

bubonic plague in 1900. Lucas is best known today for the Papaw Ointment that bears his name, and that is still made, to a secret formula, by his descendants.

Another intriguing entrepreneur was Sarah Jenyns, corset-maker. In her chapter, Rosemary Knight describes 'the medicalisation of corsetry' in the nineteenth century. At considerable expense, Mrs Jenyns sailed to England, where she acquired a patent for her specially designed corset, and had it accredited by the London Incorporated Institute of Health. Back in Brisbane she set up a business, aided by a contract to supply medical corsets to hospitals. In 1964, twelve years after her death, her family business employed 1100 people in seven factories in Brisbane, before selling out to Triumph International just as the bottom fell out of foundation garments.

In one of her chapters for this collection, Alana Piper tackles the vexed issue of 'quackery'. When medical knowledge was advancing rapidly, it was not always easy to distinguish between a charlatan and a scientist ahead of his time. She tells the story of one out-and-out quack, George Roberts, who claimed to be able to cure cancer with a secret formula. On the other hand, sometimes there were genuine breakthroughs. John Thearle tells how two Brisbane doctors, John Gibson and Jeffers Turner, identified a problem of lead poisoning among local children, and traced it to the painted wooden verandah rails and gates on which they played. Queensland enacted the first legislation outlawing lead in paint in 1922.

Early Brisbane was a small place, and the same people appear across several papers, as does Dr Lucas's papaw ointment. The Director General of Health, Sir Raphael Cilento, is only mentioned in passing, as is Ned Hanlon, the Labor Minister for Health and Home Affairs (and later Premier). It would have been good to show how health policy in the twentieth century developed through them.

Such a disparate group of chapters probably made it too difficult to manage, but it is a shame that the editor could not develop more general themes, although she does set her own chapters in a wider context. In particular, what made Brisbane's health issues distinctive? The environment was hot and humid, and in the early years tropical insects brought malaria, sandy-blight, dengue fever and typhus. Brisbane was not fully sewered until the 1970s. It had an unreliable water supply, and residents depended on (lead-painted) rainwater tanks. In the face of these difficulties, it is impressive that so much was achieved on this particular colonial frontier.

Marion Diamond

University of Queensland
m.diamond@uq.edu.au

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Bruce Pascoe, *Dark Emu Black Seeds: Agriculture or Accident?* Broome: Magabala Books, 2014, ISBN 9 7819 2214 2436, 174 pp., A\$35.

Some years ago, I visited a number of abandoned Aboriginal camps and noticed that most had a similar range of useful and edible plants. When I asked local Aboriginal peoples about my observations, they told me their ancestors had brought the plants there. I heard similar assertions about flora at the Bunya Mountains. I assumed

medicinal plants grew there because of environmental conditions, but a couple of elders explained to me that the plants were introduced by Aboriginal visitors from different regions. I was amazed by their certainty. These elders knew others viewed their people as hunter-gatherers but nonetheless they did not qualify their response.

For many Aboriginal families I know, Bruce Pascoe's recent book, *Dark Emu Black Seeds* is a welcome recognition of what they have been telling us all along: that their peoples lived more settled lives than we recognise. 'If we look at the evidence,' Pascoe explains, 'Aboriginal people *did* build houses, *did* build dams, *did* sow, irrigate and till the land, *did* alter the course of rivers, *did* sew their clothes, and *did* construct a system of pan-continental government that generated peace and prosperity' (2014: 129). For some, such a history may seem impossibly inclusive or even revolutionary. But it continues the work of many others, including Harry Allen and Bill Gammage, who have been arguing for years (and, in Harry's case, for decades) that Aboriginal people were farmers. Of course, this practice was different from the way we farm today, but it was farming nonetheless.

Recognising this difference in method and approach is important. People only notice what they are looking for, and they can be blind to things that fail to fit their expectations. Given that Aboriginal Australia was isolated for 60,000 years, we should not expect such a world — with its unique flora, fauna and environment — to reveal markers of Western agriculture, even if it contains its own complexities. Pascoe's book helps us to grow the 'eyes' to see this difference. In my own journeys with Aboriginal peoples, I have continually been surprised at the subtlety of their technologies: slight marks on a tree, a few stones shifted here or there — 'invisible' signs to the untrained eye, but indicators of masterful land management.

Pascoe's style in *Dark Emu Black Seeds* is relaxed and chatty, and the book wears its scholarly credentials lightly. Pascoe does not take us on the all too common academic rollercoaster of debunking other theories and counter-theories, or nit-picking at details that often characterise polemical histories of Aboriginal Australia. He adeptly uses the sources, the science and family memories to make his point, although his rhetoric may bristle up against some readers and others may find his conclusions too ambitious. But the book's purpose is not to convert every sceptic. Rather, it offers a vision of Aboriginal Australia that might assist Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities to grow closer to each other, and to the continent on which they reside.

Ray Kerkhove
Griffith University
raykerkhove@gmail.com