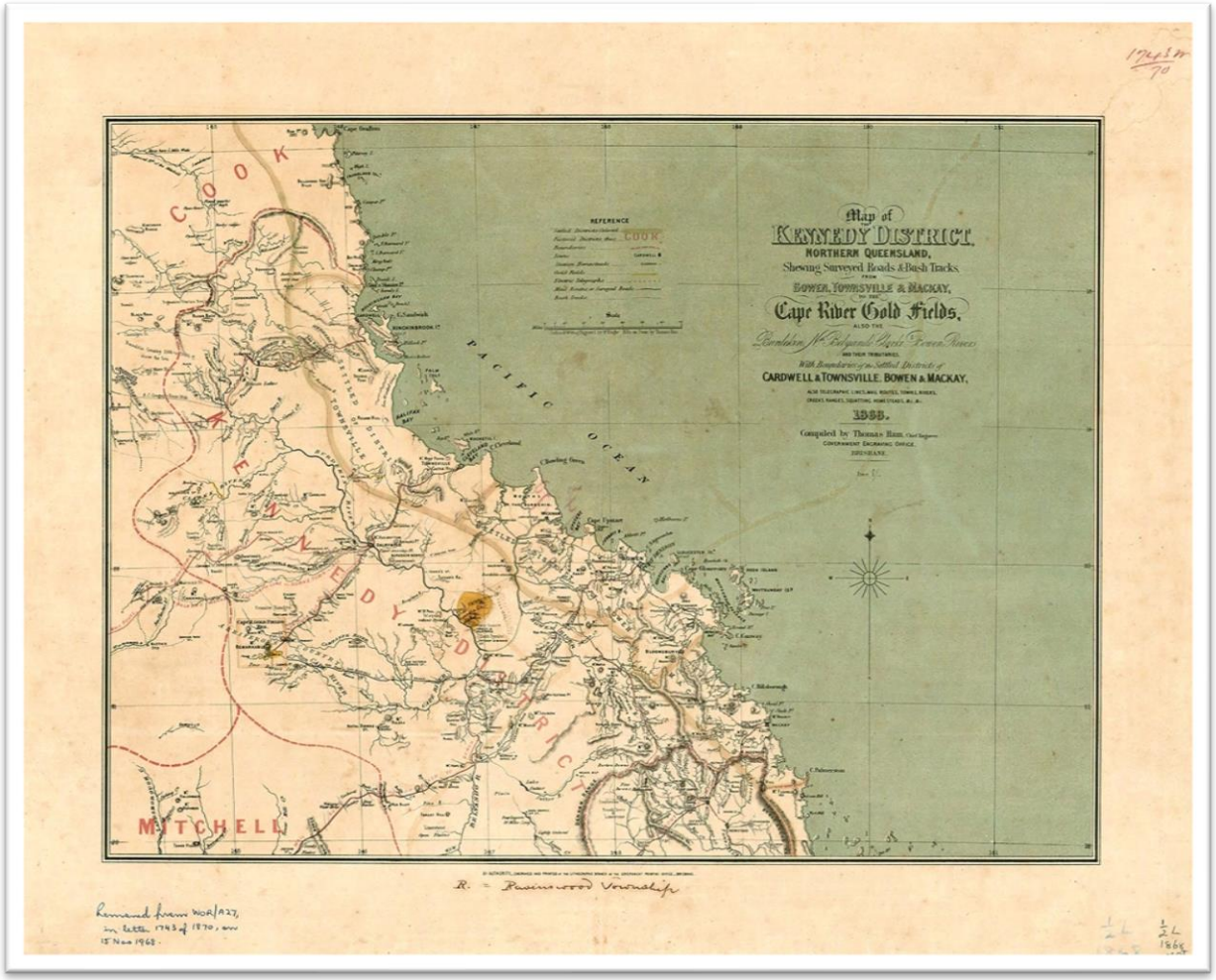
3. John Mackay: Founding Father?



Map 3.1: Kennedy Land District
Source: Museum of Lands, Mapping and Surveying.

Memorials

During the 2010s, there was an extension of a long-standing public debate in Australia about statues and memorials dedicated to 'founding fathers' such as James Cook, Robert Towns, and John Mackay. This occurred alongside a similar debate in the US over statues in the southern states which commemorate heroes of the Civil War, and in Europe in relation to slavery. African Americans and others felt uneasy and angry about the statues of men who endorsed and profited from slavery still staring down on them. These protests came together during 2020 in violent demonstrations centred on the Black Lives Matter campaign. One question raised was how to deal with the issue: pull down statues and monuments; modify the wording on them to something suitable for today's more politically correct views; or to erect new accompanying statues that gave equal billing to the other side of the history? In Australia, two prime ministers, Malcolm Turnbull, and Scott Morrison, entered the fray in relation to memorials and accusations of slavery, which they said never existed in Australia.

