

The Life and Times of Dr Hermann Beckler (1828-1914)

An Australian – Bavarian Odyssey

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Statement of Authorship

Except where explicit reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma. No other person's work has been relied upon or used without due acknowledgement in the main text and bibliography of the thesis.


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Abstract

The principal aim of this research thesis has been to reconstruct the life and times of Dr Hermann Beckler (1828-1914), a Bavarian-born scientist and adventurer who spent six years in Australia between 1856 and 1862.

This study constitutes the first authoritative analysis of Beckler's life. It focuses on the various turning points that influenced his odyssey-like journey from Bavaria to Australia and back again, as well as his travels within Australia, his interest in the natural environment and the botany of Australia, and his empathy towards the Indigenous people.

Beckler was a product of the Age of Romanticism. He was an enigmatic and contemplative person, yet possessed a degree of toughness and resilience to overcome what appeared to be initially a self-imposed exile, replete with self-recriminations, as he tried to establish himself, firstly as a medical doctor and then as a pharmacist in the pioneering Moreton Bay region of colonial New South Wales. His interests in the natural sciences provided a solution to the problem of employment, and his botanical collecting skills ultimately gained him a position with Dr Ferdinand Mueller of the Melbourne Botanic Gardens. He worked as a botanical plant collector in northern New South Wales before his medical qualifications and botanical saw him appointed as medical doctor and botanist to the Victorian Exploring Expedition 1860-1861 led by Robert O'Hara Burke and William John Wills.

Beckler recognized this appointment as an opportunity to explore the hitherto unknown parts of the interior of Australia and while he did his best to fulfill his role, he was frustrated by the mismanagement of the whole expedition by Burke's erratic leadership and by the ineptitude of the Royal Society of Victoria's Exploration Committee. He remains one of Australia's and Germany's forgotten explorer botanists. This thesis aims to bring to life Beckler's contribution to this important episode in Australian colonial history.

Acknowledgements

The researcher wishes to acknowledge the support and guidance offered by his Principal Supervisor, Professor Ian Clark and his Associate Supervisor, Associate Professor Fred Cahir. The President of the Burke and Wills Society, Mr Dave Phoenix, provided excellent historical advice, as did members of the Society during trips to the Australian outback, in the course of which the researcher followed the Burke and Wills Track and other locations of research interest. Special thanks are due to Mrs Renate Mattiske who provided valuable help with the difficult translations of some of the Beckler German documents.

In Bavaria, the researcher wishes to thank especially Herr. Stefan Lenz, Burgermeister of Höchstädt Town Council for permission to access the Beckler Collection. Special thanks are due to the Town Hall Archivists, Herr. Leo Thomas and Frau Michaela Thomas for their keen interest, support and access to the Beckler Archival collection of letters and illustrations during the researcher's visits, as well as the special research trips to Bad Hindelang and Fischen.

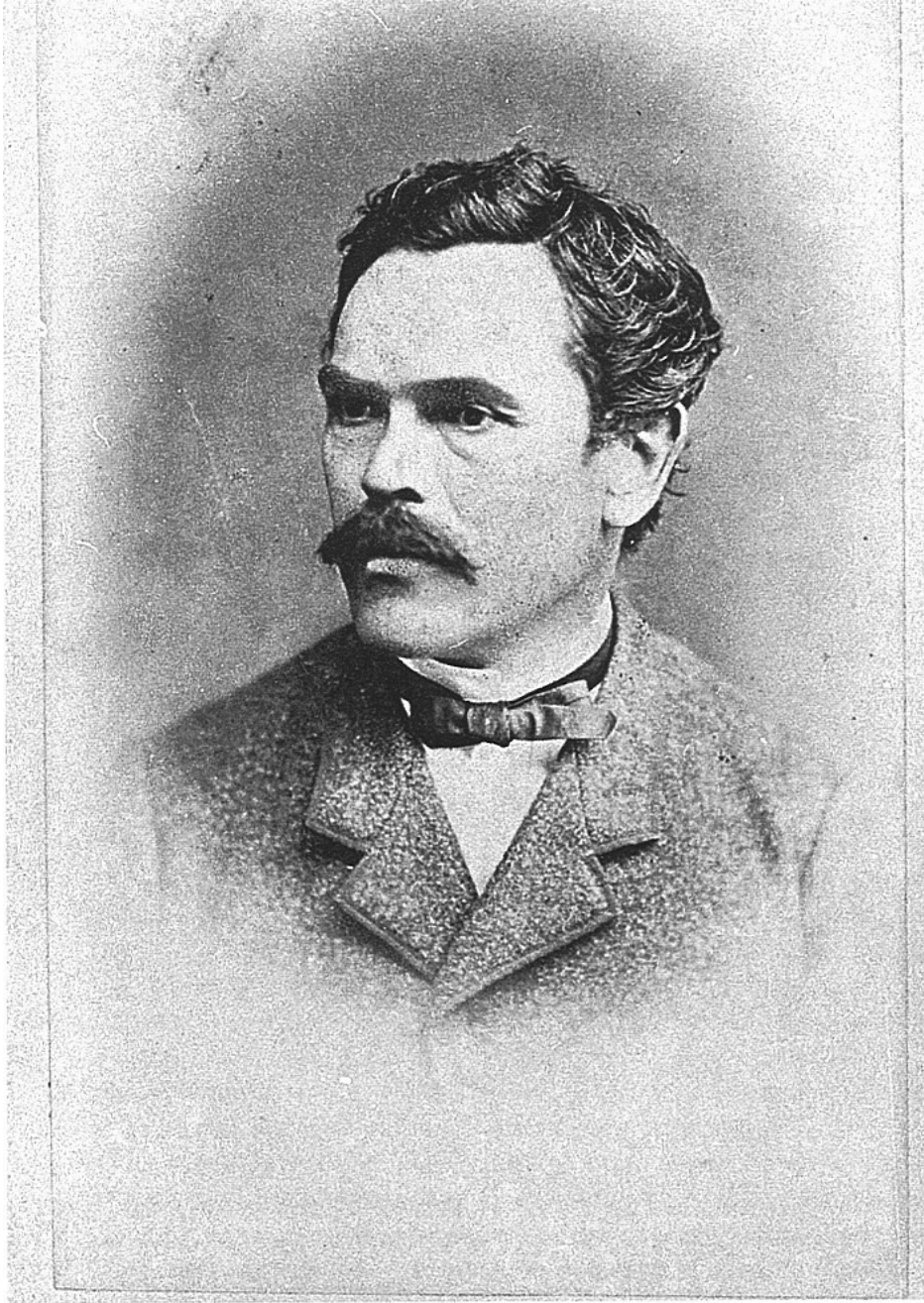
Mention must also be made of the staff of the Bavaria State library, Munich; the Augsburg City Archives, the Bavaria State Archives and the Regensburg Botanical Society for their interest and ready responses to my research queries.

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Dr Hermann Beckler

Figure 1. Carte-de-Visite of Dr Hermann Beckler - per courtesy of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne. From the Mueller Album Collection of Carte-de-Visite's. Portrait taken by E. Biegner and Co., formerly of Guben, then Berlin (stamped on back M. Biegner, Photograph)

NB. Portrait taken in Berlin either in 1862/63 and not 1861 as commonly dated.

Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis is the first comprehensive study of the life and times of Dr Hermann Beckler. Born in Höchstädt un der Donau, Bavaria in 1828, Beckler studied medicine at Ludwig-Maximilians II University in Munich, graduating in June 1855. He left Bavaria in September that year bound for Australia where he spent six years before returning to Bavaria in mid-1862. Following his return home, he worked for thirty-six years as a country doctor, first in Vorderburg, then in Bad Hindelang and finally in Fischen, all towns in the Bavarian Allgäu, before his death in December 1914.

Beckler's six-year odyssey in Australia witnessed him working firstly as a doctor and then as a pharmacist among the German communities of the Moreton Bay District of what was then New South Wales, before taking up botanical collecting in the mid-north coastal region of New South Wales for Dr Mueller of the Melbourne Botanic Gardens. Later he was appointed medical doctor and botanist to the ill-fated Victorian Exploring Expedition 1860-61 (otherwise known as the Burke and Wills Expedition), established by the Royal Society of Victoria. He left Melbourne in January 1862, returning home to take up life as a country doctor in the southern part of Bavaria, where remained until his death on 10 December 1914 in Fischen in the Bavarian Allgäu.

Beckler faded from both the Australian and German scenes into relative obscurity following his return home. However, his experiences in Australia would eventually form part of a series of articles that he wrote for German readers during the years 1863 to 1879. His major work, '*Burke Expedition: Eine Reise nach Zentral-Australien*', (Burke's expedition: A Journey to Central Australia), would remain unpublished until discovered in 1954, translated into readable modern German in 1976 and finally published as an English translation as '*A Journey to Cooper's Creek*'¹ in 1993.

¹ Jeffries S. & Kertesz.M, *Hermann Beckler, A Journey to Cooper's Creek*, being translation of Hermann Beckler's unpublished manuscript '*Burkes Expedition: A Journey to Central Australia*', edited with an introduction by Stephen Jeffries. Carlton, Vic. MUP-Miegunyah Press in association with the SLV, xlv, 205 p.,[4] p. of plates: ill. (some col.), maps, 1993.

Review of Literature

A researcher examining a person's life journey of eighty-six years, some 186 years after his birth and 100 years after his death, is faced with a particularly challenging task. A task not made any easier by the fact that, in this case, the life's journey embraced the Old and New Worlds, from an existing Old World culture in German Bavaria undergoing tumultuous change to a new Australian colonial society and culture developing in the wake of European colonization in 1788.

This research project has been based in large part, on an analysis of Beckler's *Letters to his Brother Karl*², a collection of thirty-nine personal and at times, voluminous letters totaling 442 pages, written by Beckler during his six year Australian odyssey, from 15 September 1855, just prior to his departure from Germany (Hamburg), to the last written in Melbourne on 25 December 1861. The '*Letters*', document all of his entire Australian sojourn, which ended when he left Melbourne on 20 January 1862, however, they also provide insights to his formative years prior to his journey. Written essentially as private communications to Karl, Beckler's younger brother and confidante, they contain personal insights, musings, even fantasies and contradictions. Struggling to come to terms with various situations experienced throughout his sojourn, Beckler poured out his inner thoughts and moods. Beckler's '*Schiffstagebuch*' (ship's logbook)³, recorded during his seventeen-week journey to Australia, has also been examined. Remarkably, the original '*Letters*' and '*Schiffsreisetagebuch*' have survived and together with the original manuscript of Beckler's major work (*Burke's Expedition: A Journey to Central Australia*) and other Beckler material, are held today in the Town Hall Archives in Beckler's birthplace, Höchstädt un der Donau.

Beckler's '*Letters*' were written in German in a flowing cursive style; written on both sides of the paper (crosshatch style) and interspersed with drawings, a nightmare for the

² Beckler, Hermann; *Letters to Brother Karl*. A collection of 39 letters written by Beckler from September during his journey to and within Australia from 15 September 1855 to 25 December 1861, totalling 442 pages with illustrations. Actual letters and some illustrations are part of a translation in German by Dr Renner, a Munich historian, for the State Library of Victoria in 1976 and held today in the Manuscripts Collection of the Library.

³ Beckler, *Schiffsreisetagebuch* (Ship's Log Book), Travel from Hamburg to Moreton Bay 1855-56, pp.47.

German translator [Dr Renner] engaged to transcribe these documents into readable Modern German.

An edited version of Beckler's '*Letters*' was published in German by Professor Johannes Voigt in 2000⁴, however, the researcher has preferred, because of the extensive editing, to use his own translation of the original Renner translated version of the complete '*Letters*', as well as the '*Schiffsreisetagebuch*'.

Other supporting primary source material have been used, mainly sourced in Germany, adding yet another major research task when attempting to unravel Beckler's life and times. Most of these works were sourced from articles written in Old German, or from modern German translations (in the case of Beckler's '*Letters*' and '*Schiffsreisetagebuch*'). This material includes articles written by Beckler for popular German magazines of the time, or read before the prestigious Berlin Medical Society after his return. These were all published in the old German Black letter (fraktur font).

The researcher has extensively translated into English all German articles and materials used in this thesis.

In 1954, Josef Heider, a Bavarian author and historian, discovered the Beckler material held by the widow of Beckler's grandnephew, Frau Sophie Beckler, and used this material to publish his article, '*Hermann Beckler*'⁵. Subsequently, a Munich historian, Dr Michael Renner, in 1975 examined the Beckler material, including Beckler's unpublished manuscript, '*Burke's Expedition: A Journey to Central Australia*'. Renner alerted the Australian Embassy in Bonn to the existence of this valuable material and the State Library of Victoria engaged him to undertake the painstaking work of transcribing these manuscripts (*Letters*, ship's log book and the unpublished manuscript) into modern German, which today forms important primary resource material available for German and Australian research scholars. Beckler's Humboldtian discipline of observation, which manifested itself in his meticulous recording of all that he saw around him, has ensured that these manuscripts form an important part of Beckler's comprehensive legacy of detailed reports, drawings and collected plants specimens throughout his Australian journey, particularly as an officer of the Victorian Exploring Expedition.

⁴ Voigt, Johannes H. *Hermann Beckler: Entdeckungen in Australien. Briefe und Aufzeichnungen eines Deutschen 1855-1862* 2000. (Discoveries in Australia. Letters and Papers of Germans 1855-1862), pp 403; Thorbecke, Stuttgart. (In German).

⁵ Heider, J. *Hermann Beckler*, pp 419-444.

Since the collapse of the expedition in 1861 and the handing down of the findings of the Committee of Inquiry in January 1862, researchers, writers, novelists have tended to concentrate on three central aspects of the expedition. Notably, the exploits of the two main figures, Robert O'Hara Burke and William John Wills; the saga at the Dig Tree site where the returning Gulf party arrived late in the evening to discover that the Depot party had left earlier that morning and the rescue of John King, the only survivor of the Gulf party.

Fortunately, the 1993 English translation of Beckler's seminal work, '*Burke Expedition: Reise nach Zentral-Australien*', ('*Burke's Expedition: Journey to Central Australia*'), translated by Stephen Jeffries and Michael Kertesz, and retitled and published as '*A Journey to Coopers Creek*'⁶, has been a valuable primary source covering Beckler's participation in the ill-fated Burke and Wills expedition. However, this manuscript only really documents twelve months of Beckler's six-year odyssey in Australia.

Another important source has been the National Library of Australia's Digitised Newspapers (TROVE), which has been used extensively to trace reports of Beckler's movements in the daily newspapers during his Australian sojourn. This has been a valuable resource, despite the confusion by early journalists mis-spelling Beckler's name, and/or confusing him with his expedition colleague, Ludwig Becker.⁷

In a survey of Burke and Wills literature, historian Dave Phoenix⁸, has noted that of the ninety or so reports, manuscripts, books, novels, articles, travelogues and even films, published about the expedition over the past 150 years, little can be regarded as authoritative research material, with most being simply a monotonous rendition of variations on the same old expedition themes. The exploits of the remaining members, (Officers, Ludwig Becker, Hermann Beckler, George Landells, William Wright and assistant, William Brahe), were largely treated in a superficial manner and only generally referenced and briefly analysed, to give some colour and enhancement to the role and performance of the two main characters, Robert O'Hara Burke and William John Wills, as well as other Gulf party members, Charles Gray and the rescued John King. Much uninformed discussion and debate was made about the resignations of Landells and Beckler. With the benefit of quality research discussed in Chapter 5, it will be shown in

⁶ Jeffries S, et.al., *Hermann Beckler, A Journey to Cooper's Creek*.

⁷ This irritating defaulting spelling experience still occurs today on many web browsers.

⁸ Phoenix, Dave, *Burke and Wills Reading List*; Reading list for Members of the Burke and Wills Historical Society. 2013.

Beckler's case, that his resignation (subsequently withdrawn) was a direct outcome of Burke's mismanagement and misguided resentment towards the scientific members of the expedition.

While the contributions made by the two German scientists attached to the expedition, Dr Hermann Beckler as medical doctor and botanist, and his colleague Dr Ludwig Becker as artist and naturalist, have been largely ignored by historians, there have been some notable exceptions. Coinciding with the 100th anniversary of the expedition, the publication of Dr Jim Willis's *The Botany of the Victorian Exploring Expedition* in 1962⁹ at last highlighted the significance of Beckler's legacy of botanical collecting. The role and exploits Ludwig Becker were further explored by Marjorie Tipping in '*Ludwig Becker: Artist & Naturalist*', published in 1979¹⁰, and in Tim Bonyhady's, '*Burke and Wills: From Melbourne to Myth*', published in 1992¹¹. Bonyhady, in his preface, describes the expedition as a 'German affair', noting the involvement of Dr Ferdinand Mueller, Burke (who spoke fluent German), Ludwig Becker, Hermann Beckler and Georg Neumayer, as well as William Brahe. According to Bonyhady, 'when things went wrong, the Germans were blamed.'¹²

With these exceptions, academic interest and recognition of Beckler's contribution was slow to evolve. Work carried out by a German researcher, Dr Johannes Voigt, at The Australian National University in the 1980s, resulted in a series of articles covering aspects of Beckler's Australian journey. Among these, Voigt's chapter, 'The Australian Experience of a German Doctor: Hermann Beckler's Letters and Writings on the Fifth Continent'¹³ in *Stories of Australian Migration* makes many important observations, yet its value is somewhat dampened by the editor, John Hardy's comments in the introduction to the volume where Hardy wrote:

⁹ Willis, J. H. *The botany of the Victoria Exploring Expedition (September 1860-June 1861):and of relief contingents from Victoria (July 1861-November.1862)*. R. S. of Victoria. 1962.

¹⁰ Tipping, M. Ed., *LUDWIG BECKER Artist & Naturalist with the Burke & Wills Expedition*, MUP.pp.224,1979

¹¹ Bonyhady, Tim., *BURKE & WILLS From Melbourne to Myth*, David Ell Press, Balmain, pp. 388, 1991.

¹² Bonyhady, Tim., *BURKE & WILLS From Melbourne to Myth*,.page 8

¹³ Hardy, J. ed. *Stories of Australian migration* New South Wales University Press /Australian Academy of the Humanities, 1988: refer Voigt, Johannes; *The Australian Experience of a German Doctor: Letters and writings on the Fifth Continent*; pp. 67- 82.

William Beckler [sic], the nineteenth century doctor from Hochstadt, who went first to southern Queensland, and then overland droving to Melbourne and for a time got mixed up with the Burke and Wills expedition, finished up returning to Germany after nearly six years in Australia.

While this quote; the mis-spelling of Beckler's name and casual reference of being 'mixed up with the expedition', serves to illustrate the local academic indifference and lack of knowledge of the importance of Beckler's contribution and involvement in this iconic episode of Australian exploration history, nevertheless, it was fortunate to have Voigt's initial research and his reflective article.

As a further example of academic confusion, a candidate for a Masters of Music thesis submitted for examination at the University of New South Wales in 1993 used an article, which Beckler wrote for the German journal *Globus*¹⁴ in 1867, about an Aboriginal corroboree he had witnessed during his time in Australia. The article in which Beckler recorded the musical notation of Aboriginal chants, was republished by *Globus* in their Anthropological and Ethnological series a year later. The Masters candidate used the second article in her thesis, referring to Beckler as having conducted an early anthropological expedition and as having written his account, 'when travel writing was still in fashion'.¹⁵ Interestingly, the candidate failed to make any connection to Beckler's role in Australia or indeed his role in the Burke and Wills expedition, where he was the only expedition member other than Ludwig Becker, to display empathy and record articles on the plight of the Australian Aborigines.

Such has been the lack of academic interest in Beckler and his life story, in both Australia and Germany, that one can argue that he has become Australia's forgotten German scientist. From its outset, the Victorian Exploring Expedition, despite other political and economic motives, was designed as a scientific expedition whose purpose was to explore the unknown interior of Australia north of the Murray River to the Gulf of Carpentaria. The public outcry and opprobrium that arose from the tragic outcomes of the expedition resulting not only in the deaths of Burke, Wills and Gray; but also Ludwig

¹⁴Beckler, Hermann; '*Corroberri: Ein Beitrag zur Kenntnis der Musik bei den australischen Einwohnern*', (Corroboree: A contribution to the knowledge of the music in the Australian population) (*Globus*, Vol. 13, 1867 pp. 82-84).

¹⁵ Sainolan, N. *Music-If So it May be Called Perception and Response in the Documentation of Aboriginal Music in Nineteenth Century Australia*; Part thesis for degree of Master of Music; Uni. of New South Wales 1993.

Becker, William Purcell, Charles Stone and William Patten), led in part to the failure of the Royal Society to publish the scientific results of the expedition. This failure was to be finally addressed, as an outcome of the 150th commemorations of the expedition, with the publication in 2011 of *Burke and Wills: The Scientific Legacy of the Victorian Exploring Expedition*, edited by E. B. Joyce and D. A. McCann.¹⁶ Hermann Beckler's botanical contribution to the expedition was examined in Linden Gilbank's chapter, "The Botanical legacy of Ferdinand Mueller and Hermann Beckler".¹⁷ In the same publication, Harry Allen, in his chapter, 'The space between: Aboriginal people, the Victorian Exploring Expedition and the Relief parties', addressed the observations of Aboriginal life and culture recorded during the expedition and by the relief parties, and paid tribute to 'the deeper appreciation of Aboriginal culture'¹⁸ displayed by both Beckler and Becker in their writings.

In a recent companion publication, '*The Aboriginal Story of Burke and Wills: Forgotten Narratives*' edited by Ian D. Clark and Fred Cahir, the researcher addressed the Aboriginal contribution to the expedition as carefully observed and recorded by Hermann Beckler and Ludwig Becker.¹⁹

In all past and recent narratives, there has been no examination or even deeper understanding of Beckler's reasons for coming to Australia in the 1850s, his attempts to practice as a medical doctor either prior to or during the expedition, and his attempts to save the four dying members of the expedition's Supply party, including his colleague Ludwig Becker. Nor, has any consideration been given to the reasons for his return to Bavaria in 1862 to re-engage as a medical doctor and practice in an isolated part of southern Bavaria up to his death in December 1914. The following chapters will consider these aspects in a holistic approach to an examination of his life and times.

Research Methodology & Process

In searching for a research method and process in which to chart and analyse the life and times of Hermann Beckler, it has been necessary to trawl through an array of social research methodologies and wrestle with a glittering vocabulary of, at times, inconsistent

¹⁶ Joyce E. B. & McCann D. A. Eds. *Burke and Wills, The Scientific Legacy of the Victorian Exploring Expedition*, CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, Vic., 2012

¹⁷ Ibid., 97-129.

¹⁸ Ibid., 245.

¹⁹ Clark, Ian D. & Cahir, Fred, Eds. *The Aboriginal Story of Burke and Wills FORGOTTEN NARRATIVES*, CSIRO Publishing, 2013. In Chapter 5, pp.81-113.

terminology. In adopting a suitable social research methodology in which to return a thorough analysis and understanding of Beckler's life history, I have selected a biographical interpretative framework based on Norman Denzin's interpretative biographical qualitative research method,²⁰ as I believe this chronological methodology will deliver the best research outcomes for this thesis.

Following translation and review, all primary source material was analysed and interpreted in terms of the following research questions in order to gain an overall appreciation and understanding of the significant turning points in Beckler's 86-year life journey.

For the evaluation of Beckler's life in Germany prior to and after his Australian journey (1828-1855 and 1862-1914), the researcher has also relied upon documentation, etc., which has been obtained during research visits to the Bavarian town locations of Höchstädt un der Donau, Bad Hindelang and Fischen; as well as visits to the Bavarian State Library in Munich and Bavarian State Archives and University Archives in Augsburg. Other sources actively used have been German archive portals. The main questions this research seeks to address are:

- What possessed a young outstanding German medical graduate to leave Bavaria immediately after graduation and travel to Australia?
- What led to his failure to practice medicine in Australia and take up botanical collecting?
- What led to his initial frustration during the early part of the Burke and Wills expedition causing him to ultimately resign, yet to remain with the expedition as their medical officer with the death of four expedition members under his care?
- What led Beckler to return to Bavaria?
- What led him to write extensively on Australia for German readers?
- What led him to up-skill his medical qualifications and return to practice as a community doctor in an isolated part of southern Bavaria?
- What affect did the expedition have on his personal life during his final years?

The research methodology and process of analysis have been designed to examine Beckler's 86-year life history across two Worlds and to divide this interpretative

²⁰ Denzin, Norman K. Interpretive biography, Sage Publications 1989.

examination into key chapters recording the important events. An introduction within each chapter traces the evolution of each story / turning point and a conclusion at the end of each chapter summarises the significance of the events. An overall concluding chapter at the end of this thesis draws together the research findings.

For a theoretical perspective, I have used the theory of hermeneutics (interpretation) to underpin the method and methodology during my interpretative enquiry and research of the textual documentation of Beckler's life and times. This theoretical approach acknowledges the context and interpretation of the contents of the research against the times (i.e. Beckler, as a product of European romanticism and as a visitor to colonial Australia of the 1850s/60s), while at the same time recognizing the historiography of Beckler's life journey across the 86 year period. Overall, I have adopted an interpretivist approach to this research work and thesis in explaining Beckler's position as a disciplined observer of natural phenomena. Furthermore, as a sensitive recorder with an enlightened outlook as an individual of his times, Beckler was caught up in trying to decide between romanticism and reality and to find his place in two culturally diverse societies of the Old and New Worlds.

Chapter 2

In Bavaria 1828-1855 and his Journey to Australia

The quote; ‘Oh God, they my parents certainly did not deserve to have such a troubled son’²¹, captures the sense in which Hermann Beckler left his hometown Höchstädt un der Donau to travel to Hamburg, arriving a few days before his twenty-seventh birthday in September 1855, before embarking on his journey to Australia. This chapter examines Beckler’s formative years, his family influences, schooling and university studies and the influences that ultimately saw him leave Bavaria immediately following his graduation. His motivation for choosing Australia as his New World destination, as opposed to America or elsewhere, and his reflections and expectations recorded during his long sea journey to Moreton Bay, New South Wales, are also examined.

Hermann Beckler was born in Höchstädt un der Donau on 28 September 1828, in a house which originally stood at number 40 Herzogin-Anna-Straße (Duchess Anna Street), close to the Town Square in a small country market town north-west of Munich in Swabia, southern Germany.²² The town dates from the 11th Century and gained prominence in 1704 as the site for the Battle of Blenheim (Blindheim), the outcome of which changed the course of European history and ultimately lead to the emergence of Great Britain as a world power.

Hermann was the eldest of six children (four brothers, Hermann, Karl, Ignaz and Paul) and two sisters (Franziska and Walburga), born to Kaspar and Franziska Beckler (née Speth), who were married in 1826. Franziska was the daughter of Dr Paul Speth, a Royal District court physician in Gunzburg some 10 kilometres to the south of Höchstädt. Hermann’s father, Kaspar Beckler, was born in 1796 to Johann Beckler and Anna Maria Schegl, at Ungerhausen, near Memmingen (approximately 100 kilometers to the south of Höchstädt).

²¹ Beckler, *Letters*, 5.

²² Modern day picture of the site of the original Beckler House (since demolished) in Duchess Anna Street, Höchstädt, Courtesy; Höchstädt Historische Gesellschaft, Dec. 2014.

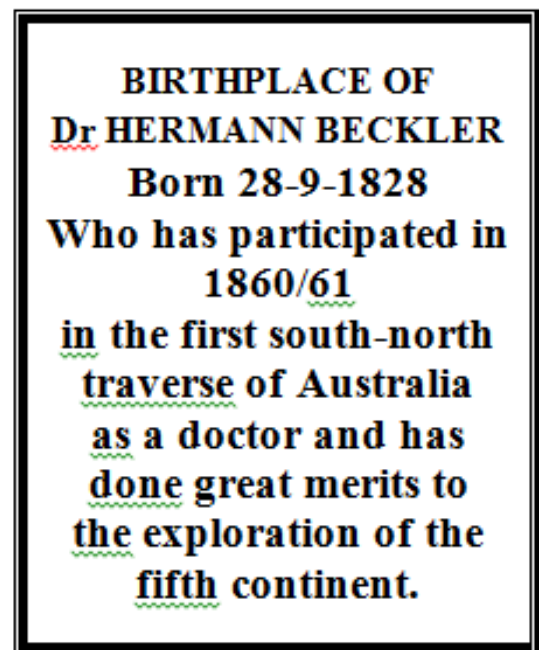


Figure 2. TOP - Beckler home site in Duchess Anna Street, Höchstädt, taken December 2014, looking west to the Town square and church, showing on the left-hand side the modern building on site of the original Beckler home; i.e. the building between two old style gable roofed buildings. The commemorative plaque erected in 1962, is shown in faint white against the gray wall of ground floor façade, with its picture and translation above. BOTTOM - Translation of Plaque

In November 1825, Kaspar Beckler was appointed acting Head Second Teacher at Höchstädt. This position, which included the duties of cantor at the local parish church, was confirmed in 1827. In 1845 he was appointed First Teacher and Choirmaster.

