The Australian Veterinary History Record is published by the Australian Veterinary History Group in the months of March, July and November.

Please take the opportunity to visit the AVHG web page <www.vetsci.usyd.edu.au/avhs>
and also the Australian Veterinary Historical Records
When you log onto http://ses.library.usyd.edu.au/handle/2123/222

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Dr. Helen Fairnie
Dr. Keith Hughes
Dr. Dick Roe
Dr. Patricia McWhirter

The Australian Veterinary History is a Special Interest Group of the AVA (AVHG). All who are interested in any aspect of veterinary history may join. Annual subscription is $20. Enquiries to the President, Dr. Andrew Turner, 25 Garpton Street, Princess Hill, Victoria 3054, Australia. Tel/Fax 61 3 9380 1652. email<ajturner@bigpond.net.au>

All comments and opinions expressed in the Australian Veterinary History Record are those of the individual writers and not of the Editors, nor do they represent any official policy of the Australian Veterinary History Group or its committee.

APOLOGIES: John Holt, Jack Arundel.

Minutes of the 16th Annual Meeting of the AVHG Melbourne Victoria 25-30 May 2008 were received and passed without correction.

REPORTS of the President, Secretary/Treasurer, Honorary Librarian, were received.

GENERAL BUSINESS:

The President gave a report on the Presidents meeting. He is optimistic that a new era has arrived with the appointment of a new CEO.
There was general discussion about the location and care of the Historical Collection.
The President will follow this up with the Office of the Australian Veterinary Association National.

Dr Auty announced that the 38th International Congress of the World Association for the History of Veterinary Medicine would be held in Switzerland from 11-13 September 2008, he would be attending and would extend greetings from the Australian Veterinary History Society.

ELECTION of OFFICE BEARERS:

The Committee was re-elected unopposed.

Hon. Librarian’s Report

Hon Archivist’s Report

AUSTRALIAN VETERINARY HISTORY SOCIETY (AVHS)

PRESIDENT’S REPORT

Report to Members

The AVA Annual Conference in Perth is now over and the Scientific Sessions of AVHS were a great success. Papers from the meeting will be presented in the next edition(s) of the AVH Record. Special thanks to Dr Helen Fairnie for making the local arrangements.

The Annual Meeting voted to increase the annual membership fee to $30 so that there will be opportunity to undertake initiatives for the security of valuable books in the Max Henry Memorial Library and an initiative to use the contents in the Bob Taylor Memorial Museum, now in storage at AVA Headquarters at St Leonards, NSW, to promote veterinary science.

The Annual Meeting is in Darwin next year from 17 to 21 May 2009. The AVHS is holding its Annual Meeting on Monday 18 May 2009 proceeded by a scientific program. Members are invited to present papers of a veterinary historical nature at the Scientific Meeting preceding the Annual Meeting. I look forward to seeing you at the meeting.

The membership of the AVHS is currently 61 ordinary members and 23 student members. The AVHS Committee is anxious to gain more members by inviting your colleagues to participate you can recruit new members. You and prospective members are invited to present papers for incorporation into the Record whether presented at the Annual Meeting or not. Reg Pascoe has agreed to present a paper at the next Annual Meeting so I am seeking more papers. If you are interested in presenting a paper, contact a Committee Member, the Honorary Editor of the AVH Record or myself for guidance about the topic and whether there are previous papers in the Record. Past copies of the Record can be viewed on the University of Sydney website at http://www.vetsci.usyd.edu.au/avhs/avhs_record/.

The AVA is reviewing and renewing its website and the Committee will be pursuing AVHS representation in the new website to increase our visibility in
the profession.

Finally I would like to express my appreciation to Committee Members for their work over the last year and I look forward to continuing current and starting new initiatives over the coming year. The achievement in re-establishing the Max Henry Library has only been successful with much effort but it has demonstrated what can be possible. If you have ideas for promoting veterinary history, please send me an email and I would be pleased to share them with the AVHS Committee.

Kind regards
Andrew Turner
President AVHS
ajturner@bigpond.net.au
61 3 9380 1652
Annual Report – Secretary/Treasurer

Your Society continued to meet its objectives in 2007 membership remained steady. The Record proved popular and appears to be a useful recruiting tool, the Conference papers were well received and we continued to steadily run down our cash reserves.

A new challenge appears to beset the Society in the spin that appears to be the norm for organizations that wish to be in the eyes of the media when in fact they have little to report. An example is the extraordinary claim that the incursion of the minor condition, Equine Influenza “may have been the biggest crisis facing AVA members in 60 years”.

Leaving aside what was the crisis that occurred 60 years ago, I suggest that scrapie, eradication of BCPP, TB and Brucellosis, Newcastle Disease, the creation of a national veterinary organization, and the construction and opening of the Australian Animal Health Laboratory (AAHL), the discovery of Bluetongue, animal rights and welfare, and the various crises that have been the norm in livestock exports, and the RC into the meat industry, all put El which the northern hemisphere has been happily accommodating in its horse population since at least 1821, into the minor matters list. It behoves the Society and its members to throw a dash of cold water on such claims that can only be made by those who have no real appreciation of our history.

The 38 International Congress of the World Association for the History of Veterinary Medicine is to be held in Switzerland in September. The main Topic is the “Man Animal Relationship from Antiquity to the 20th Century”. I requested that an announcement be run in the AVJ. Apparently lead-time has prevented this. I have the necessary paperwork if anyone is interested. I shall be attending (DG) and presenting a paper “Canine/Human Relationships in Aboriginal Australia”. If desired I will extend greetings from the Society.

I present the financial statements for 2007 as prepared by central office. As usual I am unable to understand the statements. Questioning in the past by my predecessor and myself did not lead to clarification.

I recommend that the subscription be raised from $20 to $30 dollars.

John Auty.
The Australian Veterinary Annual Financial Return for the period ending 31 Dec 07

Name of Division – Historical

Statement of Financial Performance (formerly called Profit & Loss)

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2006</th>
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<tr>
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<td>(146)</td>
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<td>5946</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Accumulated funds</strong></td>
<td>4538</td>
<td>5801</td>
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### Statement of Financial Position (formerly called Balance sheet)

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<td>(146)</td>
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<td><strong>5801</strong></td>
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BANK RECONCILIATION

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PART A

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PART B

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<tr>
<td>Cash Book closing balance 31 Dec 07</td>
<td>1228</td>
<td>684</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Report of the Hon. Librarian Max Henry Memorial Library

The catalogue of the books in the library is almost complete and will be printed and also recorded on CD and on a website. There are about 1000 books currently in the collection.

AVA members have the same borrowing rights as students and staff of Melbourne University.

I have read the formal agreement between the university and the AVA and am satisfied that our interests are protected. An issue, which concerned me, was the storage of valuable old books. The agreement provided for these books to be held in the Special Reading Room of the Baillieu Library but they are currently held in the office of the librarian of the Gilruth Library. The staff of the Special Reading Room have no interest in the books and say their facilities are inadequate for preservation of old books. On the other hand, the Gilruth Librarian and Nicki Mock, the librarian appointed by the university to catalogue the MHML books, are enthusiastic custodians of the old books. I agree with them that the old books are secure and adequately stored where they are and obviously they are more accessible to students and AVA members in the Gilruth Library office. An improvement would be a lockable cabinet to replace the open shelves in the office and I have offered to provide one. I feel confident that the necessary funds can be obtained by donation and I will contribute myself as necessary.

I handed the surplus books sent to me by Dick Roe to Nicki Mock and she has compiled a list of these and other duplicates. The books have little monetary value and it is proposed to first offer them to AVA members and then to Melbourne University veterinary students. Any remaining will be destroyed when space for their storage becomes unavailable due to future acquisitions. If the method of disposal is accepted, the list can be published in the AVHR, and possibly the AVJ, and applications processed in order of receipt.

If any reader of this report would like to donate books, money or a display cabinet to the library, please contact Dr Tom Hart (MHM Librarian), PO Box 267, Gisborne 3437, Victoria, phone (03) 5428 3424 or e-mail tombart@tpg.com.au. It would be helpful if activity associated with the MHML were channelled through Dr Hart.
Report of the Hon. Editor of the Australian Veterinary History Record.

Three issues of the AVHR, Nos 49, 50, 51 were published in the months of July, November and March 2007-2008. The articles in issue No. 49 included *Southern Ocean Divers* that provided an interesting scientific study of the activities of the mammals in the Southern Oceans. The studies of these species are aiding the assessments and predictions of climate and environmental changes occurring within the Southern Ocean environment.