Based on information from Cook's voyage along the east coast in 1770, in 1788 the first British settlement was founded. The penal colony of New South Wales initially occupied the whole eastern half of the continent. The issue at the heart of any celebration of Cook's

feat is the debate over the proclamation of Crown land status and the consequent dispossession of at least one million Australian Aboriginal people from their land. First Nations Australians also suffered death from epidemic diseases, as well as deliberate extermination through settler violence and the use of the paramilitary Native Mounted Police. By 1901, Australia had 3,700,000 settlers and only 50,000 to 100,000 Aboriginal people. Australians are now comfortable with the nation's convict beginnings, but not with the decimation of the Aboriginal population, nor the shame of their subsequent treatment.

Two centuries onwards, memorialisation of Cook's voyage still arouses debate. In Queensland, Cook is remembered by a land district, a town, a major bridge in Brisbane, a highway in Cairns, and a university named after him in Townsville. Robert Towns and John Mackay, lesser celebrities, each have a city named after them: Townsville is the largest city in North Queensland; and Mackay, 388 kilometres south, is the urban centre for one of Australia's major sugar-producing regions. Towns was a Sydney businessman and ship-owner with substantial Asian and Pacific trading interests. In Townsville there is an obelisk on the top of Castle Hill, which was originally erected over Towns' grave in Sydney, and in 2005 a statue was erected in a riverside park in the city, which continues to generate antagonism from the descendants of South Sea Islanders whom he imported to work on his properties in the 1860s. John Mackay was an explorer, a failed pastoralist, a maritime adventurer, and later a senior public servant. Less well served than Towns, in 1960 a plaque at Walkerston, dedicated to his 1860 explorations, was unveiled by his son. He is remembered in Mackay's main street by a utilitarian concrete-base clock with a plaque, unveiled in 1957, presented by the Australian Natives' Association (a White, not an Indigenous organisation). There is also a marble bust donated in 1977 and a more recent portrait, both of which reside in the Mackay Regional Council administration building. John McCrossin, credited here as joint leader of the 1860 expedition, does not rate a similar mention. The Mackay family, beginning with John Mackay himself, have been astute in building the myth.

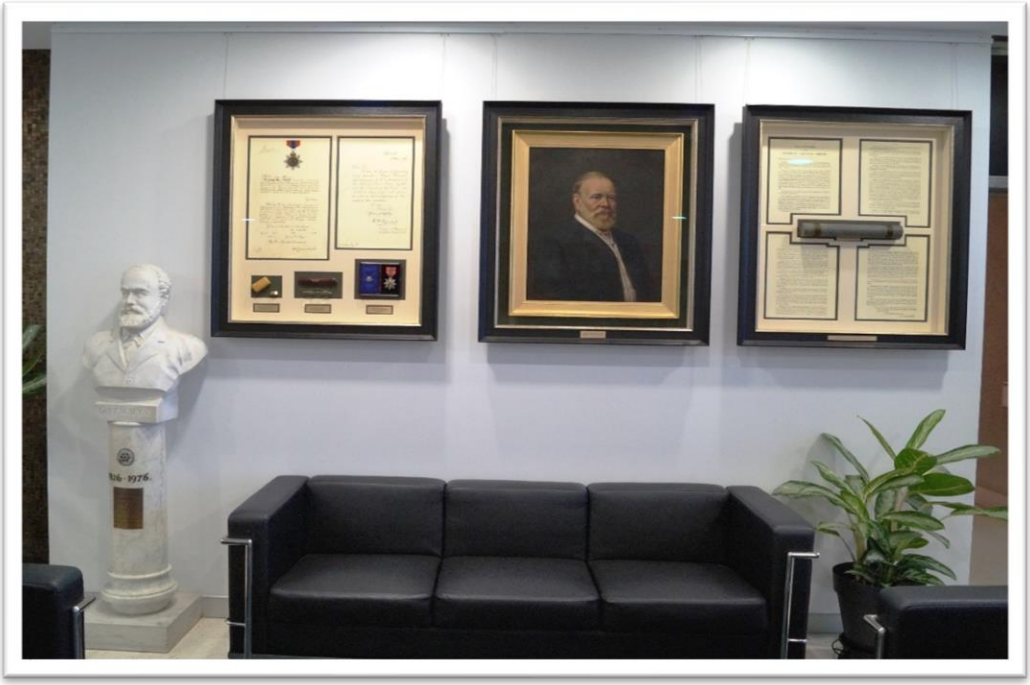


Plate 3.1: The bust and portrait of John Mackay at the Mackay Regional Council administration building.
Source: Mackay Regional Council.

