

Book review:

Gilruth: A Complex Man

Authored by Ted Egan AO

Review by: Matthew Littlejohn

Regional Office Leader

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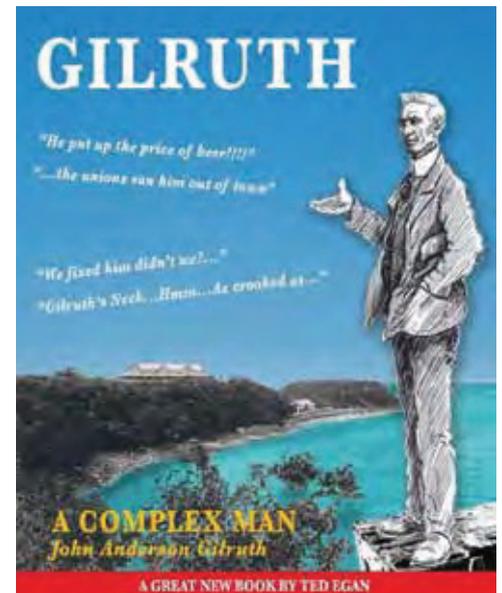
In this new history of Dr John Anderson Gilruth, first Administrator of the NT, Mr Egan expressly avows that he has written a comprehensive history; instead presenting the life and times of Dr Gilruth through a 'social commentary' perspective, with emphasis on the Territory as it was at the time. 'Social commentary' is entirely apt, in this instance, as Mr Egan offers his own (at times scathing) assessments of the background, personalities, and character of many of the main players. Mr Egan is not afraid to insert himself into the narrative, calling on his own memories, presented in first-person, and, in one instance, citing as a source a conversation had with his next-door neighbour! (The neighbour was, admittedly, Don McKinnon, NAWU unionist and former editor of the *Northern Standard*). These personal touches make the book easy to read and give it a true sense of being grounded in lived Territory history, rather than a dry academic account.

Mr Egan also takes the time to thoroughly explore two personalities beyond Gilruth himself—the 'antagonists' of the saga, unionist

Harold Nelson, and Mr Fred Thompson, owner/editor of the *NT Times* (as it then was). Criticism of these two men is heavy, and largely justified. Mr Nelson is presented as a shrewd, tough unionist prepared to go to any lengths to bring down Gilruth. Mr Thompson's *NT Times* is specifically rebuked for the 'sensationalist bias' in its reporting, despite its unique position as the only such publication in Darwin (...no comment).

Mr Egan's most vitriolic assessment (or should that assassination) is, however, saved for Mr Harold Jensen, a fellow public servant who was demoted by Gilruth and afterward bore him great enmity, and who Mr Egan accuses of telling 'absolute lies' in his recount of the Darwin Rebellion.

But aside from the informative (and often amusing) biographical information, there is a significant aspect of lived Territory history that is uncomfortably ever-present throughout the pages of this book: race. Mr Egan does not shy away from addressing the way First Australians were treated in frontier times, but does not stray into justifying behaviours as products of their



time. The White Australia Policy features heavily, and on almost every page there is a reference to its impact or the attitudes in early Darwin life towards not just First Australians, but Chinese, Greek, and Maltese immigrants as well. As someone without first-hand recollection of these policies, I found this confronting reading, but Mr Egan's own personal background in Indigenous policy is invaluable in placing these aspects of the work into proper context, with useful, modern reference points.

But what of the man himself, Dr John Anderson Gilruth? He is presented here as a man of high intellect who made ‘silly’ decisions, while facing never-ending struggles against unionists and Vestey’s conspiracy theorists. The much-repeated claims of the Gilruth urban myth are examined and critiqued, and often found to be wholly lacking in evidence. It seems that the myth has indeed become bigger than the man, and Mr Egan has gone back to the

primary sources to locate, as far as possible, an accurate account of those tumultuous years.

Overall, this book is an insightful and important contribution to the history of the NT. It throws into sharp relief some of the differences between frontier life and our modern day political dramas, while at the same time reminding us that some things never change (the recommendations of the 1920 *Ewing* Royal Commission

into the Gilruth administration hit particularly close to home: ‘cruel and wicked’ gaol sentences being handed down; ‘unacceptable irregularities’ concerning conduct of prison officers, sly grogging, and ‘unforgivable’ treatment of Aboriginal people—what’s changed nearly 100 years later?). This book is definitely required reading, and is highly recommended to all.

Book review:

Legal Professional Privilege in Australia

Authored by Dr Ronald J Desiatnik

Lexis Nexis Butterworths Australia 3rd Edition 2017

Review by: Ainslie Corridon

Graduate Clerk, Darwin

Dr Ronald J Desiatnik’s *Legal Professional Privilege in Australia* is a well-constructed resource for anyone who strives to understand the doctrine of Legal Professional Privilege (LPP) in the here and now of Australian jurisprudence. As a relatively recent graduate, I

have had fresh experience of many, many textbooks. No doubt you can recall the weight and value of the Law School book bag, the awkward twangs of the back and shoulder while lumping those things from A to B. You won’t mind those twangs with this particular set of 352 pages—not

only is it bound in an attractive green with silver lettering, but this modest volume is concise and informative. It is not dense with paragraphs that make your grey matter contract and give rise to that small voice bubbling up from your subconscious with that existential question of ‘why the heck