many other examples of nineteenth century writing, Richards’ text was not outwardly derogatory towards the Indigenous people that she encountered. Instead, like many of her ilk, Richards wrote in a general manner of the Aboriginal people with whom she interacted, but did it in such a way that she managed to belittle them. She referred to ‘the Blacks’, ‘my black companion’, and ‘the Black boy’, without referring to these people by name. In this, she denied them the respect and dignity afforded to others that she wrote of in her diary, demonstrating her ambivalence to the Indigenous people with whom she interacted. Richards

578 Richards, 22 November 1883
579 Richards, 26 November 1883
afforded the Indigenous people a status on par with the weather to which she occasionally referred.

From her diary, Richards’ ambivalence towards the Aboriginal people seemed to be entirely unselfconscious. For her, and many like her, the Indigenous population provided an adequate supply of home and farm help, and little more. Richards did not portray herself as either one of ‘Gods police’ or a Christian crusader for the Aboriginal people, unlike Conigrave or Christina Smith. Instead, it is in her role of wife that Richards was able to demonstrate her credentials as white women as civilising force on the colonial frontier.

Throughout the diary, Richards referred to ‘Tom’s tempers’ and his drinking. She tried to placate her husband, but it would appear with little result. These descriptions have a two-fold purpose: they demonstrate Richards’ attempts to civilise a white man (white men often behaved badly on the colonial frontier, and white women were seen as the force that could ameliorate their behaviours, as has been discussed elsewhere in this thesis); and they demonstrate, to a latter-day audience the many struggles of pioneer women which have become an important aspect of the resilience of women in the social memory.

It is in these descriptions of Tom’s tempers that Richards provides us with her best examples of the context and contested nature of space in the male/female relationship, particularly on the outskirts of white settlement. In one such instance, Tom left his wife waiting in the street for one-and-a-half hours. She wrote, ‘I felt angry and he swor [sic] loud in the street at me but he had been drinking.’$^{580}$ This appropriation of the public space by the male is a common aspect of the Australian experience, and one that is common in the social memory of the pioneering of Australia. It is not the only time in the diary where Tom’s tempers forced them back from the public to the private sphere, either. In this way, his anger acted as an enclosure to his wife, ensuring that when she ventured in the public realm, she

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580 Richards, 18 September 1881
quickly returned to the private. This delineation of space is a common aspect of the Australian social memory, and indeed, most Western narratives, around the male and female space.

Richards’ diary raises some very interesting questions about privacy and the responsibility of historians to delve into the private lives of those who have gone before. Whilst a lot of the diary is dedicated to the mundane, there is much written that is extremely personal and that one may expect would cause embarrassment if the details were known by others, such as her sleep-interrupting flatulence and the problems within her marriage. Richards is long-since dead, but the rawness of the diary, and the details that it provides in some respects, are enough to make a modern-reader question their justification in both reading the diary and critically examining the details of someone’s inner thoughts. Do people have the right to such access?

The answer, I believe, is a resounding ‘yes’. Historians cannot only focus on the public persona, the glossed-over veneer that people choose to present to the world. Where possible, those exploring the past must delve into the personal and the private in order to gain a better understanding of how life actually was, rather than how people wished that it was. It is unknown if Richards’ marital problems were widely known at the time that she was writing of them, but to give us a better understanding today about what life was like for women living on the frontiers of white civilisation, it is important that we understand and acknowledge these realities.

Despite the private nature of these sources, as they have been deposited in public arenas (libraries, archives, and the like), these private sources have taken on public roles, which, in turn, have been used to at once form and mould the national social memory. Because of Richards’ station in life, she fits quite closely to the national social memory of Australia’s pioneer woman. In many ways, her life story aligns to the ideal that is present in the social memory, because in many –
but not all – ways, she was the ‘type’ who has been taken to be representative of
an era and whose story has been chosen to be remembered and perpetuated
through the national celebratory narrative. Primary sources like Richards’
diary can be used to legitimise the notion that the social memory of pioneer women is
based on a reality, and by pointing to the lack of contesting voices from the past,
an argument, albeit flimsy, can be made that pioneering white women were those
women who have been perpetuated in myth.

