

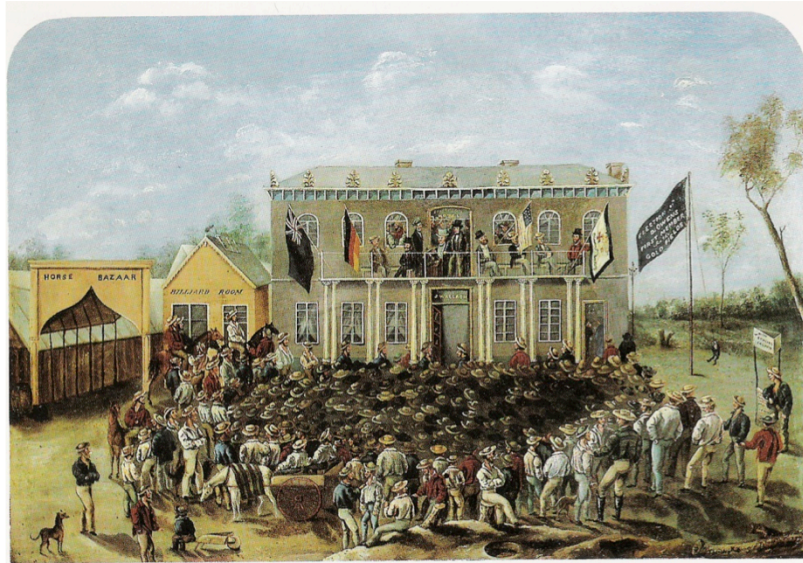


**“Heimat im Gepäck”: Luggage and Baggage –
from Victorian Germans to German Victorians**

Leo Kretzenbacher

If you ask young Melburnians, all things German are the epitome of hip. These days, you can't walk through the more happening suburbs of Berlin without constantly bumping into the Fitzroy and East Brunswick crowd, and vice versa, the young person's guide to Melbourne reads more and more like a German menu. Not only do we have a Berlin Bar in Chinatown, but for eleven years Melbourne had a very hip bar called “Der Raum” – which has now relocated to Munich of all places, I'm informed, where the name was changed, because a German name doesn't sound quite as fascinating in Germany. However, we still have a pizzeria catering to generation Y in Melbourne which is apparently doing a roaring trade under the name of “Pizza meine Liebe” and until recently, there was also a lovely laneway restaurant that had knighted its own name as “Von Haus”.

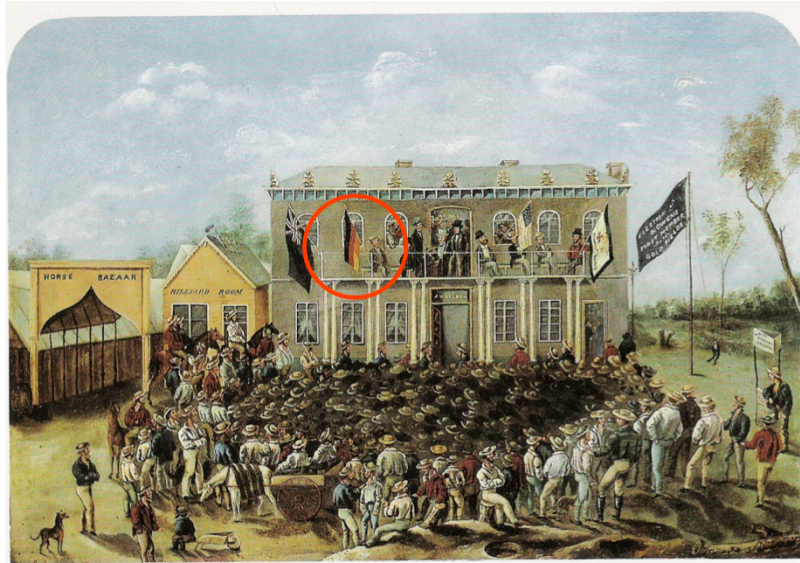
And yet, although German ancestry, according to the last census, is still among the top ten of ethnic and national ancestries in Australia, German Australians and their descendants are much less visible than other ethnic groups in Australia. We will hear Sabine Nielsen talk about the exhibition later. I myself would like to remind us of the long history of German migration to Australia – and more specifically to Victoria. With the help of a few pictures, I'd like to sketch what we could call the pre-history of the personal migration histories from the 1930s to the 1990s that are told in such lively voices by their protagonists themselves in Sabine's book and shown on Eva-Marias portraits.



