

The Rev. John Dunmore Lang and German immigration into Queensland

Around where I live, just north of Toowoomba in Queensland, you only have to look at street names, or at surnames in the local paper, to realise how prevalent Germans were among the early European settlers here. The same applies on the Darling Downs and in the Lockyer Valley.

I've become interested in one particular German family who settled near where I live in Highfields and established a farm. They were called the Kuhls – originally Kühl with an umlaut, which is why it's considered more correct to pronounce the name *Keel*.

The family gave their name to Kuhls Road, which runs from Cawdor Road in Highfields to Barracks Road in Cabarlah. Near the Cawdor Road end is the beautiful Peacehaven Botanic Park, with its magnificent gum trees, landscaped gardens, sweeping lawns and views to the north-west towards the Bunya Mountains. This land, nearly 5 hectares of it, was originally part of the Kuhl family's farm, and was generously donated to the people of Highfields in 2004 by the late Stan Kuhl.

Work began on the park in 2005, and in early 2006 a community group called the Friends of Peacehaven Botanic Park was set up to assist. The official opening of the park, organised by the Friends, was in September 2006. Sadly, Stan didn't live to see his vision come to fruition. He died in March 2005.

I came to live in Highfields in 2015, and my first step towards integrating myself into the local community was to join the Friends of Peacehaven. I'd discovered that the Friends ran a native plant nursery, and I volunteered to help. Six years later I'm still doing it. I've also embarked on my own project: to put together a book about the park. Hence my interest in German immigration to the area, with a special focus on the Kuhl family.

German immigration to Queensland in the 19th century is more or less synonymous with Lutheran immigration. (Highfields still has two Lutheran churches, the earlier one having been established in the 1870s.) And any investigation of the immigration of Protestants into Queensland leads inevitably to the Rev. John Dunmore Lang.

The Rev. Lang was a fiery Scottish Presbyterian with a great gift for rubbing people in officialdom up the wrong way. It seems this characteristic ran in the family. The *Australian Dictionary of Biography* has this to say about his mother, Mary Dunmore:

She had formidable powers of moral indignation and such capacity for vituperation that in comparison her son's most savage strictures seemed but a mild remonstrance.

The *ADB* sums up the man himself as:

Presbyterian clergyman, politician, educationist, immigration organizer, historian, anthropologist, journalist, gaol-bird and, in his wife's words engraved on his statue in Sydney, 'Patriot and Statesman'.

Lang was educated at the University of Glasgow and became a minister in the Church of Scotland at the age of 21. He was a so-called Evangelical, and took issue with the trend within the church towards 'moderatism' and its system of lay patronage. This was a contributory reason for his decision to emigrate overseas, and his younger brother, who was already in Sydney, assured him that his talents would be appreciated there. The Rev. John Dunmore Lang became Sydney's first Presbyterian minister in 1823.

Almost straight away, Lang clashed with the authorities and with factions within the Presbyterian Church in Australia. This prompted him to publish the first of many polemical works, *Narrative of the Settlement of The Scots Church, Sydney, New South Wales*, and resulted in his first tangle with the legal system. He was sued for libel by James Elder, one of the minor targets in this work. Elder was awarded damages of one farthing.

Many of Lang's battles were connected with his fervent belief in the value of education. He unflinchingly took the moral high ground, regardless of the damage that his pronouncements might inflict. This constantly got him into strife, and he was twice jailed for libel. Nevertheless, his determination to champion the underprivileged earned him considerable public popularity.

He shuttled back and forth between Australia, the UK and Europe many times, often to drum up financial support for his various causes, or to visit his publishers (he was a prolific writer), and on one occasion to persuade his much younger cousin, Wilhelmina Mackie, to marry him. But often the focus of his visits was to promote emigration to Australia.

Here's another quote from the *ADB*:

The upright young minister was always horrified by the licentiousness of the convict colony. Even his agitation for free immigration had a moral purpose, for he hoped the immigrants would behave better than convicts and emancipists and, by reducing colonial wages, lessen the workers' deplorable dissipation.

In the 1830s Lang turned his attention to the Moreton Bay settlement. It was a notoriously brutal penal colony, and his intention was to establish a string of missions along the coast, in order to counter the evil influence of what he described as the 'depraved convict population of the colony' and to 'civilise' the Aborigines.

The mission at Zion Hill, later called Nundah, was established in 1838. Lang had intended to recruit Scottish Presbyterian missionaries to work there, but on a visit to Europe he met a German banker who asked him whether there might be prospects in Australia for missionaries trained at the new Gossner Mission institute in Berlin. Lang responded enthusiastically, and a contingent of German missionaries and artisans, some of them with wives and families, set off from Germany in 1837, arriving at Zion Hill in mid-1838. There were two ordained ministers among them: Wilhelm Schmidt and Christopher Eipper.

The mission wasn't a success. It never had adequate funding, and the local Yaggera people had little interest in being 'civilised' by Europeans or indoctrinated with their alien religion. The Zion Hill Mission closed in 1848. Nevertheless, this was the beginning of German settlement in Queensland.

The next phase occurred in the 1850s. In a land grab that began in the 1840s, a powerful English and Scottish 'squattocracy' had established huge pastoral properties on the Darling Downs. But then came the gold rush, and their workers were tempted away by stories of fortunes to be made on the goldfields in Victoria. Migrants seemed the best answer to the labour shortage, and the squatters turned to immigration agents to recruit rural workers from overseas – including Germany. Many shepherd migrants sailed from Hamburg and arrived on the Darling Downs under contract between 1852 and 1855. These workers earned the approval of the Rev. Lang, who found them to be 'reliable, frugal and sober workers ... with strict moral habits and strong religious faith'.

When Lang was elected to the NSW Legislative Council in 1854 by the Moreton Bay District, one of his campaigns was to press for the establishment of a separate colony. Separation finally occurred in 1859, and one of the first actions of the new Queensland Government was to appoint a select committee to 'consider and report on the best means of promoting immigration to the colony of Queensland'. This resulted in a policy of assisted and land-order immigration, which included making smaller blocks of land available for selection – so-called 'closer settlement'.

In the subsequent years Lang pushed hard to bring in German settlers under this policy. He saw them as a potential Protestant yeoman class, and highly desirable in counterbalance to 'the threatened invasion of Roman Catholic paupers from Ireland'. To Lang, Catholicism was pure superstition and possibly the work of the Devil.

Thousands of Germans migrated to Queensland in the 1860s and '70s, with a large proportion of them selecting land on the Darling Downs and in the Toowoomba and Lockyer Valley regions where there was an existing German population.

Stan Kuhl's grandparents arrived from Germany in 1873 on the ship *Friedeburg* and made their way westwards to Highfields, or Koojarewon as it was known then – meaning 'top of the range'. There, the Kühls selected the land that is now Peacehaven.

Meanwhile Lang was engaged in his final battles with authority. He died of a stroke in 1878, leaving a mixed legacy. I'll give the final word to the *ADB*:

His achievements in promoting education and immigration bear comparison with those of any of his contemporaries, but would have been much greater had his intense inner drive not been inextricably compounded with an irresistible impulse to hurt those who showed opposition or were even merely lukewarm towards his designs.

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Barbara McKenzie
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