

Editorial

In the previous issue of *Queensland Review*, Belinda McKay used the occasion of the state's sesquicentenary to reflect in her editorial on some of the core themes that have shaped Queensland – and outsiders' beliefs about Queensland – across 150 years. Identifying a persistent and sometimes pernicious commitment to development as one of the state's most fundamental characteristics, she drew on texts that accompanied the celebrations to mark the arrival of Governor Bowen in 1859, the state's jubilee in 1909 and the state's centenary in 1959 to illustrate the sustained adherence to a narrowly framed concept of progress.

This issue, with its focus on celebrations, also responds to the state's sesquicentenary, specifically the wealth of festive events and activities ranging from steam train journeys to a re-creation of the first recorded rescue on a Queensland beach, and from digital storytelling to business breakfasts. In her introduction to the official sesquicentenary program, Premier Anna Bligh stated: 'This year we will reflect on our people, our places and the stories that have shaped our identity.'¹ The seven authors in this issue of *Queensland Review* have responded to that declaration by reflecting on the significance of public celebrations in Queensland's past and present.

Their articles are intended as a contribution to a more thorough exploration of the histories of celebrations and festivals in Queensland and Australia. Each author focuses on a different example of celebrations in Queensland, and poses different questions about their topic. Beginning with the ornamental arch erected in Brisbane's Botanic Gardens for Governor Bowen's arrival and ending with debates in 2008–09 about planned changes to Brisbane's Expo '88 site, the collection aligns with the span of 150 years of Queensland's history that is being commemorated through the sesquicentenary events. In contrast to some of the upbeat claims about the Q150 celebrations, however – such as the Premier's declaration that '2009 is a time for everyone to feel good about being a Queenslander'² – the articles in this issue of *Queensland Review* adopt a more critical approach to their subject-matter, enriching our understanding of the state's past and present.

Judith McKay begins the collection with an intriguing account of what she describes as those 'curious structures', the triumphal arches that were once such a common feature of public festivities in both metropolitan and regional Queensland. Her analysis reveals the capacity of celebrations and their symbols to embody some of the core values of a colonial society, such as imperial loyalty, while simultaneously obscuring and even denying other fundamental features of that society. The themes of symbolism and imperial loyalty are also evident in Katie McConnel's article, which explores the priority accorded to ensuring that the colonial governors had the financial means and an appropriate building in

which to host events to celebrate and commemorate royalty and empire. As well as encouraging us to adopt the injunction ‘follow the money’ to assess the value placed by the Queensland government on vice-regal functions, McConnel’s interest in Government House itself demonstrates the usefulness of focusing on the sites of celebrations.

Two articles analyse agricultural shows in Queensland. Rob Edwards considers how regional and rural agricultural shows have linked local activities to broader colonial values, including progress, through a case study of the Gympie Show from 1877 to the early years of World War II. He emphasises the show’s importance in demonstrating and celebrating local achievements and positioning them within state, national and imperial frameworks. By contrast, Ross Laurie and I turn our attention to the metropolitan agricultural show, the Brisbane Exhibition, in a single year. We explore how the centrepiece of Queensland’s 1909 celebrations, the Jubilee Carnival, was superimposed on Brisbane’s annual show, and argue that, ultimately, the Carnival’s popularity, format and impact relied primarily on the show’s status as the thirty-fourth Brisbane Exhibition.

Geoffrey Ginn and Donna Lee Brien extend the scope of the collection with their analyses of two of Queensland’s major celebrations in the post-World War II era. Through an almost forensic examination of records relating to the production of the centennial publication, *Triumph in the Tropics*, and the 1959 re-enactment of Governor Bowen’s arrival in Queensland, Ginn demonstrates the insights that can be gleaned from focusing on the processes by which celebratory outputs are conceived and produced. He also encourages us to ponder the aspirations of Sir Raphael Cilento and others to express their understanding of Queensland’s past in the state’s centenary year versus the outcomes and subsequent assessments of those outcomes. Donna Lee Brien’s study of Expo ’88 introduces yet another fruitful approach to analysing celebrations. Rather than concentrating on the event itself, Brien emphasises its aftermath, particularly memorialising activities such as the celebrations that marked the twentieth anniversary of Expo.

While the examination and re-examination of occasions and memorials dedicated to the commemoration of events such as participation in wars is a significant strand within Australian historiography, there has been less interest in the critical analysis of celebrations. I hope that this collection will prompt further analysis of the rich history and multiple meanings of celebrations – private as well as public, and local as well as state and national.

— Joanne Scott

Notes

- 1 *Queensland’s 150th Celebrations – 2009*, Official Program Edition 1 (Brisbane: Department of the Premier and Cabinet, 2008).
- 2 Premier of Queensland’s welcome, Q150 website, <www.q150.qld.gov.au>, accessed 1 September 2009.