

GERMANICA PACIFICA

Series Editor
James N. Bade

Andrew G. Bonnell
Rebecca Vonhoff
(eds.)

Germans in Queensland

150 Years

11

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Andrew G. Bonnell and Rebecca Vonhoff
July 2012

Introduction

Andrew G. Bonnell and Rebecca Vonhoff

In 2009, the state of Queensland celebrated the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of its existence as a distinct political entity. Upon Queen Victoria's blessing in 1859, the then colony of Queensland was formed by separating the northern part of the colony of New South Wales. By 1891, there were 14,900 persons living in Queensland who were born in Germany, making Germans one of the most significant groups of non-British settlers.¹ The Queensland German community, and individuals of German descent, would continue to play a significant part in the history of the colony and state throughout the following century. The 2009 sesquicentenary year saw a range of commemorations. At the University of Queensland, site of a number of previous conferences and symposia on German-Australian history over the years, it was decided within the history discipline that it would be timely to mark the occasion with a workshop that would provide an opportunity for scholars to discuss the current state of research on German-Australian history taking the example of the German community in Queensland.

The response to the call for papers was gratifying, with participants coming not only from the University of Queensland and elsewhere in Brisbane, but also from interstate and even Germany. This volume is based on a selection of the papers presented at that workshop, augmented by a couple of other contributions from scholars in the field.

Since Germans settled in Queensland (arriving even before the colony's separate existence) they have seen Germany's unification, Australia's Federation, two world wars, the division and reunification of Germany, and dramatic social, economic and political transformations.² Over some decades, a considerable body of research on the German-Queensland connection has been built up by historians and scholars from other disciplines. Some work has focussed on documenting the contribution of Germans and people of German heritage to the history of the colony, and later state, of Queensland. Other work has focussed on

1 *Queensland Past and Present: 100 Years of Statistics, 1896-1996* (Brisbane: Queensland Government Statistician's Office, 1998), p.78. For an excellent concise history of Queensland, see Raymond Evans, *A History of Queensland* (Cambridge and Melbourne, 2007).

2 When discussing the history of German-Australian relations it is important to remember that these nations were not constantly identical state formations throughout this past: until 1901, 'Australia' consisted of a number of distinct, more or less self-governing colonies within the British Empire; before the founding of the Reich in 1871, Germans came to Australia from many distinct, independent German-speaking states, and again from 1949 to 1990 there were two separate German states each with its own relationship to Australia.

conflicts around the role of the German community, taking the relationship between the German minority and the host society as a case study in order to test our understanding of the latter. The present collection provides a snapshot of the current state of research into the history of Germans in Queensland, and reflects the interests and concerns of historians in the early twenty-first century.

In 1983, Johannes H. Voigt, a Stuttgart-based German specialist in Australian studies, edited a major collection of essays on Germans in New South Wales and Queensland.³ The volume marked the centenaries of a number of significant moments in the history of German-Australian relations: the founding of German clubs in Sydney and Brisbane, founding events of the German Protestant church in the two colonies, and German migrant Charles Rasp's discovery of valuable ore deposits at Broken Hill. Voigt was assisted in this project by the Sydney University *Germanist* John Fletcher and John A. Moses, a specialist in German history at the University of Queensland. The bilingual volume dealt with an impressive range of topics: in addition to the topics noted above, it included biographical essays on significant individuals, and essays on social, religious, cultural, and business history.

Manfred Jürgensen and Alan Corkhill's edited collection in 1988 (coinciding with the bicentennial of the start of British colonization of Australia), *The German Presence in Queensland over the Last 150 Years* followed an interdisciplinary, international symposium of the previous year which was attended by many of the preeminent scholars in the field whose works have continued to shape historiography in recent years. Articles by Raymond Evans, Gerhard Fischer and Kay Saunders were among the first to reveal Australian Government internment practices during the two world wars, which posed a critical challenge to the way in which Germans and people of German descent lived in Queensland, and even to the very existence of distinct German communities in Australia. The internment issue has been a particular focus of work on the history of Germans in Queensland (and elsewhere in Australia) in subsequent years. The edition also looked at the significant accomplishments by Germans in the state and the role the place played in constructs of imagination and identity both in the Antipodes and Europe. Both editors were *Germanisten* at the University of Queensland, resulting in a strong emphasis on literary and cultural themes. Other essays looked at aspects of the social history of migration and again at significant individual figures. Exploration of cultural policies by John Moses and trade

3 Johannes H. Voigt, ed., (with John Fletcher and John A. Moses), *New Beginnings. The Germans in New South Wales and Queensland/ Neuanfänge. Deutsche in New South Wales und Queensland* (Stuttgart, 1983).

relations by Johannes Voigt explored the topic of German-Queensland connections in a wider historical context.