Papers from the Annual Meeting provide a record of the evolution of Veterinary Science over the last century in the control of animal diseases. Bringing us to the present are several articles on the changes in veterinary practice and administration.

The AVH Record is continuing the recording of our history and, what is most important, it is being written by our members.

*Ian Parsonson.*
ARTICLES

A Short History Of Rural Veterinary Practice
In Western Australia: 1964 to 2007. P 13
John A.L. Maxwell,
Katanning Regional Veterinary Hospital, PO Box 273
Katanning WA 6317

The Rinderpest Outbreak At Fremantle,
Western Australia In 1923 P 25
William T Clark 51 Henry Bull Drive Bull Creek WA 6149

The Darwin Rebellion 1918 - 1919 P 38
Hon. Austin Asche AC QC Darwin NT

Letter to the Editor P 50
WJ Pryor,
309 Pryors Road
Scotsburn, Victoria 3352, Australia.

Dr John A.L. Maxwell Katanning Regional Veterinary Hospital PO Box 273 Katanning WA 6317

Introduction
Throughout the history of Australia's veterinary profession there has been concern for the viability of private veterinary practice. In the latter half of the 20th century, when urban practice began to thrive, the concern focused on rural practice.

In the 1970s the profession attempted to address the issue (Gannon 1975) and more recently the Federal Government’s Review of Rural Veterinary Services (Frawley 2003) highlighted the plight of rural practice. However, nothing significant or substantial resulted for rural practice from these efforts.

The author decided to examine the situation in Western Australia during the last 40 years to see what could be learnt and what could be put into effect to provide stability for rural practice. Murdoch Veterinary School was approach with the project in 2004 and surveys of government veterinary officers and rural practitioners in Western Australia were undertaken in 2006. Some of this material has been published (Maxwell, Costa et al 2008a and b).

History
The first qualified veterinary surgeon in Western Australia was HH Burns, GMVC, a graduate of Kendall’s Melbourne Veterinary College, who established a practice in Perth in 1895. He was followed by EA LeSoueff, GMVC, Curator of the Zoological Gardens in Perth in 1897 and RE Weir, MRCVS, Chief Inspector of Stock for Western Australia in 1904 (Underwood 1979).

In 1911 “An Act to regulate the Practice of Veterinary Surgery, and for other related purposes.” was assented to (Veterinary Act, 1911). During the first 10 years only nine veterinary surgeons registered and as a result the Act was amended in 1923. The purpose was to allow permits to be issued to unqualified...
individuals on condition that they operated in areas not already serviced by a qualified registered veterinary surgeon (Veterinary Surgeons Act Amendment Act, 1923). By 1952, 25 veterinarians had registered (Ward 1958). The modern era of veterinary practice in Western Australia began in 1960 with a new Act (Veterinary Surgeons Act, 1960). In that year there were 22 veterinary surgeons and 9 permit holders listed in the Register; 50% of the registered veterinary surgeons were urban practitioners in Perth, 23% were government veterinary officers and 27% were in rural, mainly diary practice.

In 2008 there were 1072 registered veterinary surgeons in Western Australia (Godkin 2008). Forty-eight (4.5%) worked for the Department of Agriculture and 900 (84%) were employed in private practice; 77% in Perth, 6% in the regional centres of Geraldton, Bunbury, Albany and Kalgoorlie and 17% in country practice principally in the south-west agricultural region of the state.

**Era**

Rapid expansion of agriculture took place in Western Australia during the 1960s and this was matched by growth in rural veterinary services. Two agricultural innovations took place at this time; one was the development of farm management advisory services and the other was the establishment of a subsidy scheme to attract veterinary surgeons to rural Western Australia. In the farm management advisory services 30 to 40 farmers grouped together to finance the employment of a farm advisor, usually an agricultural scientist, to provide advice on soil, pasture, grain and financial matters so that members would be more efficient and hence more profitable than those not in such services (Falconer 1990). The subsidy scheme was a financial partnership between the State Government and local government bodies, usually shires, to underwrite the salary for a veterinarian during the formative years of a country practice. The scheme recruited veterinary surgeons to nine practices in country Western Australia (Shilkin 1970).

The 1960s closed with a rural recession that ushered in a troubled decade for agriculture and for those servicing agriculture during the 1970s. A wheat quota scheme operated and with the collapse of the beef boom in the mid 1970s there was a 20% reduction in veterinary staff in rural practice. At the beginning of
1975 there were 500 rural practitioners, but by the end of the year only 400 were left (Gannon 1975). The farm management movement collapsed in Western Australia. From 50 consultants in 1966/67 there were only 23 in 1973/74 (Falconer 1990). The subsidy scheme came to an abrupt halt; all nine subsidized practices ceased and in most cases the veterinarian left the region to either settle in Perth or leave the state.

Australia’s fourth veterinary school was established at Murdoch University in 1974 and began producing graduates in 1979. At the official opening of the school, the Premier stated, “The whole purpose of this school is to get the best trained surgeons onto farms doing wonderful things for the economy and for the farming industry of WA” Further he did not want to see, “vets caught up in the dog and cat syndrome.” (Clark and Grandage 2005). The former did not happen and the latter has come to pass.

The 1980s saw the reduction in the economic significance of agriculture in Western Australia and at the same time an overproduction of veterinary surgeons occurred. For the first time in the profession’s history in Australia more veterinarians were produced than could find employment and this was accompanied by a disregard for the code of ethics, deterioration in the relationship between practices and an era of ‘anything goes’ began (Frost 1976, Morris 1976, Alexander 1978). The 1990s was a period of adjustment to major changes in the profession. The overproduction impacted on practice remuneration and many practices resorted to merchandising and the sale of pet food to supplement income and we became a profession of shopkeepers.

The profession, previously a male bastion, began to be flooded with female veterinarians and accompanying this was an increasing demand for part-time work. Veterinary surgery, which had been a vocation, became a job or a hobby. The present decade began with a questioning of the direction being taken by the profession and this was accompanied by a questioning of the competence of new graduates to function in a practice setting (Rex 1993; Anon 1999; Coleman, Salter et al 2000).

The Government Review examined Australia’s livestock industries and rural veterinary practice and five years after its release its major achievement appears to be the establishment of the Australian Veterinary Reserve (Frawley 2003).
Issues
During this period a number of issues arose to confront the profession and some are examined here. These are controversial and the author brings the perspective of a rural practitioner – one who has serviced the rural community in this state for the last 45 years.

Are farmer’s worth servicing?
It is the servicing of economic livestock that defines rural practice. However, in Western Australia, apart from the few in consultancy practice, most rural practitioners attend companion animal cases rather than economic livestock cases. At the time the survey was conducted (2006) only 30% of rural practice respondents serviced economic livestock; 19% for female respondents and 39% of males. The balance of practice time was spent servicing companion animals (Maxwell, Costa et al 2008b).

The Frawley Review, quoting ABARE stated, “only some 20% [of farmers] engage veterinarians in any given year for professional services and advice…average expenditure by farm on veterinary service is about $200 per year.” (Frawley 2003).

As a result a number of West Australian rural practices are questioning the advisability of servicing economic livestock. Twenty per cent of survey respondents had curtailed their services to economic livestock and 10% had eliminated them altogether (Maxwell, Costa et al 2008b).

The failure of Herd and Flock Health Services.
For the last 40 years the Flock and Herd approach has been promoted as the panacea for the effective servicing of economic livestock. Numerous attempts have been made to provide this type of service, few have succeeded. Fourteen of 82 (17%) rural practice respondents provided this type of service. Three did so exclusively; two were employed full-time, one with sheep and the other with pigs, whilst the third worked part-time with both sheep and beef cattle. Eleven provided the service in conjunction with a traditional therapeutic service. Eight earned between 5% and 10% of total practice income from this service whilst three earned between 10% and 20% of total practice income (Maxwell, Costa et al 2008b).
Farmers manage livestock for money and they use a veterinary service, the traditional therapeutic or a consultancy service, on economic grounds. From colonial days farmers have received advice from government on all aspects of farming at no direct cost to themselves and as a result they have developed a ‘free-for-service’ not a ‘fee-for-service’ mental attitude. Until and unless farming operates as a business without being propped up by government, they will never know the true costs of production and will not be able to determine if farming has a future and what services it can afford to use (Stowe 2006).