In many ways, the very ordinariness of Richards’ diary reinforces the ideals
of the national legend. Richards’ life was not a fancy life – she is a kind of
‘everywoman’. Generally, her diary is very mundane, focussing on rain, bills, and
the like. In being so ordinary, her story can be read as being quite common in
terms of the Australian pioneer woman’s experience, and many of the experiences
of her life reflect what has become the Australian social memory of pioneer
women.

None of the women explored here can be seen as the quintessential pioneer
woman of the Australian social memory – and, indeed, it could reasonably be
argued that the quintessential pioneer woman of the Australian social memory is
such an ideal that could never be fully realised in the one woman. However,
Conigrave, Brewer and Richards all display several attributes that are taken to be
indicative of how all women of their period lived and behaved, and thus are
perpetuated as the social memory of the time.

Examples do exist of writings that were done by women who in no way fit
what has become the dominant social memory of the Australian pioneer
woman. Some women, who were poor, or of diverse ethnicities, found the ways
and means to teach themselves to write and record their thoughts, and in some
instances, these writings found their way into library and archival collections.
However, their voices were few and far between, and by far and away the most

581 Many of these have been reproduced in collections such as Freedom Bound and Life Lines.
common women’s voices still heard from the pioneering period of Australia’s past were from the white, middle- to upper-classes on whom the national social memory is based.

By referring to primary sources to identify the ‘average’ pioneer woman, it is feasible to argue that the social memory is closely based on reality. As always, though, the national memory is as much about forgetting as it is about remembering. By using these sources, we forget all the women who could not find a voice in the written word; we forget those whose words were not deemed to be worth preserving; and we choose to remember only a select few. Our national legend remembers the romance as it forgets the reality.
CONCLUSION

Deciding to remember, and what to remember, is how we describe who we are.

- Robert Pinsky

The Australian pioneer legend is a legend that is warmly embraced by the majority of the Australian public. It is a legend that comforts; that reassures; and that helps solidify the rightfulness of the white inheritance around which the Australian social memory revolves. The women of the pioneer legend are a carefully constructed idealisation that has provided a place for the nation’s white women to claim a space within the national narrative – a place that can be widely celebrated without obfuscating the traditional masculinist bias of the Australian social memory.

When creating foundation myths and a long and proud history, Australian society has looked not to the Indigenous Australians who had arrived long before the European explorers, exiled prisoners and British military arrived on the nation’s shores. Rather, when looking to establish a foundation story that could be embraced and celebrated, the stories of the Aboriginal people were forgotten or glossed over and the whites who settled the land were promoted to mythological proportions – the brave and hardy pioneers who claimed and tamed the virgin land.

The realities of the lives of these pioneers were of little consequence, as the Australian folklore which surrounded them spun their stories into a triumphant trope. Dispossession, rape and murder of the original inhabitants of the land was forgotten; bad marriages were transformed into narratives of overcoming adversity; and the white women who had little choice but to follow their husbands into the bush, should the whim take them, were painted as devoted and loving helpmeets who embraced the challenges of bush life with gusto. The pioneers created the nation and the success of Australia is balanced on their shoulders. It
was the pioneers who forged the national identity, an identity to which contemporary Australia still clings (whilst, ironically, living in urban settings and seldom venturing into ‘the bush’): the mateship, independence, hard-working nature, and loyalty which were – according to popular understanding – solidified on the beaches of Gallipoli, were forged in the bush.

For the majority of Australians, this narrative is one which is deeply ingrained in the national social memory, and which forms the basis of understanding as to what it means to ‘be Australian.’ By understanding and accepting the pioneer narrative, white Australia can claim a distinguished heritage on which a rightful inheritance can be claimed.