Both Towns and Mackay were involved in different ways in what is known as the Queensland labour trade, an almost five-decade circular migration of Pacific Islander people, mainly from the Melanesian islands, into Queensland between 1860 and 1908. During the memorial debate, Australian South Sea Islanders (descendants of the original Islander immigrants) raised objections to the naming of cities after two men involved in 'Blackbirding'—the common name for the Queensland labour trade—a term with strong connotations of illegality. The Pacific labour or 'people trade' is often equated by the public with the enslavement of African Americans. Certainly, Australian South Sea Islanders see it that way. Historians generally take a different approach, recognising indenture as legally distinct from slavery, while acknowledging its exploitive unsavoury nature. This is discussed further in Chapter 9. Towns and Mackay were bit players in a part of our colonial history that Australians prefer to forget. Robert Towns, ostensibly a pious Christian and ethical businessman, pursued profits with scant regard for human lives. He began his search for and use of cheap labour in the sandalwood and bêche-de-mer trades in southern Melanesia in the 1840s and was also involved in trade to China and India. Towns' return cargoes sometimes included labourers, as he imported a small number of Indian labourers into New South Wales in 1846, and a larger number of Chinese labourers in 1854. All of this is context to his importation of several hundred Pacific Islanders into Queensland between 1863 and 1868.

John Munro Mackay

John Mackay had a more active involvement in the Pacific than Towns, and there can be no doubt that he was involved in some unsavoury adventures. While they were co-operative, I found the family very defensive of their famous ancestor, whom they regard as the main force behind the 1859–60 exploration party that entered the Pioneer Valley. The issue here is historical accuracy and what can be known (or never known) about events so long ago. Despite recent contrary conclusions in Kett Kennedy's *Mackay Revisited* (2002) and Lyall Ford's *Roads to Riches* (2012), based largely on Andrew Murray's diary from the expedition, the Mackay family claim to be innocent of the possibility that John Mackay might not have been the leader. They also protest that he was never a 'Blackbirder', although there is undeniable evidence that he did participate in the Queensland and Fiji labour trades in the 1870s, and owned plantations in Fiji that employed Melanesian labour. He certainly qualifies as a 'Blackbirder' in modern usage of the word.

In Scotland, the Mackays were a middling farming family with substantial connections to the chiefs of the Mackay Clan. A few generations earlier they had been holders of a 'tack', a large land lease from Lord Reay, the clan chief, which was sub-leased to tenants. Although not caught up in Highlands' land clearances—when tenant farmers were forced off their land and common lands were enclosed—the family was not wealthy. George Mackay married Anne Munro in 1834, and on 26 March 1839 John Munro Mackay was born in Bonar Bridge village on the north bank of the Kyle in the county of Sutherland, in a house belonging to his uncle John Munro. In mid-1839, George leased Balnafoich and its substantial house, one of the two 'home' farms on the Fraser-Tytler family's Aldourie estate in the parish of Creich in Sutherland, about 11 kilometres from Inverness. John was educated at Castlehill, Inverness, at a school ('Mackenzie's on the Hill') run for the Free Church, a 1843 breakaway movement from the (Presbyterian) Church of Scotland. Mr Mackenzie was famed as a mathematician, many of his students ending up in the Royal Navy and the Merchant Marine. This explains John Mackay's ability in higher mathematics, basic astronomy, and navigation, which served him well in his Australian and Pacific adventures.

Plate 3.2: John Munro Mackay in the 1880s.
Source: Courtesy of the Mackay Family Collection.

The Mackays' lease at Balnafoich expired in May 1853, which led the family to migrate to Australia a year later when John Munro Mackay was 15. They hoped for a better life, including land ownership. Their first base was in Melbourne during the Victorian goldrushes, then briefly Sydney in 1855, moving finally to Ness farm at Saumarez Ponds, between Uralla and Armidale on the New England Tablelands. The farm later merged into the Saumarez sheep property. The Mackays chose to resume rural life and sheep farming—what they knew best. The picture which appears is of a typical Scottish immigrant family struggling to make a success of life in the colonies, but happy with the opening possibilities.

John Mackay, five feet six inches (168 cm) tall, with a strong Scottish brogue, a stocky build, blue eyes, a ruddy complexion and rich dark red curly hair and beard, was every bit a Scot. A practical and ambitious young man, he was never going to stay home on a sheep farm at Uralla when surrounded by a land of new opportunities. As a teenager and young man Mackay tried to make an income through whatever means was available. He worked on his father's sheep farm, and at one stage helped overland cattle to Melbourne for Captain William Dumaresq and A.J. Macinnis of Furracabad pastoral station in the Glen Innes district. (In 1856, Macinnis married John Mackay's sister Margaret.) Intermittently, onwards from 1857 Mackay was involved in a mining venture at Rocky River gold diggings near Uralla. He also worked as a surveyor on the still unfenced sheep properties in the New England district. Next, in 1860 he became part of the overland expedition from New England to the Pioneer Valley in the new colony of Queensland, discussed below.

John McCrossin

Ten-year-old John McCrossin (1831–81) arrived in Sydney with his parents Samuel and Martha (*née* Stitt or Steele, a second marriage) and their six other children. The McCrossin family, lineal descendants from the clan Macrossan, one of the most ancient in Ireland, seem to have arrived in Australia with limited finances. From Newton Stewart, County Tyrone, Ireland, they migrated with relatives and applied under the Government Immigrant Bounty Scheme. Both parents put their ages down below the 40-year cut off, although only Samuel got away with this ruse. They left Ireland, presumably because of the deteriorating conditions

in rural areas. The family moved to a small (15 acre) sheep property between Armidale and Uralla, part of the Saumarez pastoral property begun by Henry Dumaresq in 1837.