The reason for the profession’s failure to effectively service economic livestock lies not with the service provided, but in its under-utilization (Maxwell 1978). The author knows of only one successful private veterinary consultant and he has retired to teach animal production to non-veterinarians.

**Why aren’t new graduates competent for private practice?**

The graduate of an Australian veterinary school appears well educated but they are poorly trained. They have satisfied the university in examinations, but they lack basic animal handling skills and have little understanding of the realities of practice and come to it lacking many necessary practical skills. A number of routine practice procedures have not been carried out by the student; many have not been observed. For example, my current associate never saw an equine castration at university, let alone perform one.

Eighty-six per cent of Western Australian government veterinary respondents and 90% of rural practice respondents considered their education adequate to function as a graduate, but the corresponding figure for the acquisition of practical skills at university were 52% and 60% respectively and this was considered an impediment to the successful transition into the veterinary workforce (Maxwell, Costa *et al* 2008a and b).

After spending five years at university graduates require training. The practice staff undertakes this training and it is done at the practice’s expense. There is debate as to how long it takes for a new graduate to become an asset to the practice; some in small animal practice claim it takes about 6 months, whereas, in rural practice it can take much longer.
A Dean of an American veterinary school stated, “An honest assessment of priorities reveals today, as always, that the primary objective of the university’s function is to produce qualified practitioners.” (Vaughan 1978)
The Australian universities are not achieving this.

Specialization.
Originally, having a veterinary degree meant that one was a specialist in the examination and treatment of animals. The diagnostic disciplines such as pathology, bacteriology and parasitology were the first areas of veterinary specialization. Those in clinical practice submitted samples to these specialists, who were employed in diagnostic laboratories. At the same time individual veterinary surgeons demonstrated exceptional skills in an animal species or physiological system or in a discipline, such as surgery and their peers acknowledged this by voluntarily referring cases to them.

Currently, specialists complete a coursework program under the auspices of the Australian College of Veterinary Scientists and their non-specialist peers are expected to refer cases to them (Taylor 1983; Woolcock 2007). The theory of specialization is attractive, however, the expected successful outcome of referring is not always realised. The assumption that a specialist is more competent than the generalist is often unwarranted and the promotion of the specialist by the denigration of the generalist is to be condemned.

In Western Australia there are very few registered specialists and most are employed at Murdoch University (Godkin 2008). When staff at this school advises students to refer to a specialist they are essentially directing future practitioners to refer cases to himself or herself and this seems to be done without regard for the conflict of interest.

The overproduction of veterinarians in Australia.
The overproduction of veterinary graduates that began in the 1970s has continued unabated for 30 years leading one former veterinary educator to point out that Australia’s production of veterinarians exceeds that of the USA and UK by more than 30% (Heath 2007).
This overproduction is in contrast to the medical profession where there is a chronic shortage. In 2005, there were 113 medical graduates from two West Australian universities, whilst in the same year there were 79 veterinary graduates from Murdoch University (Anon. 2006; Maguire, Wallace, et al 2008).

The low income and status of veterinary surgeons in Australia is a result of this oversupply; 35% of respondents were dissatisfied with their income and 13% with their status. The best known economic law – the law of supply and demand – has and is being breached by the oversupply and with new veterinary schools scheduled to come on stream the condition can only get worse. Why have the Australian universities persisted with this policy for the last 30 years? What is their agenda?

Changes in the service being offered in rural practice.
Traditionally, rural practice derived income from three sources; viz. professional fees, cost of medication used and travel cost (Blood 1985). During the latter part of the 20th century other income sources were added and this was demonstrated in the survey where a number of procedures were added to the ‘core’ veterinary services (Maxwell, Costa et al 2008b). Seventy-one per cent of rural practice respondent’s merchandise and 55% sell dog and cat food and this has led to the epithet ‘shopkeepers’ being applied (Hirschhon 2007; Maxwell, Costa et al/2008b).

Has this been achieved because it evolved naturally from the provision of a veterinary service or was it undertaken because veterinary practice provides insufficient income? In support of the latter explanation, the survey recorded that 34% of respondents found it necessary to develop an independent income. Others have reported that “poor remuneration” in rural practice is a reason that many leave to pursue higher incomes in urban practice (Heath 1996; Brown and Silverman 1999; Heath and Neithe 2001).

Is the veterinary profession losing its scientific credibility?
The veterinary profession had its origin in the 18th and 19th centuries with the establishment of university training in Europe and Britain. It based its position squarely on the scientific method, turning its back on the empiricism
of its predecessor the farrier apprentice and it did so by exposing them as quacks (Schwabe 1984; Kendall 1988).

The Australian veterinary profession began in a similar vein; 100 years ago the first two veterinary schools established Chairs in Veterinary Science and students graduated with a Bachelor of Veterinary Science degree.

However, in the latter half of the 20th century, the profession, through its national association, embraced the empiricism of ‘holistic medicine’ (for example, acupuncture, chiropractic, homeopathy) and more recently animal psychology. The failure of the association to face this issue in 2005 and reject these pseudo-sciences illustrated how far the profession has let its scientific credentials slip.

**The failure to involve rural practice in surveillance.**

The Government Review cited surveillance as an essential veterinary activity to prevent the incursion of exotic livestock diseases into this country, whilst also noting that there was a decreasing capacity of government veterinary services to provide it. Their solution to the problem was the formation of the Australian Veterinary Reserve, which, by its very nature, is a reactive body called upon when exotic diseases land on our shores (Frawley 2003).

Frawley and his colleagues failed to see that surveillance could be provided by utilizing the existing infrastructure of rural veterinary practice in this country. They reported that there were more than 1000 rural practices in Australia, some of which would be willing to participate in a surveillance program which could prevent exotic diseases, such as FMD from entering and ruining our favoured animal export status (Frawley 2003). This would avoid the fiasco that was seen with FMD in the UK in 2001 and the Equine Influenza outbreak that was seen here in 2007.

The cost would be miniscule relative to the cost of having the disease here.

**The gross gender imbalance of veterinary graduates will have to be addressed.**

In 1994 the Dean of the University of Sydney’s Veterinary School was quoted saying,
He welcomed the fact that the profession was starting to be dominated by women because they were smarter, more dedicated and better vets. Women have a vocational commitment to veterinary science that is instinctive, whereas men are more financially calculating in their choices...he enjoyed teaching women because they were a civilizing influence in the class.” (Anon. 1994)

Apparently this veterinary school selected female students in preference to males.

Adolescent females mature earlier than their male peers and a comparison of academic scores at Year 12, when the student is 17 years of age, is not a valid comparison and should no longer be the prime selection criteria students for university admission.

Female graduates are the intellectual equal of males, however, they lack the male’s physical capacity, they are not prepared to devote all of their working life to practice and they do not, by and large, aspire to own and operate their own practice. The survey reported that half of the female respondents worked part-time, whereas 27% of males did so; 58% of female respondents had significant periods of their working life not being a veterinarian, whereas 15% of males did so; and 32% of female respondents, but 90% of males owned and operated their own practices (Maxwell, Costa et al 2008b).

Unless this trend to complete female dominance of the profession is halted there is little likelihood of a continued veterinary presence in the country, as is the case currently with rural medical services.

**Conclusion**

The veterinary profession in Australia has reached a watershed. It has reached a point where there is the need for a thorough self-examination and reassessment of what its function is – what it is to be a veterinarian – and where it is to proceed in the future. This will require the participation of all Australian veterinarians, not just those who are members of the association, which at present only has 50% of Australian veterinarians within its ambit and can no longer claim to represent the profession as a whole (Connely 2004).

If this is not undertaken then it will be imposed by others from outside the profession.
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THE RINDERPEST OUTBREAK AT FREMANTLE
WESTERN AUSTRALIA 1923
William T Clark 51 Henry Bull Drive Bull Creek WA 6149

Introduction
Rinderpest is a highly infectious viral disease affecting quite a wide range of species but morbidity and death in cattle and buffaloes cause the main economic loss. Virulent strains of the organism produce a high mortality in these species. Other wild and domestic species, including sheep and pigs, can be affected but show less obvious clinical signs and lower mortality.

Outbreaks of rinderpest have caused huge losses in Asia, Europe and Africa during the past three hundred years. It is reported that outbreaks in the Transvaal and Cape Colony in South Africa in 1897 resulted in the loss of over two million cattle. The outbreak of the disease at Fremantle in 1923 was the first and only time that the infection reached Australia but it did pose a very serious threat to Australia’s livestock industries.