The feminist academics of the 1970s questioned this narrative, though: they questioned a story in which all women’s experiences could be easily compartmentalised; and a story into which all (white) women supposedly fitted. Quite rightly, they argued that the depth and variety of experiences of women living on the frontier of Australia’s white settlement could not easily be summarised into one neat narrative – that of ‘the pioneers.’ What these academics did not do, however, was examine how the narrative itself had changed through time – how it had bent and moulded, itself, to remain relevant, even though understandings and values changed. They did not examine the many ways in which the general public gained their understanding of the lives of pioneer women – an understanding that was, and is, deeply ingrained in Australia’s communal knowledge. And, whilst these historians may have changed the thinking about the realities of women’s lives as they were understood amongst other historians and theorists, they did little to break down the cult of the pioneer woman as it existed in the wider community.

To a large extent, the study of Australia’s pioneer women, within the academy, had somewhat stagnated since the 1970s. Work like Godden’s, McGuire’s and Lake’s had demonstrated that what had been taken as given, did
not reflect reality, and from there, it appears that the study of pioneer women was put to the side. However, this thesis has not sought to examine the lives or the realities of women who came under the broad umbrella of the label of ‘pioneer women.’ Instead, I have systematically analysed the social memory of pioneer women; and the shifting energies that persist around this dominant narrative.

As has been demonstrated throughout this thesis, societies gain an understanding of the past from such a wide and omnipresent variety of sources, that they are often not even understood to be transmitting information about the past. Other sources are consciously shaping social memory and promoting specific understandings of the past, but although the creators may have specific views of the past, they are unable to fully counteract the social baggage that the public bring with them: this was clearly illustrated in the response to the ‘Women of the West’ museum exhibition in which the display was viewed positively, and as accurate, by the majority of viewers; but which also proved a site of conflict for those whose social memory did not match the dominant memory which was reproduced.

And, whilst all these sources promote a remembrance of the national narrative, at the same time they encourage an active forgetting of those parts of the past that have not been embraced by the national narrative. Whilst the response to the ‘Women of the West’ demonstrated the positive response of the general public to the Australian social memory of pioneer women, it also demonstrated the contested nature of national narratives and the forgetting which is integral to the promulgation of the social memory of pioneer women. Other sites of memory, such as the memorial to Mary Seymour on Kangaroo Island (which was examined in Chapter Five: Memories in Stone) demonstrate more complex instances of the conflicts of remembering and forgetting. The memorial on Mary’s gravesite demonstrated the way that an Aboriginal woman’s identity had been suppressed in favour of whiteness which, in turn, gave way to a reclaiming of her Aboriginal heritage by her descendants. The example of Mary’s memorial demonstrates the
fluidity and conflicts of memory; whilst also demonstrating the fluidity and conflicts of race.

Sources that inform understandings of the past are not just the archival documents upon which the historian has traditionally relied to create an understanding of the past: indeed, for most people, their understanding is a derivative of a miscellany of inputs, from a wide variety of sources, that they encounter throughout their life. The general population may read a popular history text: but they also view memorials, hear poems, see pictures and visit museums, and it is a conglomeration of these sources that inform how they view the past. These diverse sources work in unison to create the national social memory of pioneer women.

By concentrating on a wide range of diverse sources, I have demonstrated the ways in which social memory is transferred through communities; and the differing meanings that are illustrated within these sources. Historians tend to focus on primary sources to gain their understanding of the past, researching and critically analysing the meanings of the records that past societies leave. Most people in the community do not do this, though, and still gain an understanding of the past – one which they believe to be true, even when they cannot articulate how they came to possess this knowledge. And, while they gain this knowledge from a range of sources that they may not be aware of being informed by, it is often a firmly held belief. A national social memory is formed without many people being conscious that they have been influenced by such a variety of images. Some of these sources have not previously been considered in the exploration of historical understanding; but as has been shown throughout the preceding chapters, the general public get their understanding from a wide variety of sources.