In 1992, just a couple of years after the unification of West and East Germany, Alan Corkhill published what is still the standard survey of the history of *Queensland and Germany*. Corkhill summed up his approach by stating that since the book was

concerned as much with documenting the lives, pursuits and accomplishments of ordinary individuals, as it [was] with reviewing and evaluating demographic, socio-economic or socio-cultural patterns and trends, a good deal of consideration has been given to the minutiae of local histories, family chronicles and person reminiscences.⁴

Corkhill used as his organizing themes immigration and settlement, politics, trade and commerce, and language and culture, before concluding with a survey of post-1945 developments. The extensive range of sources drawn on has made this book the starting point for many subsequent, more specialized, investigations.

In the (nearly two) decades since these works helped to mark out the field of the history of Germans in Queensland, there have been numerous more specialized studies. As already noted, the issue of wartime internment has stimulated considerable interest and controversy. There have been a number of notable dissertations which have dealt with the history of Germans in Queensland. Some theses have examined specific local community histories, others have examined Queensland Germans as sometimes as part of a wider or comparative study. Notable recent dissertations include Barbara Poniewierski's detailed investigation of the Nazi Party in Australia, and its German members in all states, including Queensland; Chris Herde's comparative analysis of German settlers and colonial liberalism in Queensland and Wisconsin; and Roisin Goss's study of Eugen Hirschfeld, the German consul in Queensland before the First World War, in many ways a key figure in the history of Germans in the state.⁵ One also finds coverage of the Germans in Queensland in general works on the history of Germans in Australia.⁶

In the present volume, **Andrew Bonnell's** chapter on the Germans' contribution to Queensland's labour movement explores links between German Social Democrats and those who had migrated. For the most part, Germany's urban wage workers came to Queensland quite late in the pre-1914 period. In other circumstances this group would have formed the natural constituency of Social

4 Alan Corkhill, *Queensland and Germany* (Melbourne, 1992), p.xviii.

5 See Appendix for a list of theses.

6 E.g. Jürgen Tampke, *The Germans in Australia* (Cambridge and Melbourne, 2006).

Democracy or labour activism, but the outbreak of the First World War meant these (mostly) men were excluded from workplaces and trades which may have acted as vehicles for politicisation. In the years following the arrival of this group of German-Australians, antagonism directed toward them escalated as they were classified as following the Kaiser's imperial line. Ironically, being labelled sympathisers of the Wilhelmine Empire strangled the workers' possible forays into radicalism in Queensland during the lead-up to war.

When German migrants travelled to Australia, they brought with them many things: physical belongings were transported by hand while hearts carried customs, memories and hopes. **Chris Herde's** chapter on German liberalism in Queensland posits that some individuals also brought with them political orientations which were either diluted or strictly upheld to varying extents. Herde asserts that German MPs John Heussler, Isidor Lissner and Jean Baptiste Isambert brought a liberal *Weltanschauung* that was current at the point of departure from their homeland. They held a desire for a reformist liberal government to create a regulated civil society to protect the freedoms of an enlightened middle class against the twin dangers of aristocratic privilege and working class radicalism. The group's politics was in line with the maxim of 'greatest happiness for the greatest number' which was popular at the time in Queensland, and which had been adopted by other German politicians. This group's politics unified them despite their occasional divergent views during a time when Queensland's political temper turned from being broadly liberal to radical working class as the twentieth century dawned. In time, their German liberalism manifested itself in the acceptance of utilitarian political principles. Gradually, they cherry-picked from their political past and absorbed some of the Queensland political culture but this never came at the expense of their German liberalism.

