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The Australian Veterinary History Group is a Special Interest Group of the AVA [AVHG].

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Preliminary Notice:

**AGM, Veterinary History SIG
Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre
Monday 24 May 2010.**

History of Veterinary Specialisation in the Greyhound Industry.

Dr John Murray and Dr Jim Gannon

History of Veterinary Specialisation in the Pig Industry.

Dr John Holder and Dr Ross Cutler

Centenary History of the Melbourne Veterinary School.

Prof Ivan Caple

History of Goats in Queensland.

Dr Faye Schutt

Antecedents to the Veterinary Club System in New Zealand 1900-1930.

Dr Edgar Burns

Leptospirosis in Queensland.

Dr Jean Elder and Dr Bryan Woolcock

Annual Meeting: Australian Veterinary History SIG.

Annual Dinner: Punjabi Palace, 135 Melbourne Road, West End.

Cost: \$30 for a 3 course Indian Banquet, corkage \$2.

HISTORICAL ARTICLES

The following three articles were presented in the Forum on *J A Gilruth in the Northern Territory* during the Annual and Scientific Meeting of the AVH SIG in Darwin on Monday 18 May 2009.

GILRUTH

J Hills

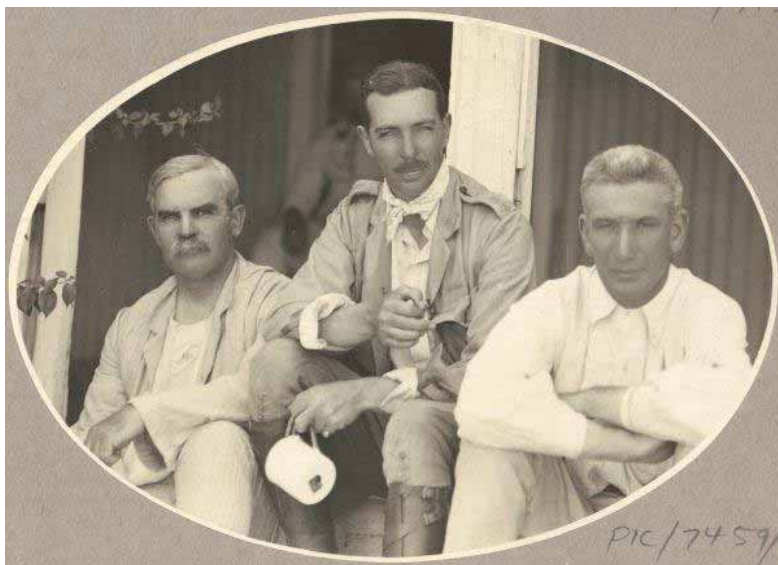
Forum Chair

PO Box 954, Darwin, NT

I suggested the Gilruth topic for this meeting, as obviously the name Gilruth is familiar to Australian veterinarians, as his name is attached to the very prestigious Gilruth award. I think that many would not know he was an Administrator of the Northern Territory from 1912 to 1919, and was virtually run out of town after an uprising of 500-1000 men who marched on Government House in Darwin and effectively confined him there. He and his family were then evacuated by ship.

As I became more interested in history I have wanted to provide Territorians with another aspect of the man, Gilruth. A few years ago Austin mentioned his presentation, written for the Lyceum Club in Melbourne, on the legal aspects of Gilruth's removal as Administrator. After reading it, I asked if I could send it on to the AVA History Group, as a fascinating insight into the processes and illegal events of that whole episode. The article was published in the Record No. 52.

Meantime, I was researching the history of Batchelor, a town around 100km by road from Darwin. It was developed by the Federal Government and the mining Company CRA when uranium was discovered at nearby Rum Jungle and the town flourished during the 1950s. Batchelor township was built on the Batchelor demonstration farm site being one of three Top End farms selected for development in 1911. Gilruth was involved with the farm when it commenced in 1912 and whilst adverse involvement has been recorded, other references record his wise advice in matters agricultural. Indeed it suited general opinion at the time for Gilruth to shoulder all the blame, whether for Federal Government decisions or his own bull-headed and narrow opinions. This completely overshadowed all the good decisions he made. As Batchelor moves close to celebrating its centenary it would be good to present a more positive involvement for Gilruth in that area and the Territory generally.



From left: Minister Josiah Thomas, Sir Walter Barettelet and Dr. John Gilruth at Katherine Telegraph Station in 1912.