Throughout this thesis, I have shown the ways in which the Australian identity has been understood and shaped by a wide variety of non-traditional sources. To contextualise this understanding, Chapter One: Social Memory and
Pioneer Women, focussed on the study of social memory as a shared experience; and the ways that social memories respond to flux and change within communities. The chapter examined the way that the pioneer woman has been idealised and moulded to fit societal ideas; and how social memory has worked as an agent of the past to service the needs of the present. As was demonstrated in this chapter, the national social memory of Australia’s pioneer women relies as much on collective amnesia as it does on communal remembrance.

The second chapter demonstrated that, despite the challenges to the Australian pioneer legend that have been mounted since the 1970s, by-and-large, the popular histories of pioneer women have continued to present a depiction situated firmly within the framework of the dominant social memory of the Australian public. Popular histories – from which the wider community receive their notions of written history (as compared to academic histories) – continue to be informed by the social memory. Writers of popular histories have either sought to work within the memory; or have unconsciously been informed by it.

In the third chapter, I demonstrated how cultural depictions – many of which were created in the 1890s – have worked to form persistent images that resonate in the Australian social memory. As was explored, the artists and writers who created these representations were also drawing on a tradition of social memory, and were also subjected to contests of understanding. Many of these images have become iconic, and are drawn upon when remembering white women on the land.

Chapter Four: Pioneer Women in Museums saw a shift to the present-day, and the depictions of contests of social memory that play out in exhibitions, from the small to the large. Through a study of a variety of exhibitions, it was shown that museum exhibitions of pioneer women tend to focus on the dominant social memory; but as has been demonstrated throughout this entire thesis, that social memory cannot reflect the reality of the past for all viewers and thus the social memory itself is a site of contest.
The representation of women in monuments and memorials is yet another way that societies create their understandings and knowledge about women in the past; and the fifth and sixth chapters of the thesis examine public memorials and private gravesites. Both memorials and gravestones were created to last, and thus cannot respond to changing values in the same way that representations like those found in museums can. However, the way in which these monuments can be viewed and interpreted can change; and the ways that these stone remembrances remain relevant demonstrate the ways in which societies implement their own understandings into representations. These sites are contested sites, and their meanings change throughout time.

Following from the personalised remembrance at gravesites, family histories perpetuate many of the narrative themes of the dominant social memory; and whilst perpetuating the memory, they are also informed by it. As was examined, family histories follow the dominant themes and narrative structure of the Australian social memory of pioneer women.

Finally, I looked at the writings of pioneer women, examining the ways in which these ‘authentic voices’ have been used to bolster the legend of the Australian pioneer woman. As demonstrated, these sources were selective in their creation and preservation, and this selectiveness has fed the exclusivity of the pioneer legend.

As I have established throughout this thesis, the wider community does not gain its understanding of the past from the clearly and thoroughly researched histories created by trained and disciplined academics. Rather, their understanding of the past is gained much more organically, fed from a number of sources that have not been considered to be ‘history sources’ – and the study of non-traditional history sources throughout this thesis has demonstrated that. The Australian social
memory is a potent force, and is fed through a number of different avenues into the collective consciousness.

Traditionally, historians have sought to understand the past using only the concrete facts, the unremitting ‘truth’: examinations of the past that did anything else were dismissed as ‘false histories’, the works of untrained amateurs whose importance and influence was, at best, negligible. The past, as it actually happened, was thought to be able to be reclaimed and assessed by those who had undergone rigorous training in the discipline of history, and other interpretations were set aside. But, as the collection of chapters presented here has demonstrated, societies understand the past and get their understanding of the past from a variety of sources, and it is not acceptable to only value those understandings which are created within the realms of academia. The importance of other understandings, and the ways in which those understandings are created and evolve, tell us so much about the past, and the present, that it is folly to dismiss them from our studies.