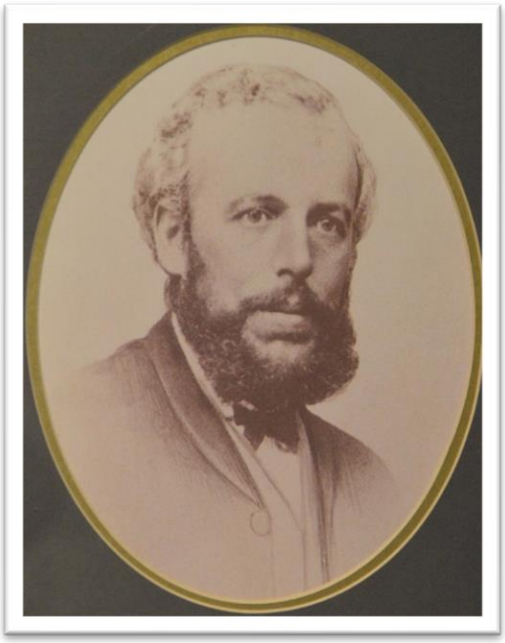


Plate 3.3: John McCrossin.
Source: Courtesy of the Uralla Historical Society.

The McCrossins stayed there until 1857, leasing the small property and living in a comfortable house. In 1853, Samuel McCrossin (probably Samuel Jr.) leased the Travellers Rest Inn in Uralla, on five acres (two hectares), also owned by Dumaresq. In 1857, the small inn was taken over by George Mackay (father of J.M. Mackay). Samuel McCrossin died in 1866. John's brother Samuel Jr. then became licensee of the Uralla Hotel. John McCrossin ran the post office and store in Uralla. James McCrossin, John's brother, married Margaret Starr of Armidale, obviously a relative and perhaps a sister of James Starr, who part-financed both John Mackay and John McCrossin's attempts to begin pastoral properties in the Pioneer Valley.

The McCrossin–Mackay Expedition

The McCrossin-Mackay expedition fits easily into the patterns described in Chapter 2. Both McCrossin and Mackay relied on their fathers for support, although neither family had substantial wealth. The eight-man and 28-horse expedition was the idea of John McCrossin, whose father funded half the costs. The McCrossin family supplied 14 horses and the upkeep for John McCrossin, and Duke, the Aboriginal member of the party. John Mackay and the other members of the expedition were expected to supply their own provisions and two horses each. They all hoped to profit equally from the expedition and the seven Europeans planned to divide any new land discovered between them. McCrossin knew Mackay from the Rocky River goldfield, close to both of their parents' farms. They would have known the history of exploration in the north-east of the continent: by Edmund Kennedy in 1847–48, Leichhardt between 1844 and 1848, and the Gregory brothers' 1855 expedition from Moreton Bay to Port Essington; as well as another trip by A.C. Gregory in 1858 in south-central Queensland in search of the lost Leichhardt expedition. They were also aware that the inland corridor was being explored and divided into pastoral leases, and that the new colony of

Queensland was about to open the Kennedy District for selection. McCrossin and Mackay knew that the first explorers to arrive had the first choice of land.

The expedition left Ness farm on 16 January 1860, intending to travel overland to the headwaters of the Burdekin River, with the aim of selecting new pastoral leases. These were usually between 25 and 100 square miles in size. Lessees could also gain control of adjoining leases, uniting thousands of acres under one individual, one family, several partners, and/or a financial institution. If they were successful in establishing pastoral stations, these 'overlanders' became wealthy. Squatters began with Crown land leases, which they had to stock, and at the end of the 1860s, when many leases were halved in size, as compensation they were able to convert large areas to freehold. Success required access to capital.

John Mackay's explanation of the initial planning was long regarded as standard. He said that the idea went back to his time in 1859 on the Rocky Creek goldfields:

> Having, in time, made the acquaintance of some young men whose relations owned station properties in the district, a trip to the far north in search of country for their rapidly increasing flocks and herds, was often discussed in my tent, and always concluded with a pressing invitation for me to join them, holding out as an allurement an immense fortune to be acquired as a squatter. The rainy season coming on and my claim all but worked out, I at last acquiesced with their wishes, in which resolve, however, I fear a love of adventure proved the strongest incentive.[1]

Mackay was 21 years old and McCrossin was 29, both young to lead such an expedition. McCrossin's diary has been lost. Mackay kept a diary and rewrote it several times. The only other diary was kept by Andrew Murray. Along with some accompanying letters, Murray's diary was serialised in the *Uralla and Walcha Times* in January 1960 and seems to make clear that McCrossin was the leader of the expedition, contradicting Mackay's claim. On 6 November 1859, McCrossin wrote to Andrew Murray of Haning station at Bendemeer, and other acquaintances from around Uralla.