National Library of Australia, image number: nla.pic-an24294371.

Part of the souvenir of the visit of the Federal Parliamentary Party to the Northern Territory in April - May, 1912. Creator unknown.

The History Record has an article about Gilruth's clock, (November 2001, number 32) in which the author refers to Gilruth as the pioneer of the more modern methods of veterinary education, and also into establishing the methodology for the investigation of problems in animal health. "His methods in teaching, research and administration were always original."

As the first Chief of the Division of Animal Health of CSIR, he was described by Sir David Rivett as "a great man in every way - frank, fearless and tactful". The first two attributes were obviously not tempered by the third (tact) in his years in the Territory. Maybe he developed tact after reflecting on his Territory experience, or more likely he had a much greater ability within his particular field of veterinary science.

In recent times, Austin's paper was published in the History Record in 2008 and Chris Bunn published a paper in 2003. These two gentlemen will each speak about their respective papers followed by a presentation from John Auty. There will be a short time for others to offer relative opinions or facts.

As an outcome I seek an acknowledgement of the great contribution that Gilruth made scientifically and practically which was important for all of Australia, and so temper the prevailing view of his role as a despot in the Northern Territory.

THE DARWIN REBELLION 1918-1919

Hon. Austin Asche AC QC
Formerly Chief Justice and Administrator, Northern Territory
Darwin, N.T.

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 which made the name “South Australia” a little strange for a Colony which now stretched from the Great Australian Bight to the Arafura Sea.

Although the 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 1871-72 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 1873, 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 allocated 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. 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 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 communications between Melbourne and Darwin was by telegraph, which had limited capacity for detailed instructions and discussions. The trip from Melbourne to Darwin, if undertaken by a conscientious Minister, to 10-14 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 degrees 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 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 S. J. Mitchell who knew the Territory well. He had represented the Territory in the South Australia parliament and then became the “Resident; i.e. the South Australian term for the Administrator for the Territory, and he had also acted as a judge in Darwin. When the Commonwealth took over he became the 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 Roma 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 J.A. 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 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 described 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 that it appears to have done then.

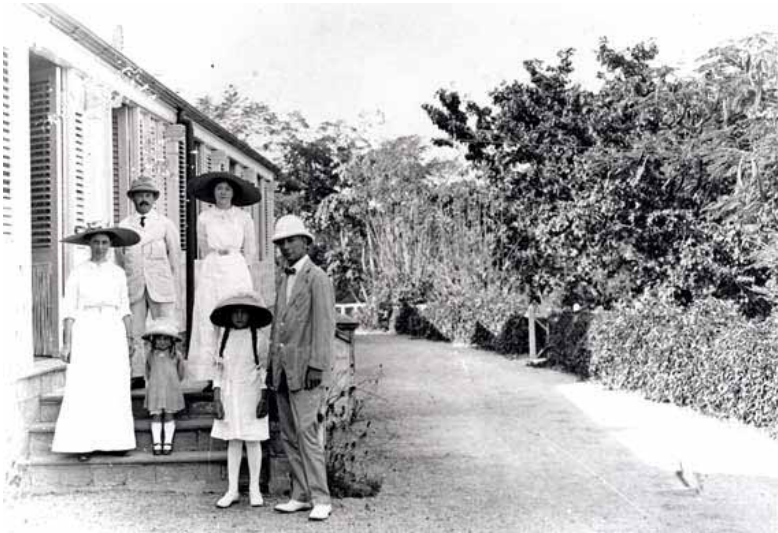
He was an affectionate husband and father, his personal courage was never in dispute, and, in searching through oral records in the Northern Territory archives, I have found references to various acts of kindness to individuals. But, in his public life, a fairly clear picture emerges of a man supremely confident of his own judgement 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 even 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.

H. E. 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.



Gilruth Family, Darwin 1912

Judge Bevan was also 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, be 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 be 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 be 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 which could 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. They were met by Carey who said he would consult the Administrator. He returned some time later and handed them a sheet of paper on which was written one word “No”. The strike collapsed soon after.

The immediate result was no doubt seen by Gilruth as 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 commentator:

“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 the 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 himself to his Melbourne friends as one whose wise policies had been thwarted by a recalcitrant population. And you might be interested in who his friends were. Indeed, one writer sets them out as some 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 W. A. Watt. The writer adds, and you can draw your own conclusion 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 the 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 he had become the 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 “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 labour leader of the time, and he seems to have been always 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 of policies which stressed the apparent indifference of the Federal government towards the Territory, and its failure to allow the citizens any representations in the Federal parliament. Furthermore his working class support was considerably augmented by the arrival in the Territory of Vestey’s Meatworks.

