Queensland's earliest consular appointment?

by J. C. H. GILL, B.A., LL.B.

The earlier issues of *Queensland Heritage* have made some mention of public archives properly so-called; that is, of the governmental and other official papers of the State. Some indication has been given of the value of public records for the historian.

State archives are not, however, the only historical treasury. For a young country such as Australia there are a surprisingly large number of documents of an archival or semi-archival nature still in the hands of private persons.

All too often these private holdings consist of a single document or a small group of papers and, being divorced from their frame of reference, they whet the curiosity as to the reasons which brought them into existence. Their actual historical value is not, however, entirely cancelled out, and it can be enhanced once their provenance has been established.

The following group of documents held by a Brisbane man\(^1\) is a case in point:

(a) A Letter Patent of the Senate of the Free Hanseatic Republic of Hamburg dated 2 November, 1855, appointing George Appel its Vice Consul at South Brisbane, New South Wales;
(b) An Exequatur under the Royal Sign Manual dated 2 September, 1856, approving George Appel as Vice Consul for Hamburg at South Brisbane; and
(c) A letter dated 17 February, 1857, from the Colonial Secretary, Sydney, to George Appel notifying him of the gazettal of the Queen’s approval of his appointment (Colonial Secretary’s in-letter 618/1857).

A series of questions immediately presents itself—
(i) Who was George Appel?
(ii) What was his qualification for such an appointment?
(iii) Why did Hamburg consider it necessary to have a Vice Consul at South Brisbane?
(iv) What were the steps that had to be taken before George Appel could be notified of the Queen’s approval of his appointment?

If these questions are capable of answer it is considered the three documents become wholly meaningful because their frame of reference has been re-established.

Whilst perhaps not sufficiently so to satisfy the purist, it has been possible to obtain enough information from various sources to give reasonably full answers to the questions posed.

George (sometimes referred to as Georg) Appel was born at Hesse Cassel in Germany on 19 August, 1823, and died at South Brisbane, Queensland, on 25 May, 1910. His death certificate shows that he was resident in the colonies of Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland for an aggregate of 58 years prior to his death. Therefore he arrived in Australia in 1851. He was employed as a gold escort on the Victorian Goldfields when the bonanza was at its peak, but he did not succumb to the lure of gold mining. At the age of 30 (1853-1854) he went to Moreton Bay and became a merchant. Principally he was a sheep broker. However, he handled little local stock, but mainly imported sheep from overseas and the other Australian colonies which he sold to Moreton Bay graziers. He shared a wharf at South Brisbane with the sawmilling firm of McGhie Luya. The wharf was on the downstream side of Tribune Street, South Brisbane, in the area, between that street and the Dry Dock, which is now occupied by the Brisbane Milling Company’s wharf and flour mill. He acquired an area of land towards the suburb of West End bounded by Hampstead Road on the east, Vulture Street on the north and the back fences of residential properties fronting Franklin Street on the west and Brighton Road on the south. On this area, which was locally known as the “Sheep Station” he ran his imported sheep and conducted his sheep sales.\(^2\)

Appel was prominent in Brisbane’s German community (in 1857 consisting of some 435 persons) and was a foundation member of South Brisbane’s first Lutheran Church, the Nazareth, now located in Hawthorne Street, Woolloongabba. Prior to the establishment of this Church the South Brisbane Lutherans had journeyed to St. Andrews, North Brisbane established by Gerler in 1856. However, from 1853 to 1855 Pastor J. G. Haussmann, one of the Nundah Missionaries of 1838, was an itinerant minister and his services were much in demand. The following year saw the establishment of the church in South Brisbane.

\(^{1}\) George Appel, by courtesy of the Oxley Memorial Library.

\(^{2}\) Queen's approval of his appointment.