> I am getting a party together to go North on an exploration taking up new country for stock and knowing you to be a good bushman and horseman, wish to invite you to join my party. Each member will find his own outfit, and bear his own expense, and sharing equally in any country we may find. Please let me have a reply as early as you can.[2]

The main finances came from the McCrossin family, although it is likely that Mackay was the better bushman of the pair and his superior navigation skills were crucial. Earlier analysis of the expedition, such as that by Henry Roth and John Kerr, accepted that John Mackay was the leader, which the Scot always claimed. In 1881, he described himself as 'chosen leader'[3]of the expedition. More recent historians, Kett Kennedy and Lyall Ford, have not supported Mackay's claims. The Mackay Regional Council website has another interpretation, which I suspect is an attempt to reconcile Kennedy's research with established local opinion:

> In 1860, an enterprising Irishman John McCrossin selected 20 year old Scot, John Mackay, to lead an expedition to seek pastoral opportunities and they came across the coastal ranges, now known as the Pioneer Valley.[4]

This interpretation contradicts McCrossin's letter to Murray. The main evidence that John Mackay was the leader chosen by McCrossin comes from John Mackay himself.

The Mackay family has always been strong in its support of their forebear as the

leader. In 1960, Rainey Hugh Mackay came to his father's defence when Andrew Murray's diaries were published. The main piece of evidence used by Rainey Hugh Mackay was a brief 1925 newspaper note on John McCrossin, who died on 11 November 1881. It said that: 'In 1859–60 John McCrossin took a leading part in the expedition led by Captain John Mackay, which located the port of Mackay in Queensland.'[5] That is hardly conclusive, and at that stage Mackay was not a marine captain. The 1881 *Uralla and Walcha Times* obituary for McCrossin is not of much assistance, although it gives McCrossin first billing, stating that 'Mr. McCrossin, together with Captain Mackay and others undertook an exploring expedition to the extreme Northern parts of Queensland.'[6] It also mentions that Mackay visited McCrossin a week before his death. Interestingly however, a 1925 inscription on John McCrossin's memorial does not describe him as the leader.[7] Members of the Uralla Historical Society (now housed in McCrossin's flour mill) credit McCrossin as leader, and an account of the McCrossin family by Allan Rainbird suggests the possibility that McCrossin was the leader. Kett Kennedy's 2002 history of Mackay (the most recent) argues in support of John McCrossin. There is no doubt that John Mackay quite deliberately set out over decades to strengthen his claim to have been leader, rewriting his diary, which weakens his case. I toyed with calling it the McCrossin expedition, then settled with the McCrossin–Mackay expedition.

The exploration party was a mixed group. The third member was another Scot, David Cameron, originally from Fort William, Inverness Shire, who had arrived in New South Wales in about 1851 and was a pastoral station manager. The fourth was Ulsterman John Muldoon, who had arrived in the colony in 1854 and was Cameron's mate from the goldfields. The fifth was the most incongruous, an Italian ship's carpenter named Jovana Barbra (or Giovanni Barberi) who had arrived in 1859 and had anglicised his name to John Barber. There were two colonial-born men, both with pastoral experience: 22-year-old Andrew Murray, originally from Wanbra on the Macleay River, who had spent most of his life in the New England district; and 21-year-old Hamilton Robinson from the Hunter River. The eighth member was Duke, a 21-year-old Aboriginal man, the son of Brady and Mary Ann, leaders from the 'Salisbury' tribe, which seems to have been the Anaiwan nation from the New England Tablelands.

The group were religious enough not to travel on Sundays, but far from harmonious. Some of them were a little too fond of alcohol whenever they stopped at wayside inns early in the trip. Mackay and McCrossin were partial to a 'wee dram'. Cameron and Murray were anti-alcohol. Muldoon was overly religious; he thought Mackay was greedy with food and argued with him. Cameron also argued with Mackay and quit the expedition at Rockhampton. Muldoon became ill with fever when they were near Princhester station and returned south. According to Henry Roth, he went into partnership with a pastoralist named Mackenzie, and was drowned on the Fitzroy River in 1866.

The party travelled via Armidale and Glenn Innes and on to the Darling Downs, to Drayton, Dalby, and Jimbour station, and then Gayndah on the Burnett River. As their guide they had two compasses, and surveyor Leopold Landsberg's maps of what became southern Queensland. Travel between Gayndah and Port Curtis was slow as they agreed to move a herd of 500 cattle between the two places for John Bell, a friend of Murray. They rested in Gladstone (a failed 1847–48 convict settlement, re-settled in 1853) before moving north to the village of Rockhampton, where they remained for two weeks, preparing beef jerky and other provisions. They set out north to Broadsound, crossing the Fitzroy near Yaamba, stopping off at Henry Radford's Princhester station, and Biddulph Henning's Marlborough station. At Yaamba, Murray borrowed and made notes from a copy of the published diary of Leichhardt's 1844–45 travels from Moreton Bay to Port Essington, presumably owned by Peter F. Macdonald, one of the lessees (mentioned in Chapter 2). While not totally

unprepared, not having Leichhardt's journal (published in 1847) suggests that they were a little amateurish. After crossing Broadsound Range, the expedition moved north up the Isaac River, and Nebo and Denison creeks. Often observed by Aboriginal people as they travelled, they were well-armed but nonetheless wary. On the Isaac they came across a large party of Aboriginal people who attacked, and the explorers fired back. They took fish left behind at the Aboriginal campsite, supplying a tomahawk, a knife, and a pumpkin as compensation. Two weeks later they met another small group who showed fear of the explorers.