Seemingly, Australasia was a place very unlike the *Vaterland* and about as far removed from the ideal location for a German to thrive as could be imagined, at least in an era in which the ability of white men to thrive in tropical climates was a source of considerable anxiety to advocates of imperialism. But Dr Rudolf Asmis, the German Consul-General to Australia from 1932 to 1939, having spent time in Africa and Asia during his diplomatic career, rejected the accepted view of the Australian location. **Emily Turner-Graham's** chapter studies this man's perennial push for the maintenance of *Deutschtum* against an unusual background: the tropical north. Here, he believed, was in fact a place where a 'new breed of German' could be found, hence proving that 'true' Germans could be created and nurtured outside of Germany. Turner-Graham looks to Asmis's hitherto unexplored writings in her discussion of the man to consider how geographical location and white identity were fostered in the far-flung north, and

considers the contextual implications of the rise of Nazi ideology to add to debate on Australia's contribution to the Nazi world empire.

The elasticity of borders and the reach of ideology within groups of Germans dispersed around the globe are considered by **Rebecca Vonhoff** in her chapter on Wilhelmine imperialist identity. Correspondence linking Germany's Pan-German League with individuals in Queensland is used to show the reach and depth of Wilhelminism and how concepts of *Deutschtum* and a broader overseas identity were cultivated through or informed by the strength of nationalistic affiliations and ties to the *Vaterland*. Despite increasing tensions between British-Australia and Germany which demanded demonstrable loyalty from the German-migrants, between 1871 to 1914 an imagined community was fostered within Australia whose characteristics found resonance with a global 'German-ness'.

But questions of identity and loyalty were not easily resolved, even by the finality of war and internment practices. **Christine Winter**'s chapter on the inter-war transformation of German-Australian identity draws on the case of Friedrich Otto Theile. Theile, a Lutheran pastor in Queensland who fell in and out of favour with the Australian government, went from negotiating with departments in 1920 to being interned in 1941. He oscillated between adopting a patriotically Australian stance in which he was contemptuous of German hubris and ignorance, to 'feeling completely German'. The result is a finding that does not easily fit into a narrative of migration and multiculturalism: Theile was a man whose personality drove his sense of identity at a time when Germanness and Australia-Britishness was incompatible. He was opportunistic with his allegiances, becoming 'everything to everybody, for the sake of his ambitions and desires'. Winter's findings are an important reminder about the role of the individual in any conceptualisation of identity. As much as historians discuss loyalty, disloyalty, dualism and alterity, at the heart of any investigation into identity lies the individual and personality traits should perhaps not be sacrificed in the pursuit of more easily-contained identity constructs.

Even the unknown Germans of Queensland add to the sum contribution of the group to the state. **Henriette von Holleuffer** in her chapter on the young, urban and professional individuals whom history has hitherto forgotten, shows the breadth of the Germans' involvement in state affairs across diverse places of employment – studios, music halls and hospitals. The social complexion of these lesser-known Queensland Germans adds diversity to the more familiar picture of the heavily agrarian social composition of this population. They may not have been farmers, but these young, urban professionals came seeking the same opportunities as their land-toiling kinsfolk. History knows more about the composer Andrew Seal than it does about the physician Edward Albert Koch. And simi-

larly more is known about the Roggenkamp brothers, Christoph and Martin and their photographic business than the pioneer photographer Heinrich Müller. But these men's stories add to the Queensland story, argues von Holleuffer, and reveals how the state viewed its protagonists.

Similarly, **Regina Ganter's** chapter delves into the lives of three individuals through whom the story of a Lutheran mission in North Queensland can be told. Ordained missionary Johann Sebastian Hörlein, stockman H.G. Steicke and indigenous assistant Johannes Pingilina experienced the 'spectacular failure' that was the Bloomfield River mission, south of Cooktown in the state's humid and rugged north. The personal lives of these men reveal as much about the individual experiences of those in the mission, as of the Lutheran church and the missionary venture as a whole, as Ganter investigates the internal failings of the missions and the intentions of the missionaries themselves. These three men were dissimilar in almost every way, and yet they were united in their desire for female companionship. However, although they may have pined for a meaningful relationship with a woman, in general the role of females in the Lutheran mission enterprise has not been taken seriously and they have largely been excluded from the historical record. But by investigating the men at Bloomfield River, Ganter has been able to construct an image of the women who were 'the social leavening' in the small community which began to disintegrate not long after its founding in 1886. At the level of a micro-historical case study, Ganter's chapter illuminates the interplay between issues of race and gender in the contact zone between Europeans and Indigenous people in Queensland.