Vestey’s was a powerful international organisation with pastoral interests particularly in Australia and Argentina. In 1917, it opened the meatworks in Darwin, fully supported by the Commonwealth which 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 Vestey’s 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 Vestey’s. 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. Grrrr!

Nelson was clever enough to manoeuvre Gilruth, with Gilruth’s help, into accusations of being over-friendly with 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 Vestey’s 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 that 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 responsible for this. It was the Federal government that had nationalised the hotels and there were 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 1000 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 may have worsened the situation. Certainly there was potential for violence and 27 special constables had been sworn in and the government, previously warned by Gilruth, had dispatched a warship, HMAS Encounter, which was now in the Harbour. A small group of the Cable Guard were also present but there was no intervention.

It was the comparative peacefulness of the event which has led some commentators to call it no more than a 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 19 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 later, while the Administrator remained effectively imprisoned, was a serious breach of its responsibility to its servant. Recalling Gilruth's surrender, particularly when no effort was ever made to re-instate 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 of 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 by the next most unpopular. It did not add to the wisdom that Carey had to return from Vestey's to take up the post, so he was doomed from the start.

Here I make the point which 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. A record of the conversation was kept by Carey and no-one seems to have queried its accuracy. The general tone was 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, 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 which 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, all done without bloodshed or loss of life, liberty and money. It must be the most successful rebellion in Australia's history.

Of the two rebellions of which we hear, the Rum Rebellion did result in punishment of the nominal leader Johnson who was court-martialled and cashiered; and, although only for a day, Bligh was formally re-instated 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 which 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 which 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 resolved 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 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, Cary, 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 many 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. 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:

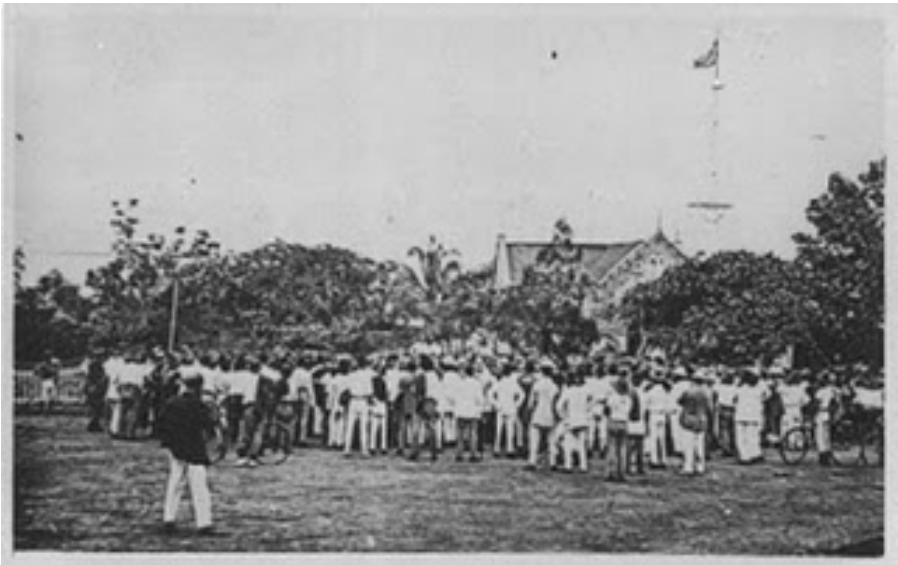
“The question still remains to be answered as to how the affairs of the Empire could be carried on if British officials throughout the world, in such a contingency, behaved in like manner”.

(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 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.



JA GILRUTH IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

Dr Chris Bunn
Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer
Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
GPO Box 858, Canberra, ACT 2601

Introduction

John Anderson Gilruth is a major figure in the history of New Zealand and Australian veterinary science, but his time in Northern Territory as the Administrator between 1912 and 1920 has generally been ignored by the profession possibly because it ended in failure.

