

# Editorial

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Queenslanders recently ushered in the state's sesquicentenary year by electing Australia's first female premier. In her victory speech, a radiant Anna Bligh recalled 'a time when people regarded us as the backward state of Australia ... a time when nobody would have thought that we would be the first state in the country to elect a woman as our premier'. During its first 150 years, Queensland has notched up some impressive firsts for progressive politics: the world's first labour government took office in Queensland for seven days in 1899, for example, and Fred Paterson – who held the state seat of Bowen from 1944 to 1950 – was the only member of the Communist Party ever elected to parliament in Australia. But over this period both conservative and Labor governments have embraced a development ethos, which – with its calamitous effects on Indigenous culture and the natural environment, and its antipathy to dissent – has contributed to the state's reputation as socially and culturally backward. Little has changed in the twenty-first century: Peter Beattie enthusiastically adopted Joh Bjelke-Petersen's 'crane count' as a barometer of the success of government policy, and Anna Bligh is photographed almost daily in a hard hat, visiting construction sites.

The year 2009 marks both the 150th anniversary of Queensland's separation from New South Wales and the 150th anniversary of responsible government. On 6 June 1859, Queen Victoria signed the papers creating the new colony. On 10 December 1859, the first Governor, Sir George Ferguson Bowen, was sworn in and the colony of Queensland was officially founded: its name, according to Bowen, was devised by Queen Victoria herself. The colony of Queensland, uniquely in Australia, began with two houses of parliament: an appointed Legislative Council and an elected Legislative Assembly. (Following the abolition of the Legislative Council in 1921, Queensland is today Australia's only unicameral state parliament.) The white population of the colony in 1859 was around 28,000, of whom approximately 6,000 lived in Brisbane. Most of the gazetted territory of the colony was not under effective colonial control in 1859, and indeed the borders of Queensland changed several times in the years following separation. Until the end of the nineteenth century, the colony of Queensland was in effect a moving frontier.

Peter Macinnis has argued in *Mr Darwin's Incredible Shrinking World* (2008) that 1859 – the year that Darwin published *The Origin of Species* – represents something of a scientific, technological and cultural divide.<sup>1</sup> Darwin's book, according to Macinnis, did not so much change the world as mark the culmination of enormous changes taking place in the world of science and technology. In 1859, Mannheim invented the slide rule, Mendel began studying the genetics of peas, and Bunsen and Kirchhoff invented spectroscopy. There were gold strikes in Australia and America, and Edwin Drake drilled the first oil well. The world's

population passed one billion, work began on the Suez Canal and P&O won the first contract for a regular steam mail service between Britain and Australia.

The development of the new colony of Queensland was profoundly shaped by new ‘world-shrinking’ technologies such as rail, telegraph and ocean-going steamships. Ironically, these technologies enabled Queensland to remain relatively decentralised, sparsely populated and non-industrialised: its relatively low labour-intensive primary industries (agriculture and mining) were scattered throughout the vast state, but railways and steamships transported their products to global markets. The natural environment increasingly attracted travellers, both scientists and simply tourists. Even today, Queensland’s economy is dominated by mining, agriculture and tourism. Booms and busts were frequent in the colonial era, eerily foreshadowing the fate of Queensland’s mining towns during the current financial crisis. New technologies of communication and transportation also led to the development of new forms of colonisation: Queensland’s infamous policies of removal, containment and bureaucratic control of Indigenous people were first documented in a comprehensive way by Rosalind Kidd in *The Way We Civilise* (1997).<sup>2</sup>

An Ipswich solicitor who had recently migrated from England, Charles Frederick Chubb, celebrated the arrival of Sir George Ferguson Bowen to take up his post as governor of the newly created Queensland in 1859 in an ode that prefigures the development ethos that has marked the colony and state of Queensland throughout its subsequent history:

Blessed be the gales and fav’ring winds  
 That brought thee, Bowen, to these shores,  
 Where Nature wild her untold stores  
 Of wealth has buried; where teeming mines,  
 With sparkling gems, yet hidden from the gaze  
 Of man’s quick searching vision, dwell in vain:  
 Where glorious sunshine darts alone her rays  
 On fallow ground, unblest’d with yellow grain.<sup>3</sup>

