

VON NEUMAYER'S PLACE IN HISTORY A CENTURY ON: CLOSING REMARKS AT THE ANNIVERSARY SYMPOSIUM

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THE Georg von Neumayer Anniversary Symposium held at the Royal Society of Victoria Hall in Melbourne on 27–30 May 2009 brought together a wide range of perspectives on the life, times and scientific achievements of one of the most remarkable figures of 19th Century Australian, German and polar science.

For those participants who had already researched and written extensively about von Neumayer's achievements in the past, the Symposium served to reinforce, broaden and contextualise their earlier understanding of his place in the history of science. For those who had not met him before or for whom 'Neumayer' was little more than a name on a plaque or a portrait in a gallery of Australia's colonial past, Professor Neumayer emerged from the Symposium as one of the most inspiring and endearing figures of early Australian science, a father figure of German meteorology and oceanography and the pre-eminent protagonist of polar research as key to understanding the working of the natural systems of the planet.

The presentations at the Symposium provided many fascinating insights into von Neumayer the person and his life-long commitment to science. It is impossible to do justice to them in a short summary but it may help to capture, for the record, some sense of the inspiration and exhilaration of the Symposium if I juxtapose a few of the more resonant and enduring word pictures that emerged from the individual presentations. From the two days of talks and discussions, we learned that Georg von Neumayer:

- had the privilege of growing up (in Europe) in an environment of unusual intellectual freedom (Krause);
- was well-educated, intelligent, well-liked and decisive (Thiede); and charming, politically astute,

hard-working and scientifically more than competent (Home);

- had, from an early age, a deep passion for the sea and for sea-faring life (Machoczek);
- tried, without success, to join the Prussian, the Dutch and the American Navy (Krause);
- first sailed to Australia in 1852, at age 26, as an ordinary seaman and spent time as a digger on the Bendigo gold fields (Home, Krause); and returned to Germany in 1854;
- from 1854 on, was only interested in nautical physics, oceanography, meteorology and geomagnetism (Krause);
- was a disciple of (Alexander von) Humboldt and (Matthew Fontaine) Maury (Home); took inspiration from Maury's work in the 1850's particularly in respect of Southern Ocean observations (Smith); and was the first to apply emerging approaches to southern hemisphere oceanography (Quilty);
- returned to Australia in 1857 with proposals for an ambitious and far-reaching expression of Humboltian Science (Gillespie); and despite initial opposition, had soon won support for, and established, a major geophysical observatory on Melbourne's Flagstaff Hill (Home);
- brought to Australia new standards of work in physical science, an insistence on meticulous, precise observation that constituted a veritable sea change from what had gone before (Home);
- laid the foundation for the long-term climate record for Melbourne (Williams);
- supervised and personally observed measurements of magnetic declination, inclination and intensity at the Flagstaff Hill and the new Melbourne Ob-

- servatories; and travelled about 10 000 km, mostly on horseback, on his magnetic survey of Victoria (Morrison);
- by the time he left Victoria, was universally looked up to as one of the foremost members of the local scientific community (Home);
- served for 27 years as (founding) director of the Deutsche Seewarte in Hamburg compiling sailing directions for the worlds oceans (Machoczek);
- paid very much attention to the publication of all meteorological data measured, which soon became an example for the publication of data from other countries (Lüdecke);
- was probably the most significant figure in establishing maritime services and ocean research in Germany (Thiede);
- introduced synoptic meteorology in Germany; popularised weather reports and forecasts; founded the German Meteorological Society; and wrote the first paper published in the German meteorological journal *Meteorologische Zeitschrift* (Lüdecke);
- laid the foundations for the future development of the German National Meteorological Service as a public institution (Kusch);
- emphasised that the most pressing questions of geophysics could be solved only by intensive polar research (Krause);
- led the organisation of the first International Polar Year (1882–83) and inspired more than a century of Arctic and Antarctic research culminating in the (fourth) International Polar Year of 2007–08 (Allison);
- was always aware that the issues and problems to be solved were beyond the scope of single national institutions, and that a joint effort and cooperation between different institutions and countries was the approach to be taken (Machoczek);
- established the tradition of scientific excellence in Australian meteorology and inspired the spirit of friendly cooperation between nations in applying meteorology and its sister sciences for the common good (Zillman);

- was a major figure in the history of Australian and Antarctic science (Quilty);
- made a remarkable contribution to science in his adopted home (Home); and
- undoubtedly is one of the most respected and distinguished scientists of his time (Kusch).

The Symposium participants felt privileged to have heard from so many distinguished speakers and to have seen so many historic photos, drawings and other iconic images and to have joined in the historic phone hook-up to Neumayer Station in Antarctica.

The members of the Symposium Committee are especially grateful to our German colleagues (Wolfgang Kusch, Cornelia Lüdecke, Reinhard Krause and Jörn Thiede) for travelling to Australia for the Melbourne Symposium following earlier Neumayer Centenary celebrations in Germany and for the powerful symbolism of their presence, and that of the German Consul-General, Dr Anne-Marie Schleich, and the Society Patron, the Governor of Victoria, Professor David de Kretser AC, at the opening of the Symposium. It was an occasion for shared pride in the extraordinary German contribution to the origins of Australian science and shared affection for the memory of one of the most admired and respected figures of international 19th century science.

The Committee wishes to thank the Director of Meteorology, Dr Greg Ayers, and other Symposium Sponsors and all the organisations and individuals who provided historic materials and information. We were delighted that the Chief Executive Officer of Geoscience Australia, Dr Neil Williams PSM, agreed to provide the dinner address. The Symposium especially benefited from the extensive knowledge of von Neumayer's life and times by Committee member Professor Rod Home and; most of all, from the thorough, patient and detailed work of David Dodd in bringing the Symposium concept to an exciting reality and then taking on the formidable task of assembling the papers and images into a permanent record through publication in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria*.