Social memory is a legitimate way of interpreting the past and understanding the present, but as with all methods of understanding what has gone before, there are frailties that are inherent. Fundamentally – and this is again the case with all forms of understanding the past – the creation of social memory is situated firmly in the present and makes its assumptions based on the value-sets of modern society, rather than the value-sets of the era that is recreates. Whilst historians strive for objectivity in their work, and endeavour to ensure that they are not implementing their own value-sets on things that happened in the past – instead presenting things as they actually happened – social memory is not introspective enough for this to occur. Social memory is not conscious enough to seek to question meanings and understandings, but relies on outside forces to dictate the way in which it moves.
The presentation of social memory illustrates much about the society in which it was created. For example, the 1973 publication of the family history, *The Goldstein Story*, in which the author noted that a female forebear had died at the age of 40 and suggested that her death may have been directly or indirectly caused by her manic-depressive, alcoholic husband, shows a great deal about the attitudes to marriage at the time: the author goes on to note that the female forebear in question, ‘may have been a nagging and unsatisfactory wife and may herself have contributed to [her husband’s] emotional instability.’ Similarly, Frederick McCubbin’s decision to call his iconic painting ‘The Pioneer’, naming only the male in the triptych, despite the woman’s centrality to the image, demonstrates the degree of input women were believed to have had on the land.

Social memory is a fluid entity that responds to changing needs of communities and their understandings of their identities, and their place in the world. All understandings of the past, be they history or social memory, are created within the confines of contemporary understanding and beliefs, and are subjected to changing tensions and shifting energies as those societies are. No understanding of the past is stagnant, and as such, history and social memory are dynamic entities. The past is a fluid phenomenon, as it can only be re-imagined in the ever-changing present. And thus, the way that the past is examined, displayed and interpreted, tells us as much about the present as it does about the past; likewise, the way that those portrayals are interpreted at various times illustrate changing values and shifting energies of a society.

Social memory is not something that is formally recorded – it is a much more organic interpretation of the past, infusing objects and sites with memory, without necessarily analysing those meanings. It is transferred and transformed through a wide variety of media and those meanings are perhaps not even fully understood by those who create them. The social memory of pioneer women is so embedded in the Australian society that it would appear that a number of creators

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582 Henderson, *The Goldstein Story*, 31
are unconscious of the predefined parameters in which they work: indeed, this seems to be particularly true of those writing popular histories, whose work closely subscribes to the social memory of pioneer women without acknowledging the fact.

The relationship between sources and the dominant social memory is a symbiotic relationship that creates and then feasts on its own creations: the sources, in the main, are created using the parameters of the pioneer women’s legend as the basis, and can therefore be seen as the stuff of the memory. But being created within this structure means that they reinforce the social memory and can thus be seen to be propagating the memory.

Because of this complex relationship between memory and source, the relationship is not a stagnant one – instead, it changes, through time, in a positive feedback loop. The sources are created within the social memory and in turn, become the feeders of social memory.

An important component to the social memory of pioneer women is the centrality of whiteness; and this is a component that has persisted since the inception of the memory. As has been shown, this aspect of the social memory is one that has displayed itself in all manifestations of the memory. It is shown in the importance of the ‘first white woman’ in an area (or similar), in the forgetting of women of other ethnicities, and in the social amnesia about the Indigenous experience in Australia.

The pervasiveness of whiteness, which is prevalent in the dominant Australian national narratives, is something that will be difficult to overcome, and particularly within the wider community: indeed, whiteness is such an ingrained part of the nation’s social memory that, whilst academics may find ways to diversify understanding and appreciate experiences, these will not necessarily flow outside the academy. The nation’s social memory is constantly experiencing
tensions of understanding and challenges of memory: but these challenges do not necessarily reflect the changes in understanding that are a result of thorough research and thought. Instead, they reflect societal ideals which can be informed by a wide variety of things, from the very personal and internal, to international affairs. How academics can move understandings beyond this is a very complex issue indeed.