Individuals' personalities were reflected in the trip they took to come to Australia; people who encountered difficulty to satisfy a curiosity or fulfil a desire. At a time when life was difficult for women who did not fit snugly within societal norms, Amalie Dietrich was unusual both professionally and personally. A biographical account by **Birgit Scheps** reveals how this German woman divorced herself from domesticity – specifically an unhappy marriage and caring for her daughter – to pursue her professional interests. Even her voyage to Australia in 1863 was a struggle against propriety, and the idea of a woman travelling to the South Seas, unaccompanied and for work as a naturalist, was initially rejected. Her stubborn refusal to be kept from the Australasia-bound ships led to significant professional success: the largest collection of zoological and botanical material that was ever created by a single individual undertaking research in the field. Scheps reveals Dietrich's professional contributions and the range of her collections in the unknown and largely unexplored colony of Queensland. Just as then, today the naturalist's contribution remains controversial, especially as far as her collection of skeletal remains of Aborigines is concerned. Some of the objects collected by Dietrich can still be found in German museums like the

Museum for Ethnography in Leipzig, where the butterflies and taipans are legacies of her time in Australia.

Dietrich's ties to the Godeffroy shipping company and her contribution to the Museum which carried that name in Hamburg formed a link between Europe and the Antipodes, but as **Barbara Poniewierski** has stated, that connection was hardly the most significant aspect on the shipping company's influence on Australian society. Poniewierski does not paint J.C. Godeffroy and Son, Hamburg's largest shipping firm and the controllers of a strong vein which coursed around the world linking Australia, in an overly golden light. The trip taken by German migrants to Australia was 'not a pleasure cruise', she surmises. Rather, the immigrants travelled in cramped and insanitary conditions, were under-nourished, ill and at the mercy of unscrupulous emigration agents. These conditions are described by Poniewierski, who also explains the Godeffroy family background that led to the firm's expansion to include shipping lines to Australia in 1851. The story of the ships that ferried Australia's German immigrant population was heavily steered by trade, which as an industry itself is affected by politics, revolutions, diseases and wars – all of which could turn a promising economic project into a disaster, while technical innovation could make equipment worthless. Winter concludes that these factors and a series of poor financial decisions led to the ruin of the once-prosperous company. But the demise was not final, and the influence of the migrants whom Godeffroy brought to Australia is still evident in the present age through their descendants.

What becomes clear over the course of this edited collection of essays is that for a state that was remote and removed from Europe, Queensland and its Germans did not exist in isolation. The interplay between actor and ideas both within Australia and with Europe shows the surprisingly minor role geography played in the decision to emigrate and carve out a life in the Southern Hemisphere. Given the current lively interest among historians in exploring transnational history and reciprocal links between Europe and the wider world, it is likely that future historical investigations will continue to explore different dimensions of the relations between Germany and Australia, and the constituent parts of these states, in different periods. It is likely that the study of social groups, organisations and individuals, and of their ideologies, will continue to yield avenues of inquiry as historiography moves away from the questions of national loyalty or otherwise which understandably dominated academia in the latter part of the past century. As time passes, from the group termed internees, immigrants, dissidents or loyalists, people emerge, with their own personal senses of identity and heritage, as society moves to a lived reality of multiculturalism, whatever the official name of government policy of the day might be,

and this development will pose new challenges, and perhaps offer new rewards, to historians willing to trace it.

Challenges for future research include fields which this collection was not able to cover, given the areas of research interest of the available contributors. There is room for a more synthetic social history that will incorporate the plethora of local history studies into a coherent structural analysis of the history of Germans in Queensland. The field of business history, a notable feature of Voigt's 1983 collection, is currently relatively dormant, but the business activities of Germans in Queensland before and after the Second World War offer significant opportunities for researchers. The field of post-1945 migration remains relatively underexplored compared with the preceding episodes of dramatic wartime conflict, but it offers the challenge of tracing increasingly diverse and plural individual identities, which in all likelihood will become the way of the future.

J.C. Godeffroy and German Migration to Queensland*

Barbara Poniewierski

In investigating the history of nineteenth-century German migration to Australia, and more particularly Queensland, the voyage out is an important starting point. An understanding of the part played by the Godeffroy shipping company of Hamburg, which played a central role in German migration to Australia for much of this period, is essential for a fuller appreciation of German migrants' experience, and requires careful source analysis beyond the conventional assumptions or generalizations sometimes encountered in the literature.