Josef Heider²³ in 1954 wrote of the Beckler children that:

The parents provided them with an excellent education despite their rather meager income. Although economical, they encouraged self-control and character education and through the profession of the parents, gave each child the mental stimulation and a rich general education, particularly with books and a healthy dose of independence.²⁴

Despite the limited income of their father, brothers, Hermann and Karl, studied at the Gymnasium School in Dillingen, some two miles west where they walked each day whatever the weather. The surviving school annual reports testify that Hermann was one of the more able students. Hermann would have preferred the study of natural science, but it offered little prospects of a career. On the advice of his Grandfather, Dr Speth, Hermann, after gaining his *Abitur*²⁵ and completing a period of military service, entered the Ludwig Maximilian II University in Munich in 1849 to study medicine. The Revolutions of 1848, which had seen the University temporarily closed when students protested against the King of Bavaria, had introduced the ideas of liberalism and a reaction to authoritarian rule among the student body. It was amidst this background that Beckler commenced his studies in 1849. In the following academic year, he was awarded a King's Scholarship of 100 thaler.

Heider reports that Beckler's 'years of study in Munich shaped his unconventional nature which gave his parents some grief'.²⁶ This unconventional personality and attitude was acknowledged by Beckler in his first letter to his brother Karl from Hamburg which

²³ Heider, J., *Hermann Beckler*, in von Gotz Freiherrn von Polnitz, *Lebensbilder aus dem Bayerischen Schwaben*, (Live images from the Bavarian Swabia) Munchen; Hueber, 1954 Vol 3. pp 419.

²⁴ Ibid., 419-420.

²⁵ Qualification of attainment taken in the final years of secondary schooling for admission to university studies.

²⁶ Heider, *Hermann Beckler*, 420.

included the line, cited above ‘Oh God, they [his parents] certainly did not deserve to have such a troubled son’.²⁷

Beckler graduated with the Degree of Doctor of Medicine, Surgery and Obstetrics, Prorsus Insignis (High Distinction) on 20 June 1855 with a dissertation entitled, ‘Ueber die Uterinblennorrhoe’, which examined uterine blennorrhoea. On returning home to Höchstädt, he immediately informed his parents of his decision to immigrate to Australia, not-with-standing his graduation in Medicine with honours. His decision was partially explained in a letter he wrote to his brother Karl in September 1855, in which he stated that: ‘the thought of practicing amongst poor people in some out of the way location in Swabia did not satisfy him.’²⁸

The romantic ideals of the pursuit of medical practice in an Arcadian setting including the study of the natural sciences, which he had pursued during his time at university, was apparently far more appealing. Despite their pleading with him not to go, his parents and grandparents eventually relented and provided funds for the journey. The decision to emigrate to Australia rather than America is at first puzzling, especially when the cost and length of sea journey are considered, as it would have been a far better prospect to travel to America with a similar northern hemisphere climate, than to face the long sea journey to another hemisphere half way around the world. However, there were a number of influences which affected Beckler’s choice of Australia as his new world destination.

Firstly, it seems apparent that Beckler had thought about his new world journey long before his graduation, as he had engaged an English language teacher, Madame Crecentia Ganser,²⁹ to teach him English. By the time he left Munich, he had become deeply infatuated with

²⁷ Beckler, *Letters*, 5.

²⁸ Ibid., 5

²⁹ By a subtle twist of fate, Madame Ganser had an earlier association with the Irish theatrical dancer and courtesan, Lola Montez, who had appointed her as an interpreter, after Montez arrived in Munich in mid-1846. Lola’s involvement with King Ludwig I of Bavaria ultimately led to citizen riots in Munich in February 1848 and the subsequent abdication of the King followed by the March Uprisings across German States and the return of law and order. Ironically, Lola was in Australia (Ballarat) at the time of Beckler’s arrival in Moreton Bay in February 1856.



Figure 3. Beckler's medical degree certificate awarded 20 June 1855 by the Ludwig-Maximilian II University of Munich - courtesy Höchstädt Town Archives.

Ganser who would figure in his correspondence throughout his Australian journey.

Secondly, the suppression of the 1848 Uprisings and return to autocratic rule led to an enormous wave of immigration from the German States to New World regions, such as North America, South America (Chile and Peru), South Africa, and Australia. Hamburg, the famous Hansa city, had become the great immigration departure point and a number of famous shipping lines were active engaged in the emigration trade.

Foremost, was the Godeffroy & Sons shipping line³⁰, whose regular sailings to South America, Australia and the Pacific led to the Company placing advertisements in major German newspapers, as well as in the popular *Allgemeine Aswanderer –Zeitung* (General Emigrant Newspaper).

However, perhaps the most influential factor in Beckler's choice of Australia was his contact with Georg Neumayer, who had returned to Munich from Melbourne in 1854 to seek funds to establish a Magnetic Observatory. Neumayer returned to Melbourne in January 1857 with funds and instruments, and a plan to equip Melbourne's first observatory in the Flagstaff Gardens as a fully-fledged magnetic observatory; the observatory was later moved to its present-day site adjacent to the Melbourne Botanic Gardens. Prompted by his meeting with Neumayer who probably encouraged his latent or emergent travel plans, and further fed by seeing immigration advertisements, Beckler would have booked his passage through the Godeffroy's agents. Neumayer sailed as a crew member on the Godeffroy ship, *Reiherstieg*, during his first visit to Australia in August 1852.

While in Munich, Neumayer conducted a series of lectures about his experiences in Australia during 1852-1854, particularly in Victoria, and Beckler had met and spoken to him about the length of the sea journey to Australia, among other things. Beckler would mention Neumayer's comments in his letter of 22 January 1856, written as the *Johann Caesar* was nearing Moreton Bay:

when I was in Munich, I was pleased because Neumayer had said that the trip would take about 4 to 5 months, I thought it might take a little longer. In

³⁰ Spoehr, F. M. *White Falcon, The House of Godeffroy and Its Commercial and Scientific Role in the Pacific*, Pacific Books, Palo Alto, California 1955.

Hamburg, I was pleased to hear that the same journey could take three months and now in the 17th week of the trip I am very glad that it will soon be over.³¹

Beckler would renew his acquaintance with Neumayer in Melbourne on arrival in 1859 and again in 1860 when he applied to join the Victorian Exploring Expedition as medical officer and botanist.

Another important factor was Beckler's interest in New World natural history. This was stimulated by the publication of Alexander Humboldt's tome *Kosmos*, with volumes 1 and 2 appearing during 1845 and 1847. Deeply interested in Humboldt's writings, particularly from his South American expedition, Beckler wrote to the German scientist and explorer prior to his departure. Humboldt provided him with a letter of introduction; 'as a naturalist and as a well-qualified doctor.'³²

As advanced by Herde, another related, although more general factor, was the high degree of interest in the discoveries and tales of the New World that caught the imagination of an educated and enlightened German community.³³ An insatiable appetite for New World discoveries led to a plethora of articles about far-off lands by German scientist-explorers and adventurers appearing in family magazines and journals such as; *Das Ausland*, *Die Gartenlaube*, *Petermanns Geographische Mitteilungen* and *Westermann's Illustrierte Deutsche Monatshilfe*. This interest in adventure by an educated German middle class (of which Beckler's family belonged) was yet another factor in Beckler's overall interest in the New World.³⁴ It should also be mentioned that that Beckler's departure for the New World was not motivated by religious intolerance as were the earlier waves of New World immigration (for example, the Old Lutherans prior to 1840s), although there were various bureaucratic restrictions including Catholicism, which did not sit well with Beckler's liberal democratic beliefs.

³¹ Beckler, *Letters*, 10.

³² *Ibid.*, 45.

³³ Herde, Chris. *The Political influences on German science in 19th Century Australia*, Paper presented at Australasian Political Studies Association Conference, Uni of Adelaide 2004.

³⁴ Of related interest, his brothers would all do well, Karl would have a university education and become a science teacher; both Ignaz and Paul would become Directors of Music, while Franziska (Fanny) would become a governess.

To Beckler, presented with the choice of settling down as a country doctor in Bavaria or travelling to experience a New World order after many years of concentrated study under authoritarian rule, the answer was self-evident.

On 15 September 1855 on arrival in Hamburg, Beckler wrote his first letter to his brother Karl. They would all be characterised by an in-depth detailed account of the various stages of his travels, written in a honest and genuine, reflective romantic style, recording at times his deepest personal and inner thoughts and adversities. They would contain some remarkably colourful and charming descriptions of the outback landscapes through which he travelled, as well as his experiences collecting botanical specimens – a kaleidoscope of his daily life in colonial Australia during his six-year sojourn.

Beckler was obviously in a sober reflective mood, as a person usually is when embarking on an unknown long journey, as he remarked:

I have had 6 years living in Munich, I had 6 and 8 colleagues around me, God if I had no money and I asked them to lend me some, they laughed at me. Cousin August urged me on the last day to repay the florin, which I had borrowed from him. Had I not had my dear Madame [Ganser] I would have often starved.³⁵

Beckler had to find accommodation in Hamburg as his ship the *Caesar Godeffroy* was due to sail on 30 September. He found a one room apartment and was forced to live frugally until his payment as the ship's doctor commenced once he was on board the ship. His letter describes in detail the cultural aspects of the city of Hamburg, which he made every attempt to explore, especially its natural history museums. Hamburg, with its overseas shipping lines returning from far off countries, had become a centre for botanical and natural history collections from around the world. The Godeffroy Line had established a large Natural History Museum for items brought back by their ships' captains and had also sent botanical collectors to Australia and the Pacific on collecting missions.

I do not get bored here. I probably visited more often the Natural History Collections, than the Hospitals. They are very rich [exhibits], but otherwise poorer with marine animals than ours. Birds are in huge numbers, especially from

³⁵ Beckler, *Letters*, 2.

South America. Today I will look at the collections of paintings - there are several days a week with free entry.³⁶

Beckler was already thinking of the opportunity to send back natural history items, plants and animals and even explored the cost of shipping with Godeffroy's shipping agent, Dieseldorff & Co, mentioning to Karl: 'that everything I will gather you could either sell at Augsburg or gain an award exhibiting at the Augsburg Naturgeschichte Verein [the Augsburg Natural History Club]'.³⁷ Clearly, his interest in natural history collecting had emerged before he left Germany. He also mentioned that he would send certain items to Professor Roth, his Zoology Professor.³⁸

Already his interest in natural history collecting had emerged before he had even left the country.

Writing again on 24 September, Hermann mentioned that he would now be sailing on the *Johann Caesar* (Captain Möller)³⁹, as the *Caesar Godeffroy* would not be available to sail because of the low water level in the harbour.

Beckler commenced recording his journey in his *Schiffsreisetagebuch* (Ship's Log Book - a log of five notebooks)⁴⁰ on the morning of 1 October 1855. As he would later recount, it was the date of his mother's birthday. He and his fellow passengers had come on board during the previous afternoon and all had experienced their first night on board the *Johann Caesar*. The voyage, like the two previous Godeffroy voyages, would be direct, with no landfalls being made between Hamburg and Moreton Bay, a situation which would add an element of discomfort to the passengers.

A week had passed with the ship still in the North Sea, providing Beckler an opportunity to meet and assess the motivations and expectations of the 245 passengers on board,

³⁶Ibid., 4.

³⁷Ibid., 6.

³⁸ Johannes Rudolf Roth (1815 –1858) was a German zoologist and traveler. In 1843 he became Professor of Zoology at the University in Munich and in 1858 died in Lebanon and is buried in Jerusalem.

³⁹ Ibid.,

⁴⁰ Beckler, *Schiffsreisetagebuch* (Ship's Log Book) Travel from Hamburg to Moreton Bay 1855-56, pp.47.

twenty-three of whom (making up three families) were German assisted immigrants; the remainder, approximately 220, being unassisted immigrants⁴¹



Figure 4. Barque *Johann Caesar*, State Library of Queensland Collection.

As his ship's log records, Beckler appeared genuinely concerned about their expectations, noting that:

The majority of passengers are driven here by their poverty, their inability to provide adequately for themselves in their homeland, some the quest for wealth and the hope for a better and happier life, even if there was no certainty of that. They all wanted to find a happier existence in a faraway part of the world. How sanguine they are in their hopes, which can be deduced from the fact that they have to serve 2 years before they would be able to do something for themselves. I cannot stop thinking that this undertaking was at least half of a slave trade. Are there going to be good masters over there who will be satisfied with a generous advantage?, will some of the passengers experience that or will other passengers

⁴¹ The New South Wales Government during 1849-56 paid financial assistance (bounty) for the importation of German families as assisted immigrants recruited by an agent mainly from the wine growing districts in the south-western German states – see The employment of Assisted German Immigrants to NSW 1849-56, in Jenny Paterson in *The Ancestral Searcher* vo. 20 No 2 pp.175-180 , 1997

face further costs and harbour the experience of fraud?, or will they be able to, in the 2 years learn the language and establish themselves in business?⁴²

A sobering assessment of the prospects of these German immigrants, which Beckler would soon witness the difficulties these immigrants would experience in trying to establish themselves, mainly as farm workers, in agricultural areas of the Moreton Bay district. A situation that would soon have some bearing on his efforts to establish a successful medical practice.

Beckler had his major medical event on 27 October with an old man experiencing a mental breakdown. Again he reflected: ‘what promise do they bring to Australia, an old man, and even older woman with a bunch of uneducated children, without money and being solely dependent of their father’s service. It is awful when these people start to think of their future woes. No wonder the poor devil has gone crazy.’⁴³

On 23 November, as they crossed the Equator, Beckler reflected that another goal of his journey had ended. Satisfied with his work as the ship’s doctor, he recorded; ‘I can generally conclude that the health of the passengers had been satisfactory, with the exception of treatment of a syphilitic sailor, a girl with a rectal prolapse and the boy with a fracture’.⁴⁴

King Neptune came on board and all passengers were subject to a baptism of seawater. Beckler hid in his cabin and escaped the oft repeated and excessive seawater treatment, as illustrated in the following sketch of Neptune’s visit to sister Godeffroy ship, the *Caesar Godeffroy* in 1852.

⁴² Beckler, *Schiffsreisstagebuch* (Ship’s Log Book).1855-56, 3.

⁴³ Ibid., 12.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 26.



Figure 5. Neptuns Fest am Bord des 'Cesar Godeffroy' Captain Behn am 30 September 1852. Translation: Neptune's Festival on board the 'Cesar Godeffroy' Captain Behn on 30 September 1852

By early December, the ship had left the South Atlantic and was now below South Africa following the great circle sailing route and heading east to round below Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania). Albatrosses started to appear and other Southern Ocean features appeared in the form of seabirds and whales. At night, the Southern Cross and other southern hemisphere constellations were visible. Christmas Day was spent on the cold Southern Ocean. Beckler recorded:

All my thoughts are with home. We celebrated Christmas last night; a white tablecloth was spread instead of the usual blue linen cloth, as this was very solemn occasion. We ate a little better than usual, and drank a few glasses of punch, which made us cheerful and warm made us what we received a concert played on a music box by the helmsman.⁴⁵

On 5 January 1856, after ninety-seven days at sea, Beckler concluded his ship's log:

⁴⁵ Ibid., 39/40.

In the morning, I will finish the fifth and last book of my journey. It covers an interesting account of the trip throughout its length. Maybe I should have had some knowledge of instruments and included some valuable findings. While I am ignorant and without a clue about sailing, I shall of course be able in Australia to utilize and make comprehensive studies⁴⁶.

Reinforcing this point Beckler remarked: 'A person who resides in a foreign country for years and has nothing new or valuable to report, does not deserve the gift of life'.⁴⁷

Beckler resumed his letters to Karl on 22 January 1856. They were now off the east coast of Victoria heading north towards their eventual destination at Moreton Bay, then part of New South Wales (now southern Queensland). He recounted in detail his shipboard experiences, the North Sea storms, the cold weather experienced in the Southern Ocean, the icebergs, the fast trip after rounding the Cape (of Good Hope) with the wind (westerlies) always from behind them and, on a lighter note, the hilarious visits to the privies on a rolling ship. He also described his southern hemisphere astronomical observations and the array of sea birds that he had observed and documented. He ended his letter with the determination of further study in Australia: '[I] will diligently collect plants and draw landscapes, study mathematics, etc. ⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Ibid., 40.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 47.

⁴⁸ Beckler, *Letters*, 21.

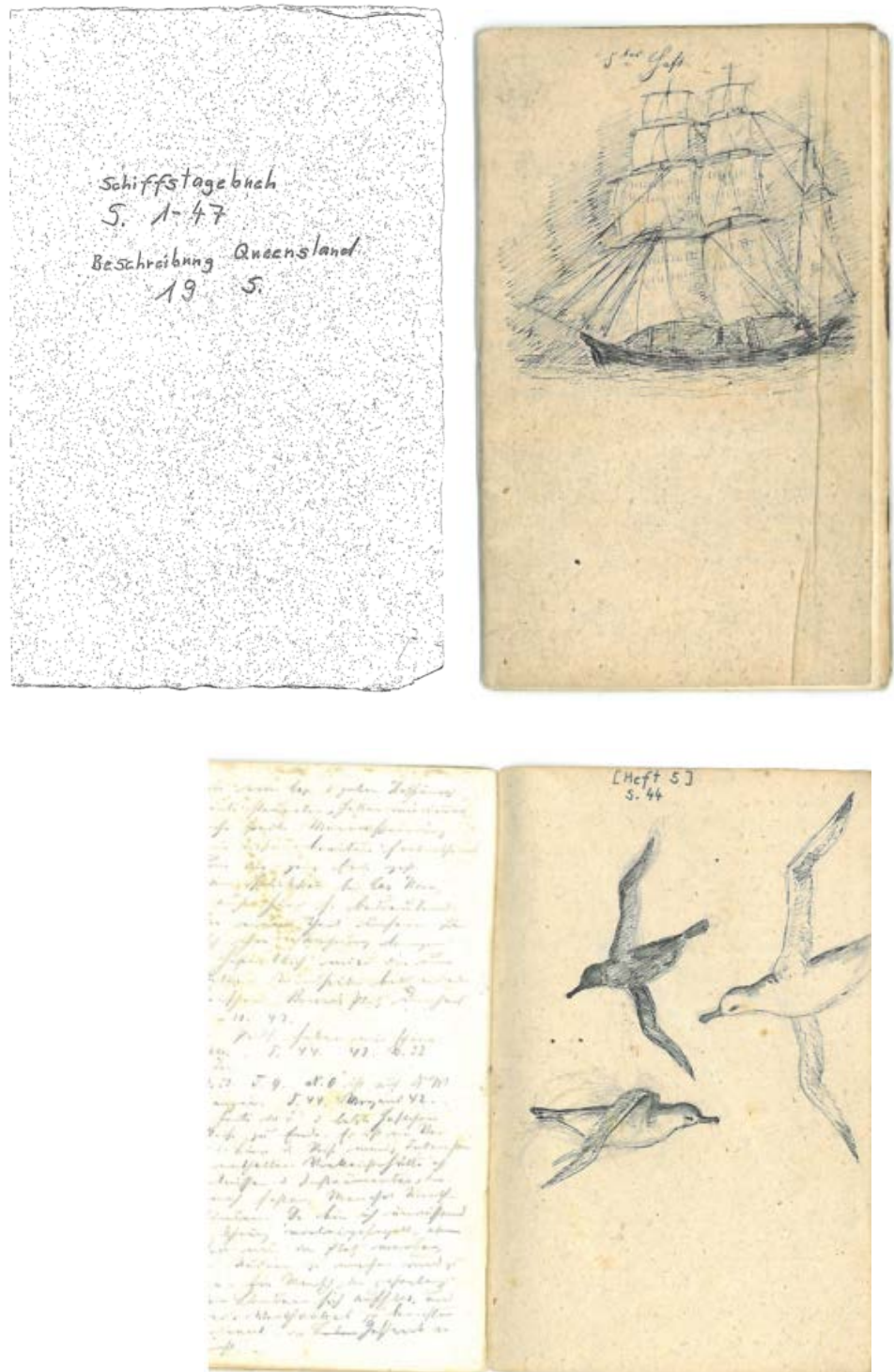


Figure 6. Beckler's Ship's Log Book (Note book -octavo) Höchstädt Town Archives. Top - Cover page & a passing sailing ship; Bottom – Albatrosses (original documents)

Writing on Sunday 27 January, he mentioned that today was the 17th week of their trip and depending on the winds, they would be in Moreton Bay in a few days. He also

mentioned that every day he had assisted the Captain with his observations and called the time from the chronometer.

The calculations, the seafarers make are not difficult. They are simple additions and subtractions using logarithms and their reduction as natural numbers and degrees of a circle ... The hardest part is always the longitude, because the chronometer is not necessarily reliable. There is also nothing more than a very accurate crafted clock, which has to bear the period of the 1st meridian (Greenwich) unchanged by all the ships sailing through the longitudes,⁴⁹

These astronomical observations, combined with his love for mathematics, would later be of benefit to Beckler during his attempt, towards the end of his Australian sojourn, to find a professional career, this time as a surveyor, with Professor Neumayer in his Magnetic Survey of Western Victoria.

His attitude hardened by months at sea, Beckler explained that he had not yet written much about his fellow passengers because:

They are hardly worth mentioning, some ordinary families (except from Württemberg), poor, unclean, raw rabble, which golden mountains fool and are nothing much else than slaves, at least until they have learned from the crossing. Strangely, they all have when you hear them, had their good living and wish all again with to be in their treasure laden homeland. Why are they going if they had life? There are disgruntled, mean people, they will give the Englishmen a bad idea of Germany's sons and daughters. Not a single, decent girl among them ... We have all sorts of vermin on board, which was only brought onboard by the passengers. How happy I would be if this group would be redeemed.⁵⁰

Once sympathetic, Beckler's attitude towards his fellow passengers had changed through his interactions with them during the long shipboard journey.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 24.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 24

Chapter 3

In Australia 1856 – 1859

Moreton Bay District, New South Wales

This chapter is concerned with Beckler's arrival at the Moreton Bay district and his reactions to his new homeland. His initial reaction, captured in his letter to his brother Karl was one of sheer delight: 'Dear brother, Yesterday was one of the happiest days of my life; I will try and describe this day to you and give you a vivid picture'.⁵¹ However, his subsequent disappointment that the region did not live up to his romantic ideals of an Arcadian community prompted him to move to Ipswich where he experienced difficulties in establishing his medical practice, not least through his failure to have his medical qualifications assessed to permit him to practice without fear of potential litigation. His attempt to establish himself as a pharmacist highlighted the extent to which he had misjudged his ability to establish a successful professional career, and was not helped by his lack of finance. His resulting despondency prompted a growing attraction to the observation of the local natural environment and plant collecting as a distraction and possible alternative source of income. His later meeting with Augustus Gregory and his initial association with Dr Mueller led to a period of botanical collecting as discussed below.

The *Johann Caesar* arrived off the entrance to Moreton Bay in the midst of a violent tropical storm with lightning that lit up the whole sky on the evening of 31 January 1856. The following morning all eyes were on the coast as the ship moved through a maze of small islands and sandbanks, sounding the horn as they went, while waiting for the pilot to arrive. After the ship anchored, the Captain asked Beckler:

Would you like to land [?]; Karl, Just think what joy for the first time to set foot on the beach of a wild tropical island! My heart was pounding and I felt my blood warm and pulsate through my body, my eyes shone like those of a drunk and in a moment, I had climbed down the rope. The beach was quite low, with the regular surges of the sea, which breaks with light green, worm-like waves on the shore, which is called a swell. As the boat could not land; one had to catch the moment in which the wave rolled against the land and jump on to it. We jumped into it

⁵¹ Beckler, *Letters*, 25.

like ducks and in a moment we were on the sand. Quickly the boat went on to the pilot station. Thousands of shells lay scattered about some of which I gathered. I also found the middle of the sand beautiful, lush plants with sweet-scented flowers. As we walked, three cute little dogs [dingos] looked at us in surprise and then followed us. They could not bark, but only had a dull hoarse voice, which we heard from time to time. Now we saw in the distance two natives, called to them, and followed them, but they ran very fast. At the same time we saw the pilot come in his boat to our ship and we were now looking for our boat to arrive.⁵²

That evening the second mate threw out a line for sharks and in the morning found a 15-foot shark on the line. It was hauled aboard and killed. Beckler asked for its eyes, which were so clumsily cut out that he could not send them back to Germany. Next day, at 10.00 am, the anchor was raised and the ship sailed under the command of the pilot to the Roadstead, which was reached at 5.00 pm that evening.

Beckler struck up a lively conversation with the pilot whom he described as English, about 55 years and rather a 'dandie', so I had a nice English lesson'.⁵³ He went on to describe the scene: A steamboat, a postal steamer from Sydney, comes twice a week to the cities of Brisbane and Ipswich. There are another four steamboats, which make daily trips between these two cities. Yesterday, the Health Officer and the Customs Officer came onboard. It was a sultry afternoon on the smooth sea, and a Steamboat appeared to zoom by. Oh, I had such joy; it was the full of well-dressed people, of course in the white neat suits, which suits tropical countries. I tell you, the steamship, along with the people, were so dashing and classy as the most beautiful Rhine steamer.'⁵⁴

The passengers and Beckler disembarked on 3 February 1856 and five days later Beckler travelled by steamboat to Ipswich as he had hoped that there would be a better opportunity to establish his practice there than in Brisbane. He had obtained a reference from a German merchant, Johann Heussler, a community leader in Moreton Bay whom he had met in Brisbane. This gave him access to necessary credit and an introduction to a Mr John Nahar, licensee of the Crown Hotel in Bell Street, Ipswich.

⁵² Ibid., 27.

⁵³ Ibid., 28.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 29.

On 18 February, Beckler wrote to Karl in a decidedly somber pragmatic mood as he indicated the need to start recording his adventures in 'alien Terra Australis'. He continued:

they would not be the adventures in a wild lush tropical country, ... but rather the adventures of an ordinary prosaic life, hardship and worry, an existence such as in a rocking frail boat, in which one can be thrown out of each wave into the abyss, dangling between heaven and earth, with money being the solution in the southern half of the earth.⁵⁵

We all thought there would be in some idyllic corner of the world, where many individual Settlers graze their countless herds of cattle and sheep, where the brave advancing Europeans would still often encounter the natives, and in a hard struggle often pay for their boldness. We thought sometimes of miserable wooden huts, maybe a couple of shops: I myself was quite happy in the thought of being here on far fields as the only doctor. I saw the poor people in thirst for my medical aid, I saw them coming towards me friendly, there was no doubt they would willingly share with me their riches.⁵⁶

Clearly, Beckler's romantic idealism and initial euphoria, experienced in those first days of his arrival had been swept away. His ideals of being part of a German diaspora in a pioneering Arcadian community had not and were never going to materialise. Far from being the only doctor, he would now be reduced to providing medical help to a poor community of scattered German immigrant families who were mostly unable to pay for medical treatment. Beckler was certainly not going to share their 'riches'. It is little wonder that he exclaimed to his brother: 'Dear Karl, it's all different from what I had thought, it lacks a lot what I expected in Europe'⁵⁷

Beckler went on to describe Brisbane: there were only two named streets and immediately outside the city the bush commenced. He described the local vegetation, which happily included exotic banana trees, but there were no coconut palms as he had expected. After seeing mango trees, he remarked that:

⁵⁵ Ibid., 32.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

no one knows anything about them and after asking are they part of the flora of Australia, only the Botanical Gardens in Sydney would know, ... You have now probably already guessed that I am not in a paradise like I, my captain and my friend in Hamburg thought. It is everything to wrestle for this life, you have got to summon up courage, not to despair and here I have come so far, that I will at least try to do the utmost as a doctor. Otherwise, I can try something else soon enough. In general, Australia is not a country to help physicians to riches, because of the number of doctors here for decades; the population is still too thin and scattered. There are two English doctors in Ipswich here for a long time. A German doctor Dr Sasche, had arrived here and had made a good business, but through an unfortunate event and was immediately ostracised by the English doctors and left for a small town in the bush called Warwick.⁵⁸



Figure 7. View of Brisbane in the 1850s From Brisbane City Archives Collection

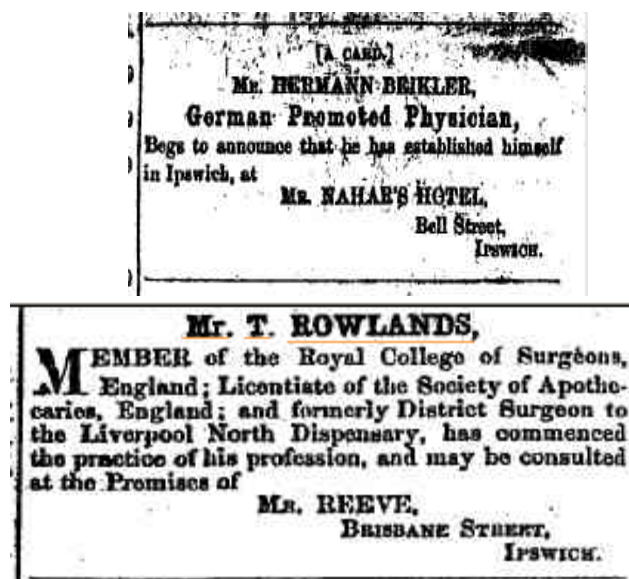
⁵⁸ Ibid., 37.



Figure 8. Early Ipswich 1850s John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland.

To make matters worse for Beckler, a third English doctor, a Mr T. Rowlands, had recently arrived in Ipswich and both he and Rowlands had advertised their new practices in the local newspaper on the same day, 16 February 1856.

Both advertisements were from The Moreton Bay Courier of Tuesday, 16 February 1856. Given the superior wording of the Rowlands' advertisement compared with the simple wording of Beckler's, including the mis-spelling of his name. It was not an auspicious start for Beckler.