The Australian social memory of pioneer women has a number of other underlying themes which persist through the various incarnations of the memory. Motherhood is one such persistent theme, which has had the effect of framing men as fathers – seemingly at odds with the ideal of the ‘lone hand’ which has existed in the masculine narrative of the pioneer legend. Some of these aspects of the memory have adapted as values have shifted. For example, the essential positioning as mother has responded to changes within society – rather than women’s sole role in the family unit, motherhood is now accepted as one of the myriad roles of the woman within the family. The pioneer woman remains as a mother, but she is also a worker on the land, and a being in her own right.

The social memory of pioneer women has been subjected to changing influences – and these changes have manifested in a variety of sources: in popular and family histories, in museums, in cultural depictions, and in memorials. Most people do not acquire their understanding of the past through intensive and exhaustive research; instead, they appropriate, as their own, the messages and meanings from a social memory that is manifested in a wide variety of forms.

All of the aspects of the social memory of pioneer women, though, point to the artificial positioning of an idealised womanhood – whether this is a positioning created by men, or whether it is a positioning created by women. Whether it is subservience to their husbands; or an independent streak which meant that the pioneer women revelled in life on the land: these ideals perpetuated in the social memory may have been the reality for some women, but they were too tightly
circumscribed to depict the reality for all pioneer women. Society changes, but the social memory remains an artificial construction of illusion.

The dominant national social memory remembers the celebratory parts of the past and forgets those parts that are hard to reconcile to a celebratory narrative. Of course, this creates tensions within the public domain because what is celebratory for one section of the community is not necessarily celebratory for all; and the pioneer legend provides a prime example of this fact. For white Australia, the pioneer legend *is* a story of celebration – it is a foundation narrative on which the legacy of white achievement can be based. However, for Aboriginal Australia, the pioneer legend is the story of dispossession – of being dispossessed of their land, their heritage and their history. For those of Chinese heritage, whose families immigrated to Australia to take part in the gold rushes of the mid-nineteenth century, the pioneer legend is a story of amnesia – of being forgotten as some of the earlier migrants to Australia’s shores after white colonisation. Thus, a tension of memory; and a tension of remembering and forgetting, is a central component of the pioneer narrative.

All social memories are subject to tensions of understanding and acceptance and these contests are demonstrated in the way that different people respond to the different aspects of the memory, and in this respect, the social memory of pioneer women is no different. The strength of spirit of Australia’s pioneer women is something illustrated in the ‘Women of the West’ exhibition in the Queensland Museum: the resilience of the white women of the bush is reinforced by the display, and feedback to that exhibit demonstrated how favourably visitors saw this depiction. At the same time, the depiction of pioneer women at Sovereign Hill focusses on the more ‘ladylike’ qualities of white women living in basic conditions.

As I have previously stated, this thesis has not sought to destroy the social memory of pioneer women; indeed, whilst social memory is not subjected to the
same rigorous examination as more formal histories, it provides historians with
considerable information both about the past, and how it is interpreted and used in
the present. All societies wish to understand their pasts, and examine their own
heritage. For a majority of people, this understanding of the past comes from
social memory rather than the more formal study of history. Masses of information
about the past is passed through communities, without a formal undertaking to do
so. Furthermore, whilst social memory is a way of understanding the past, it is also
a way of making sense of the present. The past as it happened cannot be regained,
and thus to understand what has gone before, communities recreate their beliefs
about what that past was like. But in doing so, those understandings are situated
firmly within the present – the ideas and ideals that are portrayed cannot but be
coloured by the values of the creator. And, accordingly, the understanding of the
past is not a true picture of the past, but one coloured by the views of the present.