This article discusses the origin of the infection, its spread and eventual control and some of the social and political issues that were of concern at the time.

Source of infection
In 1923 the virus could only reach Western Australia by sea. Fremantle was the major port on the western shore of Australia and a considerable volume of overseas trade passed through the port. At that time there were regular shipments of livestock to Singapore and other Asian ports and ships would call at ports in such as Derby, Broome and Carnarvon in the northern part of the state to collect livestock on the return journey to Fremantle.

Sometimes these ships carried pigs or sheep as live stores that were killed as required to feed the sailors on the voyage. If the animals were killed while the ship was in Fremantle port the internal organs and waste was collected by farmers, boiled and fed to pigs. Manure, which accumulated on the ship, was distributed for use as fertiliser in the market gardens near Fremantle. Live sheep were exported to Singapore and, as the sheepskins had no value in Singapore, they were brought back to Australia.
The source of the outbreak was never definitively determined but there was strong circumstantial evidence that rinderpest was brought to Fremantle with the arrival of the *S.S. Charon* from Singapore via Derby and Carnarvon on the 3 of October 1923. Three pigs were taken aboard in Singapore as live stores and are thought to be the source of the infection although the pigs showed no obvious clinical signs.

The boat collected 297 cattle at Derby and 436 sheep at Carnarvon. Thirteen cattle died on the voyage and another 16 were considered unfit for human consumption and within a few days of landing were slaughtered and sold as "dead meat". The rest of the cattle were sold to butchers and slaughtered at Robb's Jetty, just south of Fremantle, on the 8 October. Two remaining pigs and the sheep showed no signs of the disease and there was no evidence that spreading manure, feeding offal to pigs or handling sheepskins contributed to the outbreak.

At the time there was considerable concern that rinderpest had already infected stock on the pastoral properties in the north of the State and if this had happened the disease would be very hard to control. Fortunately this was not the case.

**Spread of the disease**

The main outbreak of the disease occurred in the Beaconsfield area around the 30 October and spread to other centres at Belmont/Bassendean and Rottnest Island.

Beaconsfield is situated four kilometres south and east of Fremantle harbour. The sandy coastal soil is infertile with mineral deficiencies that were unrecognised in 1923, so hand feeding was necessary to maintain milk production. Adjacent to this area was the extensive Fremantle Common with native vegetation which cattle were able to freely graze although the nutritional value of the plants was poor and some of them were toxic. It was possible for cattle wandering in the bush to make contact with the cattle awaiting slaughter at Robb's Jetty. Other agricultural activities in the area involved piggeries and market gardens and sheep and goats were also kept. Infection was diagnosed in 23 herds in this area but generally the herds were
very small. Only seven herds had more than 20 cows and the remainder had less than five.

The Belmont outbreak involved three properties situated approximately 25 kilometres northeast from Fremantle. No direct animal contact with the Fremantle cases was established but the official report states that there was an absence of reliable records and the information collected was somewhat open to question. Sheep had been driven along a bush track through Belmont linking Fremantle to the Midland stock market but follow-up on these animals found no evidence of rinderpest.

Bassendean lies immediately across the Swan River from Belmont and one farm there became infected. It was known that cows occasionally swam across the river and spread by this route was confirmed when an infected cow from Belmont was found dead on the riverbank in Bassendean.

The third outbreak occurred on Rottnest Island, a popular holiday resort lying about 25 kilometres off the west coast. A small herd was kept to supply milk to the residents and visitors and in anticipation of the holiday season the proprietor of a hostel had bought animals to augment the herd. The farmer in Bassendean who was soon to find rinderpest in his own animals supplied the animals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outbreak</th>
<th>Number of farms</th>
<th>Number of cattle</th>
<th>Number diagnosed with rinderpest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beaconsfield</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belmont/Bassendean</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rottnest Island</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Diagnosis
The diagnosis of the cause of the sudden and severe cattle losses was difficult as no veterinary surgeon in Western Australia at that time had prior experience of dealing with rinderpest. Three cattle, which died on the first farm, had necropsies performed by a veterinary surgeon from the Stock Department and a diagnosis of possible poisoning was made. Losses on an adjacent farm started during the first week in November and the owner asked Mr W E F Burton, Registered Veterinary Practitioner, for advice. Mr Burton had no formal training but was added to the list of veterinary practitioners under a clause in the Veterinary Surgeons Act Amendment Act of 1923 which permitted registration of those who had undergone not less than three year’s training in a veterinary hospital and subsequently served abroad with the Australian Imperial Forces.

Mr Burton recognised the seriousness of the situation and called for assistance from Mr EA Weston BVSc who had been his commanding officer during the Great War and now worked as a private practitioner. Post mortem examinations were carried out on the 16 November, samples collected and Mr Weston reported to the Mr RE Weir, Chief Veterinary Officer, that there was a serious outbreak of an infectious disease in the Beaconsfield area. A further post-mortem examination was carried out on the 19 November by Mr Weston, Mr A L McK Clark LVSc from the Stock Department and Dr J Dale from the Health Department and they concluded that the disease was probably rinderpest.

The diagnosis of Rinderpest had such serious implications that the government looked for further specialist opinions. On the 22 November the Minister for Agriculture announced in the House of Representatives that he had wired the Prime Minister asking that he send over a Commonwealth veterinary officer with knowledge of the disease.

The Commonwealth Director-General of Health and Director of Quarantine, Dr JHL Cumpston asked Dr WAN Robertson BVSc, Chief Veterinary Officer of Victoria to go to Western Australia immediately. On the 28 November Dr Robertson visited infected areas and after examining animals and post-mortem material wired Dr Cumpston to say that he had no reason to doubt that
rinderpest was present. Further support for the diagnosis was provided by Professor HA Woodruff MRCVS who happened to be in Fremantle en route to Europe at that time.

However the disease had such serious implications that the Commonwealth Government wanted to have the diagnosis further confirmed by the opinion of two veterinarians with field experience in dealing with rinderpest. Major CJ Sanderson MRCVS who had experience in South Africa and Mr HS Leonard MRCVS who had dealt with it in Siam travelled to Perth, examined animals and specimens and concurred with the diagnosis.

In order to clearly demonstrate that the disease was due to an infectious agent experimental studies were carried out at the Bicton quarantine station. Between 30th November and 6th December eight heifers, seven pigs, four goats, two kangaroos and two “opossums” were given material from clinical cases. There were control groups of heifers, pigs and goats. Three heifers developed pyrexia and one of them had lesions at necropsy similar to rinderpest. Four pigs developed pyrexia and had lesions at necropsy and necropsies were not performed on the goats. No illness was detected in the marsupials. The experiments were to some extent inconclusive as some of the animals were slaughtered within six days of inoculation. By this time all the experts had agreed that the problem was due to Rinderpest and it was considered unwise to keep a site of possible reinfection when a process of stamping out was underway.

In 1923 there was no definitive laboratory test for rinderpest such as virus isolation and years later the question has been asked – was it really rinderpest or might it have been bovine pestivirus infection (Mucosal Disease/Viral Diarrhoea)? The mortality was possibly not as high as might be expected to occur with rinderpest in a susceptible population of cattle but the mortality rate cannot be accurately calculated as clinical cases were immediately destroyed and shortly after the onset of the outbreak all in contact animals were destroyed.
Control and eradication of the infection
On the 19th November 1923 on recommendation from Mr Weir, Chief Veterinary Officer quarantine was imposed on all affected farms. By the 22nd November the number of infected farms had increased to eleven and the quarantine area at Beaconsfield was substantially extended. However at this stage only animals showing signs were slaughtered. When diseased animals were discovered at Belmont the quarantine area was further extended and by December 4th all farms within 30 miles of Fremantle Town Hall were placed in quarantine.

Following negotiations between the State and Commonwealth Governments a board of control was established on the 13th December. The chairman was Mr WN Hedges, a pastoralist of Western Australia, Mr PJ Hampshire, a dairy expert of the State and Dr WAN Robertson, representing the Commonwealth. Dr Robertson was appointed executive officer and took control of the eradication process.