On a happier note, Beckler reported that he had visited a farm outside Ipswich and saw his first kangaroo. He described them as very strange animals:

the hind feet are developed disproportionately large and strong (compared to body size), while their front feet are very stunted. They cannot go, they must always bounce. The one I saw at the farm was tame and are rarely seen in the city.⁵⁹

Beckler also commented on the plight of the local Indigenous peoples remarking:

that there were many, but very few were able to earn money by working – the rest being left in a wretched state by society. Men and women hang around the streets begging, although they must be dressed. The women dress weirdly, carelessly like small children. Both men and women smoke incessantly using clay pipes and drink liquor like water. But drinking is also the passion of the civilised inhabitants, compared with Germany's drinking habits, the bestial drinking habits of the English involve the young and old and all liquors. The available water is very bad, but you can drink lime-juice. Despite this general evil you see every day drunks in every tavern, it is generally considered normal, however, from a doctor's point of view the outcome means more patients.⁶⁰

Beckler's practice was still not established. He bemoaned the fact that he was always waiting for patients and had to be neat and tidy, which meant he could not. 'roam around for days in the wilderness', as he might have liked. He complained of suffering terribly from mosquito bites, despite having a mosquito net over his bed.

Writing on 21 February 1856, Beckler described yet another setback. Arriving in Ipswich, he had with him the letter of introduction from Mr Heussler to Mr Grace, one of the first merchants of Ipswich. Grace met Beckler on his first morning in town and 'destroyed [him] entirely in two minutes'. Grace informed Beckler that Dr Rowlands would absorb the patient load left by a German doctor, Dr Sachse who had relocated to Warwick, and that, by setting up practice in a hotel, as Beckler intended, he would never get a patient. Stunned into silence at the prospect of not gaining employment as a doctor, Beckler wrote no further about this dilemma, but indicated that he wished to talk further

⁵⁹ Beckler, *Letters*, 39.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

to Grace ‘since he is an excellent businessman and knows life in the colony for many years, he will give me at least a go with good advice too hand’.⁶¹

During the ensuing days, Beckler met with Grace who asked him about his surgical instruments; Beckler had only brought a few instruments with him. Grace had noticed Beckler’s advertisement in the newspaper and offered write a more suitable one following the presentation of his medical documents. He held in high regard Beckler’s recommendation from Humboldt, both as a naturalist and as a skillful well-qualified doctor. His confidence somewhat restored, Beckler confronted Grace about his future prospects:

You know my situation, Mr Grace, if it is possible, I would like to stay right here; if not, I ask you for your help as I am determined at whatever time you require it to travel into the deepest interior of the country . No, he [Grace] had said, stay here, you can rely on me, you will most certainly stay here, I will make an arrangement for your home. So, I will stay here.⁶²

Grace recommended that Beckler visit the Catholic Clergy for help (there was a large population of Catholics in Ipswich, mainly Irish immigrants, but also German.) There Beckler met Father Mayendie who introduced him to his flock ‘as a German physician from our religion’.

Matters seemed to take a turn for the better as Beckler was invited to join the clergy for a ride around the neighbourhood. He accompanied Father McGinty on a borrowed horse for his first ride and after a single lesson was able to handle the horse at a trot and canter. During the ride Beckler took the time to observe the local vegetation, indicating that he would make some grass trees he had seen the subject of a separate report. On Thursday 28 February 1856, Beckler received his first patient; two further patients presented later. However, the arrival of an additional doctor from France, a Dr Levi, left Beckler firmly convinced that in six months there would soon be half a dozen doctors practicing in Ipswich. Constantly short of money, he thought of opening a medical dispensary, but lack of funds thwarted the idea.

Beckler reminded Karl, whom he hoped would follow him to Australia, to learn to ride a horse before he came and to have at least six months tuition in English with Madame

⁶¹ Ibid., 43.

⁶² Ibid.,

Ganser. In a remark directed at Madame Ganser, he proudly mentioned that, 'I find that people say that I speak very well and that they cannot understand how you can be successful in conversational English without having been in England or America'.⁶³ By the end of March, Beckler was still operating his practice from the Crown Hotel with his patients being poor Germans under contract who could not afford to pay and Irish patients who disputed any charges.

An opportunity to practice at Drayton, a small village 90 miles northwest of Ipswich, occurred when one of the two doctors there, a drunkard, died after poisoning himself, and the other, an extremely unpopular man, wanted to leave. Given his current patient load amongst his scattered and remote patients, Beckler decided to stay in Ipswich.

Writing during April, Beckler mentioned two pleasant recent occurrences. First was a meeting with Dr Dorsey who had spoken well about Beckler's practice. Dorsey had been the first doctor in Moreton Bay; he ceased practice after six years and became a squatter. Recently elected to the Legislative Council, Dorsey promised Beckler any assistance he could offer. The second event was the satisfactory progress of a young patient with tuberculosis.

Beckler's *Letters*, however, reveal that he was struggling with a difficult patient clientele. He was tense and exhausted and two patients with severe complications had died, although two other seriously ill patients appeared to be making satisfactory progress. Becker wrote that 'I treat them with quinine and wine according to rational principles, which I owe to the teaching of both of my unforgettable teachers, Dr. Gietl and Dr. Pfeufer, but you know, I have very little faith in the efficacy of the drug in general and I hope less than many others do.'⁶⁴

Reflecting on the loss of two of his patients, he observed that: 'here the efficiency of a doctor can quite easily be stupidly judged according to the number of patients who have died.'

But these events were taking their toll on Beckler. As a sign of his fatigue, he made the mistake of extracting a good tooth from a patient instead of the bad one. The extraction had been done under poor light, yet he made no excuse for his error:

⁶³ Ibid., 60.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 69.

Yesterday, I had the bad luck to pull out a good tooth instead of a bad one. Why does this mishap not happen to a poor German beggar on the ship instead of this Englishman? The man can cause me considerable damage and had I 10 pound spare, I would rather lose it than have this bad luck. It was not really light enough in the hole I live in and I set the key in vain onto the bad tooth. But this is no excuse⁶⁵.

Worse was to come, as all was not well regarding his entitlement to practice.

The German doctor from Warwick, Dr Sachse, had visited Sydney and on return had spoken to Mr Heussler about Beckler. Sachse and Beckler met briefly and exchanged pleasantries; soon afterwards, rumours started to spread that Beckler was not a doctor and that he had no diploma⁶⁶. Mr Charles Baillon, Dr Dorsey's farm manager and a friend of Beckler's, alerted him to the rumour being circulated by Dorsey. Beckler immediately went to see Dorsey and showed him his diploma. Dorsey assured Beckler of his broadest support and offered him the loan of books and instruments and even one of his horses; he also wrote a statement saying that he had seen Beckler's diploma and dismissed the rumour as pure malice. Yet Beckler was to hear later that Dorsey had supported the newly arrived surgeon, Dr Rowlands. Beckler decided that his interests would be best served by ignoring the gossip; though he informed his friends of his indignation.⁶⁷

Towards the end of April, Beckler took a six months lease on a house in Bell Street in the centre of Ipswich. He received a shipment of medicines procured through Grace at the same time, but had to wait another three weeks before he was able to purchase furniture to move in and establish himself in the building. By the end of the month Beckler hoped (if he had the means to travel), to go to Sydney to show his papers to the New South Wales Medical Board and have his name placed on the Medical Roll and at last be authorised to practice in the colony.

Hermann's ultimate failure to travel to Sydney was an unfortunate blunder, as in 1855 the Medical Practitioners Act (NSW) had been amended to recognize foreign medical

⁶⁵ Ibid., 68.

⁶⁶ Early medical practitioners in Moreton Bay, did not hesitate to criticise their colleagues, even publishing their slanderous opinions in the press, from Patrick, R, *A history of health & Medicine in Queensland 1824-1960* ; UQP. 1987, pp.29-30.

⁶⁷ Beckler, *Letters*, 70.

qualifications; since 1839 only British qualifications had been recognized. Had he done so his Australian journey would have had a very different outcome.

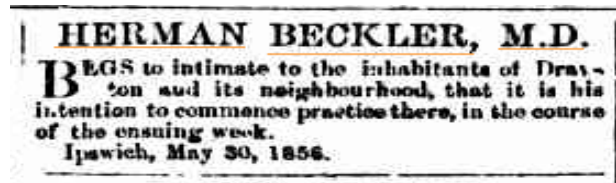
Beckler was taking stock of his situation. Clearly, his medical practice was insecure without the authorisation to practice. But there was a more insidious issue, which grossly affected Beckler's liberal views, namely, the blind hatred and fanaticism driven by the Catholic hierarchy against the Protestant community and particularly by Father McGinty himself, who Beckler described following his first meeting as an intelligent man, yet so stupid. This had resulted in Beckler's practice being solely used by poor Catholic parishioners who, owing to their impoverished state, were more prone to diseases, particularly tuberculosis, leaving him no opportunity to extend his practice to the better classes, the Protestants, whom his colleague, Dr Rowlands had serviced since his arrival. Doctors with Protestant patients could charge exorbitant fees and generally had city practices, rather than scattered and remote country patients and rented rooms.

But perhaps the greatest insult to Beckler's personality was a discussion with Father McGinty in which the older man chided him about his speech and recommended he use the word 'Sir' after each greeting, after every sentence and at least from time to time during each conversation. This instruction on manners went straight to the heart of Beckler's personal views and reaction to subservience, slavery and servility. While he expressed the intention to treat everyone with respect, he would not use the word 'Sir' 'in the manner as do the servants in England and the slaves in South America', however, he would do his best to get used to such nonsense⁶⁸.

During May, Beckler met a Mr Lord from Drayton who had travelled extensively in Germany and spoke perfect German. He assured him of all possible support if he moved to Drayton, however, with no money and a house rented in Ipswich until November, it was an unlikely move, although Beckler indicated that he would probably leave Ipswich and travel to Drayton at some point. On 7 June 1856, Beckler advertised his intention to move in the *Moreton Bay Courier*.⁶⁹

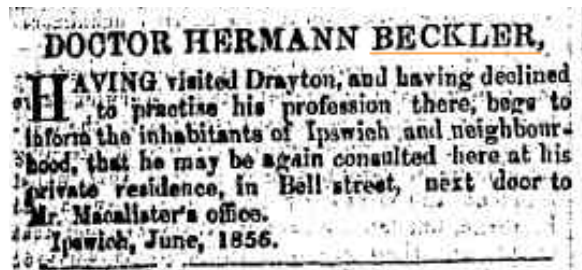
⁶⁸ Ibid., 76.

⁶⁹ 1856 'Classified Advertising.', *The Moreton Bay Courier* (Brisbane, Qld. : 1846 - 1861), 7 June, p. 3, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article3713795>



With only a small number of patients, Beckler evidently had a great deal of spare time as his regular letters to Karl conveyed remarkably detailed descriptions of the flora of the district and its majestic trees and grasslands. On the way back from a trip to Drayton, Beckler met a bullock driver who had returned from hunting and he was able to inspect specimens of ducks, cockatoos and a platypus. He went on to describe the bird songs that he had observed and the melody of the magpies, which he would later write about following his return to Germany in 1866. He reported that he shot a kangaroo with an immature fetus in the pouch, with its mouth on a nipple.

Something went wrong on the trip to Drayton, as soon after Beckler disclosed that he would not be moving.⁷⁰



On 4 July 1856, Beckler was invited to a picnic organised by a Captain Towns from Sydney who had rented a steamer that sailed down to the confluence of the Bremer and Brisbane rivers. At the request of some ladies, and owing to the fact that 'there were no German Police present who would prohibit it', Beckler, an accomplished pianist, had played the 'Marseillaise'.⁷¹ Beckler would have relished this new found freedom from authoritarian rule.

On 13 July, he returned from a trip in the bush to attend the son of a squatter who had fallen from his horse and broken his thigh. He rode to the squatter's home during a terrible storm, made worse by the condition of the roads. He received 20 pounds for two

⁷⁰ 1856 'Classified Advertising.', The Moreton Bay Courier (Brisbane, Qld. : 1846 - 1861), 12 July, p. 1, , <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article3715881>

⁷¹ Beckler, *Letters*, 87.

trips and after paying 3-5 pounds worth of expenses, he remarked that the remainder would go within a few days on debts.

Writing on 4 October Beckler reported that there were now five doctors practicing in Ipswich and there was not enough return from his practice to live.

Uneasy about his future, Beckler felt quite alone with only his friend Charles Baillon, who had come from Vienna some eight years earlier. While he did not seek invitations, he was invited out regularly because of his piano skills, which made him to feel like a servant.

In all of his letters to Karl, Beckler encouraged him to join him in Australia. Apart from learning English, he suggested that Karl should study botany, zoology and mineralogy to understand the flora and fauna of Australia. Beckler talked about sending home plants and rock specimens and suggested they could be sent to the Augsburg Museum who would pay for them, rather than to the Munich Museum, who would only give public recognition. He informed his brother that he would be leaving Ipswich in November and also that he hoped to leave for Sydney in 2-3 weeks. He also requested books on mineralogy, zoology and botany, particularly on tropical plants.

Writing from Ipswich on 26 November 1856, Beckler indicated that this would be his last day in the town. He had left his rented premises in Bell Street in October, auctioned its contents, and would be living temporarily with two suitcases of books and clothes at the Crown Hotel. He would be making a trip to the interior to a station of Mr Bracker, an elderly German man. As if to add to his failure to establish himself in Ipswich, he had developed toothache and had to ask his English colleague Dr Rowlands, to remove the tooth.

Beckler's next letter was from Tenterfield, New England, on 14 December 1856. He had arrived there the previous day via Warwick, where he had been advised that there was no doctor in the town. Again, it appeared that he was too late, as he had found out that arrangements had been made with an English physician who was yet to arrive. Beckler was wise enough to know that, 'If he does arrive, I will have to leave'. In his letter, Beckler recounted that he not left Ipswich until 5 December and that he had travelled by horse over the *Australian Cordilleras* (the Main Dividing Range) towards Warwick, stopping at an inn at Cunningham's Gap. In customary fashion, his letter provided a detailed travelogue of these events, the landscapes and flora through which he had

travelled, which had reminded him of the beautiful open countryside of the Danube around his home town of Höchstädt. Reaching Warwick on 9 December, he had met up with a German friend arranged by Baillon. He also met up with a German Jew named Birkmann who showed him around Warwick in a spring cart. Beckler learnt that the town was not a happy place. Not surprisingly, the town's doctor, Dr Sachse, whom Beckler had known before, had contributed to the general unhappiness in the community, through his manner of charging exorbitant charges for his services. Beckler was advised to go on to Tenterfield, which he did, arriving on 13 December. He was pleasantly surprised with the beauty of the place, which though small, had an excellent guesthouse.

Beckler's next letter, dated 1 January 1857, was written from Mr Bracker's Station 'Warroo' at Mackintyre Creek. He had met Mr Bracker in Ipswich and had been invited to stay if he was ever in the area. As he had not heard whether the English physician had taken up the appointment at Tenterfield, Beckler had decided to travel to Bracker's Station some 90 miles to the northwest, reaching it on 21 December 1856. He celebrated Christmas and New Year at the station, remarking mournfully that he felt he would never be able to get ahead. The area had experienced bad floods, which prevented him from returning to Tenterfield, so he passed the time by reading. At Bracker's station he discovered and read Dr Ludwig Leichhardt's *Journal of an Overland Expedition from Moreton Bay to Port Essington*. It was Leichhardt's personal copy, which he had presented to the Brackers after staying with them during his second journey. Beckler recorded the special note that Leichhardt had written on the inside cover:

*'To Mr and Mrs Bracker, his hospitable friends,
in kind remembrance of Dr Ludwig Leichhardt.'*

Beckler was extremely impressed by Leichhardt's journey, musing: 'I think it is one of the greatest things that can make a man and although he had suffered hardships of all kinds, such as misery, poverty, hunger and thirst, he had every reason for fortune and thanks for the success of his journey.'⁷²

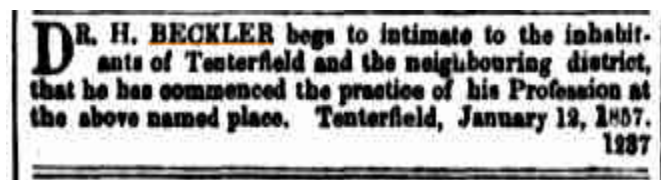
⁷² Ibid., 109.



Figure 9. Frederick Bracker's 'Warroo' Homestead 1850s

John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland

Beckler also mentioned Augustus Gregory's North Australian Exploring Expedition, which had passed through the area on the return leg of its journey to Moreton Bay, and noted the role of Dr Mueller as botanist, whom he would meet later in his life journey. He returned to Tenterfield on 17 January 1857 and advertised in the *Empire*,⁷³ a Sydney newspaper on 23 January 1857, that he had commenced practice in the town.



He was accompanied by Bracker, who saw an opportunity to buy a house, which he promptly gave to Beckler at a special rental. As the expected doctor had not materialised, Beckler found himself in a town with a need for his services.

⁷³ 1857 'Advertising.', *Empire* (Sydney, NSW : 1850 - 1875), 23 January, p. 1, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article60275997> -



Figure 10. View of Tenterfield 1861 Joseph Backler (1813-1895).

Courtesy of the State Library of New South Wales

Beckler's letter to Karl in March contained a report of Gregory's expedition and complaints about how expensive it was to live in Tenterfield. Until Bracker's house was ready, Beckler was forced to stay in the guesthouse, which while simple and clean, had thousands of fleas! Then there was the significant difference in the climate between Moreton Bay and Tenterfield and with autumn now upon the district, cold nights were becoming more frequent. Beckler mused about buying an allotment, a frequent theme, and wrote extensively about the landscape, the plants, the iron bark trees and his collection of beetles, and so on.

Writing in May, he was clearly unhappy about being stuck in Tenterfield and mused about going to India on a free passage as a ship's doctor;- another frequent theme. He had written to some shipping merchants in Sydney, and they offered him a cheap passage, not a free one. His letters became more expansive as he had become a diligent reader of the newspapers particularly the *Empire* and laced his letters with comments on every news item reported both local and overseas. With renewed interest, he wrote pages on the parliamentary system in each colony remarking that:

he had little interest in the political situation when he was still at home ... What is more natural in a country where the people, although dependent on the mother country, are literally self - governed , or at least has the full rights to do so. This freedom is not older than 12-15 months and extends not to all colonies, but for the time being in Victoria, New South Wales, Van Diemen's Land and South Australia.⁷⁴

In July, Beckler complained about the paucity of replies from home and announced that he had made up his mind to leave Tenterfield: 'I cannot wait for half of my life to be always in debt, how I wish to feel good once again after being miserable for many months'. He went on to explain that for the past three months:

I have always had one and the same patient, a woman with cancer of the tongue, which has now reached a stage near the end. It was not until I treated her for many weeks, visiting her twice a day to give her morphine as much as she could stand, that I am now four weeks here longer than I thought to remain, as I could not leave.

And what reward? The husband not only did not pay me a penny, but now wants to bring me to court on the grounds of incorrect treatment, simply because I could not cure a virulent and aggressive tongue cancer. This is by the way, a very popular method here, an imperfection of human nature, to place a doctor in trouble and take revenge on his person. A doctor, especially a "foreigner" - or stranger, incredibly can easily lose his freedom for a few years, namely; being sent to prison with hard labour. Dammed Australia.⁷⁵

Beckler , ever concerned about his eligibility to practice, was clearly worried as he wrote about Dr Müller, a Frenchman with a large practice in Sydney, who, in the previous six months, had been twice before the Criminal Courts on account of similar accusations. In the first case he was found guilty, but he was cleared in the second. Another doctor, a German called Bratenahl in Bendigo, Victoria, had recently been convicted of manslaughter, allegedly because of negligent and incorrect treatment of a woman during confinement; he was subsequently acquitted. His Tenterfield experience and the pressure

⁷⁴ Beckler, *Letters*, 136.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 145.

it had caused would result in his final determination to move out of medical practice and to consider the possibility of establishing himself as a pharmacist.

On 26 August 1857 Beckler wrote from Purga Creek, a station near Ipswich managed by his friend Charles Baillon. Angry that he had not heard from his brother since a letter dated September 1856, he urged his family to write every month, stating ‘you know what a letter from home means to me – if you do not write to me more diligently, I shall no longer write to you for 3 years!’ He explained that he had left Tenterfield after doing all he could to establish his practice, but without success. He had settled his debts and had eight or nine pounds left. He had gone to Warwick and, after meeting his friend Marcus Birkmann, had decided to settle down as a druggist with letters of credit from Birkmann. He had rented a house and had travelled down to Ipswich to purchase drugs, but none were available and so he had ordered them from Sydney. He stayed at the sheep station with his Viennese friend, Baillon, while waiting for the drugs to arrive; he hoped to be in Warwick at the end of September.

Writing again from Purga Creek Station on 16 October, Beckler exclaimed that he been to Ipswich and had received two letters dated April and June. He was obviously enjoying his stay at Purga Creek Station with all its magnificent wild life and particularly its bird life, for he went on to describe the bird songs – the dawn chorus and the evensong. These avian musical experiences he would later write about on his return to Germany in *Die Gartenlaube* (the *Gazebo*) in 1867 under the title of the ‘*Die Musik der Vogel*’ (‘The Melody of the Birds’).

Beckler returned to Warwick toward the end of November, his writings capturing the romantic majesty of the landscape:

After almost a year, I am riding the same route from Ipswich to Warwick. Again my eye grazes on the paradisiacal charm of the landscape. It is the same image, the same impression as last year. How beautiful is the earth! How rich the life of nature, how fresh the green of the flower as the gentle ethereal blue of the hills and mountains, lush overwhelming as the dark masses of foliage of Scrubs, as strange and new forms of the plants. My horse goes in comfort and not taking care of his speed, well noting that I have lost myself. How often I thought of you

[Karl] during the 80 miles and how great would the pleasure have been, if I could have shared all this with you.⁷⁶

Once again all his plans went awry. His friend, Marcus Birkmann, had found his wife dead in the basement of his house and had been charged with manslaughter and was now awaiting trial in the Brisbane Goal. Beckler reflected that he should have stayed with Baillon at Purga Creek Station where he had been involved in sheep husbandry activities. While there, he had made a number of tentative plans for his future, including one to travel with a squatter overland to Melbourne as a shepherd with a flock of sheep which would have been: 'an interesting journey of nine months with a monetary reward'⁷⁷.

The other plan had been to travel into the interior with Gregory's expedition commissioned to find traces of Leichhardt. Following up on this, Beckler had written to a Danish friend, Boesen, a businessman in Sydney, to contact Gregory. Beckler received a prompt reply from Boesen, to the effect that 'Gregory, who led the last expedition and this expedition wants to take a doctor or scientist. However, funds are too low and no time for collecting. Beckler thought he should have gone anyway: 'I would probably have to cook, clean and load horses to carry loads,' but Gregory had apparently said to Boesen that 'it is a sin to take a scientific man to work'.⁷⁸

Beckler indicated that he had finally decided to start as a chemist and druggist in Warwick. He went to Kilner, a chemist in Ipswich, who supplied everything wholesale from London and arranged credit:

because I have not a penny. One difficulty I will have here, which I have thought about before, is that I would quite happily leave Australia, if only I could, but I cannot. So I am determined in this branch of medicine to trade in drugs and to strive for success. I cannot progress any other way. If I had travelled to Sydney to obtain the qualification, I would have perhaps tried again to practice and would indeed go all the way. Without qualification to practice is downright dangerous. Your freedom is continually at stake. A patient dies, immediately suggests some questionable qualification and a court physician says what he sees fit, makes a few suggestive comments and the consequence is that you will be referred to the jury of manslaughter. ... The Drug business pays well and is a much quieter life, and I

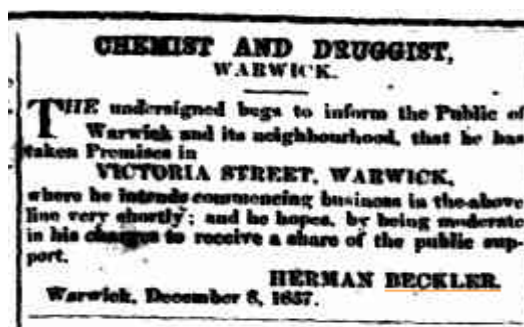
⁷⁶ Ibid., 154.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 156.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 158

hope trapped in my little shop, to live quite comfortably between my shop and some good books.⁷⁹

Accordingly, the *North Australian, Ipswich and General Advertiser*⁸⁰ on Tuesday 15 December 1857 carried the follow advertisement confirming Beckler's intentions to establish himself as a chemist and druggist in Victoria Street, Warwick 'very shortly; and he hopes, by being moderate in his charges to receive a share of the public support!'



On 17 December, Beckler wrote:

I think I cannot close better than if I tell you in the exodus of an article in the Sydney Morning Herald. This is article No.15 written by a botanical amateur [William Woolls] in Parramatta, close to Sydney. Should I get the 14 previous articles so I find what is interesting? The writer is full of gratitude to Dr. Mueller, Government Botanist, of whom I have mentioned to you. Dr. Mueller has helped him with corrections and identification that he must really be a very skillful and diligent systematic botanist, and as far as I know, he is after he came back from Gregory's expedition and went to England, and there found recognition. This article is about Asteraceae in Parramatta.⁸¹

On Christmas Eve 1857, Beckler nostalgically wrote:

⁷⁹ Ibid., 159/160

⁸⁰ 1857 'Advertising.', *The North Australian, Ipswich and General Advertiser* (Ipswich, Qld.), 1856 - 1862), 15 December, p. 2, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article77429334>

⁸¹ Beckler. *Letters*, 173/174 - William Woolls (1814-1893), clergyman, schoolmaster and botanist, Woolls was best known for his promotion of Australian botany and his assistance to other scholars rather than for large-scale systematic work. From K. J. Cable, 'Woolls, William (1814-1893)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/woolls-william-4886/text8175>,

You remember we are at the summer solstice. It was a hot day, even for me oppressive. The evening with moon lighting is gorgeous and relatively cool to the heat, although there feels the oppressive sultriness. I feel so well and life is so easily under the magnificent sky that your ego does well, although I have only a few shillings in my pocket. How hard is to remember these inverted seasons - Christmas frost at home, the pleasant, but yet so different furnace heat, to the sparkling snow at the window, and finally to the richly decorated and lighted Christmas tree, joys of childhood and sweet surprise of loving parents.⁸²

Writing from Warwick on 1 February 1858, Beckler mentioned that:

Today I have received your letter of 14 October 1857, which I will answer, but it will have to wait for March mail, because I still have no money. Today, it is two years since I saw Australian soil for the first time. There have been many worries and sorrow and after 2 years, nothing but 120 pounds of debt. But debt speaks for credit. Your letter is really sad for me, but a source of joy. I read the '*Empire*' from Sydney, about Neumayer. Mother is very wrong when she calls Australia a poor country. Unfortunately in your life there is no such green, no such sky seen and no such shiny stars. It is a paradise.⁸³

Beckler mentioned that his friend Birkmann had been acquitted and the public had given him three cheers in the courtroom: 'Here [at Warwick] we received him with joy, a number of men rode to meet him, and all houses hoisted on flags. The Chinese arranged strange things to their huts. Since Birkmann is back, I live in his house, so - I am all right.'

But all was not well with his pharmacy business:

I have my pharmacist load but still cannot open because part of Drugs have not arrived yet, but have received many inquiries and hope for the best ... You remember that I wrote to you about Dr Lippmann. The poor man has recently taken a sad end. He rode from Brown's Public house to Mr. Bracker's station (you well know the place from my Letters), lost himself, his horse came back, they were looking for him, they found his body, he starved to death under a gum

⁸² Beckler, Letters, 178.

⁸³ Ibid., 179.

tree. A hideous end is to be eaten alive by a shark and the next miserable end is to starve in the Australian wildernesses.⁸⁴

A few weeks earlier he had been hoping to see his first Aboriginal 'Koroberi' (corroboree). He had never seen one, although he had been two years in Australia:

I went with Dr. Labatt in the camp of the Savages. It gave the impression of another time. But the Blacks fought too much and let us wait too long. We stood near a group, who were drinking stolen brandy. There was a violent dispute all at once, with two boomerangs suddenly buzzing past us, though not meant for us, but too close to be pleasant. We then went home.⁸⁵

Beckler wrote that Mr. Gregory, leader of the expedition seeking to find the traces Dr Leichhardt, had been in Warwick for several days.

I saw and spoke to him. He is a man of ordinary affairs, of my height and build, but you can read the hardships through which he experienced in his face. He looked ill and haggard, and you can diagnose almost once liver disease. I talked to him about the expedition and told him who I was and that I would have gladly taken part in the expedition under different circumstances. Yes, he said it would be a nice trip, nothing more and nothing less of a scientific expedition. From the last station they only took six months with provisions. Gregory has already found during the last expedition Leichhardt's camp and will initially visit this again. If he comes back, he will probably lead a large expedition across the continent, through the desert, like Leichhardt's last plan. For this expedition, the Victorian Government will fund and it will take 2 years to complete.⁸⁶

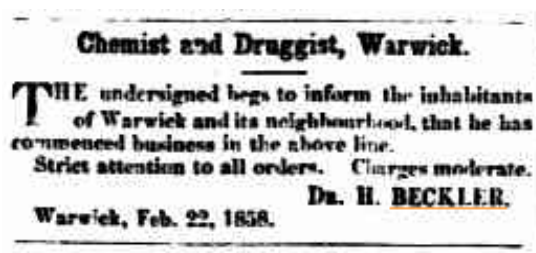
Unwittingly, Beckler was referring to an expedition that would later become the Victorian Exploring Expedition, in which he would join and play an important role. Writing on 21 February, Beckler wrote that his business was still quite slow, as he advertised business with the note. 'Charges moderate'.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Ibid., 181.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 181.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 182.