On the afternoon of 17 December 1918, stop-work meetings were held in the town and at the meatworks. About 1000 men walked to Government house behind a car carrying an effigy of Gilruth tied to a stake. A deputation presented a motion to Gilruth that stated in part:

“We, the citizens of Darwin here assembled askthat the Administrator address us regarding his administration of the Territory of the last five years. Failing to comply that he be asked if he is willing to leave Darwin by the steamer and remain away until a public commission is granted on his administration. This meeting will guarantee him safe conduct to the steamer....” [1]

Factors relating to Gilruth that led to the rebellion

Gilruth’s personality was a catalyst for the uprising but many other factors, beyond his control, also contributed.

Among scientists of similar background and interests, Gilruth’s blunt dynamic style of leadership was respected and he was able to demonstrate his personal kindness and loyalty that endeared subordinates to him. Among the heterogeneous population of the Northern Territory, he was seen as merely arrogant and insensitive.

His forthrightness was regarded as too blunt for an Administrator of the Northern Territory. Gilruth crushed ruthlessly a major strike in 1913 and he imposed, without consultation, new hours of work for government employees. The men considered this treatment heartless, soulless, and inhumane in the extreme. With a few minor concessions, Gilruth might have won a respected position as an arbitrator. Once he refused to see the Union deputation sending the Government Secretary, with a one-word written answer — ‘No!’

Organised unionism came to the Northern Territory in the first year of Commonwealth control (the government insisted that their tradesmen and employees should be members of a Union). The White Australia policy and anti-Chinese feeling (concern they would lower the working conditions) fuelled support for the Unions. Very soon, the Commonwealth was paying wages 25% above the rates of the southern states. The local meatworks readily yielded to union pressure owing to their dependence upon government railways and wharves, and because of the short duration of the killing season.

Industrial arbitration not only failed to gain industrial peace, but it further imposed a ruinous burden on the Northern Territory. Most workers were single. The cost of living was similar to temperate Australia, but they were granted a family wage and an allowance for climate and isolation. The high labour costs granted in the industrial disputes affected all other industries. In agriculture, people found it more profitable to earn wages than to struggle growing crops.

The erection of the meat-works and the extension of the railways brought an influx of labour from many different nationalities. The Union achieved great importance by influencing all the unskilled labour. Isolation became an important factor and those in control of labour could discipline workers. Unionists created disturbances for very minor reasons. For example, men struck against the long-established practice that coloured crews should land cargo from their own vessels.

The union bosses decided who were to be employed and who were not. The chief unionist and implacable foe of Gilruth was Harold Nelson who didn't rest until the Administrator and his colleagues had left the Territory.

The Royal Commission

When some Darwin citizens forced the departure from Darwin of three of Gilruth's closest colleagues, seven months after Gilruth had left, the government was forced to act. A Royal Commission resulted.

The Commission was asked to investigate:

- the recent upheaval of the administrative authorities;
- any irregularities in Northern Territory administration; and
- examine if any government officers had proprietary interests in certain Northern Territory mines.

Commissioner Ewing found Gilruth guilty of ‘highly improper’ but not ‘corrupt’ conduct. “Dr Gilruth is an able man, and in my opinion within the sphere for which Providence intended him very much above the average. Unfortunately he was called upon to rule a democratic people, a task for which he apparently is unfitted. He had little toleration for any person who disagreed with him...”. Gilruth had failed to make use of his appointed Board of Advice, thus depriving Territorians of their “...slight vestige of democratic government.” He also had allowed unsatisfactory accounting methods to exist in the Aborigines Department ¹.

Obituary Comments

When Gilruth died in 1937, the obituary notices are insightful about his character:

“A man of remarkable personality and great forcefulness”. “Under a rather stern exterior he had a heart that felt for all less fortunate than himself”. A M Patterson “The Press” NZ 10/03/37

“He was a man of strong character, a pungent and powerful speaker an exceptionally clever raconteur”

“...no words can convey the extraordinary vigour and staying power of body, the keen original and fertile mind, the dogged tenacity and resourcefulness of purpose and action and the happy spirit which swept all before it...”(Georgina Sweet AVJ June 1937).

“Gilruth formed strong opinions and occasionally, for he was most eminently human, his opinion was wrong. Then began the battle. No amount of circumstantial evidence, however strong would shake him. One had to produce a clear-cut crucial experiment or observation to convert him...”(Mackerras AVJ June 1937)”

Conclusion

- Gilruth was a great scientist
- For a number of reasons he had an impossible task in developing the Northern Territory during WW1
- He demonstrated tremendous drive and stamina
- He displayed very poor diplomatic and negotiating skills in handling people and situations, but he was not corrupt.