Page Seventeen  Queensland Heritage
chaplain to English and German settlers in Queensland and he held services at the homes of his flock in rotation. Although Haussmann moved to Victoria in July 1855 to take up the pastorate of German Town (Grovedale), his daughter, Maria Jane, either remained in the Moreton Bay area, or returned to this district, for on 9 February 1858 she and George Appel married. Maria Jane had been the first female European child born at Zions Hill (Nundah) Moreton Bay, the date of her birth being 12 January 1839.

By the time the Colony of Queensland was established on 10 December 1859, Appel was already in the Government service as Official German Interpreter at Moreton Bay and Inspector of Sheep under the Scab in Sheep Act of New South Wales. He was then appointed the first stock inspector for the new Colony of Queensland. The Government of the new colony confirmed him in his former position as German interpreter, and granted him exemption from jury service.

No record can be found of his ceasing to be Vice-Consul for Hamburg. From Statistical Registers and Blue Books, 1861-1871, it appears that he remained in that office until the last mentioned year. His name does not appear as Vice-Consul for Hamburg in 1872, or thereafter. In 1870, the principal German consul agent in Brisbane was Armand Ranniger, who described himself as Consul for the North German Confederation. He was still so described as at least as late as August 1871, but in a letter dated 5 January 1872, he is described as Imperial German Consul. It is probable, therefore, that when the full effects of German unification under Bismarck were felt in this part of the world, there was no further need for consuls for provinces, states or cities of the German Empire, and so no further work for Appel as a vice consul.

As a German by birth who was engaged in a business that used sea transport and who early in his residence at South Brisbane achieved some prominence in the German community, Appel had the qualifications for a consular appointment. It may be surmised that the Hamburg authorities would in the first instance have received recommendations from the masters and/or owners of vessels on the Hamburg register that the City should have consular representation at Moreton Bay. Inquiries (discreet no doubt) made through such well known identities as Pastor Haussmann would have disclosed Appel as a suitable nominee. Lacking access to Hamburg records the steps leading up to Appel's appointment may only be the subject of surmise based on the normal manner in which such appointments were made.

Similarly the full reasons why the Hamburg authorities considered it necessary to have a consular representative at South Brisbane cannot be explained authoritatively. However, some information on this subject is given in the Letter Patent, a translation of which follows:

* * * *

WE THE SENATE OF THE FREE AND HANSE CITY OF HAMBURG record and acknowledge hereby, that we, in order to preserve and promote the existing trade and shipping connections between our State and the Royal Britannic Colony of New South Wales, have deemed it useful and necessary to establish a Vice-Consulate for Hamburg at South Brisbane, and that we have nominated and appointed as Our Vice-Consul, Herr George Appel, a resident at that place.

Therefore, through this document, We authorize Our Vice-Consul at South Brisbane, Herr George Appel to manage and use this Vice-Consulate of Hamburg, with all the associated rights, prerogatives, privileges and freedoms to manage and to use, so long as We or Our Successors do not deem it necessary to decide otherwise.

We bring to the notice of and order all ships' captains, commanders and their crews, who sail under the flag of Hamburg, (as well as all citizens, inhabitants, natives of the city and their families) to regard and acknowledge the aforesaid Herr George Appel at South Brisbane as Our Vice-Consul.

We also request the High Government of Your Royal Britannic Majesty, to acknowledge the aforesaid Herr George Appel as Our appointed Vice-Consul at South Brisbane, and with gracious good will accept and receive him; to allow him the associated rights, liberties and privileges which attach to his office by law and by custom, similarly as with the Vice-Consuls of other friendly States, allowing him undisturbed use of such; to grant all necessary protection and aid to him in the practice of his consular work; also to offer a ready hearing to him, if he, in Our Name, makes useful proposals for the profit of the mutual shipping and trade, or raises other matters.

Whereof to the Deed have We affixed this Consulate-Patent with the signature of one of Our Secretaries and Our Great Seal of State. Executed at Hamburg, the 2 Nov 1855.