⁸⁷ 1858 'Classified Advertising.', *The Moreton Bay Courier* (Brisbane, Qld. : 1846 - 1861), 31 March, p. 1, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article3717420>



Again on 27 March 1858 he wrote to Karl, that:

Tonight I received your kind letter of 31 December and tonight I saw a grand Corroberi. I was not sure what a Corroberi [sic] was, and full of the desire once yet so to see something that I hurried out, and found in my haste barely enough time to breathe. I heard already in the distance, the wild voices and the metallic sounding hitting together of boomerangs.⁸⁸

Following the corroboree, Beckler wrote four detailed pages in which he delicately described the choreography, the performance of the dancers, the music, and the soul of the occasion; his composition was later published in Germany. Beckler was evidently in a writing mood and seeking solance in botanising, he wrote fifteen pages, complete with drawings, on his detailed botanical analysis of the Australian Grass Tree, having literally dissected a whole plant during his four-month stay at Purga Creek Station. Despite business in his drug store being slow, he was now able to reduce his indebtedness to his suppliers and friends. Beckler busied himself with reading the daily newspapers (*Sydney Morning Herald*, *Empire*, etc.), as well as undertaking long botanical exploring walks along the Condamine River during the weekends.

In reading the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 1 January 1858, he noticed a report of the Exploration Committee of the Philosophical Institute of Victoria advocating the establishment of an expedition to cross the interior of Australia from east to west 'How much I want to be there'⁸⁹, he exclaimed in a letter to Karl. Little did he realise that he would soon become caught up in a life changing event; the proposed expedition was the forerunner of the future Royal Society of Victoria's Victorian Exploring Expedition, in which he would play a significant role as an important scientific member.

Beckler had been staying with his friend Marcus Birkmann in his guest house (public inn) for eight months since his return from Purga Creek Station and he liked to practice

⁸⁸ Beckler, *Letters*, 181.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*,

his piano playing skills (classical and dance music) at every opportunity. His avid reading of the daily newspapers alerted him to a series of botanical articles written in the *Sydney Morning Herald* by William Woolls. He included the article in his June letter to Karl 'to show you that even in these remote regions there are people who have an interest in these things.'⁹⁰

Later, Beckler wrote to Woolls and asked him to recommend some books on Australian flora. Woolls had written him a polite friendly letter in reply and had given him all possible information. With the coming of spring, Beckler indicated that he would concentrate on botany as well as collecting birds and other animals, such as platypuses.

His regular letters to Karl continued to contain commentaries on all manner of subjects, including commentaries on local events, his dissections of plants and animals, even the report of Gregory's expedition to find traces of Leichhardt and the continuing series of botanical articles written by William Woolls in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. On 29 September 1858, Beckler wrote:

Yesterday was my birthday. I am now 30 years old. I think, if there will be no extraordinary coincidences, such as at sea or other misfortunes, to live well for 20 years and still hereby many time for hope of success, for perfection in spiritual and moral relationship and hope for many happy days as temporary satisfaction in material terms, reunion, etc. ... My present time I share between studying and refreshing medical subjects, a little botany and mathematics. The botany I cannot go very far, because it would take years of exclusive work of a man to study the local or the flora of the District. But what little I do, it is enough to satisfy me.⁹¹

On 1 October 1858 he wrote:

Today is the Birthday of our dear Mother. May she enjoy many more years and may it be granted to me poor devil, to hug her again! Today, 3 years ago I began the journey from Hamburg to Australia. We left at 6 o'clock in the morning, that is, weighed anchor, and a steamer pulled us down river.

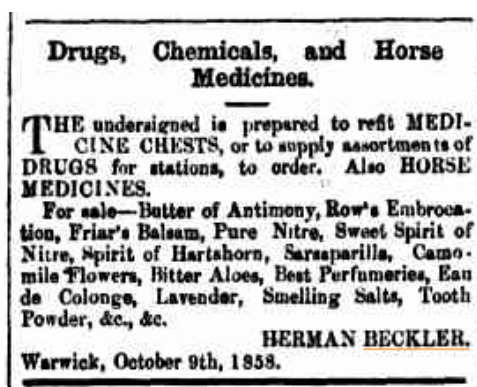
I had money just some good penny and a few Hamburger schillings and was literally wealthier than today, full of hopes, full of spirits and the fresh courage

⁹⁰ Ibid.,

⁹¹ Ibid., 265.

was only slightly attenuated by the indescribable feeling, the one who feels of home, when he on his own, breaks loose and wants to penetrate into a strange world. How different today. At the time, I belonged, real at least, under the weary class of Europe, but today I am a tired Australian, dam the gum-trees.⁹²

Beckler continued to advertise regularly. His advertisement in the *Moreton Bay Courier*⁹³ on Wednesday 27 October 1858, indicated that he was now supplying horse medicines!



Writing home on Christmas Day 1858, he was in a melancholy mood:

What should I write to you? I have a heart so full and want to say so much and do not know where to start. I think I could almost take everything in a few words. Today, I would be at home in Blenheim [Höchstädt], the warm stove, where the old parents sit and dream about their life, where I want to sit next them, to you, Fanny and see myself satisfied, if not rich, cheerful, if not even funny. How would mother be happy if could see her and love them. Ah, home, home.⁹⁴

Beckler's homesickness and unsettlement did not subside as wrote in the following pages: 'I am now determined to leave Warwick if I can. I want to give the whole lot up and go with the sheep to Melbourne over land and from there either to directly come home or come home in a roundabout way.'⁹⁵

⁹² Ibid., 265.

⁹³ 1858 'Classified Advertising.', *The Moreton Bay Courier* (Brisbane, Qld. : 1846 - 1861), 27 October, p. 1, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article3719070>

⁹⁴ Ibid., 296.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 297.

On 24 January 1859, Beckler received a letter from Dr Mueller⁹⁶, in which he was offered engagement as a collector for a few specific areas in New South Wales. Not much would be paid and the cost of such trips would not be great because he would live on the stations. At the Richmond River, he would live especially cheaply, on the station with the labourers (cedar sawyers and others) and very close to Mr Benson, a gentleman whom he knew well. Mueller also sent Beckler a copy of the newly published first volume of his *Fragmenta phytographiae Australiae*, written entirely in Latin.

Matters looked even brighter on 27 January, as Beckler wrote that he had met Mr Dalrymple who would be in charge of taking sheep down to Melbourne for a Mr White. He noted that Dalrymple was a nice person and was relieved to know that there would be two other young gentlemen, so he wouldn't be alone with 'rude' people. They would go to Maiden's Punt (Moama, on the New South Wales side of the Murray River), about 200 miles north of Melbourne and would be paid 30 shillings a week and food. The route would be down the MacIntyre River, then the Macquarie, Lachlan and Murrumbidgee Rivers.⁹⁷

Beckler bemoaned the fact that they would not go as far west as the Darling 'which would have been interesting because of the vegetation'.

On 1 February, Beckler saw Dalrymple who indicated that they would leave Warwick for Pike Dale Station to pick up the sheep on 11 February and then commence the droving on 15 February. Beckler closed his pharmacy and settled all his debts. His friend Birkmann gave him a southwester (hat) and overskirt. He also took with him 'blankets, woollen shirts, socks, good strong shoes, a water bag, sketchbook, sheet music and a table summarising the plant families, not to mention pipes and tobacco: 'It will be a *spiffy* trip.'⁹⁸ It seems Beckler was now fully conversant with Australian colonial idiomatic language. Writing his last letter from the district on 4 February 1859, prior to his departure as a drover, he urged his brother to send his next round of letters to Messrs. Haege and Prell, Agents, Melbourne, Victoria.

⁹⁶ This letter has not been traced, but it is likely to have been prompted as an outcome of Mueller's correspondence with William Woolls, during which Woolls had mentioned Beckler's botanical collecting activities, as a result of Beckler's earlier correspondence (1858) with Woolls.

⁹⁷ Becklers, *Letters*, 310/311.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 316, original emphasis

Chapter 4

In Australia 1859 -1860

To Melbourne & Botanical Collecting in New South Wales

Hermann Beckler now experienced first-hand the vastness and the unforgiving nature of the Australian bush as a member of a team of drovers bringing 10,000 sheep some 1300 kilometers from the Darling Downs to Deniliquin, an overland journey that took them five months. Anxious to leave immediately for Melbourne at the conclusion of the journey, Beckler, in typical fashion, provided his brother with a colourful descriptive travelogue of his coach ride through the New South Wales and Victorian countryside into the city of Melbourne. This travelogue is particularly interesting and historically significant, coming as it does from the pen of careful observer. But, despite the elation of exploring the landscape, and culture and social life of what was then the largest city in the land, Beckler was still personally unsettled as revealed in his letters home to his brother. Further disappointment was to come when he discovered that his Munich diploma was not recognized by the Victorian medical authorities. Clearly troubled by this setback, Beckler accepted employment with Dr Mueller at the Herbarium while he considered other options, one of which was to sail home as a ship's doctor; yet to arrive home without funds to reimburse his parents for his education was not a happy prospect.

'My overland trip is over', wrote an elated Hermann Beckler to his brother Karl on Friday 1 July 1859 shortly after his arrival in Melbourne: 'I have to commence this letter to you, otherwise I forget everything - expect no order in this letter – I will write stuff down as they occur to me, with some chronological notes.'⁹⁹

Six days earlier, on Saturday 25 June 1859, the droving team had camped eight miles from Deniliquin on the Edwards River with 10,000 sheep. Beckler was glad that they did not have to move further as for several weeks he had suffered from chillblains and rheumatism, which had left him with a stiff knee. The last two days of their trip had been the worst and he had had the morning watch (2 am to 7 am). His Mackintosh had been soaked to the skin and he had had to wade through water and mud. Monday 27 June was even worse as by then they were only a short distance from the town and the sales yard superintendent was not satisfied with the papers of the agent who was to receive formally

⁹⁹ Beckler, *Letters*, 319.

the sheep. Telegraph messages to Melbourne and Sydney quickly settled the matter and they were pleased to finally hand over the sheep just before sunset, which had been difficult to handle all day owing to the soggy ground. In the evening Beckler and his colleagues received their payments via 'a mercantile note to Mr Tooth¹⁰⁰ in Sydney'.

Fortunately, Beckler had brought some sovereigns with him, otherwise he would have had to wait for money to arrive from Sydney. With his droving friend, Wilkinson, they set off at once to make the trip to Melbourne arriving just in time to board the mail coach. Beckler mentioned that it was very unsafe to travel and going on foot and camping outdoors being cheaper, the recent rain had made travel extremely arduous.

Beckler described an exhilarating coach journey from Deniliquin to Melbourne:

A mail coach ride in wild Australia! The distance between Deniliquin and Melbourne is 180 miles, and mail makes this way in about 27 hours. The wagons are known under the name, 'American wagons' and are everything you could wish for in strength and lightness. The relays are of 12 miles, some are longer. The time to change horses is 3 minutes, half an hour for tea in Moama, or Maiden's Punt on the Murray and half an hour for breakfast in MacIvor (Heathcote). Four horses are on each wagon and the drivers are mostly 'Yankees'. With what degree of skill and equanimity they go through their terrible work is amazing, because they have no road on which to drive. They drive over the wild country out along the telegraph line, through thick and thin, mud and swamp, dry and wet, rocks, sand, and everything.¹⁰¹

After travelling throughout the night, they arrived next day around noon in Kilmore, an important junction and staging post, 40 miles north of Melbourne. There they joined a larger coach and by mid-afternoon they were in Melbourne.

Beckler, in describing his first impressions of Melbourne as they entered the city from the north, was clearly impressed:

Through the haze of the Bay [Port Phillip Bay] one sees the indistinct, but the not too unmistakable image of a big city. At the next mile post we find ourselves 5

¹⁰⁰ William Butler Tooth (1823-1876) the Sydney based owner of Pike Dale station and many other stations in Queensland and New South Wales.

¹⁰¹ Beckler, Letters, 320.

miles from Melbourne, and the next minute brings us to one of the northern suburbs, "Brunswick".

The first public building on the Sydney road, which we encounter and one that is well suited to give us an idea of the importance of the city and the colony is the "Stockade" or prison [Pentridge Prison].

A little later we see on the same side the university, a not yet finished building (the fourth wing is still missing)¹⁰². The buildings so far are completed, and museum, lecture halls, apartments, etc. already fill the interior of the recently inaugurated institution. The university is in the pure Gothic style, window arches, doors, ornate rings, columns, capitals, bows and all. It is a building that needs to make the architect proud and to me it is incomprehensible how you can bring something already built on our southern continents.

Next from the road, behind the University is a birthing house¹⁰³, a large Italianate brick building with no exterior decoration, but in good style, I think at best Italian.

It's all commercial, trade and commerce, restorations, hotels and department stores are created in the grandest scale. A showcase I have never found neither in Augsburg nor in Munich and only sporadically in Hamburg. By 3 and 4 houses next to each other ranging with a storefront with the broad gleaming brass strips down to the ground. There is nothing you could not have in Melbourne and the shops are separated as in any large city, tobacco and cigar shop, shoe and boot store, spices, fruit shop, furniture and books, etc.¹⁰⁴

Writing again on Monday 4 July, Beckler described his visit to the Museum then housed at the University of Melbourne:

The day before yesterday, Saturday 2 July 1859, I visited the Museum in the [Melbourne] university buildings, open to the public every day from 9am -5pm. A stone staircase leads to the First Floor of the northern wing, which is designed entirely for the museum. On both sides of the stairs are two halls. The inner room

¹⁰² The researcher witnessed it being completed in 1970s

¹⁰³ Melbourne Lying-in Hospital and Infirmary for Diseases Peculiar to Women and Children, established on the cnr of Swanton and Grattan Streets in 1858.

¹⁰⁴ Beckler, *Letters*, pp. 324/326.

on the left contains mainly beautifully executed models, apparatus and machines for gold recovery, various quartz crushing apparatus amalgamators. Puddling machines, a large model of a Russian sieve machine, commonly used in the Urals, collections from the various gold mines of Victoria,¹⁰⁵

On leaving, I read some of the black board mounted displays, by which I found one that said, “that students cannot appear otherwise than in the prescribed clothing in the lecture halls, the museum, the library and the Quadrangle” – is this academic freedom in Australia!¹⁰⁶

Saturday 2 July turned out to be an even busier time for Hermann, as in the evening he visited the Royal Theatre in Bourke Street, with the Cafe de Paris and the Hotel Royal being part of the building:

The Royal Theatre in Bourke Street is a lovely building and of course is nothing compared to Munich. The vestibule has just been renovated, with a fountain in the middle and is large and inviting.

I say again, Munich, except Glyptothek [Sculpture Gallery], Pinakothek, [Art Gallery] etc., has nothing that can compete with the Bank of New South Wales, with the Oriental Bank, with the Saving's Bank and with other buildings in Melbourne. So far the architecture you find here are dozens as good as the architecture in London. I would like to live in Melbourne, it is a nice, great, interesting place, full of life, beautiful buildings, comforts of civilization, etc., but I do not dare. I have nothing against poverty, but I would rather be poor here than at home.¹⁰⁷

On 4 July, three days after his arrival, Beckler visited Dr Mueller, with whom he had corresponded early in the year. Mueller had offered him a position at the Melbourne Botanic Gardens at three pounds per week. Beckler thanked him for his offer but indicated that he was thinking of leaving Australia. However, his subsequent visit to Sandridge Pier to find a passage as a ship's doctor was unsuccessful.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 326/328.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 328.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 328/329.

Clearly unsettled and upset, Beckler wrote to Karl: 'All my speculation, my years of plans with ship opportunities are nothing but a huge shimmering soap bubble in the most magnificent colors, now cracked and flown away. A doctor should be able to go with any ship in any part of the earth.' He followed this with news that he had spoken to Mueller about the prospect of work and everything was now alright:

I start tomorrow at 9 o'clock to organize the Herbarium of the Victoria Colony and get 3 pounds a week, which is not much, but it is good for simple living, working from 9 - 4 o'clock, light but interesting work. I am worry free for months and not afraid afterwards whether I stay here or abroad. The same sum would always be open to me as a collector in different districts, for some it may suffice for various places, but for others it would be too little. It is enough that I am ready, in fact, I must be satisfied whether I want to or not. I have enough time left for self-study, and that will be necessary, otherwise I will not forget even everything I have ever learnt in my life.¹⁰⁸

Beckler mentioned that Dr Mueller 'was an extremely friendly, very simple man who it seems, every countryman loves to listen when he speaks.'¹⁰⁹

Beckler tried to get his Diploma qualification recognized in Victoria, but had no luck. He explained:

It's bad when you have to deal with German officialdom and equally bad with English (Australian). But if German and English officialdom come together, that's where everything happens because no good will be achieved. Enough with all the running, writing and playing Pontius Pilate - my diploma was not recognized. There are some stupid, narrow-chested regulations that must be complied with, which apply to any single foreign university rendering the diploma not being accepted, despite the specific testimonies on the stupid embossing remaining silent. It is dear brother, less cumbersome here than that for a Royal Bavarian District Court, at the Royal Police Directorate in Munich.¹¹⁰

On Monday 11 July 1859, Beckler wrote that:

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 332.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 332.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 333.

Today I have done my first daily work in the botanical garden, a work of which I am ashamed because of its utmost ease, but as always, as long as one earns his bread. At noon, I cannot go home and have therefore from 8 o'clock to 5 o'clock in the evening, nothing to eat except some tea that I get from Dr. Mueller. However, the work is very interesting because he necessarily brings a vision of so many Australian plants with it. He who could keep all this in his memory would be a made botanist at once.¹¹¹

Beckler referred to the 'lithograph of the Princes Bridge, 1854, 'by unknown artist'¹¹² at the top of his letter, in which he had drawn himself crossing the bridge (see figure 11). 'Now I come across this bridge every morning to go to the botanical gardens, so look quite closely, since I just go over it; your brother Hermann in Australia'.



Figure 11. Beckler picturing himself crossing the old Princes Bridge, Melbourne on one of his 'Letters'. Note the letter writing style translated into modern German by Dr Renner in 1976.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 335.

¹¹² A pictorial lettergram freely available in the 1850/60s for purchase from the Post Office.

Writing on 9 August Beckler mentioned that he and Professor Neumayer had just come from the German Club where they had read the latest newspapers from Germany which had arrived on the previous day.

The *Allgemeine Zeitung* goes up to 10th. As much as I looked forward to this journal after a long deprivation of this Journal, I must confess that each time I read it, it disgusts me more and more. It stinks of too much of despotism. I read and read and then apply for a few moments for reflection and are sad moments by the thoughts repeated upon me that I can no longer like to live in Germany. Now that I can no longer endure despotism, the principles and the words of such correspondents (as the *Allgemeine Zeitung* has many), give me the impression as if their remarks were directed to minor children, instead to the most educated part of the German nation.

I have forgotten how the politics work at home and after I read anything as long as English newspapers, it comes before me as I find the British and Americans, a strange monster. I am no Napoleonist and the recent downfall the Austrians do hurt me, because I have so many pleasant memories of my Austrian army friends and because they all are German (I mean the German regiments) and it hurts me and wounds my national pride to know about defeated German armies by the French.¹¹³

Beckler continued at the Herbarium. By 12 August 1859, he had finished arranging and filling twenty-one large boxes of the size of wooden boxes for clothes, etc., usually work done by high school students. However, his next job was working with the European and international collection reviewing plants from America, India, China and elsewhere which promised to be more interesting.

The next phase of Hermann Beckler's ever-changing career path now took a permanent new direction as he left Melbourne for the first time as a paid botanical collector for Dr Mueller's Herbarium. He travelled by sea to Sydney and then by coastal steamer to Port Macquarie, the gateway to his collecting area. He stayed in Sydney for eight days and tried to meet up with William Woolls with whom he had corresponded whilst in Moreton Bay. He arranged for his portrait to be taken by German photographer William Hetzer,

¹¹³ In reference to the Franco –Austrian War of 1859.

which would be the only formal portrait taken during his time in Australia. Regrettably, a copy has not been found. He looked forward to his collecting in the hinterland of the Clarence and McLeay River catchments, especially the solitary existence that collecting in such a wild country required. However, the collecting proved difficult as there were hardly any new plants. Beckler looked forward to returning to Melbourne arriving there at the beginning of June 1860; he had been away for approximately eight months.

News of the Royal Society of Victoria's impending expedition would greet him on his return and he would quickly lodge an application, expressing his expectation of acceptance in a letter to his brother Karl: 'Dr Mueller hardly doubts the fact that I can come as a physician and botanical collector'.¹¹⁴

Beckler wrote next on 15 September 1859:

This is quite a short little letter in fact, as I have had so little time to write. Currently, I am suffering from hemorrhoids and have a quite disturbed digestion, but I hope they will soon be gone with the change of climate. Yesterday evening I was at the Humboldt commemoration¹¹⁵ of the German Club. Professor Damm, Dr Mueller and Professor Neumayer attended, the latter in particular gave an excellent speech.

NB: If I go with the expedition, I come home in any case after the end of the same, even if only for a short time.¹¹⁶

He wrote again 25 September to say that he was just about to leave Melbourne to collect botanical specimens in New South Wales for Mueller:

Dear Brother, I have just read, in default again of more recent letters, your last letters of February and I am sending you herewith my last greeting from the great focus of Australian civilization, Melbourne.

Tomorrow, I am leaving Melbourne to go Sydney on the *City of Sydney* (steamer), thence to Port Macquarie to collect for Dr Mueller plants and the vegetation of the Hastings [River], then in the Alps (especially Mount Sea View, reportedly 6000 feet high). This will take provisionally 3 months, but I will

¹¹⁴ Beckler, *Letters*, 359.

¹¹⁵ Commemorating the death of Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859)

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 360.

probably be gone for 5-6 months from here and then visit the Richmond and Clarence Rivers and the local alpine heights.

It is strange that one always has with eternal lively Wanderlust, a tendency to see again the past places we inhabit, although nothing good has been enjoyed there. I am now of course, as always, full of plans for my trip and I hope that I will develop the requisite energy and diligence to what to make of it. I will collect plants (for me also insects and other vermin), make sketches, record geological heights and keep a journal.

After this trip I come back hither to go with the great camel expedition and I can already see myself.¹¹⁷

Later, Beckler wrote about his arrival in Sydney and his subsequent short stay. He would have spent his thirty-first birthday at sea off Sydney, but failed to mention it in his letter:

Dear Karl, Last Thursday [29 September 1859], I came here with the Steamer *City of Sydney*... We had a good voyage, only a bit too much wind from the front, which delayed our arrival here by a few hours. You must learn fresh sea legs again and again. I was not sick, but I felt in my stomach the unpleasant feeling several times.

I wanted go to the steerage, but the company down there were so dirty that I decided to go second class Cabin (5 pounds 5 shillings), where I was together with even quite ordinary people. First class Cabin was too expensive for 2 days travel (8 pounds). Again, after 4 long years, I was on the blue surging tide of the ocean, with the difference that this time I went on a screw steamer and that I, since the horrible catastrophe with the *Lady Bird*, *Admella*, *Dunbar*, etc., by far felt safe. It is without a doubt being on the ocean is in constant mortal danger.¹¹⁸

He stayed in Parramatta and went to visit Mr Woolls who was out of town when he called. Parramatta, he noted, 'is a spacious place without seeing worthy addition to the now resplendent in the gold jewelry orange gardens, that I think are as big as any which I think in the world.'

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 364.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 365.

Beckler recounted that while he was in Sydney he had arranged to have his portrait taken:

While I was in Melbourne, I never had time during the day to go to a photographer to get my portrait and since I know that the mother, you and Fanny [Franziska] would be very glad about a portrait of me, I found a very good photographer, a German, William Hetzer,¹¹⁹. I was supposed to look good, because I am definitely fatter than I was at home and have a slightly better colour - well, if it's a good likeness, then I 'm satisfied . So send one immediately to mother, another one to Fanny and greet them both kindest from me.¹²⁰

Beckler noted that he would be travelling by steamer to Port Macquarie, on the River Hastings, then on to the Macleay and Richmond rivers. Pressed for time, he was only able to write a few lines:

From Melbourne I have sent a letter to the 'General' [*Allgemeine Zeitung*], 'From Edwards River to Melbourne.' See if it comes and write me. I will tell you about my trip to the Hastings etc. I keep an accurate diary and perhaps send a report to '*Petermanns Geographische Mitteilungen*'. At the same time with this letter, I send 2 cards, of which one showing the routes of travelers... I will send the portraits immediately - Address as I previously wrote to you to Melbourne, because at least I have to go back again.¹²¹

Writing again on 11 October 1859, Beckler mentioned that he departed Sydney on 7 October on the steamer *Mimosa* for Port Macquarie, which they reached a day later around noon on Saturday 8 October 1859. He remarked in his notebook:

Australia is a beautiful country, as you are no doubt already convinced from my letters and the name Port Macquarie makes no dishonor in terms of scenery of the country. It is not a business place and relatively unknown and unvisited, and it is

¹¹⁹ William Hetzer, arrived in Sydney from Germany in February 1850, setting up a photographic studio at 15 Hunter Street. Hetzer became well known for his prints showing views in and around Sydney. In 1858 he published a series of 36 stereoscopic views of Sydney. He worked in Sydney until 1867, when his studio contents were auctioned and he left for Germany.

¹²⁰ Beckler, Letters. 368/369.

¹²¹ Ibid. 369.

so different, that it would be like talking about a remote country. I have never seen such beautiful coastal views and terrific domestic landscape that opens your eyes when viewing. A wide horizon and everywhere you can see unimpeded until the distant mountains.¹²²

Beckler met up with the German doctor, Dr Schröder and his large family (wife and seven children). Schröder had been in Australia for six years, yet despite being the only doctor in the district, he was still not in a viable practice situation. He was also the District Coroner and was formerly the regimental doctor in Schleswig-Holstein and once assistant to Langenbeck (Berlin's famous surgeon).

From Port Macquarie, Beckler travelled inland. On 1 November 1859, he wrote from Mr Thomas Henry's Station at Lonely Point (Long Flat) on the Hastings. He had not been successful with his botanical collecting because of the prolonged dry spell. However, he had found nine parasitic orchids 'curious creatures': which is better than nothing, one or two (of the Sapindaceae), two *Brachychiton*, much appreciated by the natives because of their fibrous bark and used in all kinds of ways in their primitive native budget (they call the trees 'Korretchong').¹²³

Beckler remarked that that there we only a few settlers up in the mountains, and noted that he had found traveling a lot easier and more enjoyable than he initially expected. He compared the Australian bush with the alpine scenery at home and mentioned that the mountains were clothed in green as distinct from the higher and exposed rock of the mountains of the Allgäu:

the people are all so nice and hospitable, in a few houses they take a few shillings for catering (which is even more enjoyable, because I do not like to always live at others' expense). Also from my now familiarity with the language and my long acquaintance with the bush, I get on quite well with these people and I am quite at home.

In the mountains you can see some good mountain scenery - nothing compared to our Alpine scenery, not even to strike the lower height of the local mountains - No bare rock, nearby mountains are green, all distant blue, those blue, one above the other towering masses, a pleasant resting point for your eyes. But the

¹²² Ibid., 371.

¹²³ Ibid., 375.

vegetation is charming enough and although I have not seen a real tropical jungle, I do believe that richer vegetation, greater light and shade, more abundant forms are nowhere to be seen.¹²⁴

But Beckler had some bad experiences in travelling through the dense lantana creepers and tangled undergrowth and remarked that while the undergrowth was:

so beautiful and wild is the thing to look at, so miserable it is to get through. It is often a really cursed history. You climb over piles of rotten branches, fearing a snake at any moment, as one holds a thorny shrub with long branches. One wants to turn to pass, but is caught on the arm. We remove the branch with the other hand and finally, we make a "rush", but find that we are trapped from behind. We reverse because the first bush keeps us in again. These things impassable every 2-3 minutes and delay us always for 2-3 minutes - so much for thorny creepers.¹²⁵

Writing on Sunday 6 November, Beckler recounted how he had obtained the flowers from a tall Tamarind Tree:

This morning a few blacks came by and I offered a sixpence to knock down one of these magnificent trees, which is botany in Australia to get a raceme bloom to ground from a forest prince. No sooner said than done; the cracking of the earth, with the trunk shattering this proud 70 foot high tree. Just to get a few remaining flowers, just enough to show the system of the embryo and well for investigating and insertion the development of recognized fruits. After my diagnosis, I found it is one belonging to the Sterculiaceae plant. The blacks call the tree 'Jembong'.¹²⁶

Beckler arrived back in Port Macquarie on 13 November 1859 to post his letters, but missed the mail boat and was forced to wait for four weeks before he could post them again.

Reflecting on his personal problems, Beckler indulged once more in deep self-analysis and self-pity laced with his homesickness. He was not satisfied with the results of his collecting as he wished to take a great collection to Melbourne.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 376.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 379.

But I still doubt very much of the success, the neighborhood here is lush, as you know already, but I just cannot say that I see a lot of different plants. Of those that I do see, I find little of the flowers or fruit.

From the expedition, I have heard nothing yet. I am very eager to know when it will go off and hopefully I will not be wearing out my bones and at least my skin is healing, not because of fat or meat. I can however, waste away in a short time afterwards in Melbourne. The sea journey (not in steerage, because the cabin is better and a free passage is not available), will make me completely fat, so that the dear mother is not grieved at the first moment of reunion.¹²⁷

Beckler indicated that his next letter might be from Richmond as he was very dissatisfied with his collection – he could not get flowers from the tall trees. He also mentioned from what he had read in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that the expedition camels had arrived from India.