Dr Robertson had a distinguished career in veterinary science. He received his veterinary training at the Melbourne Veterinary College graduating in 1898 and joined the Victorian State Public Service in 1906 as a veterinary officer. In 1910 he became Acting Chief Veterinary Officer and graduated with a BVSc degree from the University of Melbourne. He became chief Quarantine Officer (stock) for Victoria in 1913 and Chief Inspector of Stock for Victoria in 1916. Dr Robertson was awarded his Doctorate by the University of Melbourne for his thesis on Rinderpest in 1926 and in the same year was appointed the first Director of Veterinary Hygiene in the Commonwealth Department of Health. Dr Robertson was an active supporter of the Australian Veterinary Association and the Veterinary Association of Victoria.

Following his appointment Dr Robertson moved quickly to stamp out the disease and on the 14th December the Board of Control ordered the slaughter of all cattle within one mile of an infected farm. This plan was modified slightly at Beaconsfield to give a cleared area of about 20 square miles with natural boundaries or boundaries which could be adequately patrolled. All cattle, pigs, sheep and goats were destroyed as were dogs found wandering.
The total number of owners who had stock destroyed was 434. The number of animals destroyed is given in Table 2.

Table 2. Number of farm animals destroyed in the rinderpest outbreak.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cattle</th>
<th>Pigs</th>
<th>Sheep</th>
<th>Goats</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beacnsfield</td>
<td>974</td>
<td>948</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>2216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belmont</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bassendean</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rottnest</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1534</td>
<td>1024</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>2899</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The cattle at Beaconsfield were taken to an old limekiln and the carcasses were incinerated. Similar action was taken for the animals on the Belmont/Bassendean and Rottnest farms. Pigs from non-infected farms were taken to abattoirs. Following the slaughter of animals the grass and dilapidated buildings were burned and other buildings had their roofs removed to allow sunshine to enter. The remaining structures were then sprayed with disinfectant.

In order to ensure that the disease was contained, day and night mounted patrols were started round the quarantine areas to prevent movement of animals and to catch stray animals. In addition a census area approximately five miles wide was established round the periphery of the quarantine zone. Patrol officers inspected the stock on these farms on a regular basis checking for signs of disease and if any were found a veterinary officer checked that they were not due to rinderpest. In some surrounding areas buffer zones with no farm animals were established. Approximately 200 patrol officers were required and these positions were often given to men who had lost their livelihood due to the disease.
A number of steps were taken to prevent the indirect spread of the organism and some of them had significant economic consequences. The Commonwealth Government prohibited the export of stock, fodder and wool from Western Australia and appointed Mr HC Stevens of the Commonwealth Department of Health to supervise the checking of all cargo leaving Fremantle destined for the Eastern States.

The government of the Netherlands East Indies banned ruminants, meat and animal fodder imports from the State and the British Ministry of Agriculture banned a proposed exhibit of 50 Australian Merino sheep at a forthcoming British Empire Exhibition.

Manure from the livestock ships could no longer be used as fertiliser in market gardens and bags, which were used and reused for transporting vegetables had to be sterilised. Root crops could only be sold in the Fremantle area or for ship stores; however top crops such as peas, beans and tomatoes could be sold under permit. Rhubarb could be sold after it had been dipped in 1% formalin and onions after they had been dried and the outer skins removed. The control measures were quickly effective and from the 18th January 1924 all vegetables could be sold on the open market.

The use of straw packing was prohibited in consignments going outside the 30-mile quarantine area but this rule was later modified to allow the use of straw sourced outside the infected area provided no local straw was kept on the premises. The return of sheepskins from Singapore was banned and the Harbour Trust arranged to collect garbage from ships and dump it at sea.

The last of the infected cattle were killed on Rottnest on the 2nd of January 1924 so the outbreak was controlled in 64 days. The last case on the mainland occurred on the 18th December 1923, the quarantine area was reduced in stages after the 23rd January 1924 and animals re-introduced under supervised conditions.

Dr Robertson left for Melbourne on the 2nd February and Mr RN Johnstone, also a veterinary officer from Victoria, took up the vacant
position on the Board of Control. No further cases developed so on 20th March an Order in Council revoked all regulations relating to rinderpest and on the 28th March the appointments of officers on the Rinderpest Board of Control were cancelled.

**Social effects of the outbreak**

News of the disease outbreak caused considerable concern to stock owners in the affected area and to the general public. The Government was reluctant to announce publicly that the disease was rinderpest until the diagnosis had been definitely confirmed and the absence of news added to the tension. Concerns were expressed about the possibility of humans being infected and also about milk supply especially for infants.

Many of the farmers in the quarantine areas were very upset at losing their stock and their livelihood. The farms were often very small and as the cows were hand milked the owners often developed a strong attachment to the animals. An article in the *West Australian* newspaper, dated 21st November, described the distress of some farmers in Beaconsfield.

“Crouched upon a tree stump in the shade, apart from a group of visitors to the grazing area near Beaconsfield, a dairyman sobbed and shook his head. Round him lay the carcases of many valuable dairy cattle which had succumbed to a mysterious complaint which has puzzled the authorities; other cattle in a weakened condition lay on the ground, and others, still attempting to walk dragged their hind legs through the sand. The sight of the cattle broke the hearts of those to whom privations and odds, inseparable from life in the bush, had been overcome and forgotten. At present 60 cows have died and 35 are known to be sick.”

Market gardeners also suffered losses when their produce could not be sent outside the quarantine area but a number of steps were put in place to allow some vegetables to be sold and the restrictions were quickly removed when the disease was controlled.
Some hostility to the severe quarantine restrictions was reported in the press and some correspondents refused to accept that rinderpest was the cause of the losses. A few meetings were disruptive and a few shots were fired in the direction of the patrol officers but there are no reports of serious injuries. Dr Robertson addressed meetings of livestock owners to explain the situation and the measures to control the disease. The *West Australian* on December 25th reported on a meeting between Dr Robertson and hostile dairymen where Dr Robertson said:

“You think it is a pleasure for me to destroy your cows. I am following the dictates of science. To exterminate the disease a line of healthy cattle should be killed around the infected area. There was not the slightest doubt in my mind that it was rinderpest and the order was made for destruction. If it were necessary to shoot every head of stock in the area to stop the disease from getting away it would be a paying proposition. If the disease gets beyond control it will not be a few in Fremantle wanting milk but the whole of Australia wanting meat and milk. Millions will be ruined instead of hundreds being inconvenienced.”

**Costs and compensation**

The State Government soon realised that substantial costs might arise before the disease was controlled and the State Premier, Sir James Mitchell started negotiations with the Commonwealth Government over cost sharing. As a result the Commonwealth offered to pay half the cost of slaughtered cattle, half the cost of patrols, all costs associated with control over exports on the wharves and a further sum of £7000 as an “act of grace” but nothing towards indirect costs such as loss of livelihood or markets. The offer was not well received in Western Australia.

An editorial article in the *West Australian* made the point that:

“It has not been shown, or attempted to be shown, that it is due to any lack of foresight or vigilance or to guilty negligence on the part of the local authorities. This being the case, and in view of the undeniable fact that the whole of the continent is imperilled, the nation should in fairness bear the lion’s share of the cost, which will not be inconsiderable, of stamping out the scourge.”
In the Council Chamber of Parliament the Hon JW Kirwan said:
“When State powers were surrendered to the Commonwealth, one of the recognised Federal powers was that of quarantine that enabled the prevention of the spreading of great disaster in the form of an epidemic that might threaten Australia. I agree with the contention of the Minister that this is essentially a National Matter and not merely a State function.”

In the same debate the Hon HG Potter expressed his views strongly:
“I am firmly of the opinion that we have paid more than our fair share in the endeavour to free Australia of the disease. There is no doubt in minds of the Government that this is a National question and that the whole of the expense should be met by the Commonwealth Government.”
The Members responded with
“Here, here”

Earlier in the debate the Hon HG Potter gave his views on Commonwealth /State relations.
“Sir James Mitchell has been severely censured for having allowed himself to be forced into the position of paying for half of what the Commonwealth should have paid. It is not the only occasion on which Western Australia has entered into negotiations and has come off second best. It has been our experience that in a case of this kind one might as well argue with a hungry tiger as with the Commonwealth.”

The Commonwealth Government increased the £7000 sum to £12,475 as
“a sympathetic grant to meet special cases of hardship and distress.”

Because the disease was controlled within a few weeks the costs were not excessive and the State Government was not in a strong position to get more money from the Commonwealth.

