



Speech by

GARY FENLON

MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES

Hansard 21 July 1999

LANG'S SHIPS REUNION

Mr FENLON (Greenslopes—ALP) (11.05 p.m.): I rise to speak about a remarkable reunion that I attended recently at the Mt Gravatt Showgrounds. I was honoured by my constituent Mrs Beverly Fulton-Kennedy and other members of the Lang's Ships Reunion Committee with the invitation to open the event, which was arranged to commemorate the arrival of three ships, the *Fortitude*, the *Chasely* and the *Lima*, between 1848 and 1849.

The travellers arrived as a result of the vision of John Dunmore Lang—Scottish clergyman, politician and promoter. It was his work that engineered the presence of 630 chosen migrants in Queensland—part of a dream of a god-fearing, industrious Protestant community taking root in the southern continent. He insisted that these people should be Protestant to counter the influence of the Catholic Irish.

Of course, Lang was a vocal foe of transportation. Manning Clark has written of his conviction that "assisted migration and transportation would only flood the country with the offscourings of English parishes and popish gaols". I have always been keenly aware of my Irish background. Therefore, it was with a pleasure in the irony that I accepted the invitation to open this particular event.

Although I had a superficial appreciation of the events that the descendants gathered to commemorate, on the day I was astounded and astonished to learn more of the centrality of the arrivals to the early history of Queensland. J. D. Lang was a champion of the liberal democratic principles of the day. He was a strong opponent of all unfree labour and an advocate of the cessation of transportation. He was a prominent witness at the hearings of the Molesworth committee, whose brief was to "inquire into the system of transportation, its efficacy as a punishment, its influence on the moral state of society in the penal colonies, and how far it is susceptible of improvement". The committee began its hearings in 1837 and after 38 meetings delivered its report to the House of Commons in 1838. J. D. Lang was also at the forefront of an application of pressure in Sydney and London for the separation of the northern part of New South Wales. With the approval of the Colonial Office, by the mid 1850s it became accepted that the region would gain its independence from New South Wales. In addition, Lang was a champion of republicanism. He looked forward to a day when the people of Australia established a republican Government for themselves and elected their own president. That is interesting, given the debate earlier today. Indeed, in a letter to *Lloyds Weekly Newspaper* in 1849, J. D. Lang argued that Earl Grey's convict policy had paved the way for a "United States of Australia".

Although many of the arrivals whom Lang sponsored achieved eminence in the new colony of Queensland, I will focus briefly on two, the brothers Robert and Benjamin Cribb. The former arrived on the first of the Lang ships, the *Fortitude*, in 1849, while his brother arrived four months later on the *Chasely*. Lang's non-conformism, his liberal ideas mixed with a radicalism in the English tradition were to exert their influence on the brothers. Robert, who the press dubbed "Robert the Restless", was an accomplished orator and public agitator. Representing East Moreton in the New South Wales Legislative Assembly, he worked tirelessly for separation from New South Wales and separation without forced labour, whether they be Kanaka, coolie or convict. In October 1859 he became an alderman in the Brisbane City Council and in 1860 he was elected to the first Queensland Parliament, representing North Brisbane from 1860 to 1863 and East Moreton from 1863 to 1867.

Robert Cribb was a vigorous supporter of the eight-hour day and was central to a campaign that persuaded some of the town's most significant contractors to accept it. He also ardently committed himself to political fights against a renewal of transportation and State aid to religious establishments, and was also a champion of manhood suffrage, national education and the separation of the church and State.

His brother Benjamin also served in the New South Wales Legislative Assembly for the seat of Stanley Boroughs. Benjamin was also an advocate of separation and an opponent of transportation.

In the Queensland Legislative Assembly he represented West Moreton and Ipswich, and later served as an Ipswich alderman. It is also worth noting that Benjamin's sons, Thomas and James, also went on to serve in the Queensland Lower House.

I conclude by noting that this year marks the 150th anniversary of the separation of Queensland from New South Wales. Therefore, I think it is fitting to use this forum to acknowledge the efforts of the Lang's Ships organising committee in promoting an appreciation of the pioneers who did the groundwork.

Time expired.