On New Year's Day 1860, Beckler wrote from Port Macquarie:

My dear Karl, How better could I now fill in a few hours with you than with a New Year salutation, to the parents and siblings who are going to attend mass! I must today to think of the home. I cannot believe the Almanac that it is New Year's Day and as this day is a Sunday. Port Macquarie, has a Sunday coat, that is, everything is closed. How poor is a New Year's celebration in a British colony!¹²⁸

Beckler celebrated New Year's Eve with Dr Schröder over a glass of wine and cake and a chat of memories from home. In view of his limited collecting success, Beckler was hoping to find a letter from Dr. Mueller calling him back to Melbourne, only to find that Mueller wanted him to go to the Macleay river with hope of doing better there. There was still no news of the expedition.

Mueller sent Beckler the eighth Fascicle of the *Fragmenta*, [*Fragmenta phytographiae Australiae*] in which he had named a plant 'Ozothamnus' after Beckler; 'Ozothamnus Becklarii'. Beckler exclaimed: 'I have collected the plant, it's got my name - and I did not even know - that's splendid!' His next letter, dated 16 March 1860, was written at

¹²⁷ Ibid., 381.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 382.

Grafton on the Clarence River. Beckler arrived there on 27 February, but was plagued with bad weather and did little collecting:

When I said I was not happy and led during the last 9 months a very charming life, I would be lying. I have seen mountains, valleys, gorges, chasms and precipices, rivers, creeks, water holes, waterfalls and swamps. I have seen granite and mica-slate and clay-slate and granite and basalt. I also saw levels, and I saw a lot of different landscapes and vegetation.

From Dr Mueller I received encouraging and instructive letters and it may be you are interesting to hear, as it is here with our botany. From Hastings River, I sent some new and interesting things to Melbourne, including parasitic orchids, small wonderful nice little thing. There are also very large, massive, but less interesting because already known from New England's highest points and the Blue Mountains. I sent in about 50 specimens to Dr Mueller, all with the exception of one or two species are common in the flat lands of Victoria.¹²⁹

Beckler mentioned that Mr. Oldfield travelled for seventeen months in Western Australia (also for the Botanic Gardens in Melbourne) and took only 40-50 new species home, however Preiss, a German, and Drummond, an Englishman, had collected many specimens. Beckler wrote a lengthy letter as he now had a further three months of collecting firstly on the Macleay, then the Hastings and Wilson rivers, and later the Mary River.

On the Macleay, just like on Manning and the Hastings there are magnificent Scrubs. The towns or rather the settlements are situated on both sides of the river. The alluvial land on the river is so fertile that it that many farmers have been drawn to the area, however, in this wonderful land of Australia, is one of the poorest communities in the face of the earth. Almost all do not own land, but lease a farm. The alluvial land, once covered with a dense scrub, is still full of wooden stumps and roots, so that the land cannot be worked with the plow and has to be maintained by hand and hoe.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Ibid., 385.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 389.

Beckler's destination was Kunderang Station on the upper Macleay, a station in what was then regarded as the wildest part of the country. It was at least 50 miles away, but there was little risk of getting lost because of the river.

Beckler was told that he would have to cross the Macleay at most twenty-five times in five miles from where he crossed the river. By sunset Beckler had made only six crossings. He camped outdoors, had nothing to eat, however was not hungry because of his great fatigue and the heat, but had as always, tea, and sugar, tobacco and light with him:

the mosquitos were bad and let me rest a little, however they sucked my blood through my shirt and trousers. The next morning I did pretty well, as I had already seen Kunderang after six further crossings instead of 10. I was there at 9 o'clock in the morning, having begun my march at daybreak.¹³¹

Beckler was well received at the station (a miserable hut with little food, but enough to eat). He stayed there for four days, collected in the mountains, but found little that was new, other than some Moreton Bay plants, magnificent Hibiscus, two or three different types of Santalum, several species Indigofera, and [Herotes?]:

I would have stayed longer, but as I had no paper left and was not bringing any of my plants from here, I took up Mr. Hill's suggestion, to accompany him on horseback with some cattle to New England Tableland. After 10 more, crossings of the Macleay and we were at the foot of the plateau, the "great Northern ranks of mountains", or the great northern mountain range.¹³²

Writing on Sunday 18 March 1859, Beckler mentioned that:

You must excuse my bad writing and I hate it even more than you and writing undresses me because I cannot write better with the best will in the world. Our good father was right when he said, some 15 or 20 years ago: – Good God; Hermann cannot write, but only paint!¹³³

Beckler was pleased to see the New England Tablelands again and its cool weather, however, riding was not any easier, because of the rough terrain and he was not

¹³¹ Beckler, Letters, 396.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

accustomed to riding with a large pack of plants in front of him and another under one arm. He reached the station owned by Captain Crawford, a very nice Irish family where 'I was all right'. Beckler was invited to stay longer, but he declined as there was little to gain from collecting in that area. He decided not to go any further.

You can see my long journey on the map. Armidale, Mount Mitchell, Sarah River - River Ann Diggings, the first and probably the last Diggings, which I saw), Snowy Mountains, Guy Fawkes Ranges, Namoi River, Orari River, Clarence River, Grafton. From here, probably on Wednesday after Blackwall and Bolena at Richmond, I shall return with the steamer via Sydney, then Melbourne, Hurrah! Nothing like travelling!¹³⁴

Writing from Melbourne Saturday 9 June 1860, Beckler wrote about his return:

Dear Karl, last Tuesday [5 June 1860], I came here. Wednesday morning I met Mr. Prell in the street who told me that there were several letters waiting for me. What a joy to find, what I had only feared, that you are all well. I took my packet of letters and went to enjoy them in the best parlor of the best inn, settled down on a comfortable sofa, ordered a cup of coffee and began to read. The news that my portraits arrived, gave me as much joy as they have made you. From my trip, I cannot write at this time. Just a few words.

After I left New England, I came down the Clarence, due to bad weather I did nothing. Visited Richmond where I, also due to bad weather was long inactive, collected there, but had little success. I decided to return, went to Grafton, thence by steamer to Sydney (arriving on 26 May), a week in Sydney and left the beautiful city by steamer (*City of Sydney*,) and am now back here. I was horribly seasick.¹³⁵

Beckler's sea trip from the Clarence River was not without incident. As a report from *The Moreton Bay Courier* of Tuesday 5 June 1860 indicated, his medical skills were utilized:

The Grafton (Captain Quayle), from Clarence River, crossed the bar at 10 a.m. on 25th May and proceeded to the Richmond to land a surveying party; but after

¹³⁴ Ibid., 399.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 401.

being hove to for a considerable time she was compelled to return, having failed in the attempt...The Grafton again resumed her trip towards Sydney. On Friday, the 'Fenella' was boarded in Trial Bay and the pilot conveyed on board. The Second engineer of the 'Fenella', was brought back to Sydney, he having had his left arm broken by the side lever of the engine. Dr Beckler immediately set the bone.¹³⁶

Beckler's return to Melbourne surprised Dr. Mueller, who was nevertheless pleased as Mr Oldfield had left him. Beckler once again found employment at the Herbarium.

This time I have also free apartment in the Botanical Museum, that was built since my departure from Melbourne (a large bare and empty room and a side room).

I share with a German, who arrived here first and found employment at the Herbarium. I have again my 10 shillings per day and get along with it nicely, as we cook here for ourselves, which of course makes lower expenses than the humblest Board and Lodging house in the city.

Yesterday, finally the camels arrived from India for the expedition (they are still on the ship), which I hope to accompany still and will probably be for a 3-4 months break. I am healthy, but I brought back my hemorrhoids, despite occasional hardships and the moderate life, but suffer very little, with the exception of constipation.

For travelling, I have currently enough prospects – for now the Expedition.¹³⁷

Beckler was still contemplating other options for his future, as his following remarks showed:

Professor Neumayer promises me somewhere a passage, should I be inclined; Kirchner in Sydney offered me letters to his friends in New Caledonia and Fiji. A friend in Sydney (German merchant) offered for me a place in Singapore and Hong Kong. Dr Mueller often speaks about at least from a trip to the southwest

¹³⁶ 1860 'SHIPS' MAILS.', The Sydney Morning Herald (NSW : 1842 - 1954), 28 May, p. 4, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article13041055>

¹³⁷ Beckler, Letters, 402.

tip of Australia. (Cape Leeuwin). One or the other would to be sure, though some failure! But collecting? I think I would get stuck somewhere.¹³⁸

On 15 June 1860, Beckler wrote a formal letter of application to Exploration Committee of the Royal Society of Victoria to the Victorian Exploring Expedition, a letter that would represent a major turning point in his Australian odyssey.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 403.

Chapter 5

With the Victorian Exploring Expedition Mid 1860 – Mid 1861

Beckler's quest to become a member of the Royal Society of Victoria's Victoria Exploring Expedition was realised in July 1860. He had first read about the expedition proposal some two years earlier whilst in Tenterfield and his excitement about the appointment was palpable in his letter to his brother Karl. Yet he was cautious about the success of the expedition, as the Royal Society's Exploration Committee were still undecided about the route that the expedition should take and organisational problems meant that the expedition was delayed. Beckler, was not enamoured with the choice of Robert O'Hara Burke as expedition leader. Nor was he overly impressed with the qualifications of his fellow countryman Becker and other expedition officers. In summary he saw little hope of success for the expedition.

As the unfolding story of this chapter illustrates, Beckler's role in the expedition would test his expectations and commitment to the limit, culminating in his resignation half way through the expedition. The reasons for his resignation were many and varied, not helped by Burke's erratic management of the expedition. Opportunity would later enable Beckler to resume his appointment. In the aftermath of the expedition, his contribution as a botanical collector and as a key member of the supply party was ignored, nor were his attempts at providing medical support under the most extreme conditions to the dying members of the supply party even recognised.

Beckler, in his letter to Karl on 9 July 1860, wrote excitedly:

I stand on the eve of great events! It's pretty much determined that I accompany the expedition as a physician and plant collector ... hope it's my last chapter of medical practice. In fact, only the expedition can I love to make such a sacrifice and take on such a responsibility. I wear actually in every respect; 'My fur to market.' Note well, so I am more or less a personality, If I am not successful, well the expedition is to shame, then I can only wish to be unscathed through the ordeal of public opinion. But courage, courage! I have to be prudent I am half full

once again and now sit comfortably in a vice. The fact that I join the expedition, I have less to thank Professor Neumayer than Dr Mueller.¹³⁹

Beckler went on to outline briefly the preparations for the expedition.

I cannot go on to make a whole story about the preparations for the expedition, only so much. The government gave the arrangement of the Royal Society (Melbourne). The Royal Society gave it to a Committee. This was divided into two parties, and one carried the day, chose a scientifically illiterate man as the leader (but is supposed to be a very charming guy). The other was Major Warburton. Dr. Mueller is quite out of sorts about the arrangements and prophesises to me about a bad outcome every day. He very much wishes that I am going, although he liked not to recommend me directly, because he believed that would be beneath his dignity, to ask Mr Burke a favor,

To stand the stuff and as I said, I wear my fur, 'My only fur to market'. Let us be happy and successful return, the most beautiful episode in my life are the 12-18 months of the expedition! *Voila, nous risquons tout!* [Here, we risk everything!]. I have the whole story in all its importance in mind! I want to treat myself as little as possible rest to make pretty reports, pretty sketches, (I have it now quite skilled), pretty plant collections and pretty surgical cases and I know that you have wished me on this project all imaginable happiness.

After the expedition, I hope to see you. I must go home at once. I am supposed to see the wild, inhospitable interior of Australia. I will see deserts and Sandstone Mountains, tropical coasts and quite wild savages, and travel on an Indian camel in the heat of the sun over long distances in the country! Once again – if it goes well, then, I am all right. – if it doesn't go well, then I am lost! No! then I start all over again!¹⁴⁰

With these great expectations and a sense that at last his professionalism as a medical practitioner and his botanical collecting responsibilities as an officer of the expedition had been recognized: 'I wear my fur to market'; Beckler was elated. He went on to describe the leader of the expedition, Robert O'Hara Burke, who was:

¹³⁹ Beckler. *Letters*, 404.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 406.

a man of my age, hale, Irish (all of which are adventurous); previously he was what we would call a police chief in Castlemaine. He speaks very good German and can be a better judge of German, than perhaps the aristocratic Major (Warburton) who was in India. Burke was for several years an officer in the Austrian cavalry.¹⁴¹

Beckler wrote his next letter from his new address, the Royal Artillery Hotel in Elizabeth Street North on 10 August 1860, where he would board with Burke for the three weeks leading up to the departure of the expedition. He continued with a strangely intuitive assessment of Burke's appointment and his leadership abilities:

You see, dear Karl, I have already cleared my simple, comfortable room at the Botanical Museum and have saved my last month wages from the botanical garden and am now 10 days away before we should leave.

Burke, with whom I am living, is an ordinary man, a certain pleasure for me as Commander, but he has not grown into his office. As head of an expedition he has complete ignorance of the country, complete blindness in geography and astronomy, and this total lack (of knowledge) is neither unknown to the Committee, nor the Royal Society, nor the government nor even to the public.

He is now appointed and has established his choice of members and no one may withdraw their place now. This is a piece of English liberty.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Ibid. 407.

¹⁴² Ibid., 410/411.



Figure 12. The Royal Artillery Hotel North Melbourne 2015– Burke’s and Beckler’s accommodation during August 1860, prior to the departure of the Expedition. Currently it is an Irish Pub!

Next, Beckler turned his attention to other members of the expedition, namely Landells, Becker and Wills: with these important observations and compelling insights:

The Second in command is Landells, the man who brought the camels from India. He has the same level of astronomical, geographical and physical knowledge as Burke;- both know nothing.

Becker, a German who will accompany the expedition as a geologist and artist. However, he is an illustrator and an imposter in scientific and pecuniary relationships, but Geology – none. Dr Mueller who urged him [Becker] to Burke, (who did not quite want to take him), that he recommended him to the Governor himself and Burke gave him what he had to do but not necessary all. Dr de Boehm sarcastically refers to Becker, as the one the artists are proud to call a scholar and the scholars are proud to call an artist.

A young man, [William Wills], an assistant with Neumayer's Observatory accompanies the expedition for the navigation and other physical examinations. Mr. Neumayer, who also recommended Burke, urged Burke to take an astronomer, knowing that Wills's astronomical observations cannot do well. What does Burke do? He relies on Wills and wants to take no other. My position is actually still fluid.¹⁴³

Remarkably, the outcomes of these candid predictions would soon be revealed.

Beckler's appointment was 'fluid', as questions were asked in the Victorian Legislative Assembly on Wednesday 1 August 1860 about the suitability of his medical qualifications. The Chief Secretary in response replied:

Dr Beckler had been nominated by the Royal Society to accompany the expedition. That gentleman held a certificate from Dr McCrea,¹⁴⁴ stating that he was a graduate of the University of Munich and from his testimonials must be a well educated medical man, although, from the peculiar reading of the local Medical Act, he was not able to obtain the usual certificate here. He also held in his hand a certificate from Dr Gilbee, testifying to the complete fitness of this gentleman and one from Dr Mueller, certifying that Dr Beckler had a very high knowledge of botany- an additional reason why he should accompany this party. Under these circumstances and recollecting that there were several medical

¹⁴³Ibid., 411.

¹⁴⁴ Dr William McCrea (1814-1899), was appointed head of the Medical Department and as the Colony's first chief health officer was chairman of the newly established Central Board of Health.

gentlemen in the Royal Society, who were satisfied with this appointment, he thought the Government would do what was right by not interfering with it.¹⁴⁵

Beckler added that:

I am a doctor, although I am recorded as 'Botanist', said Dr. Müller and I myself am only listed as a plant collector. A geographical expedition with such expedients goes to the interior of Australia without astronomers without geologists - without the principal branches [of science] represented.¹⁴⁶

But Beckler, as if he had had a premonition, forecast dire prospects for the expedition, remarking:

With these prospects, the prospect of a successful penetration (to the interior) decreases and I fear that we, as it is now believed by a much shorter time and without being penetrated far, will come back covered with shame. Let us, remain suspicious even with the scientific results always slow and ambiguous, during our vast travel to the interior.

You can see from this that I see with little hope for the success of our journey and you can be so comforting to put yourself, knowing that the hardships and dangers for me will be certainly lower than it should be, also not a systematic, courageous advance of a successful trip. So much for the expedition.¹⁴⁷

Beckler reported on his visit to Dr Gilbee¹⁴⁸ to discuss the expedition's medical requirements including the arrangement for the medical examinations of all members of the party.

I have visited the hospital to meet with one or more of the most respected physicians, the chief medical officer (the first authority in the Medical Authority for the Colony) and Dr Gilbee, who shook my hand.

¹⁴⁵ 1860 'PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA.', *The Age* (Melbourne, Vic. : 1854 - 1954), 2 August, p. 5,

¹⁴⁶ Beckler, *Letters*, 411.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 411/412.

¹⁴⁸ Dr William Gillbee (1825-1885), surgeon, arrived in Victoria in 1852. Honorary surgeon to the Melbourne Hospital in January 1854. He had helped to found the medical school in the University of Melbourne and as vice-president of the Royal Society of Victoria helped plan the **Burke** and **Wills** expedition.

Today, I am going to judge, [examine] etc., etc., Mr Burke and other members presenting tomorrow. I myself enjoy a certain authority, as I said, 'I wear my fur to market'.¹⁴⁹

Beckler included in his letter, instructions on how to obtain his annual salary of 300 pounds in the event that he should die during the expedition. Since it would be quite impossible for him to spend a shilling during the trip, he expected the full amount to be available at the conclusion of the journey.

Beckler wrote his final letter on the day before the departure of the expedition on Sunday 19 August 1860:

Even in the largest pressure of business I will not forget you. The expedition continued here this morning. I will send you the No. XIII Fascicle of Dr. Mueller's *Fragmenta*, that will interest you, because most of the plants described have been found by me. ... So, tomorrow, tomorrow!¹⁵⁰

Beckler attended the signing on of the expedition members at the Royal Society Hall on Saturday 18 August 1860 and then spent part of the weekend checking the expedition's stores. The following excerpts are taken from Beckler's manuscript, 'Journey to Central Australia', translated, re-titled and published as *A Journey to Coopers Creek*.¹⁵¹

Beckler, in the *Foreward*, stated to his German readers:

In this book I have attempted to depict parts of a continent that is extremely interesting, but for whose nature is alien to us in many ways... Brought together here is the description of the countryside through which we travelled and that of an arduous journey, which, like other Australian expeditions, was sadly rich in unhappy destinies. For these, the inhospitable and arid expanses of Central Australia constituted a fitting setting.¹⁵²

In the *Introduction*, he further observed that:

¹⁴⁹ Beckler, *Letters*, 412.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 413.

¹⁵¹ Jeffries, S., et. al., *Hermann Beckler, A Journey to Coopers Creek*, MUP/SLV, pp. 205, 1993.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 3.

Sadly this journey, like the others, was notable less for its achievements than for the endless difficulties and obstacles encountered and for the loss of life, both of men and excellent pack animals. However, and for precisely this reason, an account of the journey should provide a better picture of this type of expedition and of the character of the inhospitable regions which form part of the Australian inland.¹⁵³

And as if foretelling the future of travelling in the Australian outback, Beckler reflected:

The inland will continue to prove a worthy challenge to man's endurance for many years to come, both for those who travel through it and as a field productive for geographical research.¹⁵⁴

In the weeks leading up to the departure of the expedition, Burke gave Beckler the unenviable task of storekeeper. This meant he had to record and label the enormous quantities of supplies and equipment, which were being delivered daily to the Government Stores. Beckler was so ashamed on seeing the large quantity of medications ordered for the horses, that he re-ordered his own modest list of medical supplies and paper for plant collections. On the Friday prior to departure, Burke decided not to accept Captain Cadell's offer to transport the stores to the Darling River via South Australia, free of charge, which meant that all the stores and equipment had now to be transported by horse drawn wagons.

On departure day, Monday 20 August 1860, everything was placed on public display in tents at Royal Park. The expedition was supposed to leave at 1.00pm, but was delayed because of the crowd of well-wishers. With the packing of the wagons, it was 4.00pm before the official exchanges enabled the cavalcade to leave (see Figure 13). It was then left to Beckler, Wills and Charles Ferguson, the expedition's foreman, to remain there until dusk, to complete the packing of some 20 tons of stores and equipment, including the hiring of two more wagons. Beckler was the last to leave:

I myself dropped dead tired into our last wagon, which we had finally loaded by nightfall. As we passed a public house, I had to ask the driver for some money for

¹⁵³ Ibid., 8.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

refreshment. In the crush I had lost all the cash I had allowed myself for extraordinary expenses during the journey.¹⁵⁵

Beckler joined the expedition that evening at its first campsite, Queens Park, Moonie Ponds. In the morning, the expedition made preparations to pack and depart, although it was 2.30pm before the whole party got underway. In what was to become only one of two photographs of the expedition, an image was taken by William Strutt early that morning showing Beckler pictured with the other officers and paraphernalia of the expedition (see Figure 14).

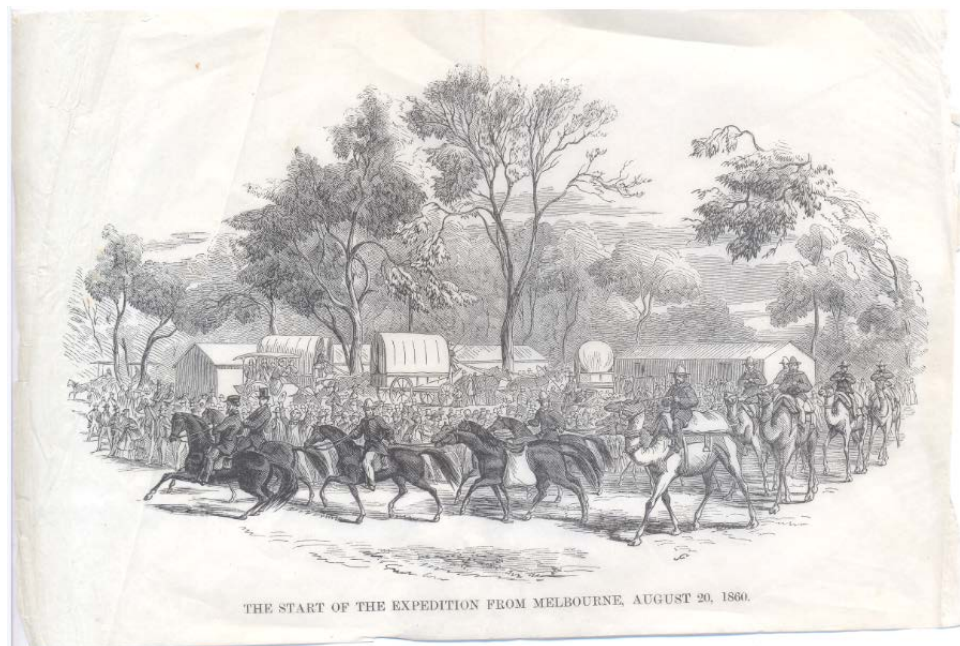


Figure 13. The departure of the expedition from Royal Park on Monday 20 August 1860.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 11.



Figure 14. Photograph of the expedition taken by William Strutt at Camp 1 (Essendon) on the morning of Tuesday 21 August 1860. Beckler is at the edge of the group on the right, standing next to the wagon.

Travel during the next few days was more efficient, as the expedition members came to understand the temperaments, characteristics, and habits of the horses and camels.

Beckler even paid credit to Burke's performance: 'Mr Burke, who was well experienced in this respect, was a credit to his post. His good natured character and his direct, open, simple nature won him the devotion and trust of both offices and subordinates.'¹⁵⁶

However, Beckler's perception of Burke as a leader would soon change as the expedition progressed.

The expedition's momentum was hampered as it crossed the Great Dividing Range north of Melbourne by the cold weather. The last of the winter rains made the travelling conditions and roads difficult for the heavy wagon loads, and also affected the health of the camels which were unused to the change of feed and developed colds and diarrhoea. The passage of the expedition through the countryside drew bystanders from the surrounding districts to the route. The citizens of Bendigo were no exception. The

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 16.

Bendigo Advertiser on Tuesday 28 August 1860 published a letter from a witness who travelled to the expedition's camp at Mia Mia to view their early morning departure:

About six this morning the clanging tones of a gong aroused us from our weary slumbers. Outside the associates and their native assistants [Sepoys] were busily engaged in preparing for a march. Camels were in all directions; some still on the ground receiving their burdens, others towering up to a tremendous height, made still higher by the large packages they carry. Under the able superintendence of Mr. Landells, the work was soon completed without any confusion and the party increased by the addition of an adventurous Frenchman, [John Prolongeau] lately employed by the host of the Mia Mia, and who, being well skilled in the management of horses, Mr. Burke was glad to add to his party, was ready to start. The cavalcade, headed by Dr. Beckler on a splendid camel, was soon in motion, and as they wended their way along the grassy slopes, had a most picturesque appearance. We accompanied the party for a few miles and then, wishing them every success, made the best of our way to Matheson's Hotel.¹⁵⁷

But the reporter from *Bendigo Advertiser* was a little more mischievous¹⁵⁸ in his account on Thursday 30 September of his visit to the expedition's Banadown camp site (Camp 8):¹⁵⁹

The tents of American duck, lined with blue blanketing are pitched and at the front of them fires are blazing at which various cooking operations are being carried on. At the entrance to a tent, engaged in discussing the evening meal on the grass, is Mr Ludwig Becker, the natural philosopher and artist, with a broad brimmed hat, spectacles and reddish whiskers and moustache, much the same as ever, with his peering look and harmless love of display but looking somewhat smarter about the neither habiliments. Dr Herman Beckler, small, dark and bilious looking, is of a more retiring character and does not strike the observer as

¹⁵⁷ 1860 'HOW WE SAW THE CAMELS.', *Bendigo Advertiser* (Vic. : 1855 - 1918), 28 August, p. 3, , <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article87946132>

¹⁵⁸ Rumours were circulating that Burke wanted Dr Stuart of Arctic fame to join the expedition in place of Beckler.

¹⁵⁹ 1860 'THE EXPLORING EXPEDITION.', *Bendigo Advertiser* (Vic. : 1855 - 1918), 30 August, p. 2, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article87946185>

one possessed of those qualities of mind which lead men to engage in such enterprises, and which have caused his selection by the Royal Society.

The reporter continued with another snide remark about the possible employment of Bendigo's, Dr Stuart to replace Dr Beckler:

We believe that the Frenchman [Prolongeau] who we stated was admitted by Mr Burke as a member of the party a day or two since, was a quartz miner on the Victoria Reef, so that there is one Bendigo man on the Expedition and we may add that if everyone could have his wish there would be more Bendigo men in it, judging from the extreme interest manifested by the two of our Doctors of Medicine.¹⁶⁰

These articles irritated Becker and Beckler, as the latter exclaimed:

We were all glad to have Matheson's and Kennedy's guest houses behind us for at both places as we and the entire party had descended to a level of exhibits displayed for the curious colonists who had travelled over from Bendigo. Several gentlemen invited us to have a few drinks with them during the evening and all of us should probably have displayed our sparkling wit, as they were evidently interesting discussions. However, we were all very tired; soon we were nodding off one after another and the conversations became very monosyllabic. For the gentlemen from Bendigo, though it seemed a sufficient basis upon which to build a detailed characterization of individual members of the expedition and publish it in their newspapers. The German element was described as unfriendly and I myself as hopeless. I now have the satisfaction, however, of having completely discredited the prognosis of these people. This ill-will was probably invoked by jealousy, for, as I later discovered, Mr Burke had promised Dr Stuart in Bendigo that he would engage him as an additional doctor for the expedition, but he eventually failed to do so.¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ [Drs Hutchison and Stuart]

¹⁶¹ Jeffries, S., et.al, *Hermann Beckler, A Journey to Coopers Creek*, 18.

The expedition could not shed its curious on-lookers and the reaction of horses to the camels was still very much in evidence in the following report from the *Bendigo Advertiser* of 1 September 1860: ¹⁶²

We have been informed that the expedition camped at the Picaninny Creek, near Mr Myles Patterson's station, on Wednesday night, from which place they started on Thursday morning. Amongst the parties who had gone out to see them start in the morning were Mr John Couche (of the firm of Eddy and Hayment, of Pall Mall), and Mr J. W. Townsend, and on sighting the camels belonging to the expedition, their horse shied, and, capsizing the trap in which they were. Mr Couche was thrown to the ground sustaining severe injuries to his wrist. He was attended by Dr Beckler, who is attached to the expedition and the dislocation reduced, so that he was able to return to Sandhurst.

On Wednesday 5 September the expedition reached Camp 14, a clump of trees south of Lake Boga. Hodgkinson, a newly appointed member of the party, arrived with dispatches from the Exploration Committee containing, *inter alia*, the awaited 'Instructions for the Scientific Observers'. Beckler received his comprehensive list of 'Instructions to the Botanist', and Burke received his 'General Instructions', which gave him the unfettered right to put a stop to all scientific observations should this work interfere with the progress of the expedition. This mandate would be exercised by Burke during the coming month against the two German scientists, Becker and Beckler.