The overall cost of the outbreak was £58,000 although that would not take account of indirect costs to businesses affected by the disease. Compensation costs for cattle and pigs slaughtered came to £26,888, half paid by the Commonwealth Government.
Factors contributing to the successful control of rinderpest
There were a number of advantageous factors which helped to restrict the disease.
The cattle population in the area was not very large and there had been little movement of stock at the time of the outbreak. The soil in the area was light sand with little herbage in midsummer when there were long periods of strong sunlight making conditions unfavourable for survival of the virus.

The topography of the area allowed good boundaries for the quarantine area. The western boundary was the Indian Ocean with the Swan River to the North while the eastern limit was the Darling Range which was unsuitable for stock as there was little grazing and a number of toxic plants. On the southern limit, extending from the coast to the range was dry sandy country largely devoid of stock at that time of year.

Dr Robertson undoubtedly played a very important part in the successful outcome, using his veterinary skills and organisational ability to quickly set up the quarantine and inspection arrangements. It is also clear from newspaper reports that he was concerned for the losses suffered by many businesses in the quarantine areas and was willing to attend the hostile meetings of stock owners to explain why the restrictions were necessary. The *West Australian* ran an editorial article praising his handling of the outbreak. Many others, including veterinary officers, stock inspectors, patrol officers, valuers, slaughtermen and other trades played important roles in quickly controlling the spread of the disease.

Acknowledgements
Assistance with this project was provided by a number of my colleagues and their help and encouragement is gratefully acknowledged. Most of the historical documents were obtained from the Murdoch University Library and the Battye Library, Perth. Jean Clark helped with editing and word processing.
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The Rinderpest Outbreak in Western Australia in 1923: Some early impressions by GL Throssal 1977. Battye Library


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Western Australian Parliamentary Record (Hansard) for discussions and motions in Parliament.
Arthur Philip, landing at Botany Bay, and thereby, by Imperial Decree, becoming the Governor of the Eastern landmass of a continent, did not waste time contemplating the extent of his domain. It was enough to be desperately involved in establishing one infant town from inadequate resources. Nor, when that Eastern boundary was extended a little further westwards, was he known to rejoice that he now held dominion over a tract of land which would one day become known as the “Northern Territory” of Australia. Nor were his successors any more enthusiastic, although the Territory remained within their jurisdiction as part of the Colony of New South Wales.

So it remained until 1862 when the evil Queenslanders persuaded the Imperial Government to extend the western boundary of Queensland into part of the Territory, thereby depriving a defenceless infant of its birthright of Mount Isa and much of the Barkly Tablelands. In 1863 the South Australians acquired the rest that made the name “South Australia” a little strange for a Colony that now stretched from the Great Australian Bight to the Arafura Sea.

Although South Australians soon repented of their decision, because the Territory cost them much money for little return, due tribute should be paid to them for what they did accomplish. The town of Palmerston, later called Darwin, was surveyed and established; and in 1871-2 the astonishing feat of constructing the Overland Telegraph from Darwin to Adelaide was completed in 20 months. Please pause to reflect how long it would take today. Also in the 1870s gold was discovered in Pine Creek and Yam Creek, and a miniature and short-lived gold rush took place. One result was to attract a significant number of Chinese, who then worked on the construction of the railway from Palmerston to Birdum. They drifted back to Palmerston and found great difficulty in obtaining work as labourers because of the hostility of the Unions who were pursuing a strong “White Australia” policy. This created the peculiar irony that the Chinese were then
virtually forced into taking up what was left for them, namely, such occupations as traders, merchants, market gardeners and shopkeepers, thereby becoming the backbone of the commercial development of the town, and, in the long run, prospering a great deal better than the unionists.

The South Australians brought with them one important gift – the franchise. After 1863 the Territorians, or at least the white Territorians and some others, duly registered, returned two members to the House of Assembly and one member to the Legislative Council. After Federation, they were included as part of the South Australian electorate of Grey for the Federal House of Representatives, and, as South Australians, were entitled to vote for the six Senate seats allotted to the State.

In 1911 the South Australians, who had been so eager to acquire the Territory, and had then spent 50 years trying to get rid of it, finally succeeded in flogging it off to a not very enthusiastic Commonwealth, and this had the immediate effect of disenfranchising the citizens. They could no longer vote as South Australians, and the Commonwealth made no provision for their representation in the Federal Parliament. This was a continuing grievance which had considerable effect on the troubles to come.

The Federal Government considered what to do with the one sixth part of Australia for which they were now responsible. It was decided that the Territory should be administered by an Administrator with wide discretionary powers, assisted by a civil service, all subject to directions and supervision of the Federal parliament represented by the Minister designated for the purpose.

At this time (1911) it must be remembered that the Federal Parliament sat in Melbourne, Canberra not being ready until 1927. Immediate communication between Melbourne and Darwin was by telegraph, which had a limited capacity for detailed instructions and discussions. The trip from Melbourne to Darwin, if undertaken by a conscientious Minister, took 19-14 days by ship, and, of course, a similar time to return; and a month away from other ministerial responsibilities could be a serious matter. How very important, then, to choose an Administrator capable of dealing immediately and sensibly with local matters.
I should also remind you that the terms “Governor” and “Administrator” have, these days, taken a 180 degree turn from their original meaning. Before self-government in a Colony, the Governor or Administrator was a power in the land, being, in effect, a Chief Executive Officer granted almost unlimited discretion by the central body. Today, in any State or Territory with self-government, the one thing a Governor should not and, indeed, must not do, is govern; and the one thing an Administrator should not and, indeed, must not do, is administer.

Darwin was a town of strong individuals. You needed to be pretty strong-minded in those days to come to the place. Most of these tough personalities were already growling over loss of the vote, and they were fairly cynical about the transfer of power to the Commonwealth. The South Australians, despite their abandonment of the Territory, did understand Territorians, in fact many of them were originally from South Australia. A Commonwealth Administrator, particularly one from another State, would need to possess tact and understanding. The man appointed had neither.

What was disappointing was that the ideal candidate was available and would have enjoyed the post. This was SJ Mitchell who knew the Territory well. He had represented the Territory in the South Australian Parliament and then become the “Resident” i.e. the South Australian term for Administrator for the Territory, and he had also acted as a judge in Darwin. When the Commonwealth took over he became Acting Administrator pending the arrival of the Commonwealth appointee. Mitchell was described as “a shrewd judge of character, energetic and fair.” I am convinced that, had he been appointed Administrator, I would not be talking to you today. He also bears the distinction of being the grandfather of Rom Mitchell QC, later Justice Roma Mitchell and later Her Excellency, Governor of South Australia.

However, the powers that be, or that then were, had already decided on another candidate; and his qualifications were impressive. He was Doctor JA Gilruth, Professor of Veterinary Pathology at the University of Melbourne.
Of Gilruth’s academic reputation and his competence in his field I can find nothing but praise. He had been conspicuously successful in New Zealand, and his acceptance of the professorial chair at Melbourne University was considered a coup for the University. After his term as Administrator he continued an illustrious career with CSIR, now, CSIRO.

He had some knowledge of the Territory, having been part of a scientific expedition in 1911 when he had reported favourably on the potential of the cattle industry. But perhaps he knew more about cattle than people, or perhaps he thought people were just another kind of cattle. Even his supporters concede some faults of character. One describes him as “able and energetic”, but concedes that “he lacked a certain amount of tact”. One, obviously not a friend, describes him as “petty, vindictive, arrogant and merciless”. Another says that he acted like a “Viceroy”. Another called him an “autocrat”.

I must here give you my personal observation that Darwin does not love autocrats any more now than it appears to have done then.

He was an affectionate husband and father, his personal courage was never in dispute, and, in searching through oral records in the Northern Territory archives, I have found references to various acts of kindness to individuals. But, in his public life, a fairly clear picture emerges of a man supremely confident of his own judgment and ability, and imperious to the point of arrogance. He knew what was good for the Territory and was not going to stand any nonsense from those who thought differently. Such men are dangerous.

He arrived in Darwin under good auspices, and was welcomed enthusiastically by the populace as portending a step forward for the Territory. He was the recipient of a great deal of goodwill; which, efficiently, ruthlessly and speedily he set about dissipating. Within a few months he was being described as “the most disliked man in the country”.

It was his misfortune that he managed to alienate even those who would be expected to support him. The business community hoped for support and did not get it; the bureaucracy, of which he was head, found him abusive and
intolerant. His two principal supporters were themselves personally unpopular, and became the more so because of their close association with him.

