

Austalian pioneer settlers from Germany

Germans were on the first fleet which sailed into Port Jackson on 26 January 1788 and two hundred years later they were among the crews of the tall ships that celebrated that momentous event.

Revered, hated, welcomed and feared, Germans have made their presence felt throughout modern Australian history. During the first 150 years of white settlement, Germans were the only national group, apart from the British, who made more than a token contribution to the development of this continent.

Originally welcomed as hardy pioneers, German settlers were responsible for discovering and opening up vast tracts of land. German scientists and entrepreneurs put their shoulders to the wheel of Australian commerce and prospered as the nation grew.

But as the German empire expanded into the Pacific, and Britain and Australia were drawn into two world wars, perceptions of Germany and its people changed and immigrants were caught in the crossfire between the old and new worlds.

In Australia there is a widespread belief that our history is the history of Anglo-Saxons, Scots and Irish, along with the Aborigines. This is not correct, especially if one considers the contribution made to all aspects of our way of life by people such as Baron Sir Ferdinand von Müller, the great botanist and explorer, General Sir John Monash, Engineer and World War One hero, Bert Hinkler, the pioneer aviator, Ludwig Leichhardt, the explorer and so on. These famous names have one thing in common; they were all of German descent.

At the beginning of the 20th Century, people of German birth or German origin amounted to over one-eighth of the population of Queensland.

Here is the story of one of them...

Staubwasser – apotheker

by Dr Owen Harris

Frederick Maria Staubwasser, German engineer, Australian dispenser and hospital administrator.

In researching the story of Frederick Staubwasser, I was aided by his retrospective autobiography written for his family in 1933, which covered the period 1872-1901 when he lived and worked in Charters Towers. Primary Australian sources were used to confirm and understand the autobiography.

His story after 1901, when he moved to Brisbane and began his professional work and family life at the newly built Diamantina Hospital for Chronic Diseases, required the most research to explain his great progress as a hospital dispenser and administrator and the two enigmas - his delayed registration by 26 years as a pharmacist, and his avoidance of internment etc, during the anti-Germanism during and around World War I.

Why Australia?

Frederick Staubwasser was apparently happy in Germany. After leaving school he became an engineering apprentice in the Bavarian Government Railways. This was interrupted by national service in the

Naval Artillery from 1889 to 1891. He then commenced work with the Austrian Steam Navigation Company and passed his examinations to become an assistant engineer on steamers plying the Danube.

When studying in Saxony, Germany in 1889, Staubwasser “met students from all over the world, and they gave me some wonderful descriptions of their country,” so in 1892 he and his brother Emil decided to emigrate to Australia.

The Staubwassers travelled as unassisted (free settler) passengers in the passenger/cargo vessel SS Oldenburg from Bremen, arriving in Sydney in December 1892, and then sailing onto Townsville after Christmas that year.

Charters Towers 1892-1901

In his autobiography he indicates that the main reasons were to board the steamer “to take us to land of gold and most extraordinary freedom”. Their final destination was Charters Towers, Queensland, where successful gold mining began in 1872, but boomed from 1886 following the Colonial Exhibition of London. After 1900 the gold mining slumped.

Charters Towers was the residence of a former German friend (Max Schmidt) previously from Munich.

The brothers worked around the district and even tried their hand at prospecting for gold and during this period, 1893 to 1899, Frederick met Dr Francis Hare who was a physician as well as the inspector general of hospitals in Queensland. It was this association which resulted in Frederick becoming employed as a warder at the Charter’s Towers Hospital.

At the height of the gold-rush there were three lodges in Charters Towers, and these eventually combined to set up a Friendly Societies Dispensary in premises called the ‘Manchester Unity Medical Hall’, but locally known as the ‘medical hall’.

Frederick Staubwasser began his training in dispensing with Mr J Wilkinson at the medical hall in 1900 while still working as a part time warder at the hospital, but in 1901 he left this job to concentrate full time on pharmacy.

At the end of this period Dr Hare appointed him dispenser at the new Diamantina Hospital in Brisbane, so he resigned his job at the Charters Towers Hospital and moved to the city, where his new position required his full time attendance seven days a week.