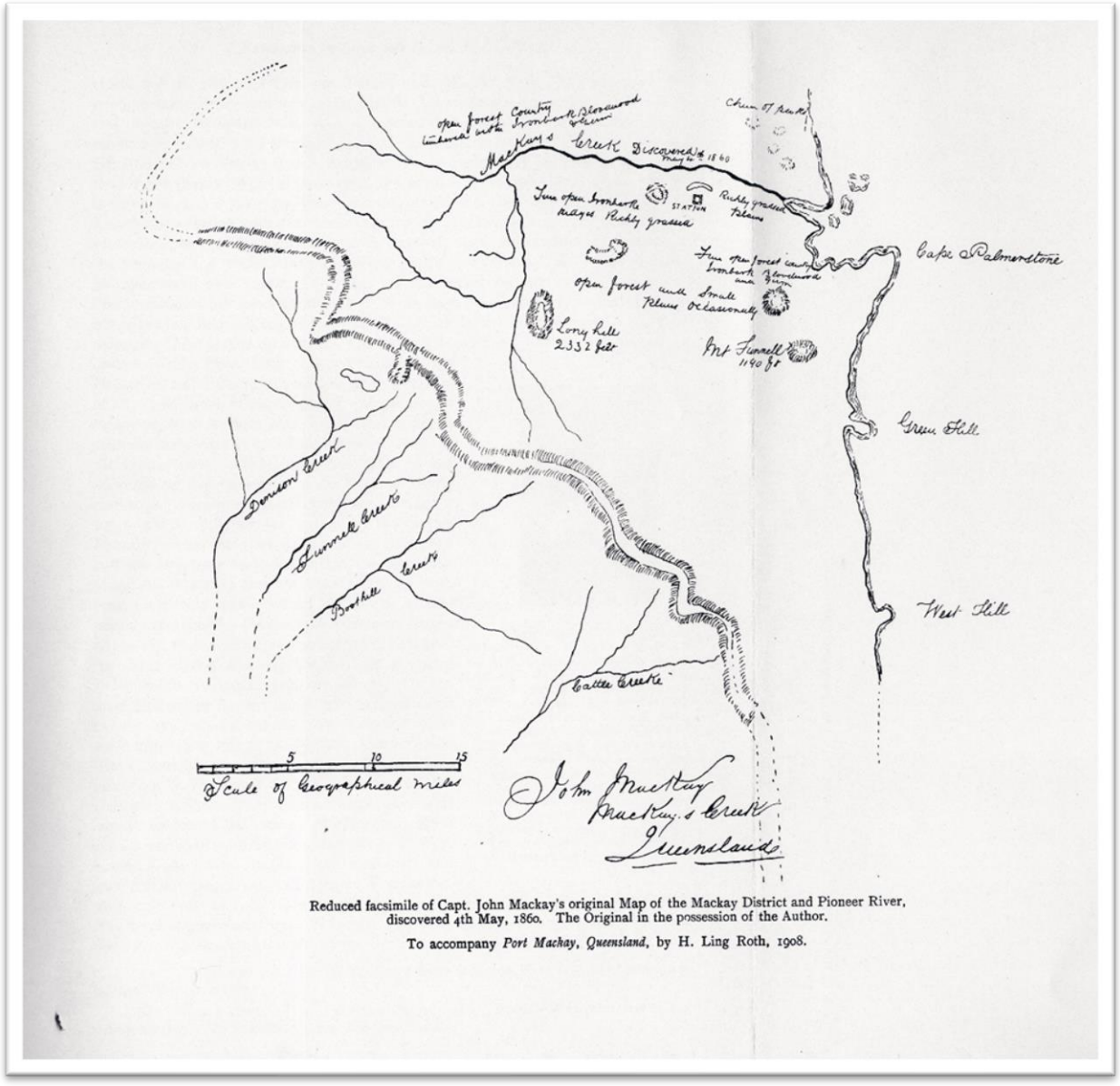
They were travelling through an area already crossed by Leichhardt in the 1840s, and the Gregory brothers, Landsborough, and Dalrymple in the 1850s. European expeditions had begun to pass close by the back of the Pioneer Valley, taking up land without realising that the splendid coastal valley and the coastal plains to the north existed. The intention of the McCrossin–Mackay expedition was to search for unselected inland pastoral land, not to explore along the coast. Because they came across trees blazed by Dalrymple's recent expedition—which meant the areas had been selected— they decided to explore in a new direction, north-east across the ranges towards the coast. The dates and travel routes in the diary entries by Mackay and Murray vary considerably. Murray said that they entered the Pioneer catchment at what seems to be Stockyard Creek and then travelled through Mia Mia. Mackay said they went further north, possibly as far as the headwaters of the Bowen, Broken and Burdekin rivers, which was probably an exaggeration. By Mackay's account, they retraced their path south towards the coast across the Eungella Plateau, entering the Pioneer Valley at about modern Crediton on a ridge of Denham and Clarke ranges. The intention was to look for a river that Leichhardt thought emptied into Repulse Bay between Midge Point and Cape Conway (now the site of Proserpine). Thinking that they were about opposite Cape Palmerston (actually the cape is 85 kilometres south of the Pioneer River), short of provisions and tired, the party headed towards the coast. Lyall Ford replotted Murray and Mackay's routes and concluded that Murray's description of their route is accurate and some of Mackay's sextant readings make no sense at all.

