

PREFACE.

In 2007 the Parliament of Western Australia celebrated the 175th anniversary of the first meeting of the Legislative Council on 7 February 1832 at the Council Chambers in Perth. Those present at this inaugural meeting were the Governor and three of his officials. The Governor and his officials continued to comprise the Parliament until 1870, although they were joined from 1839 by a number of nominated non-official members. During this period the records of the House were kept by the Clerk in the form of handwritten minutes, which at times included some details about specific points made in the course of debate.

When the Parliament was reconstituted in 1870, the Governor ceased to be a member and two-thirds of the Legislative Council consisted of elected members, with the remainder consisting of government officials and non-official members nominated by the Governor. Between 1870 and 1876 no official records were kept of the Legislative Council proceedings other than the *Votes and Proceedings* manuscript. However, Hansard staff recorded the debates from 1876 to 1890, and these were published in sixteen volumes of *Parliamentary Debates*. In 1970 it was suggested that Hansard staff compile a record of the parliamentary debates from 1870 to 1875–1876, relying on detailed reports in a variety of contemporary newspapers as well as the *Votes and Proceedings*. This volume was published in 1990 as part of the centenary celebrations of the establishment of a bicameral legislature and self-government for Western Australia.

Since 1890, commencing with Volume One New Series, the detailed parliamentary debates have been transcribed continuously, with 418 volumes of the new series debates published by the end of 2007. As the 175th anniversary celebrations approached, it seemed an appropriate time to complete the conversion of the handwritten minutes of the pre-1870 period to a more readily accessible form. Accordingly, in May 2006 Reporting Services (Hansard) was approached by the Parliamentary History Advisory Committee to undertake the daunting task of converting the handwritten minutes into electronic copy, a task that had been commenced but not completed some fifteen years earlier.

The original Minutes of the 1832–1870 period, handwritten by the Clerk of the day as the proceedings of the Council unfolded, are housed in the State Archives of Western Australia. Thirteen Clerks served during the thirty-eight years covered by these Minutes, and each brought his own style to the task. Such variety of style became obvious, and at times exasperating, as the task of transcribing the Minutes progressed. Variances in clarity, handwriting, spelling, adherence to procedure and layout of proceedings provided constant challenges in attempting to provide for historians an accurate, legible, comprehensible and consistent copy of the Minutes of the earliest days of this State's Parliament.

Working from photocopies blown up on A3 paper, as well as scanned electronic copies of the Minutes, and armed with magnifying sheets, Hansard typists Dorothy Boundy and Gaye Reeves spent six months typing the Minutes of 1841 to 1861; the Minutes for the remaining period having been typed some years ago. Hansard Reporters then worked in pairs to check all the typed Minutes against the handwritten copy. This process, which could be done only when the Parliament and its committees were not sitting, took nine months. The checking process involved reading for context, rather than text, to ensure that the right words had been identified and transcribed.

Despite this thorough process of checking, some words remain illegible, and these have been identified in the text as such. Other words were entered into the original Minutes incorrectly, and, where possible, these have been identified with the use of *[sic]*. The spellings of the day remain unchanged, but the layout of the Minutes has been adjusted to resemble, as much as is possible, the printed Minutes of later Parliaments.

With the completion of this task researchers and students alike will have access to readily usable records of the proceedings of the Parliament of Western Australia from its first sitting in 1832 until the present day.