CONSULAT — PATENT

By the Special Commission for the Vice-Consul of Hamburg at South Brisbane,

A. SIEVEKING

Secretary of the Republic of Hamburg

* * * *

Some further information has been provided by the Archives Office of New South Wales. Mr. R. F. Doust, the Senior Archivist, to whom the problem was referred, offers the following well-informed conjectures:

* * * *

The first point to be noticed is that George Appel was Vice-Consul for Hamburg. There was a German Consul in Sydney. There were (according to the census of 1856) 5,245 Germans in the colony amongst a total population of 266,189. Of these, 864 lived in the police district of Sydney, which had a total population of 79,581. This gives a proportion of Germans to total population in the colony as a whole and in Sydney as somewhere in the vicinity of 2% and 1% respectively.

If we now consider the police districts in the north which roughly correspond to the colony of Queensland, we find that the position is somewhat different. There appear to have been about 1,400 persons of German birth in these districts as against a total population of 18,000 giving a proportion of nearly 8%. Against this, of course, it may well be argued that, as with the rest of the population of what is now Queensland, the Germans were dispersed over the countryside rather than congregated in the towns, and that a Consul would have little effect in protecting their interests, if that was the purpose. Added to which, of course, is the obvious fact that most of the Germans were probably not from the city of Hamburg.

A more likely reason for appointing a Vice-Consul at Brisbane was that since the duties of a consul are very largely commercial, there were mercantile interests to be considered. The Statesman's Yearbook for 1862 shows that at that time the city had a merchant fleet of 497 vessels with a total burthen of 196,203 tons. This figure was said to include 17 sea-going steamers of 14,622 tons burthen. Hamburg was an important maritime trading nation. Since 1840 the fleet had grown from 193 vessels and 47,625 tons and was still growing (Statesman's Yearbook p.18). Although trade between Germany and New South Wales was not large—only £53,949 worth of German goods being imported in a total of £66,494 of this need not bear any relation to the number of ships involved and this can be seen from the fact that in 1857 Hamburg ranks only behind Britain, British Possessions, and the United States in the number of vessels arriving in the ports of New South Wales and behind those places and Prussia in the tonnage of those vessels. Sixteen ships of Hamburg registry arrived in the colony with cargo with a total tonnage of 6,226 and 256 crewmen. It seems probable from the returns that most of the "British Possessions" vessels were small coasting craft from the other Australian colonies, and that Hamburg thus ranks third in number of vessels and fourth
Letter Patent, appointing George Appel as Vice-Consul for Hamburg at South Brisbane.
in tonnage arriving in the colony. If an appreciable number of these vessels went to Brisbane the convenience of having a consular representative there would be obvious.7

* * * *

There it seems this aspect of the matter must be left, unless some Hamburg records can be located.

On the procedural side the matter is well documented and the steps taken are easily followed.

First, the matter was initiated by one P. Colquhoun, “the Hans Towns Consul General in London”, who wrote to the Foreign Secretary, the Earl of Clarendon on 22 November, 1855, submitting the Letter Patent of 2 November, 1855, with a request that his lordship lay before Her Majesty the Exequatur necessary to enable Mr G. Appel to enter upon his functions. This letter was remitted by the Foreign Office to the Colonial Office on 23 November 1855, with a request that the Colonial Secretary inform the Foreign Secretary whether there would be any objection to the issue of the Exequatur.

On 7 December 1855, Downing Street sent off Despatch No. 46 to Sir William Denison seeking information as to whether Appel resided in New South Wales and if so whether there was any objection to the issue of the Exequatur. If no objection existed the Governor General was authorised to admit Appel provisionally to the exercise of his functions. This is of interest as it indicates a realistic view and recognition of the slowness of communication between the Central and Colonial Governments.

A notation on Despatch 46 records its receipt per “Earl of Sefton” on 7 April, 1856. On 9 April Sir William directed that the requisite enquiries be made and the necessary letter went forward to the Government Resident, Brisbane on 15 April.