Throughout time, views change and evolve, and as a result, the aspects of
the past that are important and relevant to a modern audience change. In the late
nineteenth century, therefore, Victorian notions of femininity remained at the
forefront of importance in the memory: obedience, religious observance, 
subservience to their husband, superior household skills, deference and
submissiveness all worked to form the early social memory of pioneer women. As
ideas and ideals of womanhood have changed, though, so too have the aspects of
the pioneer women’s legend that are celebrated: instead of focussing on those
previous attributes, the memory now celebrates independence, strength, the ability
to overcome adversity, strength of character and the braveness to cope with
isolation, and personal sacrifice.

Fluidity is essential for the continuation of a social memory, and the social
memory of pioneer women has shown that it is indeed extraordinarily malleable.
Thus, the role of woman as support for the husband (who was originally viewed as
‘the pioneer’), an important aspect of the memory in the past, has been replaced by
the role of woman as equal to her husband, pioneering in her own right, alongside her partner.

It can be seen that as ideas and ideals have changed, the representations of pioneer women have taken on new meanings – rather than fading into obscurity, the community has read different meanings into established representations to ensure that they remain relevant to the changing memory. Thus McCubbin’s ‘The Pioneer’ remains a symbol of the frontier, with people misquoting the title as ‘The Pioneers’ to include the role of the woman as a pioneer; inscriptions on headstones are read as representative of an era; and history books take the parts of academic research that can be moulded to fit the dominant social memory and continue to reinforce the ideal of the pioneer woman.

Throughout this thesis, I have attempted to demonstrate how representations of pioneer women reflect the values of the society in which they were created, rather than the realities of the lives of white women who lived on the outskirts of white settlement. In part, these representations symbolise wish-fulfilment on the part of their creators – a desire for a romantic past that was much less complex than reality ever is. They also act as a panacea for the ills of the past that spill into the present, illustrating a bygone era from which white Australia does not need to question their inheritance and privilege. Social memory has the veneer of the magical – it refers to the past, but does so in the present. The images that they illustrate, though – and this is particularly true of the legend of the Australian pioneer woman – is too tightly circumscribed, too exclusive, to actually depict reality. For many people, the romance of the past is a much easier to accept interpretation than one that draws more closely on reality. Romancing the past is essential for those who do not wish to confront the complexities of the past. Social memories persist because they show how people would like to think that the past had played out. The social memory of Australia’s pioneer women has been, and continues to act, as a potent force in the understanding of the white Australian identity.
The legend of the Australian pioneer woman is not a story of the past that has been created within academia. Instead, it has been created and evolved through Australia’s national memory, and has worked with, and adapted to, the challenges that have faced it: indeed, rather than fading into obscurity following the challenges of the 1970s, the social memory of the pioneer woman has adapted remarkably well. The legend has expanded and transformed to embrace the values of the ‘second wave’ of feminism (though, of course, not the challenge to the legend itself) – and as the feminist ideals that were solidifying in the 1970s have gained widespread credence in Australian society, these ideals have been incorporated into the social memory of white women who lived on the frontiers of white settlement in colonial Australia. Expressions of the social memory, and sites where the memory is presented in a tangible form, now focus on aspects such as independence and self-reliance (as demonstrated in the popular history books that have followed the revolution in understanding about women’s lives that occurred in the 1970s) that have become part of the wider society’s understanding of the realities of women’s experiences. Rather than being challenged by changes in understanding, the social memory of pioneer women has adapted and continued to be embraced by the wider public.

The persistence of the social memory is illustration of its ability to adapt. Unlike the monuments and memorials created to honour the pioneers of the past, the social memory that such sites promote is not set in stone. As has been shown through this thesis, the social memory is subjected to flux and tensions and has responded in such a way that it has managed to remain relevant throughout the twentieth, and into the twenty-first, century.