The First Parliamentary Election, Bendigo, 1855, by Theodore King, cat. no. 28

German migration to Victoria started before Victoria was a colony of its own. The first picture I'd like to show you is a little gem I found in a catalogue of the Bendigo Art Gallery.

It shows the parliamentary election tally of 1855 on the Bendigo Goldfields. And if we look closely, we find that between an early Australian flag to the left and the Stars and Stripes of the United States on the right, the German flag that is flying from the balcony there.



The First Parliamentary Election, Bendigo, 1855, by Theodore King, cat. no. 28

Next to the sizable group of American diggers on the Australian goldfields, the Germans apparently had a presence there. And the fact that this flag, identical to the flag of today's Federal Republic of Germany, was the flag of the German Federation from 1848 to 1866, also says two more things. Firstly, the colours black, red and gold as German national colours were first introduced by the Frankfurt parliament of 1848/1849, the short-lived first attempt at a unified modern state and a parliamentary democracy in Germany. When this democracy was crushed by the combined efforts of the dozens of monarchies and principalities that constituted the German Federation, many of its protagonists had to flee – and some of those political refugees could be found on the Victorian Goldfields. Other German gold diggers, as their fellows from other countries, came purely for the adventure, of course. So we have the two extremes of the groups of 20th century German migrants to Australia represented in Sabine's book – refugees and adventurers – already represented in the 19th century.

The second thing that the flag of the German Federation reminds us of is that the boundaries of that political entity were roughly equivalent with those of the Holy Roman Empire and included not only Austria but also areas with large non-German speaking populations such as Bohemia and Silesia. And many 19th century migrants to Australia who were categorized as "Germans" were German-speaking Austrians or even people for whom German was their



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Heimat im Gepäck



Ferdinand von
Müller (1825-96)



Georg von
Neumayer
(1826-1909)



Eugen von
Guérard
(1811-1901)



Ludwig Becker
(1806-1861)

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In the second half of the 19th century, the perception of Germans in Victoria by the wider colonial community depended very much on which German immigrants one was talking about. On the one hand, Marvellous Melbourne had its very own German-speaking academic and artistic elite. I'll just mention four names here: the scientists Ferdinand von Müller (1825-96) the first Government Botanist of Victoria and founder of Melbourne's Royal Botanic Gardens, and Georg von Neumayer (1826-1909) who founded the Melbourne Observatory in Flagstaff Gardens, the painter Eugen von Guérard (1811-1901), probably the best landscape painter the Southern Hemisphere had in the 19th century, and Ludwig Becker (1806-1861), working in both fields of academia and art as an artist and naturalist.

On the other hand, the vast majority of German migrants, to rural areas such as Western Victoria or the Wimmera as well as to regional cities and to Melbourne, minded their own business, mostly successfully but rather inconspicuously to the wider Victorian community into which they blended quickly, so much so that you can almost grasp the frustration of a researcher such as Volkhard Wehner who wrote about the German-speaking community of Melbourne in the middle of the 19th century and had to deal with the fact that apart from records of a few clubs and mostly Lutheran congregations, this community left few traces. Wehner says "their natural tendency was to blend in, even to merge" (*Heimat Melbourne : a history of the German-speaking*



"Fete given by the Melbourne Liedertafel, on the Banks of the Yarra"
Engraving by S. Calvert, *Illustrated Australian News*, 1872

One successful merger of German heritage and colonial Victorian culture were the performances and festivities of the German "Liedertafeln", enjoyed by the wider Victorian community far beyond the German speakers. This engraving from the "Illustrated Australian News for Home Readers" from 1872 shows such a lavish affair.

Maybe it was exactly because German-speaking migrants tended to blend in very quickly with the wider Victorian society, the colony held them generally in high esteem. The peak of this high regard of Victorian Victoria – and I'm speaking both of the colony and the epoch – was to be seen during the celebrations of Federation in 1901.



Of all the festive arches that ornamented the city of Melbourne for that occasion, there were only two dedicated to (and by) ethnic communities of immigrants: the Chinese arch and the German arch:

“Peace and Goodwill to United Australia” reads the inscription on top. And “The German Citizens hail the Commonwealth” it says above the two side arches.