It was clear that scientific work would not enjoy the same level of importance as the expedition's brief to cross the continent at all costs. However, despite the late arrival of the botanical instructions, Beckler had already commenced his plant collecting and was recording the changing vegetation and plant communities as the expedition travelled in a north-westerly direction across Victoria. The wattle (acacia) bushes were in full bloom and he noticed how the forests of the coastal regions gave way to open bushland and the mallee scrub, 'small unimposing stretches of forest or finally, those interesting thickets which are usually called 'mallee', mulga' etc'.¹⁶³ Beckler commented at length on the soils, the ubiquitous saltbush and the diverse vegetation of the inland and the fact that it

¹⁶² 1860 'THE EXPLORING EXPEDITION.', *Bendigo Advertiser* (Vic. : 1855 - 1918), 1 September, p. 2, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article87946234>

¹⁶³ Jeffries, S., et.al, *Hermann Beckler, A Journey to Coopers Creek*, 17.

was 'characterized by a scarcity of the water, which becomes greater the further one penetrates into the interior.'¹⁶⁴

When earlier they had reached Mt Hope (Camp 11), Beckler along with Becker and Wills had set off to climb the 663 foot granite outcrop, Beckler recording that:

It was a magnificent panorama which not only affected the observer not by any delightful or varied detail, but by the horizontal areas of various gentle hues and unbroken, one could almost say, mathematical lines. At a distance of about six miles to the south-south-west, lay an isolated cone of rock called the Pyramid; a well-chosen name.¹⁶⁵

He went on to describe the views from other compass points and the effect the passing cloudscapes had on the landscape with the alternating sunlight and shadow effects. The vegetation also caught his eye:

The vegetation of this rocky outcrop was quite varied and much of it was in flower. I collected fine specimens belonging to the genera *Pittosporum*, *Correa*, *Prostanthera*, *Stypandra*, etc. For the first time during the expedition we saw a particular species of *Mesembryanthemum*, various compositae adorned the massive grey boulders. Animal life, too, seemed to flourish on this veritable island of rock. Around the flowering splendor of the shrubs swarmed clouds of butterflies and there were numerous small. Grey lizards in the cracks in the rocks; as we passed we even frightened a wallaby from its hiding place.¹⁶⁶

The expedition reached Swan Hill on Thursday 6 September 1860. Here Burke reorganised his party, dismissing four men and employing McPherson, a saddler, and Charley Gray. The stores were also rearranged; no doubt Beckler would have been involved in this strenuous re-sorting exercise.

The expedition headed northeast to Balranald, which was reached on Saturday afternoon 16 September 1860 after crossing the Murrumbidgee river on Hanan's punt. The remaining wagons (four) were brought across on the following day, Ludwig Becker noting that:

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 18.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 21.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 22.

New arrangements were to be made here. Mr Burke felt only too strongly the burden of travelling with hired wagons. He wanted to leave part of our extensive and diverse equipment behind because the further inland we came the more dispensable some of the articles seemed. He soon saw, however, that even if he was to leave quite a quantity of things behind, he could not do without the wagons since the excellent horses that went with them never failed in their work. At the same time they were used to good, plentiful fodder but had had to survive recently on sparse ration of oats and maize while still working very hard. The simple reason was that these rations were hardly available here, and then only at very high prices. This had not worried us; but the horses had lost weight and were exhausted and the carters insisted that the loads be made lighter.

Mr Burke had decided to dispense with part of the company as it seemed to him that we would not be able to move quickly enough in the inland with so many people (seventeen). Three people (Ferguson, McIlwaine and Langan) were dismissed and one Indian were discharged (Beludsch). The Indian (Beludsch) returned to us soon afterwards however, about which we were very glad, as he was without doubt the best of us all at handling the camels, especially the obstinate ones.¹⁶⁷

When the expedition departed from Balranald on Monday 17 September 1860 for Bilbarka (today's Pooncarrie) on the Darling River, it entered an exceptionally difficult period triggered by disorganisation and mismanagement that saw, among other things, the initial resignations of Landells and Beckler, and which caused lasting upheaval, ultimately contributing to the fatal outcomes of the expedition.

Beckler, Brahe and Beludsch stayed behind in Balranald to finalise the disposal of the excess stores, catching up with the expedition as it neared Camp 20 on Wednesday 19 September. However, all was not well with the progress of the expedition as it struggled through difficult terrain of soft sand, sandhills, and impenetrable mallee scrub, with a lack of water and feed for the horses and camels and no man-made roads. At Prangle (Camp 25) on 22 September, Burke divided the expedition, leaving the wagon party in charge of Beckler to follow at their own pace. Beckler noted that:

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 29.

Mr Burke became somewhat impatient at this point with the slowness and with the very difficult progress of the wagons. He therefore decided to travel ahead with the expedition party and leave the wagons to follow under my supervision.¹⁶⁸

Beckler's original appointment as medical doctor and botanist had greatly expanded. In addition to his Melbourne duties as storekeeper (which duty he continued to perform throughout the journey whenever the wagons were unpacked or stores re-assembled), he was appointed 'wagon leader' and later 'camel handler'.

The journey became even more difficult as the horses were required to draw their wagons through wild desert country, through deep, loose sand and pathless mallee scrub. Making matters worse, the over-hanging mallee boughs tore the wagon covers to shreds, and there was no water or feed. The lack of man-made roads was especially problematic, Beckler commenting:

This could be seen from the fact that wagons of the neighbouring stations hardly ever took this route, preferring to make a detour of many miles. Why did we have to experiment just here? It was the 'shortest route' the straight line!, that once again led Mr Burke into temptation. The account given us of the quality of the land was enough; the picture painted for us of the wild bush should have prevented us from taking this route.¹⁶⁹

When the wagon party finally reached Gambana (Camp 28) on Saturday 29 September, they were met by Burke and Neumayer, who had ridden back with the packhorses. Burke informed the party that they would now have to lighten the wagons by putting as much weight as possible on the packhorses and the camels. The following day was spent repacking and reorganizing 400lb loads for each of the 26 camels with smaller loads for the packhorses; some equipment was abandoned. In addition, all members of the expedition were required to reduce their personal effects to no more than 30lbs weight. This weight was later increased to 40lbs per person. On Monday 1 October 1860 the camels were loaded in the dark, an exercise that took some six hours. Ludwig Becker explained:

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 33.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 34.

As I have said, already 400lbs was nearly each camels share, mostly consisting of bags of flour & sugar, each of these bags weighed 200lbs and as each camel had to carry two of them which being fastened together before they were put on the pack-saddle, it is easily understood that 4 men were required to lift this weight into the air and then let it carefully down on the camel's back; this had to be done a dozen times. It is a most exhausting kind of labour and the new canvass bags soon told upon our fingernails – half of mine were split and bent.

Before we march Mr Burke told us that, from today, we had to walk, inch by inch, all the way to the Gulf of Carpentaria, as all the camels and horses were required to carry stores, etc. To Dr Beckler and to me he said; 'now Gentlemen from this time you have to give up your scientific investigations, but to work like the rest of the men, as long as you are on the road or not free from camp duties; at the same time you have to limit your materials and other things required for your investigating, to the utmost, in numbers as well as in weight & size of the parcel'.

I made up a small parcel with the Doctor's parcel containing 30lbs of medicine; bottles & packages included in the weight.¹⁷⁰

It seems clear that Burke, in requiring Becker and Beckler to limit their scientific work and to take on the strenuous back breaking work associated with the daily loading and unloading of the camels and horses, had developed a negative (perhaps even vindictive) attitude towards the German scientists. This attitude was evidenced in Burke's letter to Frederick Standish, Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police, in November 1860:

We shall all march for the next three or four hundred miles at all events. And the camels and horses will have to carry our weight in provisions. We have already done so for the last forty miles. You should have seen old Becker's face upon my announcing that all the officers would have to act as working men and that we shall only carry 30 lbs weight of baggage for each man. Loading the camels and then marching twenty miles is no joke. The first two days of it nearly cooked poor Becker and I think he will not be able to stand it much longer.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Becker, Ludwig., in Tipping M., LUDWIG BECKER, (Fifth Report) page 201.

¹⁷¹ From Burke's correspondence with Frederick Standish, 'The Age', 13 November 1860, p.3.

Burke had never wanted Ludwig Becker on the expedition in the first place and had not supported his appointment. (refer page 77)

The expedition finally gathered at Bilbarka (Pooncarie) on Thursday 4 October 1860, the camels and wagons taking a different route to the Darling and then to Tarcoola along the Darling to Bilbarka. The Paddle steamer *Moolgewanke* (Captain Johnson) had fortuitously arrived at Tarcoola on 8 October and Burke took the opportunity of arranging the loading of eight tons of stores, as the report in the *Adelaide Observer* of Saturday 10 November 1860 announced:

The Victorian Exploring Expedition—We learn from Captain Johnston that the distance he took Mr. Burke's baggage in the steamer *Moolgewanke*, from Tarcoola to Menindee, is about 220 miles by water, though by land the journey does not exceed 90 miles. The baggage had been warehoused at Mr. Phelps's store, Tarcoola, the waggons having been sent back to Melbourne. It consisted chiefly of leather water-bags, casks of biscuit, and tackle for the camels and horses, amounting in all to eight tons. The steamer anchored two miles from Menindee on Saturday, October 13, and Mr. Burke's party arrived on the opposite side of the river the next day.¹⁷²



Figure 15. P S *Moolgewanke* moored in the Murray River in the 1860s - Ebenezer Randell Master - from Murray River Collection, State Library of South Australia.

¹⁷² 1860 'THE VICTORIAN EXPLORING EXPEDITION.', *Adelaide Observer* (SA : 1843 - 1904), 10 November, p. 6, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article15817789>

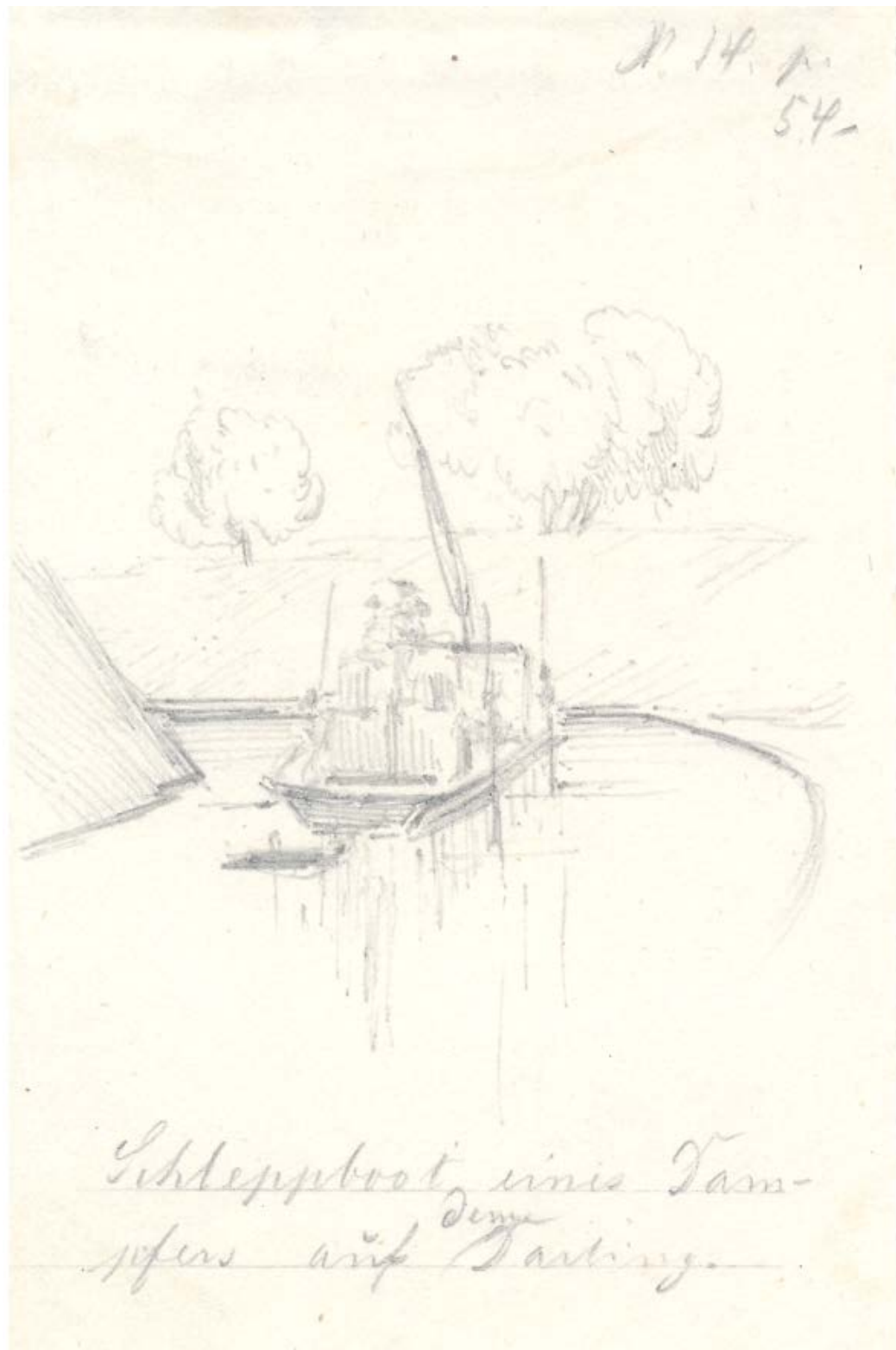


Figure 16. Schleppboot eines Dampfers auf dem Darling, Hermann Beckler. Nov.1860.
 Translation: Tugboats a steamer on the Darling – [P S Moolgewanke.]

However, all was not well with the party. Landells and Burke had had several disagreements during their stay at Bilbarka. Matters came to a head on 16 October shortly after the party's arrival at Kinchega Station, where an argument about whether to swim

the camels across the Darling erupted with Landells handing in his resignation. The camels had subsequently swum across the river 'without accident or any subsequent illness'. Recalling the circumstances leading up to the event, Beckler remarked that:

I was very unpleasantly surprised by it all. Burke and Will's opposition appealed to me so little, however, that after Landells told me he would resign, I also resolved to take this step. It was no little matter for me to draw back from a wish nurtured so ardently and for so long as this expedition, to renounce suddenly what had been a fervent desire.¹⁷³

After Beckler lodged his letter of resignation, Burke asked for his reasons which Beckler gave. The following day, in a letter to the Secretary of the Exploration Committee, Dr Macadam, he elaborated:

I gave my resignation into Mr. Burke's hands yesterday morning, and, at his own re-request, I gave him a statement of my reasons for such. I requested him to give me an order for salary up to the present date, which he refused. But as he did not accept my resignation for the moment and as I am, although he calls me unfit for my position, in charge of the depot here, an office which I only hold after he received my resignation; I hope you will be so kind as bring my claims for salary up to such time as I shall have to remain here under the consideration of your committee.¹⁷⁴

Burke and Landells both wrote dispatches to the Exploration Committee (with Wills writing separately to Neumayer). Burke indicated that he was obliged to leave the doctor in charge of the depot until the Committee had reached a decision in respect to his resignation. At the same time, he seized the opportunity to put forward the name of his friend, Dr John Stuart¹⁷⁵ of Bendigo as a suitable replacement as a person who had 'considerable experience in exploring':

¹⁷³ Jeffries S, et al., *Hermann Beckler, Journey to Coopers Creek*. 41.

¹⁷⁴ 1860 'THE EXPLORING EXPEDITION.', *The Argus* (Melbourne, Vic. : 1848 - 1957), 7 November, p. 5, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article5692871>

¹⁷⁵ Dr John Stuart (1831-1874) was involved in the search for Sir John Franklin in the Arctic in 1851 as a surgeon on the HMS Lady Franklin (Captain Penny). He had arrived in Bendigo in 1856 to attend his dying sister. By co-incidence Wills's cousin, Lieut.

I believe Dr Beckler to be an honest, well intentioned man, but very easily acted upon and very unfit for his present position. I was in hope that, by attaching him to the camels, he would be able to gain some knowledge of their habits and how to treat them; but he has only been able to discover that they cannot be managed without Mr Landells and I think he is wrong.¹⁷⁶

The Exploration Committee initially considered appointing Stuart as a replacement for Beckler, but decided not to proceed with the appointment, on the basis that it could not accept Stuart's stipulation that he be appointed as second in command of the expedition, having noted that Burke had already promoted Wills to that position.

The Exploration Committee met again on Saturday 17 November 1860 and decided to refrain from making a selection from the applications submitted (including one from Dr William Wills, senior). The Committee also agreed to communicate with Burke about the conditions upon which Stuart was willing to accompanying the expedition and asked that Beckler be requested to remain with the party until a successor was appointed.

Asked for his views of Beckler, Mueller commented that he was sure that Beckler would not leave the expedition until his successor was known. He added that Beckler had been in his department for fifteen months and that he knew him to be a very conscientious man. The Melbourne and country newspapers all reported on the resignation drama and many took clear sides. The *Mount Alexander Mail* of Wednesday 21 November 1860, reprinted the following article (from the correspondent of the *Pastoral Times*, Menindie, 20 October.)

We have the exploration party here, under the Leadership of Mr O'Hara Burke, the ex-superintendent of police at Castlemaine. If I were to give you the opinion people have of the chief, it would be anything but flattering to that gentleman. We are surprised that the people of Melbourne came to choose him for a leader and it is a riddle to many besides myself. The man is no bushman, no surveyor, no doctor; nothing could in reality be said in his favour. He arrived here with a party dissatisfied – two of his best men having left him before, Mr Landells the

Henry Le Vesconte who served on the HMS Erebus was lost along with Sir John Franklin and crew of the *Erebus*.

¹⁷⁶ 1860 'THE EXPLORING EXPEDITION.', The Argus (Melbourne, Vic. : 1848 - 1957), 7 November, p. 5, , <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article5692871>

second in command, resigned; which was followed by the resignation of Dr Beckler. It is considered that these persons took the best course of action they could take under the circumstances in which they were placed; for it would be madness to go with a man whose only recommendation is that he is a strict disciplinarian.

The newspaper report went on to say:

It appeared to us at the time that the Melbourne papers in expressing so decided a condemnation of the conduct of Mr Landells and Dr Beckler, upon the authority of Mr Burke's statement, did those gentlemen a very great injustice. It would only have been fair to wait and hear both sides before an opinion was pronounced. From what we now hear, we believe that not only will Mr Landells entirely exculpate himself from blame, but there will be very good reasons to consider the enterprise under the present leadership as a failure. If all we are hearing concerning about Mr Burke is true, and very curious confirmations of its truth have come to our knowledge, the conduct of the leader is not so much that of an inefficient man, as of a man whose mind is somewhat unsettled.¹⁷⁷

The *Age* newspaper, however, was very much in favour of Burke's management of the affair and used its editorial of 7 November 1860 to discredit both Landells and Beckler. It described Beckler's reasons for resigning (because Landells had resigned) as 'childish', (because of the inability to make botanical collections during the expedition's progress) and 'a sham'. The editor found it inconceivable that Beckler's spirit had given-way 'in the presence of the awe-inspiring solitude of the wilderness!' Adding further insult to injury, the editor went on to say: 'There is something fearfully trying to weak nerves in the silent trackless waste of wooded land and open downs, which timid imagination conjures up amidst the desolate voiceless solitude.'¹⁷⁸

These accusations were of course entirely false as Beckler's past botanical collecting experience in the wilds of New South Wales had amply demonstrated that he was very

¹⁷⁷ 1860 'THE EXPLORING EXPEDITION.', Mount Alexander Mail(Vic. : 1854 - 1917), 21 November, p. 2, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article199601163>

¹⁷⁸ 1860 'No title.', The Age (Melbourne, Vic. : 1854 - 1954), 7 November, p. 4, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article154885266>

much a 'bush man' at home in the 'solitude' of the 'trackless' Australian bush. The real issue which prompted Beckler's resignation was the embargo Burke had placed on his botanical collecting and the unreasonable workload he had placed on Beckler and on his countryman Ludwig Becker, which Beckler felt was part of Burke's vindictive plan of making both his and Becker's lives as unpleasant as he could.

Beckler wrote home to Karl on 13 November 1860. He told him that he had resigned which was good news for his mother, but sad news for his brother. He chose not to discuss the details of the resignation at this stage, (most likely because of his abject disappointment in not realising his dream to journey into the unknown). However, he briefly outlined the circumstances and reiterated that he was not coming home at this stage and recounted his recent visit to the Scropes Range and the discovery of a charming grotto. He had received Karl's letter of 12 July, a letter from his brother Paul, as well as from a medical colleague. Of his future, Beckler reflected: 'What happens now, I do not know yet. May be not as bad as I expect. But the worst here, is I believe, still better than, a general practitioner in Bavaria.'¹⁷⁹

Events would soon overtake the whole affair. While awaiting a replacement, Beckler remained at his post. Burke and a party of seven men, including Wright and two Aboriginal guides, left Menindie on the morning of Friday 19 October 1860. This was the last time that Beckler saw Burke, Wills and Gray. The party, which also included William Brahe, John King, Thomas McDonough, William Patten and Dost Mahomet, was led by Wright acting as a guide accompanied by two Aboriginal guides, Dick and Mountain, who took them as far as Torowoto. They had sixteen camels and fifteen horses for riding and some as pack animals. Beckler, Becker, Hodgkinson, Macpherson and Beludsch remained behind to set up a depot, as Beckler later explained: 'At Mr Burke's request, I myself remained with the rest of the party at the Darling to take care of the large amount of stores of all kinds and the remaining animals – ten camels and 3 horses.'¹⁸⁰ Following Burke's instructions, Beckler subsequently selected a place seven miles up-river from Menindie at the junction of a creek (Pamamaroo Creek) and the Darling River, which because of its configuration, essentially restricted the straying movement of camels during grazing. They started moving the stores to the new depot on

¹⁷⁹ Beckler, *Letters*, 416.

¹⁸⁰ Beckler, H., 'A Journey to Cooper's Creek', Jeffries, et. al, 46.

Monday 22 October. While waiting for Wright to return, Beckler openly commenced collecting and made a week-long journey out to the Scropes Range.



Figure 17. Junction of the Pamamaroo Creek with the Darling; Ludwig Becker 1860 site of Pamamaroo Creek Depot. Ludwig Becker Nov. 1860.

Wright returned to the Depot on 5 November with the Aboriginal guide Dick. At the same time a mounted trooper, Constable Myles Lyons, arrived from Swan Hill with dispatches for Burke. Wright had brought back the news that Burke needed a saddler to make repairs and, as Burke had appointed Wright as third in command, he was now in charge of the depot. Trooper Lyons, Macpherson the saddler, and Dick, left the depot on 10 November to follow the tracks of Burke, but they could not find the party and had to be rescued after Dick made a 200 mile return journey to alert the depot party to their plight. The story of their rescue, led by Beckler, and their return to the depot on 5 January 1861, is recorded in Clark, Ian D. & Cahir, Fred, Eds. *The Aboriginal Story of Burke and Wills FORGOTTEN NARRATIVES*, CSIRO Publishing, 2013.¹⁸¹

The Exploration Committee meeting on Tuesday 5 February 1861 received Wright's report about the rescue including a report from Beckler. Wright stated, *inter alia*:

¹⁸¹ Clark, Ian D. & Cahir, Fred, Eds. *The Aboriginal Story of Burke and Wills FORGOTTEN NARRATIVES*, CSIRO Publishing, 2013; In Chapter 5, The Aboriginal contribution to the expedition, observed through Germanic eyes pp.91-96.

The fidelity of Dick the native was highly praiseworthy, and I beg to return my thanks to the committee for the opportunity they have given me to reward it. Dr Beckler displayed great zeal in his efforts to bring in Lyons and M'Pherson and accompanies the party on his own responsibility in its progress to Cooper's Creek.¹⁸²

The dispatches by the secretary of the Exploration Committee, Macadam, included the following diary note from Dr Beckler:

Darling River Depot, Jan. 22, 1861.

Sir,

*You will receive with this mail a copy of my journal during the short trip I took to the interior to release M'Pherson and Lyons. Mr Wright only waited Mr Hodgkinson's return from town before setting out for the interior and I was prepared to leave the camp and to take the steamer to return to Victoria. But as no surgeon had yet arrived, I offered my services to Mr Wright, on my own responsibility, thinking it my duty not to leave the party without that assistance which I might be capable of giving them and being anxious to see the interior. Mr Wright was glad to accept of my offer.*¹⁸³

The Beckler resignation affair had now blown over; Wright accepted the offer to remain with the expedition, and Beckler resumed his appointment as medical doctor and botanist. During the three months that the party was at the Pamamaroo Creek depot, Beckler had taken every opportunity to resume his botanical collecting. The supply party, under the leadership of Wright, finally left Pamamaroo Creek on 26 January 1861.

Beckler continued his correspondence with his brother Karl throughout this period in the form of a diary, and also wrote official reports for the Exploration Committee. His diary entry for 6 March, written from the camp at the Torowoto Swamp, 200 miles north of the Darling, read:

¹⁸² 1861 'ROYAL SOCIETY OF VICTORIA.', The Argus (Melbourne, Vic. : 1848 - 1957), 6 February, p. 6, , <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article5697352>

¹⁸³ 1861 'ROYAL SOCIETY OF VICTORIA.', The Argus (Melbourne, Vic. : 1848 - 1957), 6 February, p. 6, , <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article5697352>

You will of course be surprised that I am on the expedition ... Hodgkinson had brought the news (from Melbourne) that no doctor would come for the expedition and that I was free to remain, or to go with my resignation. So then everything was as I could wish, and I left the Darling with Mr Wright's party to go to Cooper's Creek.

Beckler described at length the botanical scenery around the swamp and even found time to write an article about 'The Swamp at Duroodoo' [Torowotto]. He finished his diary with the following remarks:

This is the last letter for a long time. I do not know when and from where we come back. It is even possible that I (when I finally return home after the expedition), can tell you from the Gulf of Carpentaria ... I am so healthy in this wild life, that I fear I will never be as well when moving to a quiet life. In fact, I fear that I may have to get myself healthy and fresh of course to lead a similar, more comfortable life sooner or later¹⁸⁴.

On 8 April 1861, Beckler wrote his next letter to his Karl (since his last on 13 November 1860), from the camp on a creek 25 miles south of the Bulloo River Waterhole. The camp would become known as the 'Doctor's Camp' for obvious reasons, (see Figure 18) as Beckler manned it alone with two dying patients, Becker and Purcell, who could neither walk nor stand, being in the advanced stages of scurvy.¹⁸⁵ Beckler remained there for almost three weeks caring for Becker and Purcell as both men were in the advanced stages of scurvy and could not be moved. Realizing that they had spent nearly twenty-five weeks in pursuit of Burke, who only had twenty-four week's worth of supplies, Wright and the other members of the party pushed on to the Bulloo Waterhole, as they were anxious to reach the Cooper.

Fortunately, the Aboriginal people around the Doctor's Camp were not numerous nor troublesome. Beckler observed how different in stature they were from Aboriginal people at the Darling (Pamamaroo Creek depot). With time on his hands, he wrote about the events of the previous five months including: his rescue of Trooper Lyons and

¹⁸⁴ Beckler, Letters, 426.

¹⁸⁵ Beckler would later submit a definitive clinical paper; *Ueber das Auftreten und den Verlauf von Scorbut im Innern Australiens*-, (About the Occurrence and Progression of Scurvy in the Interior of Australia), which was read before the Berlin Medical Society in 1866.

MacPherson; his botanical collecting in the Scropes Range; and the difficulties experienced during their travel from the Darling camp. The latter included, high temperatures during the day, the ubiquitous tormenting bush flies and, above all, the lack of water, which had tormented the horses to the extent that they had become almost useless and were slowly dying. The camels, fortunately, had been largely unaffected, although scab had crippled one of them.

Reflecting on his time at the Doctor's Camp some two years later, Beckler summed up the situation of looking after the dying Becker and Purcell:

I was now a factotum physician, nurse, cook, washer-woman and, in an emergency, the sole defender of our lives and possessions. Most unpleasant of all was the fact that I had to remain near the camp and could not go and inspect the further surroundings of the creek and perhaps find some pretty, new plants. The helpless invalids could not be left alone, but I could not deny myself a refreshing swim each day in the creek whose bed lay about one hundred paces from the camp.¹⁸⁶

Beckler described his other duties thus:

As well as the labour of cooking, washing and collecting wood, I had during these days to look into the tent perhaps fifty times a day, for Becker was constantly in need something, while Purcell lay there quietly the whole day never wanting anything, although he was almost as sick as Becker. Becker could no longer walk at this time. He was suffering continually from very frequent diarrhoea. He was dependent on me in every respect and a major part of the day and night was spent exclusively in tending him. My nightly rest was interrupted so much by this that I slept only very little, and hence all the more heavily as soon as I had peace, hearing neither Becker's quiet calling nor his little bell. Nothing remained but to tie a string around my arm. This ran under the wall of the tent to his bed; by pulling it he could call me to him at any time.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ Beckler, Letters, 152.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 153.



Figure 18. Doctor's Camp at Koorliatto W. O Hodgkinson.

Writing again on 12 April, Beckler mentioned that the camels would soon depart for Bulloo and Becker was now so weak that he needed to devote his full attention to his needs.

On Monday 22 April 1861, Beckler attended three sick men, Becker, Purcell and Stone, while Hodgkinson and Balusch travelled down river searching for missing camels, leaving just Wright and Smith to attend to the camp. Seeing the camp undermanned, a group of Aborigines attempted to ransack the camp and were only stopped when guns were pointed at them. They moved away in the early afternoon. Stone, who had defended his tent, succumbed to his illness, the first member to die of scurvy. Beckler and Smith buried him 'amidst a group of charming Acacias, close to the bank'. The party built a stockade. On 24 April, Purcell died and was buried next to Stone.