HE Carey, the government secretary, had been selected by Gilruth and very soon gained the reputation of being no more than an echo of the Administrator. Of course that could be translated as commendable loyalty, but he seems to have been sufficiently over-zealous to dispel any idea that he had a mind of his own. He also had the misfortune of replacing a popular Darwin identity, whom Gilruth’s fiat had removed from the office.

Judge Bevan was a close associate and friend, and, in the circumstances it was at least unwise of him to be connected with Gilruth in some business and mining transactions. It was understandable that, in a small town the judge and the Administrator would often be seen together, particularly on official duties, but too close a friendship was unwise when the judge might at any time, but called upon to determine disputes between the administration and the citizen. Both men made a serious error in investing in a mining transaction in which Gilruth’s name was concealed as an investor.

Bevan also made some unpopular decisions, but here we run into a difficulty that judicial unpopularity can, as much is a sign of courageous impartiality as of bias or prejudice. On one occasion, however, he acted as a labourer during a strike, and, however one might applaud his determination to help in troublous times, it did no good for an office where impartiality both real and apparent is vital. Bevan did later concede that this action was unwise.

Gilruth’s uncompromising attitude was manifested early and in circumstances that would have rebounded to his credit had he bent a little. A local union called a strike. The strike was ill advised although the members had a genuine grievance about a reduction in their earnings. The strike was not supported by the other two unions in Darwin, nor by the parent body of the union in Townsville. The strikers rapidly ran out of funds, and, were prepared to surrender upon some face-saving formula. Their employer was the government, so they approached the Administrator. Carey who said he
would consult the Administrator met them. He returned some time later and handed them a sheet of paper on which was written the one word “NO”. The strike collapsed soon after.

The immediate result was no doubt seen by Gilruth was a triumph for firm action. But the strike was not senseless, it did have a real basis, and Gilruth could so easily have exercised a little sympathy with broken men without jeopardising the position of the government. The result stamped him, in the public’s mind, as ruthless and insensitive.

Here is a comment by one writer:- “a satisfactory compromise could probably have been arranged .....by a wise Administrator capable of taking a broad and generous view...but broadness of view and generosity were not part of Gilruth’s peculiar vision of his charter”.

In 1917 Gilruth’s initial term as Administrator was due to expire. He had now become so unpopular with all sections of the community that quite clearly the most sensible thing he could have done was not to seek re-appointment. He could then have retired, perhaps a little wounded, but justifying him to his Melbourne friends as one whose wise policies had been thwarted by a recalcitrant population. And, as a veterinary audience, you might be interested in who his friends were. Indeed, one writer sets them out as a sort of South Yarra clique centred on Marne Street. The names we hear of are Sir John Latham, Sir Joseph Cook (ex Prime Minister), Senator Pearce, Sir Robert Garran, Walter Massey-Green, Arthur Atley Hunt, Sir Littleton Groom and WA Watt. The writer adds – and you can draw your own conclusions as to why he adds it:– “Most lived in or around South Yarra and all, with the exception of those from interstate, were members of the Melbourne Club”.

In fact Gilruth’s re-appointment was opposed by the AWU, and it seems strange that he lobbied so hard for it. No doubt it was obstinacy of his character that led him to believe he should not leave a job undone. If so, it was a “courageous” decision in the “Yes Minister” sense of the word.

We now introduce his implacable foe and Nemesis, Harold Nelson.
In 1914 Nelson had become organiser of the Darwin branch of the AWU, and thereafter figured prominently in Union and public affairs.

There are various descriptions of Nelson varying from “a mild-mannered kindly man”, to “rabble-rouser” and “bolshie”, the latter being a favourite term of abuse in those days. But his actions do not stamp him as any more left-wing than the average labor leader of the time, and he seems to have been always a restraining influence on the more violent of his supporters. But that, of course, did not prevent him frightening the conservatives with threats of awful violence by factions he could not restrain if his own moderate and sensible demands were not met. He was a powerful orator and shrewd enough to see that Gilruth’s attitude had lost him the sympathy of conservatives; and to divert many of them to guarded approval for policies which stressed the apparent indifference of the Federal government towards the Territory, and its failure to allow the citizens any representation in the Federal parliament. Furthermore his working class support was considerably augmented by the arrival in the Territory of Vestey’s Meatworks.

Vesteys was a powerful international organization with pastoral interests particularly in Australia and Argentina. In 1917 it opened the meatworks in Darwin, fully supported by the Commonwealth that saw it as a source of war supplies and a boost to the Territory economy. In fact it was an economic disaster. It had considerable industrial troubles and many of its workers became natural allies of Nelson. It closed down in 1920 leaving the unemployed in its wake.

I was not born when Vesteys closed down, but I grew up in Darwin, always with the sight of these great empty buildings perched at one end of Mindil Beach, we living at the other end. My parents were good Territorians so I was properly brought up, along with the rest of my generation, with a vast and healthy hatred of Vesteys. We had clearly been exploited and abandoned by a sinister soulless corporation. No doubt this attitude may sound a little simplistic to those who are not Territorians, but I still feel the same. GRRR!
Nelson was clever enough to manoeuvre Gilruth, with Gilruth’s help, into accusations of being over-friendly to Vestey’s management; and in fact, Carey, with Gilruth’s assent, had accepted a position with the company. Rumours were later spread that Gilruth had suggested that the whole of the Northern Territory be sold to Vesteys for 5 million pounds. Although Gilruth denied this, there seems little doubt that these rumours were true. In fairness to Gilruth it should be noted some others had, at least, flirted with the idea, but the effect on the Darwin population can be easily imagined, as can their opinion of the man who suggested it. After that, some form of rebellion was inevitable, and the last straw (though that is hardly the way to put it) was the increase in the price of beer. Now Gilruth was not really responsible for this. It was the Federal government that had nationalised the hotels and there was some justification for raising the price. But it could hardly have come at a worse time and the wrath of the drinkers descended on the man on the spot.

On 17 December 1918 a large number of men, variously estimated at from about 500 to 1,000 marched upon Government house to demand that Gilruth leave the Territory. He was asked to address the mob, refused, but finally did so, justifying his actions. Someone (probably Nelson) shouted “over the fence boys”, the fence was pushed down and the mob entered the grounds. Some sort of melee ensued and two shots were fired into the air by a constable. Nelson calmed the mob down and told them to go home and they did.

On the whole Nelson comes out well in this incident, despite being the obvious stirrer. Before the march he had told the police of it, and assured them there would be no violence, and, with two minor incidents, there was not. The police therefore remained restrained when intervention might have worsened the situation. Certainly there was potential for violence and 27 special constables had been sworn and the government, previously warned by Gilruth, had dispatched a warship, HMAS Encounter, which was now in the harbour. A small group from the Cable Guard was also present but there was no intervention.
It was the comparative peacefulness of the event that has led some commentators to call it no more than a small disturbance, and to pour scorn on the description of this incident as “the Darwin Rebellion”. Nevertheless the fact is that thereafter the Administrator remained confined to Government House, and did not leave until the 19th February 1919 when, on government instruction, he and his family came on board HMAS Encounter and departed for Melbourne. In plain terms, the legally appointed head of the Territory was effectively deposed by the actions of a mob clearly unauthorised and devoid of any shadow of due process. The fact that this was achieved without bloodshed or mayhem is fortunate and irrelevant. If it walks like a duck, etc.

In hindsight the government’s best policy was inaction, but this was achieved by pusillanimity rather than by logic. Under any view it was the duty of the government to protect its legally appointed officer, and its failure to do so, not only at the time, but also later, while the Administrator remained effectively imprisoned, was a serious breach of its responsibility to its servant. Recalling Gilruth was surrender, particularly when no effort was ever made to reinstate him.

Instead, the government, in a truly inspired piece of bureaucratic lunacy, appointed Carey to be the “Director” of the Northern Territory. The expression “Director” entailed all the powers of the Administrator during Gilruth’s absence. But, as no one had the slightest intention of sending Gilruth back, it meant that the government had replaced the most unpopular man in the Territory with the next most unpopular. It did not add to the wisdom of their decision that Carey had to return from Vesteys to take up the post. So he was doomed from the start.

Here I make the point that is often overlooked, that the Darwin Rebellion did not cease on the day the rioters left Gilruth isolated in Government House. In fact it continued well into 1919, and these subsequent events were more in the nature of a rebellion than the earlier one.