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GILRUTH: MAN AND MYTH

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The career of John Gilruth in the Northern Territory has been examined by numerous authors. FX Alcorta in 1984 wrote in his “Darwin Rebellion 1911-1919” “Although it started as a doctoral thesis it almost ended as a novelI found myself unable to bring objectivity to the story.... The story that follows is therefore subjective”. This paper attempts to shed further light on the strange dichotomy that was the man and the myth that was John Gilruth.

Mrs. Harriet Daly daughter of the first Resident wrote of her experiences at Palmerston (Darwin) almost from the first settlement, and after leaving the Territory she continued the story up to 1884. She records the chaotic conditions and failures that were ingrained in the history of this outlier of Australian civilisation. Residents and senior officers came and went sometimes for shady reasons. Lands were occupied and given up. Mines were developed and worked out. Plantation agriculture was commenced and abandoned. The story was one of continued start and stop. Each beginning brought new human elements into the Territory to interact with the indigenous people.

The South Australian government saw an opportunity to rid them selves of this unruly outpost when the colonies federated. The last days of the SA administration were overseen as Resident and Judge by Charles Dashwood who resigned in 1904 after twelve years. Although he managed to upset most classes of the citizens, he was always able to calm them before catastrophe overwhelmed him.

The Commonwealth entered into its local governance in 1911. The European population of Darwin was less than 400, slightly outnumbered by the Chinese and more than doubled by the other non-whites. Under the rule of the Commonwealth the local population lost their votes for the federal government and the safety valve this presented. They could agitate no vote no taxation.

SJ Mitchell became acting Resident and judge under the Commonwealth. He expected to become permanent Resident and when Gilruth became Resident and the Commonwealth would not guarantee the independence of the Judge he resigned in 1912. He appears to have been popular and probably Gilruth was thought to bear some responsibility for his departure. Returning to Adelaide he had a distinguished career as a senior Magistrate and Commissioner.

Under the aegis of EL Bachelor Minister for the Territory Herbert Basedow polymath, anthropologist and bushman was appointed Protector of Aborigines. To Australia's misfortune and the disappointment of his admiring staff he quarrelled with Mitchell and resigned after 45 days. Returning to Adelaide he had a remarkable career in a range of scientific pursuits.

In 1911 JA Gilruth, foundation Dean of the Melbourne Veterinary School from 1908, was invited to investigate the possibilities for development in the Territory. He was enthusiastic and was invited to become the foundation Administrator in 1912. He had been in Melbourne for less than four years. This early departure quickly followed by the outbreak of WW1 created a situation thought by many to have brought the School to its closure in 1928.

The Director of Mines appointed in 1912 was H I Jenson DSc, University Medallist and a favoured student and collaborator of Edgeworth David. He was a public socialist. His role was the most important of the economic directorates since mining had proved the saviour of the Territory and was to continue to keep the Territory afloat. He quickly fell out with Gilruth who demoted him and then forced him to resign. He subsequently had a distinguished national and international career as a geologist.

Gilruth had thus lost the talents of men who may have made a real contribution to northern development. The next man to cross him was a more dangerous foe since he was not controlled by the administration. HG Nelson was a Queensland engine driver at a time when this was the aristocrat of worker employments. He arrived in the Territory in 1913 as an engine driver and as organiser for the Australian Workers Union.

He moved to Darwin where he became secretary of the Union in 1917. He pursued a program of expansion of the union membership. His stance was that the cost of living and other difficulties required a substantial wage loading, a condition of northern employment well recognised today. He also fought hard for the return of the franchise.

This is not the place to detail all of Gilruth's failures of leadership on the frontier. He seems to have upset every community group with the exception of his close cronies including the judge and government secretary, and the managers of the multinational Vestey's who were building an ill advised abattoir located in Darwin.

Nelson was a gifted speaker. His audience probably included wobblers, blacklisted shearers and wharfies, communards, single taxers, christian socialists, marxists of various persuasions, refugees from failed marriages and alimony, and possibly a Bolshevick or two. Pre Gilruth he appears to have been a typical AWU unionist and post Gilruth he is clearly such. Gilruth's inability to treat his constituents in an even -handed fashion enabled Nelson to marshal all the local forces to oppose him and then to drive him from the Territory. Later his senior supporters were also evicted .A Royal Commission proved inconclusive.