On 16 May, Mackay recorded that 'Looking coastwise we observed an immense tract of level country; unbroken save by an occasional hill or peak, extending away in one expanse to a seacoast. To the north there appeared a practical gap, the ridges nowhere abrupt.'[8] On the same day, Murray's diary said that they were still deep in the mountain ranges, although this does match Mackay's entry for 15 May, describing 14 May. Mackay's diary entry for 18 May said they followed a creek down its course until it joined a larger body of water, which McCrossin proposed be named the Mackay (later the Pioneer) River, supposedly after John's father George Mackay. It is puzzling that no rivers or creeks were named after McCrossin, although this must have been his choice.

The large valley they found had different vegetation from that through which they had already passed. There were clumps of palms, other tropical vegetation, ti-trees, red gums, an occasional Moreton Bay fig tree, and plains of 'kangaroo grass' (*Themeda australis*) that grew as high as their stirrup irons. The soil was rich alluvial loam, exactly the type of land they had been seeking. The party spent two weeks marking out several pastoral leases, and explored the mouth of the river, then returned south to gather resources to return to settle. Their time in the valley proved difficult. Although it was the beginning of winter, they suffered from fevers, which may have been caused by malaria. They all began taking quinine night and morning, and they were always wary of possible Aboriginal attack.

The party drew lots for land selection. Barber and Murray won first pick and selected land near the coast; Barber on the north side of the river and Murray on the south side. The next two blocks went to McCrossin (on the north side) and Mackay (south side). Hamilton Robinson, too ill to survey his own land, was allocated a lease further upstream, and Muldoon's name was added to three inland blocks. Cameron, who had quit the expedition,

received no land, and Duke was also ignored. He became ill and died not long after they left the valley to return south. Because Mackay, McCrossin and Barber were in the best health it fell to them to establish the position of the mouth of the river, cutting through dense scrub to get there. They found an extensive sandbar on the northern side which overlapped the entrance, making it hard to locate from the sea, and difficult to navigate.



Reduced facsimile of Capt. John Mackay's original Map of the Mackay District and Pioneer River, discovered 4th May, 1860. The Original in the possession of the Author.

To accompany *Port Mackay, Queensland*, by H. Ling Roth, 1908.

Map 3.2: John Mackay's map of the Pioneer Valley in 1860, showing Mackay Creek, now the Pioneer River, and its tributaries.
Source: Roth 1908, 33.

The interlopers were observed closely by the First Nations people. Returning to their camp on a lagoon near the river, they saw a party of Yuwibara, who fled towards the river. They moved camp to the junction of the Mackay River and what they called Taylor's River (after W.T. Taylor, a New England pastoralist)—later renamed Cattle Creek. Meanwhile, the Indigenous inhabitants were asserting their presence, firing areas of grass in several places between the ridges and the river, and in other ways appeared to the explorers to be hostile. On

one occasion Mackay fired a barrel of his shot gun to discourage them.

In poor health, and having marked out their land, the party decided to retreat south back over Connor's Range. On 19 June they met up with three Europeans, Andrew Scott, lessee of Hornet Bank station near Taroom, Tom Ross, and William Fraser, mentioned in Chapter 2, themselves searching out new country to select. (Fraser's family had been killed in an Aboriginal attack at Hornet Bank in 1857. He continued to seek vengeance and was said to have summarily executed around 100 Aboriginal people over the next few years, beyond his later activities as an officer in the Native Mounted Police.) They persuaded the sickly group to head for Collaroy station, then being stocked by Dan Conner. McCrossin and Mackay's party arrived there on 23 June, rested, and bartered away most of their supplies to Conner, and their spare horses to Scott. Next, they moved on south, encountering John and Christopher Allingham from New England who were driving sheep north, and passed Macartney's camp at his new Waverley station, moved to Henning's Marlborough station, passed by MacDonald's Yaamba station, and hence to Rockhampton. From there they took a steamer to Brisbane and Sydney, backtracked to Newcastle, travelled on by train to Maitland, and by horses to Uralla. The whole trip took almost seven months.