The end came at a public meeting in October when Nelson, who had procured by devious means, a most indiscreet letter written by Carey to
Gilruth, produced the letter and read it to the meeting. The letter seemed to indicate continuing connivance between Gilruth and Carey, and, also with Bevan. The result was that Nelson and others visited Carey, Bevan and the government secretary Evans and bluntly told them they must leave immediately. Carey kept a record of the conversations and no one seems to have queried its accuracy. The general tone is quite clear. If you don’t leave there will be violence. All three protested that they could not be dismissed in this way, and that they had been told by the federal minister to remain. In the end, however, taking the view that violence was inevitable if they stayed, all three went on board the ship “Bambra” which sailed the next day.

Victory was more complete than Nelson could have hoped for. The federal government huffed and puffed, but no action was taken or even, so far as I can find, contemplated against a group that had, under threats of violence, removed from office four men properly appointed by the Federal government to administer the Territory. No matter how genuine their grievances, the citizens had no authority to do this and it would be very difficult to find any legal justification.

But the government went further. In March 1919 the Minister announced that Gilruth would not continue as Administrator and this was when the Director was appointed. In September 1920 the Ministry, after giving Bevan, Carey and Evans the opportunity to resign (which they declined), terminated their appointments as from 22 September 1920.

In short, the duly appointed officials who had served the government were sacked, and those who had driven them from office were left in peace; and they got a new Administrator and a new judge. It must be the most successful rebellion in Australia’s history as it was all done without bloodshed or loss of life, liberty or money.

Of the other two rebellions of which we hear, the Rum rebellion did result in the punishment of the nominal leader Johnson who was court-martialled and cashiered; and, although only for a day, Bligh was formally reinstated as Governor, the British government was properly conscious of the need to uphold authority. The Eureka rebellion was crushed with bloodshed; and
prosecutions resulted, although all were acquitted. So the Darwin rebellion stands as the one total success from first to last.

I have given some thought as to whether the rioters could be prosecuted for any and what offences. Without going into detail I will summarise my research. Treason is quite out of the question. There was nothing approaching it. Prosecution for riot would be feasible if some reference had been made to it during the disturbance. But it wasn’t and the procedures were technical including, usually, the requirement to read the Riot Act. Sedition is probably untenable for the first government house episode because, strictly, it was not the actions of the rioters that drove Gilruth out of the Territory, but the legitimate direction of the Government. However, there is much in Carey’s report of what was said in October 1919 that could be considered as seditious and there are also grounds for the relatively minor offence of threatening words.

The government was wise not to take action for these reasons:-

a. Any prosecution before a Darwin jury would have resulted in an almost immediate acquittal.
b. Darwin was remote and, unless you over reacted, everyone down south would forget about it.
c. There were much more important things to think about, now that the Great War had just ended.
d. The Royal commission which the government set up to inquire into the events had been critical of the officials involved, and had expressed some sympathy with the grievances of the citizens. This was unfortunate for the officials because the Report of the Commission was not very satisfactory, and, indeed, was subsequently criticised by a respected judge, Kriewaldt J, as “a shoddy piece of work”.
e. Finally, and most importantly, Carey, Bevan and Evans were strongly criticised in parliament for yielding to threats, and leaving their posts, particularly when they had been officially instructed not to do so. One attack, - and there were others – was made by a Senator who described it as, “contemptible...that men charged with the serious responsibility of
maintaining order should lay their authority aside merely because a public meeting asked them to do so”.

One might of course, comment that the censorious Senator was not there at the time, but there is something to it. On reading Carey’s notes one is left with a strong suspicion that there was a fair amount of bluff in the threats conveyed, and, although most of the more respectable citizens were generally on the side of the rioters, they would have cavilled at any real violence, and we know that Nelson was basically a peaceful man, though a good bluffer, but it is easy to be wise after the event.

The Royal Commissioner was also critical – “The question still remains to be answered as to how the affairs of the Empire could be carried on if British officials throughout the world, in such a contingency, behaved in like manner”. (Does this conjure up a picture of General Roberts at Khartoum going down fighting?).

So the result was, that those who rebelled and ejected the lawful authorities, were not only unpunished but rewarded, and those representing lawful authority were punished and dismissed. Judge Bevan was even forced to take legal action before being paid some compensation for breach of his contract. Can any other rebellion show such immediate and complete success?

The Federal government also rather speedily deferred to Territorians by granting them one parliamentary representative, though with limited powers. You will not be surprised to learn that the first person elected to this seat was one Harold Nelson. And, as a fitting conclusion, many years later, Jock Nelson, the son of that great persecutor and scourge of Administrators became the Administrator of the Northern Territory.

Finally, as a good impartial Territorian, I add my own reason why the Federal government failed to punish rebellion. Our troops had spent years valiantly fighting against very tough enemies in Turkey and Europe. They were certainly not going to fight against their own Territorians, who were even tougher.

The Hon. Austin Asche was formerly Chief Justice NT and Administrator of the Northern Territory and lives in Darwin.
LETTER TO THE EDITOR.

309 Pryors Road
Scotsburn
Victoria 3352, Australia.

Wednesday, April 2, 2008-06-07
Dr IM Parsonson
Editor
Australian Veterinary History Record
2/1 Coape Street
Cheltenham vic 3192

Dear Sir:

Recent issues of the AVH Record have been full of interest. May I
comment on a number of different issues of special interest to me?

1. Recently RP (Bob) Knight gave an excellent account of veterinary
services in Western Victoria in the 1950s (no 45 and no 48). With typical
modesty, what he failed to say was that the meeting point for that group
of 1950 graduates who went to Colac, Camperdown and Warrnambool, was
often his own home where he and wife Pam provided hospitality, profes-
sional friendship and support as our group set out on the veterinary
journey.

2. During the early 1950s we greatly benefited from the visits of
CSIRO senior veterinary scientist Dr. Daniel Murnane who was
conducting research on cattle fertility. As an aside, Dan diagnosed
Trichomoniasis in a local dairy herd on one of Bob’s clients using the
vaginal mucous test.

Bob Knight and I cannot praise too highly Dan Murnane’s help to
us new graduates with support, involvement in his field research and
friendship. A 23-year old-new graduate in that area was not expecting a
senior CSIRO veterinarian to invite him to call him by his first name right
from the first meeting, an indication for us of the man’s basic humility. Dave McQueen also refers to Dan’s (and others’) monumental contributions in Dave’s fascinating paper (no 51, 2008). For some years we benefited from his informal professional help in many veterinary areas, willingly given. Dan Murnane has always retained Bob’s and my admiration and respect as a veterinarian of the highest standing whose ethic was a model of how the profession should mentor its young colleagues.

3. In that fine summary of the West Australian veterinary cadetship scheme (no 51, 2008), one other effect of the West Australian cadets at the University of Queensland not included was that they provided the core of the University of Queensland Australian Rules Football Club (!), of which I had the honour to be patron during some of that era, 1958-72. And I mention that the two authors Brian Gabberty and Barry Richards were very prominent and skilled in that team and club. Sounds frivolous but it was an important focus in the life of the University of Queensland Veterinary School.

4. Last point – in the President’s report (no 51, 2008) I found it surprising to read that the Max Henry Memorial Library (MHML) had been placed in the Gilruth Library at the University of Melbourne Vet School. I recall that the Commonwealth Veterinary Association in 1997 negotiated with AVA through the late David Banks and paid for the dispatch of the MHMI to the University of Zambia Veterinary School. I even hold a letter acknowledging receipt of the books. Perhaps it was only part of the MHML!

Yours sincerely,

WJ Pryor

Hon. Editors Note explaining point No. 4

Dr. Pryor has correctly written that following the decision of the AVA Board, the Max Henry Memorial Library was sent to the University of

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Zambia Veterinary School with the financial help of the Commonwealth Veterinary Association. However, not all books were sent. Peter Mylrea selected several hundred volumes of Historical significance that were retained in storage in Canberra until their recent removal to the Gilruth Library in the Veterinary School of the University Melbourne in Parkville. Dr. Mylrea deserves the credit for ensuring that this part of our heritage was preserved and is now available as the Max Henry Memorial Library to all interested in veterinary history.

References


Australian Public Service Board Report 1970. Study assistance in the Commonwealth Service; related statistics of cadetship and study assistance schemes.

Records of the Western Australian Department of Agriculture were used extensively in the compilation of data.

Records of the JS Battye Library, Perth, Western Australia were also accessed, principally the Western Australian Public Service Lists, published annually.
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