Captain J. C. Wickham, R.N., the Government Resident replied on 21 April “that Mr. George Appel is residing at South Brisbane and I know of no objection to the issue of the Exequatur in his favour”. Notations on Captain Wickham’s letter indicate the Governor General’s despatch No. 76 of 8 May, 1856.

Exequatur approving the appointment of George Appel as Vice-Consul for Hamburg at South Brisbane.
conveyed the required information to the Colonial Office, whilst Appel was notified of his admission to the provisional exercise of his functions on 19 May.

However, Sir William Denison in his despatch No. 76 inadvertently offended protocol by stating that he had caused an "exequatur" to be issued to Appel as Vice Consul for Hamburg at South Brisbane.

This drew from Downing Street a three page lecture (Despatch No. 101 dated 26 August 1856) on the issue of exequaturs. The Secretary of State wished "to be informed of the nature of the document which you appear to have issued to him [Appel] under the form of an exequatur such instrument being granted alone under the Royal Sign Manual". The Secretary of State sought to sugar coat the pill in that the Despatch concluded "The expression may have been merely used by you as signifying that you had provisionally recognised Mr. Appel in the capacity referred to, but I have thought it right to call your attention to the subject in order to prevent any misconception as to the steps to be taken by you on any future occasion of a like nature".

The despatch arrived in Sydney per "Marco Polo" on 8 December, 1856. A terse minute of the same date appears on the despatch—

Col. Sec.
Let me have a copy of the document or letter authorising Mr. G. Appel to act as Vice Consul for Hamburgh.

W.D. 8 Dec. '56

Copies of the letter to Appel and notice of his provisional acceptance were placed before His Excellency on 9 December. Whilst the further notations are obscure it appears that a reply went forward to Downing Street on 11 December.

The next step is a letter from Appel to the Colonial Secretary, Sydney, (undated but received by the addressee on 12 February, 1857) forwarding the Exequatur under the Royal Sign Manual (apparently sent to Appel direct by the Foreign Office) and requesting that his formal appointment be notified in the usual way.

On 12 February 1857, the Colonial Secretary, Henry Watson Parker, suggested to His Excellency that "A notice may perhaps be published of the Queen's approval of Mr. Appell [sic], with reference to the notice by which he was provisionally appointed".

The final notations are miracles of brevity—

Yes. W.D. 13 Feb '57
H.W.P. 14
Notice 16 Feb 1857
Mr. Appel 17 Feb

Thus the final point in the transaction, namely the Colonial Secretary's letter of 17 February, 1857, has at length been reached.

The documents discussed raise the point as to whether there was any earlier Consular appointment by any nation to the Moreton Bay area. The available records do not indicate that this occurred. Therefore Appel may well have been the first consular agent of any nation to hold office in the area.

REFERENCES
1. Mr G. R. H. Gill, M.B.E., the grandson of George Appel. Mr Gill was born on 10 April 1887 and accordingly was 23 years old when his grandfather died.
2. Mr Gill learned this information directly from his grandfather and also furnished on his grandfather's death the information recorded in the office of the Registrar General, Brisbane.
3. The information relative to Pastor J. G. Haussmann and the Lutheran Church is taken from a paper entitled "The Nundah Missionaries" by W. N. Gunson, M.A., Ph.D., appearing in Volume VI No. 3 of the Proceedings of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland. Particulars of Maria Jane Haussmann's birth are on record in the Office of the Registrar General, Brisbane.
6. The Letter Patent has been translated for us by Mr D. Denholm and Mr H. Diefenbach. The original and the Exequatur are reproduced as plates on pp 19-20.
7. Unless otherwise stated, Mr Doust's information came from the Returns of the Colony of New South Wales, 1857, Archives location 4/290.
8. All correspondence emanating from Government sources and the letter from Appel to the Colonial Secretary are held by the Archives Office of New South Wales. Governmental correspondence bears Archives Location Reference 4/3346; Appel's letter 4/3352.