A long sailing ship voyage to Australia as a steerage passenger in the mid-nineteenth century was not a pleasure cruise. At best the immigrants were crowded together in insanitary conditions. Water was always scarce and sometimes contaminated, while food was monotonous and not plentiful. Particularly for German migrants, it could at worst be a struggle to survive, for they could be at the mercy of unscrupulous emigration agents and ship's chandlers, ill-tempered captains and incompetent doctors. Some ships had high death tolls from cholera, typhoid, typhus and scarlet fever, while many migrants contracted scurvy or venereal diseases, and they landed in Australia in a pitiable condition.

First, mention must be made of the definitive Godeffroy book by Gabriele Hofmann, *Das Haus an der Elbchaussee*.¹ Based heavily on Godeffroy business and family archives, it is obligatory reading for historians dealing with any aspect of the Godeffroy story, but it is largely an evocative account of the family's life in Germany. Hofmann did an impressive amount of research in Germany, America and Denmark, but she did not consult Australian records, so the book is of limited use to academics dealing with Godeffroy connections with Australia. Amalie Dietrich's work for the Godeffroy Museum was hardly the most significant aspect of their influence on Australia society.²

This is not the place to discuss fascinating aspects of the family history that have been largely overlooked or played down, from the foundation of the family's fortunes in slave coffee plantations in Dutch Guyana to the descendants of the Godeffroys and their slave girls in present-day Suriname; from the inden-

*The author gratefully acknowledges assistance and correspondence with the late Carl Alfred Godeffroy, family archivist, 1984-85.

1 Gabriele Hofmann, *Das Haus an der Elbchaussee. Die Geschichte einer Reederfamilie* (Munich and Zurich, 2002; 1st edn 2000). See also the older account in Richard Hertz, *Veröffentlichungen des Vereins für Hamburgische Geschichte: Vierter Band: Das Hamburger Seehandelshaus J.C. Godeffroy und Sohn: 1766-1879* (Hamburg, 1922).

2 See chapter on this by Birgit Scheps in this volume.

tured and exploited labour on coconut and cotton plantations in Samoa to the existence of German naval wireless stations and coaling depots in the Pacific in 1914. However, some background is necessary.

The Godeffroys were Huguenots from Orleans and La Rochelle, merchants and ship owners trading with the West Indies. Self-exiled from France because of religious persecution, they found sanctuary in Germany, where they engaged mainly in the linen trade. In the late eighteenth century, they became part-owners of ships that took their linen overseas, mainly to Spain and the West Indies, but it was not until 1815, when destruction of property during the Napoleonic Wars had caused a shortage of shipping space, that they bought the first ship that they owned wholly. Jean César V renamed it *Sophie*, after his wife. Driven by personal ambitions, J.C. Godeffroy and Son became for a time the largest shipping firm in Hamburg, with the greatest number of ships, the highest tonnage, and the largest two ships. The clipper *Sovereign of the Seas*, probably the fastest ship of her era, was so large that she could not navigate the Elbe, which was not being dredged at that time.

Although it would be well recognised that seafaring under sail was subject to constraints of winds, weather and geography, some effects might not be obvious. When it came to Hamburg migrant ships in particular, the time of sailings was determined to a large extent by the seasons, in particular by the dates when the Elbe froze over and thawed out again. For a sailing ship, the shortest route might not be the fastest. Ships plying from Europe to Australia might find it faster to sail almost to the east coast of South America until they reached a latitude where they could catch the westerly winds and run before them to Australia; then they would continue to use the westerlies to take them to the west coast of South America for an eastward transit around Cape Horn. World wind patterns determined the development of Godeffroy sea trade.

Before German migration to Australia and more specifically migration to Queensland in Godeffroy ships can be understood, several things need to be known about the Godeffroy family. The ambitious heads of the Godeffroy enterprises, in particular Jean César V and Johan César VI, were constantly on the lookout for new trading opportunities, full of new ideas, eager to find new worlds to conquer. They wanted to be the greatest, the biggest, the most powerful. They wanted total control of any commercial sphere in which they operated, and if they could not achieve a virtual monopoly, they were likely to move elsewhere.

Although they were not heavily involved in carrying passengers in the first half of the nineteenth century, some Godeffroy ships had taken emigrants to North America and to the east and west coasts of South America. They were carrying copper ore from the west coast, but they had difficulty finding cargoes