Returning to Melbourne Gilruth was self- employed and apparently insolvent during the 1920's. He became the acting chief of the new Division of Animal Health in CSIR and finally chief aged 62 in 1933. The executive of the CSIR had apparently been seeking a distinguished scientist not necessarily a veterinarian to lead the Division but was "convinced " by the organised veterinary profession that Gilruth was a suitable short -term appointee.

In seeking to understand Gilruth's failure in the Territory I believe we have to examine his life from his childhood. He was the son of a Scottish tenant farmer. His mother was an educated woman who made much of her son. He spent his leisure hours with a shepherd who no doubt showed due deference to the young master. His father wished him to be a lawyer, but after two years he was allowed to enter the veterinary school at Glasgow. He was a distinguished student. On graduation aged twenty two he removed to New Zealand as government veterinary surgeon being sent to the Pasteur Institute aged 26 for post graduate study. Aged 27 he was chief veterinary surgeon (CVO) and government bacteriologist for both animal and human diseases.

This early success apparently led him to impatience with slow development of facilities and when offered the chair in Melbourne in 1908 he accepted it.

In my opinion the Melbourne university behaved shabbily in not simply taking over the Kendall Melbourne College. Several of the staff including William Kendall transferred to the new school. I have been unable to discover whether there was an undercurrent of dissatisfaction amongst the veterinary cadre of Victoria and whether this played a part in Gilruth's decision to remove to the Territory.

Since he had made a tour of inspection of the Territory in 1911 he must have been aware of the nature of the primitive conditions, the sparse and rough and ready population in his principality, the difficulties associated with the alienation of the lands contiguous to Darwin, and the problem of poor communications. It is difficult to believe that his official title of "excellency" which greatly amused the irreverent locals, and the official car would have been sufficient to have tempted him to this family upheaval. His early departure from the infant Melbourne school shows a level of disloyalty. Was he exhibiting the same impatience in Melbourne with the normal restrictions of expansion as had contributed to his departure from New Zealand?

Immediately on arrival in the Territory he began "to throw his weight around" cutting the salaries of the government establishment. He formed a cabal with the senior people around him that continued until the end and resulted in their removal from the Territory.

Apparently ignoring the wealth of information on horticulture and rice culture, the tropical superiority of the buffalo, and the zebu cattle which were in use in Darwin and it's environs, he established experimental stations at Rum Jungle and Mataranka which could only repeat the successful research and extension of the Holtzes and the Chinese market gardeners. There is no evidence that he encouraged the Chinese market and small animal farmers. The final mistake was the building of the meatworks in Darwin rather than on the better pasture lands of the Katherine.

Accustomed to success and appreciation from his childhood years his failures must be traced to his inability to accommodate the shortcomings of the human material with which he had to deal not to those innate problems which even 50 years later made life difficult for Territorians.

Each clash with the inscrutable and resistant human material led inexorably to the next quarrel until finally he withdrew to sulk in the residency with his few sycophants. He finally emerged to crown his human relationships with an extraordinary confrontation about working conditions with the sisterhood of local barmaids. The population of Darwin did him a service when they restored him to an environment suitable to his needs.

Gilruth claimed that he had never applied for a position in his life. This is patently untrue for he made an extended visit to Melbourne (where the Commonwealth Parliament was located) to lobby for reappointment after his first term had expired.

The Executive of CSIR was “forced” to appoint him as the acting and when he was virtually on the point of age retirement, permanent Chief of the Division of Animal Health. The claim however reveals a lack of humility in Gilruth that had been ingrained from his earliest years.

Gilruth died shortly after he retired. He had started to write an autobiography but it was confined to a few pages. In 1943 at the height of wartime travel restrictions the Australian Veterinary Association decided to honour his memory by naming The Gilruth Prize for him. Over the years as more becomes known there is some questioning of the wisdom of this. Certainly in the Territory he is mocked as an incompetent. There is a fruitful field yet unexplored relating to his negative effects on the later working of the Territory in the 1920's and 30's until the development of new interest stimulated by events of the second world war.

In conclusion it is interesting to speculate on the intertwined careers of Kendall and Gilruth. If Graham Mitchell had not convinced Kendall to leave the ship in Melbourne in 1880 rather than travel on to New Zealand, would Gilruth's career in that country have been stillborn? Would Kendall have created in New Zealand those developments which were to distinguish him in Melbourne? But that of course is idle speculation. The portraits of Kendall and Gilruth were painted by leading Australian artists. The contrast in the characters revealed tell their own story.

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**Kendall after Kendall
Ernest Arthur Kendall: his Life and Times**

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