Following from this thesis, there remains room to examine how the legend of pioneer women has been conveyed and presented in a variety of other media: newspaper obituaries to women would be an interesting area of further study regarding the presentation of women’s lives. Additionally, presentations like those
seen in television and movies would provide an interesting study about the way that the mass-media presents the lives of women in the past; how accurate these depictions are; and how the general public responds to these depictions.

Furthermore, the examination that has taken place in this thesis – of the relationship between sources and social memory, and of the shifting energies and changing tensions of that memory – may be implemented into the study of other national narratives to see how these narratives have changed and responded to their own shifting energies. The ways that narratives adapt to remain relevant, or disappear as they stagnate, can tell us much about the changing nature of Australian society.

The past as it actually was can never be adequately reproduced, wholly depicted or completely understood. Instead, we must rely on reproductions and re-imaginings of times gone by to help us decipher what life was like for our forebears; and to make sense of our present. There is no one single mode of understanding this past, though, no one lens through which it can be viewed. Rather, communities choose different ways to comprehend that which has gone before, and to make sense of the past to suit their own ends. Whilst academic histories have provided one mode by which the past can be examined, there are myriad others that must be understood.

The social memory of pioneer women is a memory that has been broadly dispersed and widely embraced. It has been spread through a wide variety of diverse sources, and has been subjected to competing tensions throughout time. The social memory has been flexible, however, and has adapted to fit with current societal values and thus has managed to remain relevant to Australian society even through periods of great flux.

Australians ‘know’ pioneer women, and this knowledge has not been gained through reading the writings of academics who, at various times, have challenged
the very notion of pioneer women and the romance associated with the Australian frontier narrative: instead, this ‘knowing’ has come from an incredibly strong and very resilient social memory. This memory has been created by a myriad of sources that the general public encounter in their everyday life, and which they are often not even conscious of being fed: of paintings, and stories, that have become iconic, and are disseminated in our society; of memorials that are passed each day on the way to work; of romanticised stories told by one generation to the next; and of graves of unknown women, passed on the way to mourn a friend. These innocuous feeders of social memory are ubiquitous in society; and the meanings that they portray are interpreted differently to suit the needs of the viewer who observes them.

Australia’s pioneer woman – or at least her social memory – has proven to be as hardy as any pioneer of legend. She has adapted, she has demonstrated her resilience, and she has persisted. She was, and remains, an important figure in the Australian narrative, withstanding the shifting energies and changing tensions of the nation’s social memory.
Appendix One

The Women of the West
George Essex Evans (1902)

They left their vine-wreathed cottage and the mansion on the hill,
The houses in the busy streets where life is never still,
The pleasures of the city, and the friends they cherished best:
For love they faced the wilderness – the Women of the West.

The roar, and rush, and fever of the city died away,
And the old-time joys and faces – they were gone for many a day;
In their place the lurching coach-wheel, or the creaking bullock chains,
O’er the everlasting sameness of the never-ending plains.

In the slab-built, zinc-roofed homestead of some lately taken run,
In the tent beside the bankment of a railway just begun,
In the huts on new selections, in the camps of man’s unrest,
On the frontiers of the Nation, live the Women of the West.

The red sun robs their beauty, and, in weariness and pain,
The slow years steal the nameless grace that never comes again;
And there are hours men cannot soothe, and words men cannot say –
The nearest woman’s face may be a hundred miles away.

The wide bush holds the secrets of their longing and desires,
When the white stars in reverence light their holy altar fires,
And silence, like the touch of God, sinks deep into their breast –
Perchance He hears and understands the Women of the West.

For them no trumpet sounds the call, no poet plies his art –
They only hear the beating of their gallant, loving hearts.
But they have sung with silent lives the song all songs above –
The holiness of sacrifice, the dignity of love.

Well have we held our father’s creed. No call has passed us by.
We faced and fought the wilderness, we sent our sons to die.
And we have hearts to do and dare, and yet, o’er all the rest,
The hearts that made the Nation were the Women of the West.
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