It seems clear that the Aborigines, who had observed the two deaths and burials, were now restless. On Saturday 27 April a party of some forty-five Aborigines charged the Stockade led by their leader dubbed 'Mr Shirt'. Beckler recalled:

At twenty paces Wright ordered us to fire. A few fell, several apparently from fright. Shirt fell right before us, eight paces from the palisade. He alone was severely wounded; the others picked themselves up and fairly quickly followed the rest. But Shirt, now wounded and alone with his enemies, did not lose his composure for a moment. He was a hero from head to toe. Slowly, and with difficulty, he raised himself from the ground and hurled upon us what we assumed was the curse of his tribe. It was to our advantage that it was he, the leader, who alone fell, but we all felt sorry for this noble leader and representative of his tribe. Hobbling slowly, and pressing his dirty shirt carefully to his abdomen, he staggered down to the water and disappeared into the scrub, accompanied by sinister, incoherent curses which did not, however, raise his calm to a visible excitement for a moment.¹⁸⁸

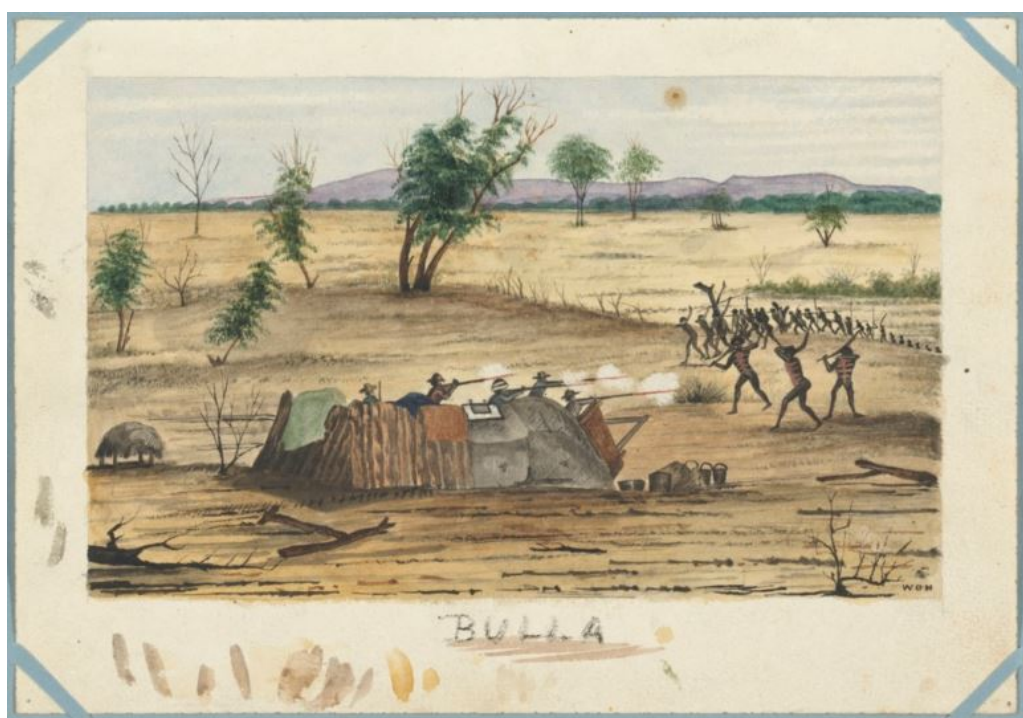


Figure 19. *Bulla, Queensland, 1861.* W. O. Hodgkinson; Album of Miss Eliza Younghusband vn4189024-s46, PIC/11535/46 LOC MS SR Cab 3/9, National Library of Australia (Bulloo River Waterhole).

¹⁸⁸ Beckler, Letters,

This violent skirmish (pictured above in Figure 19), caused Wright to abandon the attempt to reach Coopers Creek. His decision was reinforced by the arrival, quite by chance, of the returning depot party led by Brahe, who confirmed that Burke's party had left for the Gulf in December and had not returned. They were unaware that Burke had in fact arrived at the Cooper's Creek depot that evening on the day that Brahe and his party had left, 21 April 1861.

On Monday 29 April, in the early evening, Ludwig Becker died and was buried alongside Purcell and Stone. (see Figure 20, the lonely gravesites visited by the researcher in 2014). Beckler was alarmed by the condition of Patten who was also in the advanced stages of scurvy. Both parties left Bulloo under Wright's command on 1 May 1861.



Figure 20. Graves of Ludwig Becker, William Purcell and Charles Stone, Bulloo River Waterhole , 2014. Photograph courtesy of Dave Phoenix.

The conjoined party, comprising nine men, with twenty-two horses and sixteen loaded camels must have been an impressive sight as they made their way slowly southward following their original tracks. They reached their old camp at Kurliatto after a day's

travelling and decided to rest there for a few days. Wright, at Brahe's suggestion, decided to return to the depot at Coopers Creek to check whether Burke's party had returned. The events surrounding their visit have been well documented in other sources.¹⁸⁹

They returned to the waiting party on 13 May to find Patten's health much deteriorated. With the group in various degrees of unfitness, the party finally left Kurliatto on 22 May. A special bed or palanquin attached to a camel was made for Patten, however progress was extremely slow. Again, lack of water plagued the party and on 5 June at Rat Point Patton succumbed to the effects of scurvy and died.

As they travelled southward they entered an area where winter rains had fallen. This eased the problem of finding enough water, however the difficulty of finding the camels and horses after each nightly campsite continued, delaying progress. Beckler found solace in the landscape, writing that:

On the 13 June, the friendly landscape of the Mutanie [Mutawintji] Ranges, with its secret valleys and superb picturesque gorges, smiled on us once more. At the pass-like entrance to Hobson's basin, I had already seen large numbers of a marvellous acacia on our journey out. It had large glossy leaves and a soft, lilac colouring to its branches and twigs – a strikingly beautiful plant. The acacia was now bedecked with a mass of flowers, whose glory charmed the eye and whose almost overpowering fragrance permeated the air of this close confined gorge-like terrain. The rain must have been more frequent here for fresh vegetation had sprung up and I found many shrub and bush like plants in fresh flower.¹⁹⁰

Illuminating the significance of Beckler's botanical legacy, Linden Gillbank observed:

A century later, two specimens that Beckler collected near the end of his last northern trek were used to name another species for him – specimens of the fragrant acacia that had so impressed him in the Mutawintji Ranges on 15 June 1861. Mueller labeled one *Acacia notabilis* and the other a variety of '*Acacia pycnantha?*' In 1965 Dr Mary D. Tindale used the specimens to describe and

¹⁸⁹ Both in Joyce E. B. & McCann D. A. Eds. *Burke and Wills, The Scientific Legacy of the Victorian Exploring Expedition*, and Clark, Ian D. & Cahir, Fred, Eds. *The Aboriginal Story of Burke and Wills FORGOTTEN NARRATIVES*,

¹⁹⁰ Jeffries S., et. al., *Hermann Beckler, A Journey to Coopers Creek*, 185.

name *Acacia beckleri*. At last a species honouring Beckler was established using his expedition specimens. Since Beckler never visited the Barrier Range, it seems a pity that *Acacia beckleri*'s common name is Barrier Range wattle.¹⁹¹

There is a further sequel to the discovery and naming of Beckler's acacia which relates to the use of the Australian wattle on the many stylized versions of the Australian Coat of Arms and an issue of an Australian stamp.



The background to the Coat of Arms features a spray of wattle (sometimes the Coat of Arms sits on a bed of wattle), which closely resembles the florescence of Beckler's wattle, despite the fact that the proclaimed Coat of Arms wattle is the Golden Wattle *Acacia pycnantha*. Over the years Australia Post have issued a number of stamps featuring the Australian wattle. A recent version, displaying Beckler's wattle, *Acacia Beckleri*, was issued as part of their personalised stamp facility. The researcher arranged for an actual photograph of Beckler's wattle to be placed on one of these stamps and to be cancelled in Fischen and Höchstädt on the 100th anniversary of Beckler's death 10 December 2014. (see figure 21).

¹⁹¹ Joyce E. B. & McCann D. A. Eds. *Burke and Wills, The Scientific Legacy of the Victorian Exploring Expedition*, CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, Vic., 2012, Chapter 4, 125.



Figure 21. Commemorative envelope and stamps cancelled at Fischen, Bavaria.

Returning to the party's homeward journey, after their camp at Mutawinji the remaining part of the journey was largely uneventful, with the Pamamaroo Creek Depot finally reached on 18 June 1861.

Chapter 6

In Melbourne and then Victoria, Mid 1861 – Jan 1862

Beckler wrote to his brother on 9 July 1861, a few weeks after his return to Melbourne: 'Dear Karl, We are back from Bulla [Bulloo] ... I am well and have not suffered much during the trip. Four patients died.'¹⁹²

Wright's depleted Supply Party and Brahe's Depot party arrived at Menindie (Pamamaroo Creek) camp site on 18 June 1861. Hermann after attending to all clean up tasks, returned to Melbourne via paddle steamer from Menindie to Adelaide and then by the coastal ship '*Aldinga*' to Melbourne on 29 August 1861. His movements in Melbourne are not exactly known, however, it seems likely he would have collected his mail and met up with Dr Mueller and Neumayer and undertaken to make copies of his reports for the Exploration Committee. He left Melbourne on 28 September, the date of his thirty-third birthday, to assist Neumayer with his Magnetic Survey of the western part of the colony. Writing home on 11 September, he discussed his attempts to explore the possibility of becoming a surveyor. We do not know whether he was able to attend the Royal Society Offices on Monday 23 September 1861, when the President of the Society, Sir Henry Barkly, presented Dick, (the Aboriginal guide who had alerted the Pamamaroo Creek depot party to the plight of trooper Lyons and McPherson), with a brass plate and chain and five sovereigns. Beckler with Aboriginal guide, Peter, had of course facilitated the actual rescue of these two men. Beckler would hear of the deaths of Burke and Wills at Mildura during the Survey trip. On 16 December at Wellington, South Australia, he received a summons to attend a Committee of Enquiry in Melbourne. He appeared before the Committee on 30 December 1861. He left Melbourne for Bavaria on 20 January 1862. This chapter examines these events.

As mentioned at the end of the previous chapter, the party arrived back at the Pamamaroo Creek Depot on 18 June 1861, with the camels arriving a day later and slowly dispersed. McDonough was well enough to leave by the 19 August although the sepoys, Beludsch and Butan were still suffering from the effects of scurvy. Wright, with the help of Hodgkinson, arranged for dispatches to be sent with Brahe to Melbourne on

¹⁹² Beckler, *Letters*, 426.

21 June. The Exploration Committee had not heard from any of the expedition parties since Hodgkinson's meeting with the Committee six months earlier on 30 December 1860. Howitt, the leader of the Contingent Exploring Party, had appointed James Knowles to look after the stores at the camp site including thirteen camels. With Wright leaving for Adelaide, Beckler was left to forward any outstanding dispatches to the Exploration Committee. The Melbourne *Argus* reported on Friday 23 August 1861 that the Honorary Secretary of the RSV had received the following dispatches from Howitt and Beckler from Pamamaroo Creek dated 6 August 1861:

Sir, With this mail I transmit to you several papers. As I suppose that Mr. Wright's diary contains I his notes of our daily stages, I send you some descriptions unconnected by date, which it is unnecessary to repeat. Should the committee wish to have these notes also from my journal, I shall be most happy to copy them from my note-book after my arrival in town, where I hope to be as soon as possible. The collection of plants and a small case, filled with different objects of natural history by the late Mr Becker, will be taken down by the steamer, which is now on her way to this place ... Your obedient servant, Herman Beckler.¹⁹³

Beckler also included the following reports in his dispatches: 'Observations on the marked superiority of camels over horses for the purposes of the present Exploring Expedition'; 'Notes on plants collected during the journey from Pamamaroo Creek to Koorliatto Creek, Mutawanji Ranges Mutawanji'; and 'Meteorological observations by the late Mr Ludwig Becker, from 27 January to 1 April 1861.' The Exploration Committee met on Sunday 25 August 1861 during which the above dispatches were read.

Beckler left Menindie on 13 August 1861 arriving back in Melbourne several weeks later, roughly twelve months since he first embarked on the expedition, his dark premonitions about its fate fulfilled. Beckler wrote to his brother Karl in early September and yet again his plans seemed to have changed as he no longer intended to return home to Bavaria as soon as possible to see his parents:

¹⁹³ 1861 'EXPLORING EXPEDITION.', The Age (Melbourne, Vic. : 1854 - 1954), 23 August, p. 5., <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article154900727>

I have this, but it is not what I want, I need to something else. So unfortunately, I have decided to stay here. To someone at home I am guilty to explain my life; and since you are closest to me, so I want you to deal with everything. My recent past can be summarized with the words; *I am alive and well*. No more can be expected of this cursed country. Now comes the question of what to do?¹⁹⁴

Beckler contemplated visiting different Pacific countries, or China, or somewhere else, but in the end came to the sad conclusion that he could not leave without a plan for the future which would afford him a safe and comfortable living, and from which he could do something for his parents and sisters. He decided to familiarize himself with surveying, which he could accomplish in four-six months, and afterwards sit exams in New South Wales or in Queensland; he was certain he would get a job. He also decided to stay with botany, although Müller offered no substantive prospects or encouragement in that direction. He outlined his reasoning in a letter to Karl:

As a Surveyor, a subordinate class in Europe, but here is a very respectable position and a well-paid job, I can still deal with pleasure with botany, which I will do. Dr Mueller is an intimate friend of Mr. Gregory, which, as you might already know, is now the Surveyor-General of Queensland. This will make it possibly easier to take me to interesting places, among whom I especially like Port Denison. So as matters now stand, I have written to the Head of the Geological Survey of Victoria and I expect a response in a few days.¹⁹⁵

Writing on 11 September, Beckler added that:

Today, I have received a letter from Mr Aplin, Mr. Ulrich (a German) as he puts it, would quite like to have me, but there is little chance they have to make measurements (surveys), since the officers in the General Staff rely on the maps from which they draw their geological and topographic surveys. I will now probably travel with Professor Neumayer and try to learn something.

Tomorrow I will continue with Mr. Neumayer ; we will take three months. Hopefully, an interesting and educational journey for me. The dentist pulled out

¹⁹⁴ Beckler, *Letters*, 429.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 430.

my two teeth. Now that I am away from the pestilential climate of Germany, I have to lose my teeth by tooth root inflammation.¹⁹⁶

The four man survey party, comprising Neumayer, Beckler, a Mr Irvine and another assistant, Mr Waltersdorff, and three horses, left Melbourne on 28 September 1861 (Beckler's thirty-third birthday). The trip would take them to the Mallee country to the north-west of Melbourne, then to the lower Murray and then south to the area known as the Western District. A systematic series of astronomical, magnetic and meteorological observations commenced on 29 September, the second day away, and would continue daily under Neumayer's intense leadership throughout the journey. At each meteorological station (part of the Flagstaff Observatory's meteorological observing network), Neumayer would meet with the observer and compare barometric readings.

The party travelled past Kilmore and headed for Heathcote where they purchased another horse. On 11 October they reached Kangaroo Gully (Bendigo). Four days later, on the evening of the 15 October, they were camped on the Loddon River and witnessed a corroboree put on by the numerous Aborigines camped nearby. By 28 October they reached Mr Cameron's Pine Plains Station in the Wimmera. The weather was unseasonably hot and bush fires had already occurred in the district. Neumayer had planned to travel north to the junction of the Murray and Darling rivers across the dry Mallee country, but was warned against such a trip not only by the settlers, but also the Aborigines, saying that there was too much 'wallah' (dense Mallee scrub and spinifex). On 19 October 1861 the survey party reached Mr Jamieson's Station on the Murray (present day Mildura), Neumayer noting in his report that:

Dr Beckler who had gone to the station in order to get some provisions and information, returned with the sad new, that intelligence had reached Melbourne, that Messrs. Burke and Wills had succeeded in crossing the Continent, but had perished on the banks of Cooper's Creek. It is impossible to describe the effect produced upon me by this sad news. I felt it indeed so strongly that it was scarcely possible for me to finish my observations. There seems to be some uncertainty as to who is the surviving party. Were it but for the sake of science, I cannot but say that I should rejoice exceedingly to hear that it was my young friend Mr. Wills, for he certainly possessed a the qualities necessary to be an

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 433.

explorer and I should consider his death a great loss to the cause of exploration in this country.¹⁹⁷

The party left for Wentworth on 13 November in search of further news about the Victorian Exploring Expedition:

The Melbourne *Argus* had just arrived and was filled with particulars, together with severe comments about the conduct of the [Exploration] Committee in the affair. It is strange how the public are lead away by their feelings in affairs of this nature.¹⁹⁸

The party left Wentworth on 21 November and followed down the Murray as it crossed the South Australian border and finally reached Wellington on 14 December 1861. On 16 December, while still at Wellington, Beckler received a telegram from Melbourne from the Commission of Inquiry formed to investigate the circumstances surrounding the deaths of Burke and Wills. Urgently required to give evidence before the Royal Commission about the Victorian Exploring Expedition, he left by coach for Adelaide that afternoon.

Writing to Karl on 18 December 1861, Beckler explained why he was writing from Adelaide.

You will wonder that I write to you from here! You know, I travelled with Mr Neumayer, leaving Melbourne on my birthday on 28 September and reached Wellington in South Australia on 14 December. From the letter, which I sent from the junction of the Murray and Darling to our parents, you will have heard the lamentable fate belonging to Burke and Wills. There now comes, which is inevitable with the English in all such huge stories and in which Englishmen find satisfaction, namely; an investigation, an 'Inquiry'.

My friend and compatriot Brahe is exquisitely, roughly accused by the public and by the press to have neglected his duty. The Journal of the late Mr. Wills accuses him of not obeying the Instructions given by Burke. Wills's Journal alleges Brahe had instructions to remain as long as only possible in Coopers Creek, while Brahe

¹⁹⁷ Neumayer, Georg, Results of the Magnetic Survey of the Colony of Victoria, executed during the years 1858-1864, Mannheim, Schneider. 1869, pp. 37/38.

¹⁹⁸ Beckler, *Letters*, 434

only had an order to remain there for 3 months. But Mr Wills wished that the Depot party of stay 4 months, so they remained four months and one week.

Brahe had no written document from Mr Burke and it must be said, in all of these things it was very sloppy. Now a 'Royal Commission' has been appointed to investigate this matter. As such, I'm particularly not averse of course to being denied my fate and the great pleasure of allowed to be a Witness, when I found on arrival in Wellington, a letter with a few pounds travel money (which I ordered from the bank), an official summons to attend the Royal Commission. This circumstance brought me here yesterday.¹⁹⁹

Clearly incensed about the treatment being handed out to his countryman Brahe, Beckler wrote to Macadam, Honorary Secretary of the Exploration Committee, on 20 November 1861 stating:

The weekly impression of the *Argus* newspaper of the 15th instant is so full of inaccuracies against a late officer (Brahe) of the Victorian Exploring Expedition, that I think it simply my duty to send you the enclosed statements referring to the state of health of the Cooper's Creek party at the time of their arrival at Bulla [Bulloo] ...

With regard to Mr Brahe's services during the Expedition, I am sure that I only state what anyone of us would corroborate unhesitatingly, that nobody could be more zealous, active and conscientious than himself and that no one could have a stronger attachment to Mr Burke and a more strict adherence to his orders. The instructions which were given to him by Mr Burke he repeated to us so often that there could not have been the slightest mis-understanding or was it by one of the correspondents of the *Argus*.

Beckler's letter was received by the Commission of Inquiry sitting in Melbourne on 28 November 1861. In his letter to Karl, Beckler described the lengths that he went to catch the weekly interstate steamer, *White Swan*, which had left Port Adelaide an hour before he arrived. In the hope of somehow catching-up and climbing on board, he took the train to Port Adelaide, hired a cab to the beach and then hired a boat to row him out to the steamer which was just leaving the harbour. Needless to say the steamer completely

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 434.

ignored him and he had to go back to an Adelaide hotel and wait for the *Havilah* which left four days later on Saturday 21 December 1861.

Describing the city of Adelaide in detail, Beckler mentioned that: ‘there are especially a lot of Germans here and here they have a better name and a better position than in Melbourne or Sydney.’²⁰⁰ He was supposed to visit a Dr Bayer but, as he explained to Karl, he was:

reluctant to make visits and to make new acquaintances that will not come to anything. People with a different frame of mind would make masses of acquaintances and enjoy themselves as much as possible, I am always wherever I go, alone and abandoned. This inexplicable penchant for solitude, perhaps already plugged in my original nature and one’s solitary life in the bush certainly does not lose by much, despite that one may sometimes yearn for company. I have become very afraid of people and although I believe it is not a virtue, but a weakness and while I cannot change myself, I grieve about it.²⁰¹

Commenting on his visit to the Murray, Beckler enthused:

I have now visited twice, the king of Australian rivers, the Murray, once to water when I travelled, now 4 months ago from Darling to Melbourne. The second visit gives us comparably more to be seen than the water travel and is full of the greatest and most unusual sceneries that you can think of. However, since the Murray plays such a necessary main role, one that at the time of the inspection had a decent body of water and as the chance favored us, was flooded during our trip to the Murray. Wellington, where I came here with Professor Neumayer, is the most miserable place in the world.²⁰²

Regarding his quest to become a surveyor, Beckler wrote:

To be a Surveyor I have worked with Mr. Neumayer fairly well during the trip, that is, as much as journey allowed. Travelling take a lot of time and regularly camping outdoors in light or before an open fire does not work well. However, I was pretty much even on plane trigonometry, with Mr. Neumayer expecting some

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 436.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid., 439

practical examples and really accomplished some theodolite measurements with me.

But I have particular attention to his repeated representations and he knows the situation exactly - finally and after long deliberation the plan to become Surveyor was dropped.

He expressed two objections. Firstly, he said I would be here, as well as in Europe, in a very humble fall from a higher level of living to a lower one. Secondly, he cited many examples of people efficiently providing services, in Victoria, and partly in South Australia, who would never compete because of the peculiar but general prejudice of the English, towards persons with foreign backgrounds and that I would always work as a dirt beetle. I must now return to Botany.

If for me to enter any field, which I can enjoy and where I can live unchallenged by the world as much as possible, it is the plant world. Practicing as a doctor here or at home is beyond all question. It will not do. I would just go crazy. Also, I am now pretty much over the practical exercise that I - God knows - would have to start all over again. Thus, it does not matter what I am doing from the ground up. I cannot watch more patients, ie. than a practicing doctor -Scientifically my medicine is as high as ever, and I read medical writings here with interest and pleasure.²⁰³

Beckler's next letter, which would be his last from Australia, was written from Melbourne on Christmas Day 1861:

Dear Karl! Yesterday I arrived here from Adelaide, had a very good passage, but was as usual during the first 40 hours hideously seasick, a really miserable feeling! I went at once to Dr Mueller who had some letters for me, including yours of 9 October. By God, I want to come home ... I want to try to get away with the next ship. God, in April or May to be in Germany, what a hope! Rest

²⁰³ Ibid.

assured, however, that it is not the patriotic relationships that attract me, but only and only, the good fortune to have you back, because it is so miserable here in any relationship ... Question not at all what I want to do at home myself . If I ever have the energy to enter native soil again, I will also not be afraid to make my life there. It interests me, especially Fanny, I must be a necessary support. It seems she now feels very unhappy by her governess's life.²⁰⁴

The *Great Britain* has arrived with us in Port Phillip; the famous passenger ship and one of the largest. I am pleased that the plants have finally arrived, I am afraid in poor condition because the front cover was opened. Friendly greetings to all and I expect, if unforeseen circumstances should not prevent it, to see you brother one of these days.²⁰⁵

On Monday 30 December 1861, Beckler appeared before the Commission of Inquiry. Afterwards he busied himself in arranging his passage home, this time not as a ship's doctor. He booked a passage on the clipper ship, *S S Yorkshire* which was scheduled to leave the Sandhurst Pier on Monday 20 January 1862. The ship was towed out into the Roadstead and sailed out of Port Phillip Bay on Tuesday 21 January 1862. Beckler said his farewells to Mueller, at the same time raising with him the question of obtaining a reference from the Exploration Committee confirming his participation as a member of the Victorian Exploring Expedition. Mueller raised this request at the Meeting of the Exploration Committee on 20 January 1862, and it was agreed that a reference should be provided.

However, at the following meeting of the Committee on 5 February 1862, it was decided that Beckler's reference should be deferred pending the report of the Commission of Enquiry. The findings of the Commission of Enquiry were placed before the Victorian Legislative Council on Friday 21 February 1862, one month after Beckler left the colony. The report did not pass any adverse findings on the part that Beckler played during the expedition, indeed, there was even faint praise for the way in which his dispatches had alerted the Exploration Committee to the delays which had occurred with the party at Menindie. Yet Beckler's request for a reference was never honoured. Furious, Mueller resigned from the Exploration Committee.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 440/441

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 442.

Beckler's departure from Australia went virtually unnoticed. He carried with him a box of Aboriginal skeletons collected in Victoria which Mueller had asked him to deliver to his colleague, Professor Rudolph Wagner, an anthropologist at the Georg-August-Universität Göttingen (University of Gottingen).²⁰⁶ Mueller informed Wagner that he had dispatched the Aboriginal skeletons at the end of January 1862:

After learning from one of your former students, my friend Dr Berndt, that you would welcome skeletons of aboriginal Australians for your museum; I have taken the steps to procure two of them as good as I could arrange; they have been despatched to you this week free of charge by the ship *Yorkshire*, under the care of Dr Beckler, the meritorious botanical traveller. My friend Beckler undertook to transport this small contribution of the materials for your inestimable labours to the Royal Hanoverian Embassy in London.²⁰⁷

A final parting accolade and belated recognition for Beckler as 'a meritorious botanical traveller', was a small but fitting tribute to his endeavours in Australia. Mueller paid a further tribute to Beckler in a letter to the English botanist George Bentham in which he described him as 'a very superior man'.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ The repatriation of these Aboriginal relics is today still under negotiation between the Australian Government and the University and present indications (October 2015) suggest that the relics may be returned during 2016, 154 years after they were first delivered. Interestingly, Professor Wagner had after graduation set up practice in Augsburg not far from, Hermann's home town. Wagner died at Gottingen in 1864.

²⁰⁷ Mueller's letter to Professor Wagner dated 25 January 1861 in Home. R., Ed., *Regardfully yours*, Vol. II, page 129.

²⁰⁸ Mueller's correspondence with Bentham dated 24 September 1862, in Home. R., Ed., *Regardfully yours*, Vol. II. Page 162-163.

Chapter 7

In Bavaria 1862 – 1914

Beckler arrived home in Höchstädt sometime during May 1862. He had obviously made up his mind to resume his medical career, possibly for no other reason than it would provide him with a steady income. He took all necessary moves to update his medical qualification and was registered as a doctor and licenced to practice on 19 April 1863. His choice to practice in an isolated part of southern Bavaria seems at first odd, however his love of the solitude of the Bavarian mountains and his admitted social awkwardness was likely to have been a major factor. He wrote extensively about his experiences during his six years in Australia and commenced work on his manuscript, '*Burke's Expedition: Journey to Central Australia*', which is believed that he had almost finished by May 1863. About the same time, he became aware of the publication of Dr Wills's book, '*A Successful Exploration through the Interior of Australia from Melbourne to the Gulf of Carpentaria*',²⁰⁹ through an article which appeared in a German monthly magazine (identified as *Westermann's*, further discussed below). Writing to the magazine Editors, Beckler dismissed Dr Wills's accusations about his involvement in the expedition conveyed in the article, and included a footnote in his manuscript. In 1869, Beckler . who never married, moved his medical practice to Fischen where he remained the town's sole doctor, until his retirement in 1899. He died in Fischen on 10 December 1914 with Australia and Germany at war.

The *SS Yorkshire* arrived in Plymouth on 18 April 1862, exactly twelve months to the day that the depleted and dejected supply party to the Victorian Exploring Expedition arrived back at the Pamamaroo Creek depot. Beckler wasted no time in crossing the English Channel, heading home to Höchstädt to a family welcome in May. Before he left for Australia six years earlier, 'the thought of practicing amongst poor people in some out of the way location' did not satisfy him.²¹⁰, had been one of the reasons for

²⁰⁹ Wills, Dr William, *A Successful Exploration through the Interior of Australia from Melbourne to the Gulf of Carpentaria, From the Journals and Letters of William John Wills*, edited by his father, William Wills, Richard Bentley, New Burlington Street London, London, January 1863.

²¹⁰ Hermann Beckler, *Letters*, page 5

departure. Yet on his return, he chose to do just that. At last, he had come to the realise that botanical collecting would not provide him with funds to repay his aged parents and also to look after his sisters Franziska and Walburga.