In his autobiography he thanks various medical officers for their help and support since he arrived in Australia, and especially Mr Wilkinson his pharmacy tutor and Dr Hare, whom he describes as “my greatest benefactor since I left Germany... he was one of those English gentlemen who would do his utmost to help others to rise in the profession they



Frederick and Eliza, with children Louisa, Freda & Oscar, 1917.

had adopted.”

The Diamantina Hospital 1901–1938

The Diamantina Hospital for Chronic Diseases opened in 1901 on the site of the Princess Alexandra Hospital in Woolloongabba, a Brisbane suburb. The foundation senior staff of the Diamantina Hospital in 1901 was the matron Miss Florence Chatfield, medical superintendent Dr Francis Hare, dispenser/head wardsman Mr Frederick Staubwasser and visiting medical officer Dr Alfred Jefferis Turner.

These people worked very well together with mutual respect in this independent public hospital which was originally an orphanage, and initially catered for 32 patients with chronic conditions such as pulmonary tuberculosis, cerebro-vascular diseases, cancer and epilepsy. The hospital was declared to be a Public Charitable Institution under the Charitable Institutions Management Act of 1866, and was under the direct control of the home secretary and his department until 1942.

When Dr Hare resigned in 1903, Miss Chatfield was appointed

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Diamantina Hospital, Brisbane Queensland

superintendent; then in 1904, Mr Staubwasser as assistant superintendent. Both were residential positions requiring 70 set hours a week; with one being on call at all times. By 1930, the hospital had grown to 216 beds.

On May 5, 1907 Frederick Staubwasser wrote to the home secretary's department in Brisbane requesting both a salary increase and a cottage in the hospital grounds, as he was to be married in December that year and his prospects in the Diamantina Hospital were more settled. Miss Chatfield also sent a supporting letter and the request was approved in 1908. The works department built the cottage and it was occupied by Mr and Mrs Staubwasser in early 1909.

Dispenser's House 1909-1923

The provision of the cottage in the hospital grounds was a clear indication of their great support and confidence the superintendent and the home secretary had in Frederick Staubwasser.

Of Miss Chatfield, he notes "At the Diamantina Hospital I met Miss Chatfield and from the first day I could see that we would work well together."

On Miss Chatfield's retirement in 1934, Frederick Staubwasser was made

superintendent, and another dispenser appointed. A further indication of his strong support from the home secretary was his added appointment in 1933 as acting secretary of the Mount Isa Hospital when it opened, and he continued when it opened for about a year until it was properly established.

Frederick Stubwasser was naturalised as an Australian citizen in July 1912, and although he had completed all the requirements for registration as a pharmacist/dispenser in Queensland in 1901, he was not formally registered by the Pharmacy Board until 1927.

No reason can be found in archives of the Pharmacy Board

of Queensland or Pharmaceutical Society of Queensland for this long delay, but it is noteworthy that neither of these bodies had any records of anyone who had failed the examination conducted by the Pharmaceutical Society or College of Pharmacy. However, registration required an apprenticeship followed by examination.

The turbulent history of pharmaceutical training from 1884 is well documented in the *Centennial History of the Pharmaceutical Society of Queensland*. Published in 1980, it notes that most of the difficulties came from state politicians and the territorial 'war' by some leaders of the medical profession

It stabilised when pharmacy training became a course at the University of Queensland from 1960. Also there is no suggestion that hospital pharmacists were exempt from the requirements pertaining to other contemporary pharmacists, and that no registered pharmacist was employed at the Diamantina Hospital until 1934, when Staubwasser became superintendent.

Ironically, the Brisbane Hospital in 1904 employed Mr D.F 'Pa' Brown as pharmacist, but as he was unable to pass the pharmaceutical examination he could not be registered in Queensland. When the hospital employed a registered pharmacist to



Dispenser's House 1909-1923

work over him, it is a little surprising that this did not alert the home secretary to the anomaly.