Celebrations of the state’s jubilee in 1909 emphasised the ‘progress’ and ‘development’ achieved in the first 50 years of self-government. The Jubilee Memorial Volume published by the Government Printer in 1909 was entitled *Our First Half-Century: A Review of Queensland Progress, Based Upon Official Information* (1909). The following year, E.J.T. Barton published his *History of Queensland: A Record of Political, Industrial, and Social Development from the Landing of the First Explorers to the Close of 1909* (1910). George Essex Evans’ Jubilee ode, ‘Queensland, the Queen of the North’, also extolled the conquest of nature by the ‘high emprise’ of ‘Bold Pioneers’:

The toil that breaks, the grief that sears,  
 The hands that forced back Nature’s bars  
 To prove the blood of ancient years  
 And make a home ’neath alien stars!

... Back, ever back new conquests press  
The wilderness.<sup>4</sup>

The theme of development was again reiterated in the centenary celebrations of 1959. Cilento and Lack published *Triumph in the Tropics: An Historical Sketch of Queensland*,<sup>5</sup> and a plethora of other publications and exhibitions emphasised the success of the colonial enterprise. The history of the state's Indigenous people – before and after colonisation – barely rated a mention. Arthur Laurie's article 'The Black War in Queensland', published in the Centenary issue of the *Royal Historical Society of Queensland Journal*, was an exception.<sup>6</sup> During the 50 years since the state's centenary, however, triumphalist histories of Queensland have been displaced by histories which are attentive to the distinctive as well as the shared histories of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Queenslanders, of the city and the bush, of men and women. *Queensland Review* has contributed to this project by publishing interdisciplinary work which demonstrates how Queensland has been and continues to be shaped by regional, cultural, ethnic and gender diversity.

This sesquicentenary issue of *Queensland Review* opens with an article by Raymond Evans, author of *A History of Queensland*, which was published to considerable acclaim by Cambridge University Press in 2007. Entitled 'Queensland, 1859: Reflections on the Act of Becoming', Evans' article analyses the diverse composition of the migrant society that greeted the new governor, Sir George Ferguson Bowen, in 1859, before turning to 'the new colony's nether-face' – 'its history of material achievement eliding over a shadow story of land-seizure, destruction and coercion'. He reminds us that, as Separation approached, '[n]ot far from Brisbane, a frontier war was raging and its sounds and impressions often re-echoed in the township', but that subsequently 'a communal, historical amnesia' about racial conflict in the early colony developed – an amnesia that also generated 'a historiographical tradition of concealment'. Evans argues forcibly, using a telling example, that the task of retrieval and reconstruction of the colony's past can only be achieved by attending to hints and clues beyond the official record.

In the second article in this issue, 'Leaders and Political Culture: The Development of the Queensland Premiership, 1859–2009', Paul D. Williams pursues some of the implications of this 'act of becoming'. Colonial Queensland, he argues, was symbolically a *tabula rasa*, a land which had to be cleared and developed, quickly and at all costs. As the only Australian colony granted full responsible government on its creation, Queensland in 1859 was an administrative vacuum that was 'filled quickly with centralised decision-making' – setting a trend that continues today. Williams characterises the political culture that has developed over the past 150 years as made up of five interrelated elements: 'strong leadership', 'pragmatism', 'regionalism', 'state development' and 'Queensland chauvinism'.

Cheryl Taylor's paper, "'This Fiction, It Don't Go Away": Narrative as an Index to Palm Island's Past and Present', demonstrates how textual analysis can take up the task of retrieving and reconstructing histories denied and concealed by the 'act of becoming' and the subsequent 150 years of white administration of Indigenous affairs.

Taylor examines an ‘unofficial canon of texts associated with Palm Island ... for the insights they provide into the changing attitudes and understanding of whites and blacks, as the forces of repression and resistance have wrestled for dominance’. She argues that while the remoteness of reserves like Palm Island has worked to conceal inconvenient truths, fiction has played a significant role not only in raising awareness of the past, but also – more recently – in promoting solutions to problems of Indigenous identity that stem from experiences of containment and oppression.