The first step was to update his medical skills in order to gain a license to practice as a doctor in his home state of Bavaria, which he obtained on 19 April 1863, being licenced to practice at Vorderburg, Bad Hindelang, and Fischen, all remote and isolated towns in the Allgäu region of southern Bavaria. One cannot help but wonder whether the choice of these isolated towns in the foothills of German Austrian Alps was solely Beckler's. He had already experienced the beauty of a similar sort of mountain scenery during his botanical collecting in the headwaters of the Macleay River and on the New England Tablelands and the Allgäu region was renowned for its array of alpine plants and orchids. Added to this was Beckler's earlier acknowledgment, in a letter to Karl of 18 December 1861, of his preference for solitude and happiness in the bush, and, more particularly and unusually for a medical person, his general avoidance of interactions with people:

This inexplicable penchant for solitude, perhaps already plugged in my original nature and while one may sometimes yearn for company, the one solitary life in the bush is certainly one not much to lose. I became very afraid of people and although I believe it is not a virtue, but a weakness and I grieve about it, so I cannot get beyond that.²¹¹

Thus the combination of these factors suggest that Beckler was at peace with himself, and that it was his personal choice to accept a licence to practice in the remote and botanically engaging Allgäu region of Bavaria.

Beckler probably commenced practice in Vorderburg sometime late in 1863.²¹² He shifted his practice to Bad Hindelang in the Allgäu in the far south-west corner of Bavaria close to the Austrian border in September 1867, around the time of his thirty-ninth birthday. The house is still standing today at No. 6 Sonthofener Strasse, where it was originally built in 1867 as a doctor's residence and surgery by the Hindelang Town community in order to attract a doctor to the town. Beckler left Bad Hindelang after only

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Although, it appears that Beckler may still have been residing in Höchstädt in June 1863, as Mueller writing to Bentham in March 1863 about his European trip (which he never took), had indicated that letters could reach him via Dr Beckler at Höchstädt in June and in the following months.

two years, possibly on account of disagreements with the Town Council, though no precise information has been found. The suspected deaths of his aged parents in Höchstädt about that time and the need to take care of his younger sister Walburga, who was living under care in Höchstädt, may have also been factors.

In July 1869, Beckler moved further south to the alpine town of Fischen and set up practice in the house of his predecessor Dr Lutz who had just retired.



Figure 22. Fischen, Bavaria with its winter coat.

Beckler now had time to turn his attention to writing a series of articles about his experiences in Australia. He had already sent several articles to Karl for publishing in the *Allgemeine Zeitung*, but they have not been found. With all his reports and notes of his Australian journey at hand, he probably commenced writing during the long sea voyage home, or soon after his return. Certainly he seems to have completed at least half of his major article about his experiences as an officer of the expedition entitled: ('Burke Expedition; Eine Reise nach Zentral-Australien') ('Burke's Expedition: A Journey to Central Australia') by May 1863. A footnote on page 149 of his manuscript referred to

an issue sparked by the publication that year of Dr William Wills's book²¹³, which was an attempt by Dr Wills to tell the story of his son, William John Wills's, short life as:

A truthful, though brief, memoir of my son's short career, may furnish a stimulating example, by showing how much can be accomplished in a few years, when habits of prudence and industry have been acquired in early youth. He fell a victim to errors not originating with himself; but he resigned his life without a murmur, having devoted it to science and his country.²¹⁴

While the contents could be described in part as a melancholy tribute to his son, Dr Wills had adopted an attitude in which he set out to hold everyone to blame for his son's death at the Cooper in July 1861. He was particularly scathing of Wright, Landells, Beckler and Brahe, and the Exploration Committee. Wills singled out Beckler with such statements such as:

Dr Hermann Beckler, who has since returned to his native country, was neither a man of courage, energy, nor of medical experience. He resigned when Mr Landells did, and, as will be seen, for a very poor reason.

Wills also quoted from his son's letter to Neumayer in which he accused Beckler of being '*nothing of a bushman*', a statement written by a loyal second in command supporting his leader (who was himself inexperienced in the bush). It did not do justice to Beckler's skills as a bushman during his Moreton Bay botanical collecting and droving experiences.

There were at least three reviews of Dr Wills's book printed in England after its release. The first was in *The Athenaeum*²¹⁵ on 14 February 1863, followed by *The Hampshire Advertiser*²¹⁶ on 21 February 1863. The latter would have been widely read across Devon and especially in Totnes, where there had been an outpouring of grief following news of

²¹³ Wills, Dr William, *A Successful Exploration through the Interior of Australia from Melbourne to the Gulf of Carpentaria, From the Journals and Letters of William John Wills*, edited by his father, William Wills, Richard Bentley, New Burlington Street London, London, January 1863.

²¹⁴ Ibid., From the Preface of above publication.

²¹⁵ *The Australian Explorers*, in *The Athenaeum*, London, Saturday 14 February 1863 p 83,

²¹⁶ *The Australian Explorers*, in *The Hampshire Advertiser*, Southampton, 21 February 1863.

William John Wills's death and where a move to erect a monument to his son was being contemplated.

The third review was printed in the *Morning Post* (London) on Thursday 19 March 1863²¹⁷. This seems the likely source of the review published by the Editor of the German monthly magazine *Westermann's*²¹⁸, published in May 1863 under the heading; -'Latest news from the Afar- Reflections about Burke and Wills', that caught Beckler's attention.

The tenor of this German article is particularly damning and uncompromising and the writer (thought to be the Editor, Dr Adolf Glaser), would have picked up these accusations from the original English newspaper article, which was apparently written in a similar style, although not to the same degree. It must be said, however, after reading the contents of the English newspaper review article, that the German Editor was aware of the full details of the expedition saga, as the Yearbook had already published progress reports about 'Burkes Expedition' in 1861 and 1862.

Regrettably, Beckler's reply translated and recorded in the Appendix in Jeffries, *Hermann Beckler, A Journey to Coopers Creek*²¹⁹, has been incorrectly titled as: 'Beckler's reply to Dr William Wills - (details of publication unknown)', as it should have been entitled, 'Beckler's reply to the Editors of Westermann's Illustrated German Monthly'. Interestingly, further research of this German family magazine indicated that Beckler's response was never published in subsequent issues! Without the recent advent of the internet, the translators in 1993 would have experienced great difficulty in trying to discover this missing German article. As Beckler records;

Wright and I nonetheless discussed the most extensive plans. We had even considered what we would do if we found no one from Burke's party at Cooper's Creek. In this case we entertained the hope of traversing the continent ourselves. Custom had already reconciled us to our misery; the endless yearning to push

²¹⁷ *The Australian Explorers*, in *The Morning Post*, London, Thursday 19 March 1863, p 3, Issue 27847.

²¹⁸ *Westermann's Jahrbuch der Illustrierten Deutschen Monatshefte Ein Familienbuch für das gesammte geistige leben Der Gegenwart Vierzehnter Band*. (Westermann's Yearbook Illustrated German Monthly - A Family Guide to whole spiritual life of the present), published as Volume 14, April 1863 – September 1863: Booklet No. 80 May 1863. p 223-224

²¹⁹ Jeffries S, et.al, *Hermann Beckler, A Journey to Coopers Creek*, 193/194

onward must have struck us almost blind given that we were still making such plans. But this at least shows we were fighting courageously and undauntedly against all the difficulties that surrounded us and were increasing daily.#

Footnote #

*This remark is my only reply to the unfounded and immoderate calumnies thrown at our (Wright's) party by Dr Wills, the father of the traveller who died with Burke and which were reprinted from an English paper in a widely read German monthly. Dr Wills used himself as his own source. After the death of his son became known, he attempted to create difficulties for everyone in Melbourne who had anything to do with the expedition.*²²⁰

The bitterness that Dr Wills harboured towards the Germans surfaced again during his speech at the unveiling of the Wills Memorial in Totnes, Devon on 22 June 1864, when he remarked that:

He could not, or did not, wish to refer to the catastrophe, but to two or three contemptible Germans who, Heaven knows by what means they got into the expedition - might be mainly attributed the misfortune.²²¹

Assuming Beckler and Brahe were the two, was the 'third' German, Dr Mueller, Professor Neumayer, or Becker? - most likely Becker!

Regrettably, Beckler's manuscript was not published during his lifetime. Had it been published it may have forced the Royal Society to reply, but more appropriately, to move to publish the findings of the expedition rather than wait 150 years to do so.

In July 1865, Beckler's interest in the saga Ludwig Leichhardt was re-awakened by reports in the *Allgemeine Zeitung* of the revival of public interest in Australia in the fate of Leichhardt. At the time there was growing interest in mounting a search for Leichhardt to be led by Duncan McIntyre and funded partly by the Ladies Leichhardt Search Committee. The death of McIntyre in June 1866 effectively brought the search to a close and the fate of Leichhardt remains a mystery today. Beckler contributed a short

²²⁰ Jeffries, S., et.al, *A Journey to Coopers Creek*, p.149.

²²¹ 1864 'INAUGURATION OF THE WILLS MEMORIAL.', Portland Guardian and Normanby General Advertiser (Vic. : 1842 - 1876), 15 September, p. 3 Edition: EVENING, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article64632251>

article under the heading *Ist Leichhardt Todt?* [Is Leichhardt Dead?], which was published in the *Allgemeine Zeitung*, on 30 July 1865.

Beckler's clinical interest in the prevalence and treatment of scurvy, which had caused the deaths of Stone, Purcell, Becker and Patten, prompted him to write a medical treatise. *Ueber das Auftreten und den Verlauf von Scorbut im Innern Australiens*, (About the Occurrence and Progression of Scurvy in the Interior of Australia), which he submitted and read before the prestigious Berlin Medical Society on 18 April 1866.

In the following year, two articles by Beckler appeared: '*Corroberri: Ein Beitrag zur Kenntnis der Musik bei den australischen Einwohnern*' ('Corroboree: A Contribution to the Knowledge of the Music in the Australian Population')²²², based on a performance he had witnessed outside Warwick on 27 March 1858; and *Die Musik der Vogel*, ('The Melody of the Birds')²²³ in which Beckler captured the song of birds which he had experienced during his botanical collecting in the bush in New South Wales.

In 1868, Beckler published *Der Australische Tropenwald* ('The Australian Tropical Forest') in which he described the Australian tropical rain forest.

Two years later, in 1870, he submitted an article, *Die Ureinwohner Australiens* ('The Indigenous Australians'), which was printed in the *Jahresbericht des Vereins für Erdkunde zu Dresden* (*Annual Report of the Dresden Geographical Society*, Vol.6, 1870.)

Several years passed before Beckler, who had obviously retained his interest in Australian affairs, submitted an article to the *Allgemeine Zeitung* about 'Deutsche Sklaven in Queensland' ('German Slaves in Queensland') in response to the Queensland Government's debate about seeking more assisted immigrants from Germany.²²⁴

Finally in 1879, the Dresden Geographical Society published Beckler's article, *Das Murray und Darling Gebiet: Eine geographische Skizze* ('The Murray and Darling Area:

²²² Beckler, Hermann, *Corroberri: Ein Beitrag zur Kenntnis der Musik bei den australischen Einwohnern* (Corroboree: A Contribution to the Knowledge of the Music in the Australian Population), *Globus*, Vol 13, 1867 pp 82-84).

²²³ Beckler, Hermann, *Die Musik der Vogel*, ('The Melody of the Birds') -- *Die GartenLaube*, (The Garden Arbor - Illustrated Family Journal), Vol 35, 1867 pp 558-559.

²²⁴ Beckler, H. *Deutsche Sklaven in Queensland in Handel und englischen Kolonien in Australien* (Trafficking and English colonies in Australia), In Supplement to the *Allgemeine Zeitung*, Nr. 172, 21 June 1877.

A Geographical sketch'), reporting on his trip from the Darling Downs to Deniliquin and then on to Melbourne.²²⁵

In subsequent years the provision of community health services to the people of Fischen and the surrounding district probably kept Beckler busy as the region expanded with the growth of winter sports and summer tourism. However, there is little documentation available after more than 100 years to enable the researcher to confirm the details of his community involvement and more importantly, the suspected continuation of his botanical collecting and particularly his Alpine botanical interests during this time. The Fischen Town Hall Archives show that, as well as his appointment as Community Health Doctor and Physician, Beckler was a member of the Town's Traffic and Improvement Committee from 1888 to 1891, a body responsible for, among other things, the development of tourism. One can reasonably draw from this that Beckler's interests in Alpine botany may have been a reason for his appointment.

However, extensive research through German Botanical Archival websites has failed to identify any botanical articles, publications or even plant specimens collected or contributed by Beckler during the period 1870 to 1900. Plant specimens collected by Beckler during his collecting excursion to the Hasting and Clarence Rivers in 1859 are the only specimens recorded and are held today in the Bavarian State Collection.²²⁶ In 1904 he sent a collection of his botanical books to the Regensburgische Botanische Gesellschaft (Regensburg Botanical Society) and was made a member of that Society for his donation.

Closer to the present, on 17 June 1962, on the occasion of the unveiling of a commemorative plaque on the building on the site of Hermann Beckler's birthplace in Höchstädt, Bürgermeister, Alfred Reiser remarked that: 'Till his death on December 10, 1914, he [Beckler] spent all available time on his hobby, botanical research. His long experiences in this field convinced him, that the laws of nature are woven in the flora.'

²²⁵ Beckler, Hermann, *Das Murray und Darling Gebiet: Eine geographische Skizze*, (The Murray and Darling Area: A geographical sketch), (Annual Report of the Dresden Geographical Society), Vol. 6., 1879, pp. 75-94.

²²⁶ The Bavarian State Botanical Collection 1813-1988 (An overview of the collections) by Hannes Hertel and Annelise Schreiber: <http://atgard.botanik.biologie.uni-muenchen.de/botsyst/ic/ic-ind-b.htm>; Beckler, Hermann (1828-1914) [Arzt in Fischen.] Australia ("In itinere a Hastings River ad Richmond River collectae X.1859-IV.1860"): 642 (Z 1884 (gift of the collector).

It appears that Beckler, during his final years, became very interested in politics and was a supporter of the national liberal movement, the *Volkisch* movement (folk or peoples movement), a largely sentimental movement which had its beginnings in Germany after the Napoleonic Wars. Beckler's interest in the movement can be traced back to his concern expressed in his letter of August 1859, followed his reading about the defeat of Austria (involving German Regiments) during the Franco-Austrian War of 1859. The movement, which gained in popularity after Germany's defeat in the First World War, later re-emerged as one of the basic elements of the Nazi Party.

Beckler retired from practice on 6 October 1899, not long after his seventy-first birthday. In 1900 he moved with his sister, Walburga and his faithful housekeeper, Rosa Hummel, to rental accommodation in the house of master carpenter Otto Sauter, where he celebrated his eightieth birthday. It is said that Beckler made his coffin which he kept in the attic!



Wohnhaus u. Schreinerei Anton Sauter, Fischen, Burgstraße 5
Wohnung u. Praxis von Dr. Hermann Beckler 1900-1914

Figure 23. Photograph of the Sauter house in Fischen where Hermann spent his last years. Translation; House of Master Carpenter Anton Sauter, Burgstraße 5, Fischen Apartment and Practice of Dr Hermann Beckler 1900 – 1914 Courtesy Fischen Town Archives.

On 20 June 1905, Beckler was proudly honoured by his Faculty of Medicine in Munich with the award of an Honorary Doctorate of Medicine, bestowed on the 50th anniversary of his date of graduation in 1855.

Continuing to take part in the life of the Fischen community, Beckler became a member of the newly established Fischen Men's Choir (*Männergesangsvereins Fischen*); at their first rehearsal on 10 October 1906 he was included as an honorary member. The choir is still active today. A photograph taken in 1910 shows him as a member of Choir.²²⁷



Der MGv Fischen um 1910
 Untere Reihe: Nikolaus Bader (1. Vorstand), H.H. Benefiziat L. Pröbstl (Dirigent), Dr. Hermann Beckler, Dr. Bortscheller
 Mittlere Reihe: Wilhelm Schemminger, Thomas Besler, Michael Geißler, Ludwig Waibel, Wilhelm Redler, Mathias Übelhör, Anton Müller. Hintere Reihe: Anton Stöhr, Konrad Müller, Franz Müller, Max Mathes, Lukas Ess, Hugo Klaus, Wilhelm Baur, Bernhard Daffertshofer, Fridolin Spiß.

Figure 24. Group photograph of the Fischen Men's Choir taken in 1910 (Hermann shown sitting second front right).

²²⁷Downloaded from the Fischen Men's Choir website at www.mgv-fischen.de

On 8 July 1909, Beckler's younger sister, Walburga died, aged seventy-seven. His other sister, Franziska (Fanny) now widowed, had moved to Fischen and lived close by. His brother Karl, his confidant and correspondent throughout his six years in Australia and in later life, had already died, as had his other brother Ignaz. Paul, the youngest brother would pass away in February 1915 aged eight-one years. In early September 1914, three months before his death, Beckler received the sad news that his nephew and namesake, Captain Hermann Beckler of the 17th Bavarian Infantry Regiment, had been killed in action at Luneville, France. With Australia and Germany at war, the news must have had a profound effect upon Beckler as he reflected upon his life's journey in both countries. He passed away on 10 December 1914, the last surviving Officer of the Victorian Exploring Expedition 1860-1861.

Hermann Beckler was buried in the town cemetery in Bad Hindelang. With no one to take an interest in his gravesite and no headstone to make his final resting place, his gravesite now contains the graves of other persons. There is no plaque in the towns of Fischen or Bad Hindelang to record his passing, though, as mentioned, in 1962 a plaque was placed on the wall of a building erected on the site of the house where he was born in Höchstädt in 1828.

In January 1915, his will was read with his sister Franziska appointed as an executrix. His goods and chattels, including his medical books, piano and sheet music were distributed amongst his dwindling family and friends, thus bringing to an end the life and times of Australia's (and Germany's) forgotten scientist/ adventurer.

The researcher commenced this thesis with the reference to Hermann Beckler as Australia's and Germany's forgotten explorer-scientist; as the preceding chapters have shown, this description is more than justified. With his expedition reports and drawings, the botanical collection that he left in Australia and the series of articles that he wrote on his return to Bavaria, Beckler left a priceless legacy for future Australian and German scholars. His departure from Australia in January 1862, when negative publicity and recriminations about the fate of the expedition were rife, meant that by the time the Burke and Wills statue was unveiled at the centre of the intersection of Collins and Russell Streets (City of Melbourne) on 21 April 1865, the public had largely forgotten about the expedition. The Exploration Committee of the Royal Society of Victoria held its final meeting on 19 November 1872, a decade after Beckler's departure from Australia, at which it adopted the following resolution:

The Committee regrets, that it has not been in their power to publish a complete history of the several expeditions which were organized under their care and more especially, as many interesting sketches both of Dr Beckler and the late Dr Becker now in the Royal Society's Hall, will thus for the present be lost to the world; but they rejoice to contemplate the magnificent results which have flowed from these expeditions, in the colonization of vast tracts of country previously unknown and in the erection of new and flourishing settlements in the northern shores of this great continent.²²⁸

However, it was not until 1874 that the expedition reports, including Becker's and Beckler's drawings and related scientific material were finally delivered to the Melbourne Public Library for archiving. Beckler's failure to publish his manuscript, 'Journey to Central Australia,' coupled with his self-imposed exile to an out of the way region of Bavaria, meant that he too slipped from public gaze in Australia, as well as in Germany, despite his many articles in German journals which appeared up to 1879. His death in December 1914 did not even rate a mention in Australian newspapers, after all Australia was at war with Germany and his erstwhile 'patron' during his six-year odyssey in Australia, Dr Ferdinand Mueller, had passed away in October 1896.

A street is named after Hermann Beckler in his hometown Höchstädt, *Hermann-Beckler-Strasse*. The only plaque to his memory, mislaid after some years, was honoured with a wreath laying ceremony arranged by the Höchstädt Historical Society; attended by Burgermeister Stefan Lenz, at a ceremony on 10 December 2014 commemorating the 100th anniversary of Beckler's death (see Figure 21).

Beckler's name is recorded in Australia, but not in any sense as an appropriate remembrance on a commemorative plaque or the like, but rather simply as street names in suburban subdivisions in Western Australia and Queensland. In Western Australia, Beckler Court is located off Howitt Road, in the seaside suburb of Padbury, north of Perth. In Queensland, Beckler Street is a suburban street in Leichhardt, west of Ipswich, with Wills Street nearby. It is located in an area that Beckler would have passed through many times during his Moreton Bay journeys. Regrettably, Australia's capital, Canberra, does not acknowledge Beckler's name, although Ludwig Becker is commemorated with a street in the suburb of Downer. Moves are underway to remedy this omission. Perhaps

²²⁸ 1872 'THE NEWS OF THE DAY.', The Age (Melbourne, Vic. : 1854 - 1954), 20 November, p. 2, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article199377596>

most surprisingly, Beckler's name is not recorded on any feature in the State of Victoria; a glaring oversight that should be addressed.



Figure 25. Commemorating the 100th Anniversary of the death of Dr Hermann Beckler on 10 December 2014 outside the building where he was born. Bürgermeister Stefan Lenz (to immediate right of wreath with Frau Michaela Thomas and Herr Leo Thomas Höchstädt Historische Gesellschaft and Town Archivists (shown to the left of the Wreath), with the citizens of Höchstädt. Courtesy Höchstädt Historical Society.

Location wise, the most remarkable commemorative naming is that given to five gas well-heads (Beckler 1 to Beckler 5) in northern South Australia, south of Innaminka, close to the South Australian / Queensland border. While the well-heads are in the Strzelecki Desert, they are ironically located in the vicinity of Burke's fruitless march to Mt Hopeless and return during April-May 1861. They are far to the west of the Bulloo River Waterhole, the northern point of the Supply party's abortive journey to reach the Cooper's Creek depot. It was there that Burke overruled Wills's and King's suggestion to follow the Dig Tree Depot party to Menindie, and strike out for Mt Hopeless, a key factor in the subsequent deaths of Burke and Wills on the Cooper.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

In the foregoing Chapters, the researcher set out to trace the life journey of Dr Hermann Beckler; to discover and record significant turning points in his life, which shaped his career and outlook, both in Australia and in Germany (Bavaria) and to outline the contribution and legacy, which he left in his writings about Australian exploration history and Australian botany.

In Chapter 2, the researcher identified Beckler's decision to immigrate to a New World destination as essentially his desire to leave an old order of stifling authoritarianism and bureaucracy and to experience the freedom of a democratic colonial society in what he thought, given his romantic idealism, would be a romantic Arcadian setting. It was this escape from authoritarian law and order, which clashed with his liberal views during his undergraduate years, was a key driver to leave Bavaria immediately following his graduation. While there were a number of factors that made him choose Australia as his New World destination, it was probably his meeting with Neumayer in Munich was the deciding influence. Beckler took every opportunity during the long voyage to acquire new skills such as navigation and astronomy and to observe and record the changing seascapes and seasons, and this Humboldtian attitude and discipline of observing and recording the natural environment would follow him throughout his Australian sojourn.

Beckler's arrival in Moreton Bay without patronage and without medical instruments, the absence of these important 'tools of trade' became an overwhelming impediment, which severely hampered his ability to establish himself as a doctor in a pioneering competitive colonial society. He arrived with limited funds and with the unfortunate arrangements of his eventual practice situation and the poverty of his patients, he soon realized that was not going to receive the expected reward for his medical services.

Beckler's attempts to salvage his medical practice was thwarted by his failure to travel to Sydney to have his medical qualifications registered by the New South Wales Medical Board. Likewise, his later attempts improve his financial situation by opening a Pharmacy ended in failure. It would be his botanical interests and collecting which would ultimately provide him with much needed mental relief from his daily worries and his concerns for those back home in Bavaria, which would enable him to commune with

the native Australian bush and enjoy its natural scenery. His romantic, poetical and vivid descriptions of the outback scenery which feature in his extensive correspondence with his brother Karl, illustrate how deeply he felt about the solitude and beauty of the Australian outback. A loner in the strict sense of the word, Beckler liked solitude. This predisposition for solitude would follow him in his selection of towns deep in the Allgäu region of southern Bavaria on his return to Germany and medical practice.

With his arrival in Melbourne mid-way through his six year odyssey in July 1859, Beckler set out to immerse himself into the cultural life of colonial Melbourne, an opportunity which he had not experienced during his journey to date. Although disappointed to discover that his medical diploma was not recognised, he was not deterred, as he had almost had given up the idea of medical practice. Taking this revelation in his stride, Beckler commenced work for Dr Mueller at the Herbarium, work which he described as most satisfying, if not always intellectually stimulating. As if to overcome his highs and lows, he again shared his thoughts about his future with his brother Karl in voluminous descriptions about his daily activities of the city, including pen sketches of the characters of Dr Mueller and Neumayer. Beckler had always been aware of the money to be made in the collecting and dispatching Australian plant collections to institutions in Germany and was now sending plants to his brother in Germany. However, he was looking forward to his collecting journey in Northern New South Wales as he remarked to his Brother: 'I know that if I keep my health, I am going to spend there, happy, happy days in the lonely sublime wilderness'.

To Beckler his greatest achievement was to be appointed as Medical Doctor and Botanical Collector to the Victorian Exploring Expedition. Writing to his brother Karl on 9 July 1860, he exclaimed; 'I stand on the eve of great events!'

While Beckler's elation at being appointed to the expedition would be tempered somewhat by his own dark premonitions about its outcome, he could not have even envisaged the mismanagement of the expedition that would unfold and ultimately prevent its success. As he would write in the preface to 'Burke's Expedition: Journey to Central Australia', the expedition 'was notable less for its actual achievements, than for the endless difficulties and obstacles encountered and for the loss of life'. Burke's apparent antipathy towards the German scientists, Beckler and Becker, culminated in Beckler's resignation, an action which went against his personal expectation of playing a significant role as an officer of the expedition. The reasons behind his resignation have

never been properly examined until now (Chapter 5) and while many among the public and the press saw this event as symptomatic of the expedition's mismanagement, Beckler's position as a principled person went unremarked, overtaken by other events. His role in the rescue of Trooper Lyons and McPherson was praised by Wright, but ignored by the Exploration Committee. Likewise, his valiant attempts to save four members of the expedition in the face of enormous odds were never properly commended or even recognised. The failure of the Exploration Committee to provide Beckler with a requested reference of participation in the expedition was inexcusable.

Beckler's return to Bavaria was inevitable in the light of the advice given by Mueller and Neumayer about his future prospects in Australia, particularly as a foreign person and his own personal concern to repay his debt to his now aged parents. With medical practice providing the only solution, Beckler had to be licenced, a situation which he had not obtained when he left so hastily after graduation nearly seven years earlier. Not being licenced to practice, may have been the reason why his medical qualifications were not formally recognised in Victoria in 1860.

He received his practice licence a year later in April 1863 and one can reasonably draw a direct connection with his Australian bush experiences and his choice to practice in an isolated area of his beloved Allgäu, a practice situation which he had now clearly rejected as one of his earlier reasons for leaving Bavaria. As Beckler confessed in his penultimate letter written from Adelaide on 18 December 1861, a month before he left Australia, his predisposition for solitude was now part of his nature and entrenched as a result of his experiences during his six year Australian odyssey, his lonely botanical collecting and his participation in the expedition. This attitude and personality trait may have also had its genesis in his formative years of undergraduate study years as an impoverished student in Munich, as he had remarked in his first letter to his brother Karl from Hamburg: 'Oh God, they [his parents] certainly did not deserve to have such a troubled son'.

Hermann Beckler's legacy from his six years in Australia is a significant one. An independent observer at a time of great change, Beckler was concerned with the plight of the Aboriginal peoples caught up in the colonial expansion. He commented on the effect that alcohol had on the Aborigines in Ipswich, and he would write further about their 'natural nobility' in his unpublished manuscript and about his interaction with outback Aboriginal people whom he met during the journey to Bulloo Waterhole, as well as the

‘noble’ conduct of Mr Shirt during the skirmish at the waterhole. He attended corroborees and wrote effusively about them on his return to Germany: ‘the intonation unique in its purity, the individual octaves of women and children are pure delight rarely heard, as if they are the best of European opera chorus’.²²⁹ In his article, entitled; *The Australian Aborigines*, he remarked by way of conclusion that:

Something finally, is the alleged barbarity of many savage peoples and in my experience, and after the most careful inquiries at every opportunity that I have made, this is certainly not an inherent [trait] of Australian Aborigines. They throw with the spear at their enemy, they kill them by blows from clubs, but nowhere does exist even a trace of suspicion that they, like other indigenous peoples, use slow and refined torture of their enemy to death.

The Australian [Aborigines], though, by the influence of the surrounding circumstances are at a lower level of education, are so mentally as capable as many other indigenous peoples, who are favoured by the nature of their native land, however, they far surpass in education.²³⁰

Another important legacy that Beckler left for the Australian nation were the botanical plants collected during the expedition. Linden Gilbank has noted the importance of the Beckler collection, a remarkable botanical legacy of approximately 1000 specimens.²³¹ The naming of one of Australia’s most beautiful floral emblems of the outback, the Barrier Range wattle, *Acacia beckleri*, is perhaps the only lasting acknowledgement of his contribution to Australian botany.

There is, however, a final legacy that Beckler left to Australia, namely his: ‘*Letters to his brother Karl*’, a delightful, entertaining and informative commentary on colonial life in Australia. An English translation will soon be provided for use by Australian scholars.

²²⁹ Beckler, Hermann, A Contribution to the Knowledge of the Music of the Australian Aborigines, Globus, Vol. 13, 1867, pp 82-84.

²³⁰ Beckler, Hermann, *The Australian Aborigines*, (Annual Report of the Dresden Geographical Society), Vol. 6, 1870, pp 17-18

²³¹ Gilbank. Linden in Chapter 4, pp. 97-129; in *Burke and Wills: The Scientific Legacy of the Victorian Exploring Expedition*; Joyce, McCann Eds., CSIRO Pub. 2011.

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