Anti-Germanism in Queensland

Over the time when Frederick Staubwasser lived and worked in Brisbane he and his family, as did nearly all Australians of German origin, had to cope with two periods of anti-Germanism which were related to the two world wars in the 20th Century.

These periods posed a real challenge to his loyalty, created a risk of internment and to his family life, but it is notable that he was never accused of being a 'disloyalist', was not sacked and was not interned.

In the pre-war years from 1900 until 1914, Britain and Germany were in 'cold war' mode, when Kaiser Wilhelm was Chancellor. This led to the slow development of anti-Germanism in the British Empire.

The outbreak of World War I provoked immediate and continued escalation of bitterness, hysteria and discrimination. Australians at the time feared that they too might be invaded. The Commonwealth Government introduced the War Precautions Act in October 1914, which authorised the arrest and internment of any persons thought to be behaving in a way detrimental to the national security.

In 1915, the German and Austrian Embassies and Consulates were closed, and Australian citizens of German and Austrian birth were subjected to legal and social discrimination.

Soon after the Commonwealth instructed that "all enemy subjects whose conduct was "unsatisfactory" should be interned. This led to 3986 of 33,000 German-born Australians being interned, many ultimately deported and some never permitted to return.

With horrific stories filtering back home from the battlefields in France,

and the sinking of the 'Lusitania', anti-Germanism escalated with greater bitterness. These reactions were encouraged by hysterical views expressed by many high-ranking loyalists.

Throughout the country the names of appropriate streets, suburbs and even districts were changed from German to Australian.

The Queensland Government passed a regulation in 1916 that required German or Austrian born Australian public servants to be sacked and replaced by 'Britishers' if they were available and willing to be employed.

The devastating effects of anti-Germanism were exemplified in the case of Dr Eugen Hirschfeld, honorary physician and bacteriologist to the Brisbane Hospital at the outbreak of war. He was publicly attacked by the B.M.A. (now A.M.A) and forced to resign.

He ceased being the honorary German consul, and also had to resign from his seat in the Queensland Legislative Council, as well as the University of Queensland Senate.

He was interned in 1916, deported 1920, then allowed back in 1923.

For Frederick Staubwasser, these were anxious times, but he was not interned, probably because he had strong support from the home secretary, and there was no evidence of any political association with local German born Australians and he was not a member of the 'German Club'.

He was a naturalised Australian and attended the Presbyterian Church and not the Lutheran Church as one might have expected.

To his many friends and acquaintances he was a loyal Australian whose life centred on his work and family. He was not on the list of aliens reporting regularly to the CIB and he did not lose his job to a 'Britisher'.

It is appropriate to conclude this section with the comment 'All too frequently supposed disloyalty was confused with subversion. Civil liberties were sacrificed to the altar

of xenophobia and a confused and flexible sense of national security."

Frederick Staubwasser died in February 1938, leaving his wife and three young children.

Despite the war clouds gathering over Europe again, he had not sought to change his name, but his widow and family changed their surname to her maiden surname of Harrison, and Christian names were anglicised (e.g., Oscar to Andrew), by deed poll in September 1939.

This story has described a new and successful life as a good Australian citizen, family man and hospital dispenser/administrator by a 20 year old German emigrant to Australia in 1892, whilst living in a most difficult era for Australians of German birth. He succeeded by ability, integrity, study, personality, along with great rapport and support from his work peers and employers, his friends and most importantly his family.

Yet further anti-German angst in his last 6-7 years led his widow and family to seek a less stressful life by name change. The anti-German bitterness 1900-1925, and again beginning in 1932, associated with internment of other Germans is one of the tragedies of war, and it has been said that the first casualty in any conflict is usually TRUTH.

Editor's Note

Dr Owen Harris is Chairman of the Diamantina Healthcare Museum, Princess Alexandra Hospital, Brisbane, Queensland. The Dispenser's House has become the home of the Diamantina Healthcare Museum (2004).

A full list of references is available on request.

Endnotes

- 1 Tampke J, Doxford C. Australia Willkommen, A History of the Germans in Australia. NSW University Press 1990/1990