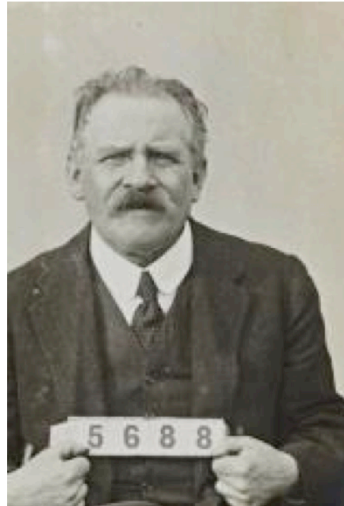
However, this somewhat triumphant German arch marks not only a high point of the German Victorians but also a turning point. 1901, the year of federation, also is the year in which Queen Victoria died and the middle of the second Boer War when German-Australian relations started to turn sour after Kaiser Wilhelm had publicly taken sides with the Boers. And the flags on top of the German Arch are no longer the black, red and gold of the German Federation, but the black, white and red of the Prussian-German Empire of 1871.



The German-speaking citizens of Australia now allowed themselves to be identified with this empire, as can be seen from the other side of the German Arch.

While “Peace and Goodwill” greeted from the northern side of the arch, the south face of it shows a gigantic painting of the Prussian military medal of the Iron Cross, immediately reminding everyone that this new Germany was a strong empire – and one that had come to play in the same league as the British Empire.

A few years later, the first World War brought a low point in German-Australian relations and a very bad time for many German Australians, when everything German had such a bad reputation throughout the British Empire that even the Royal Family had to rebrand their family name.

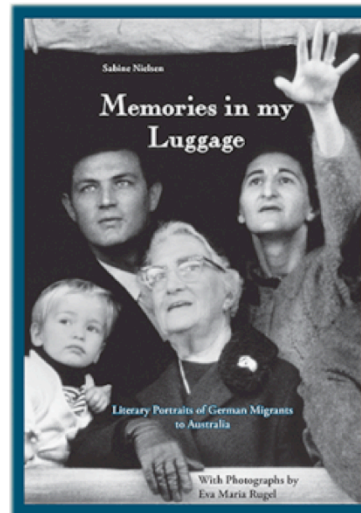


Eduard Scharf, internee

As one example, here is the internee photograph of Eduard Scharf, a renowned pianist and lecturer at the Melbourne Conservatorium who had lived in Australia since 1897, and was married to an Australian citizen. In 1915, he was being sacked from his job for being German, and he had to report to police on a weekly basis. In July 1918 he was interned as a prisoner of war until May 1919 when he was deported.

The same war that defined so much of Australia's identity was devastating for German Australians. Not only were almost 7000 Germans interned during the war, of whom 4500 had been Australian residents before the war began, and after the war around 700 German citizens were deported and more than 4600 volunteered for repatriation in Germany. Immigration from Germany was banned from 1914 to 1925 and was reduced to a trickle until after the Second World War. In the census of 1901, the Germany-born population of Australia was more than 38.000. In 1947, this number had gone down to just over 14.500.

The first refugees from Hitler's Germany came to Australia in the 1930s, and they are represented by personal life stories in the book that accompanies the exhibition.



The hard life of the refugees, the internment of German and Austrian Australians during the Second World War, the conditions under which German migrants after the war helped build up this country, the wide variety of reasons for migrating to Australia besides fleeing persecution or economic hardship, from following an Australian partner to their homeland to following a religious calling or even a pure sense of adventure, all this is narrated in Sabine's book "Ein bisschen Heimat im Gepäck", and some of it might be visible in Eva-Maria's portraits of the narrators in the book.

At the end of the book, Sabine Nielsen tells her own fascinating migration story. In all the chapters before, Sabine lets the protagonists themselves tell their stories. After reading the book, I felt great respect for Sabine's and Eva's skills, but even greater respect for each and every one of the persons portrayed in the book and in the photographs. There is a lot of hardship in many of the life stories, but also a lot of hilarious moments and sheer joy. Everyone who has ever migrated and made the surprising experience that elements and characteristics of one's culture of origin, which had seemed completely irrelevant to oneself before migration, all of a sudden assert themselves as personality traits in the new culture, will smilingly recognize such little things here and there – with Sabine it is the effort of a festive *Kaffee und Kuchen* on a Sunday afternoon, with me it's the compulsion to take off my street shoes whenever I enter someone's home that makes me realise how