

INTRODUCTION

The Royal Society of Victoria and the Australian Association of von Humboldt Fellows were delighted to host the joint symposium *Celebration of German Contributions to Australian Science and Victorian Scientific Institutions – Past and Present*. The symposium was held at the Royal Society of Victoria in Melbourne on 1–3 October 2014.

German scientists made significant contributions to the development of science in Victoria and were prominent in the establishment of the Royal Society of Victoria. They also participated in founding and/or developing the Royal Botanic Gardens, the National Herbarium, Museum Victoria, the Flagstaff Observatory for Geophysics, Magnetism and Nautical Science, the Pharmacy Board of Victoria and the Victorian College of Pharmacy, most of which remain highly regarded and significant scientific institutions.

The symposium presented an historical outline of the contributions by German scientists and illustrators to such Victorian institutions and to their fields of science. It also explored the increasingly diverse and international nature of science over the past 160 years. To this end it examined the broad fields of various pioneering scientists and the transition within their fields of research to the present day, demonstrating how complex modern science has become and how this complexity enhances and encourages international collaborations.

The symposium program encompassed an opening public lecture and panel discussion, nine plenary lectures and some thirty-five contributed papers arranged in two parallel sessions. The three days of scholarship and fellowship were judged by participants to be very worthwhile, exemplifying both the commitment of the Royal Society of Victoria to nurturing scholarship and of the Australian Association of von Humboldt Fellows to fostering German–Australian research partnerships.

In celebrating past and present German contributions to Australian science, the symposium was also a catalyst for furthering Australian–German scientific collaborations. This aspect was reflected in the presence of Mr Joseph Reichhardt, Deputy Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany, at the opening of the symposium, and the major Humboldt Kolleg grant from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation in Bonn, which included

sponsorship of four German scientists to participate in the symposium. We acknowledge, with gratitude, this grant and also the University of Melbourne's subsidy for early career researchers attending the symposium. Both the Australian Association of von Humboldt Fellows and the Royal Society of Victoria contributed major in-kind support for the symposium and, in particular, we express our appreciation of the key roles that Associate Professor Trevor Finlayson of the Australian Association of von Humboldt Fellows and Professor Lynne Selwood of the Royal Society of Victoria played in the organisation of the symposium.

The State Government of Victoria and the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany jointly sponsored a reception to conclude the symposium and to mark the 2014 Day of German Unity – the occasion was hosted by The Honorable Matthew Guy, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Planning, and Mr Joseph Reichhardt, Deputy Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany, respectively. It was a festive occasion in keeping with our theme of celebrating Australian–German partnerships and a fitting finale for the symposium.

In conclusion, we are pleased that this special peer-reviewed issue of the *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria* makes available to a wider audience many of the symposium's papers. We trust that they will convey to readers the significance of past and present German contributions to Australian science and Victorian scientific institutions and the consequent resolve on the part of the Royal Society of Victoria and the Australian Association of von Humboldt Fellows to celebrate these through the 2014 symposium. As our symposium demonstrated, present partnerships in research have a rich heritage in those talented and dedicated nineteenth century Germans who were part of the early Royal Society of Victoria.

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