The articles that follow explore some of the ways in which white settlers and their descendants have made themselves ‘a home ’neath alien stars’ in Queensland. On the 250th anniversary of Robert Burns’ birth, Patrick Buckridge’s article, ‘Robert Burns in Colonial Queensland: Sentiment, Scottishness and Universal Appeal’, considers the presence of Burns in colonial Queensland. He argues that while Queensland’s ‘harsh patriarchal rationalism’ was partly the product of the pervasive influence of Scottish Presbyterianism, at the same time the powerful affective quality of Burns’ poetry worked to soften and mitigate that ethos. The subject of Alison Ransome’s paper, potter Ian McKay (1943–90), was strongly influenced by this dual Scottish heritage. As Ransome puts it: ‘A lifelong sense of commitment to art, in particular pottery, combined with a clarity of purpose and dedication to the physical discipline of hard work characterised Ian McKay’s life ...’ In ‘Ian Calder McKay was Here: A Legacy of Beauty in Pottery’, Ransome offers an elegiac biographical essay on a major Australian artist who died at the height of his powers.

In accordance with the Editorial Board’s commitment to bring readers of Queensland Review a series of republications of significant short works of Queensland literature which have long been out of print, this issue concludes with Lance Fallaw’s poem ‘A Queensland House-Warming’, introduced and edited by Patrick Buckridge. What most interests Buckridge in Fallaw’s work is that he ‘simply annihilates the familiar contradiction between ... loving the European world he had left behind ... and, on the other hand, loving, enjoying, and appreciating the new country and wanting to spend the rest of his life here’.

The next issue of *Queensland Review*, ‘Celebrations and Commemorations: Exploring Queensland’s Past’, will be edited by historian Joanne Scott as a further contribution to reflection on the state’s sesquicentenary.

— *Belinda McKay*

## Notes

- 1 Peter Macinnis, *Mr Darwin’s Incredible Shrinking World: Science and Technology in 1859* (Sydney: Murdoch Books, 2008).
- 2 Rosalind Kidd, *The Way We Civilise: Aboriginal Affairs – The Untold Story* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1997).
- 3 Chubb’s ode was published as a leaflet, and perhaps also presented to the Governor. In a column entitled ‘Flunkeyism’ in the *Moreton Bay Courier* on 8 December 1859: 2, ‘North Australian’ reports that Mr Chubb ‘has provided himself with an ode printed on satin, which he is going to

present in person to the representative of her Majesty. This ode is, we learn, a most ridiculous piece of nonsense, such verses as neither men nor gods tolerate, and worse than all is not even original, since our informant assures us that he saw it in manuscript some twelve months ago, but that it has been *cut* and *patched* to fit the present occasion. Now we hope and trust that C.F. Chubb, Gent., in the strength of his ignorant presumption will yet be merciful, and that the representative of our Most Gracious Queen will not be nauseated by a piece of intolerably fulsome adulation thrust in his face. Save us, Oh Chubb! save our Governor and thine from the consequences of the act thou hast instituted; and we implore thee to reflect – if thou canst reflect – that emetics are neither necessary nor grateful after a “sea change”.<sup>7</sup> Governor Bowen arrived in Brisbane two days later, on 10 December 1859; the *Moreton Bay Courier* does not report whether or not Chubb decided to be ‘merciful’.

- 4 George Essex Evans, *Queensland, The Queen of the North: A Jubilee Ode* (Brisbane: H.J. Diddams [1909]), n.p.
- 5 Sir Raphael Cilento with Clem Lack, *Triumph in the Tropics: An Historical Sketch of Queensland* (Brisbane: Smith and Paterson, 1959).
- 6 Arthur Laurie, ‘The Black War in Queensland’, *Royal Historical Society of Queensland Journal* 1.1 (September 1959): 155–73.



**Queensland Day celebrations in King George Square, Brisbane, 1959**  
*Photographer: John McKay*