Was the McCrossin–Mackay expedition the first to enter the valley? There were earlier Europeans who had lived in or travelled through the north. The first was probably James Morrell, rescued in 1863, the last survivor of four shipwrecked sailors cast ashore at Cleveland Bay (now Townsville) in 1846. And there were other northern expeditions in the 1850s about which we know little. As the land was yet to be opened for selection, it was not in their interests to publicise their explorations. One example is Christopher Allingham from New England, who, using Leichhardt's map, travelled to the Burdekin in 1851–52. In 1853 he applied for runs on the Burdekin River and a year later applied for other runs in the Leichhardt district. All were refused by the new Queensland Government in 1859. Not long after, William Kilman is reported to have travelled north from Rockhampton in 1854, along the coast to Cleveland Bay, now Townsville. And Gympie pastoralist William H. Gaden (mentioned in Chapter 2) had reached the mouth of the Burdekin by 1857. There is no proof that either of their expeditions passed through the Pioneer Valley.

There is one claim, but it may not be true. On 13 July 1956 the *Daily Mercury* published an interview with Samuel Thorning. In his youth he met Frank C. Kinchant, an Englishman from Shropshire, then in his seventies, who claimed that he entered the Pioneer Valley in the final months of 1859 as a stockman on his way north with a mob of bullocks, several months before the McCrossin–Mackay expedition. Kinchant supposedly told Thorning that his party had camped on the river close to what is now the site of St. Patrick's Church in River Street. The elderly man recalled spending several days in the valley when travelling north and again when returning south. He also said that his party was not the first to enter the valley and there had been one or two others before him. Kinchant, the son of a parson, is recorded as the first man to be married in Mackay in 1867, to Jane, a sister of Robert and James Martin of Hamilton and Hopetoun stations. Robert Martin had driven a herd of sheep to Eaglefield (later Dabin) station in 1863 and moved to the valley soon afterwards. Kinchant's pregnant estranged wife left for Sydney in December 1867, travelling back to England. One could guess that it was a failed 'shotgun' marriage.

Is this a fanciful claim? Knowledge of William Kilman's 1854 trip makes me tread carefully. Kinchant lived in the district and never publicly contradicted John Mackay's claims. Mt Kinchant is named after him, as, more recently, is nearby Kinchant Dam. It is unclear where his party were taking the bullocks. Port Denison was only located in October 1859 and Bowen was not founded until 1861. However, it may be that 'north' does not mean along the coast, but over the ranges to one of the new stations such as Fort Cooper. But as Kinchant died in 1913 and Thorning was born in 1909, to trust the memory of a child would

be dubious. More generally it does point to an issue already raised. The opening of colonial settlement in the valley is best viewed as part of a continuum of pastoral expansion, not an isolated and wonderous event, which is usually how it is depicted locally.

Greenmount and Cape Palmerston

Regardless of the leadership of the 1859–60 expedition, John Mackay was certainly the leader of the first European settlers in 1861–62, albeit briefly. When the explorers headed back south, they passed through Brisbane between 21 and 26 July 1860, submitting applications for the leases they had marked out. These were considered but held over as the Kennedy Land District had been closed to selection. Then a *Government Gazette* notice appeared on 31 August, further postponing the opening of the Kennedy Land District until 1 February 1861. Their applications were refused, a decision reaffirmed by Surveyor-General A.C. Gregory in early May 1861. Undeterred, and typical of the pattern elsewhere, the party raised funds to return with stock. They told Gregory what they were planning, although ignored his further advice in September 1860 to hold off applying. Mackay began to negotiate with James Starr, owner of adjoining Mihi Creek and Enmore stations in the New England district, to raise the necessary money and supply stock. Starr, in his mid-forties, from County Armagh, Ireland, was an ex-publican, and in 1860 had stock numbering 30,000 to 40,000 sheep and 1,000 to 2,000 cattle. In the same year, he purchased Mihi Creek station for £12,000. Mackay did not know that Starr had already overextended his lines of credit.

Starr promised Mackay £550, if a pastoral lease was secured. Based on my calculations in the previous chapter, this was far too small an amount with which to begin a pastoral station. In return, Mackay undertook to drive Starr's cattle north to the Pioneer Valley to fulfill legal requirement to stock the pastoral leases. The initial 1862 leases for Greenmount and Cape Palmerston (the latter selected by Murray, but never stocked) were in Mackay's name, then in 1864 Starr's name was added to the Greenmount lease. Starr may have offered Mackay a share in the stock if all was successful, which would have been a normal deal. Kett Kennedy described Mackay's role as that of overseer. I think he is better described as the resident part-owner. The real value of any early station was in the stock, not the leased land. McCrossin also did a deal with Starr and joined Mackay in November at Yaamba, along with Henry Robinson, brother of Hamilton Robinson (from the first expedition, who had died). On 30 January 1862, McCrossin applied for the lease of coastal Shamrock Vale on the north bank of the river, opposite Greenmount. His description includes that the area was bounded by the sea. He also selected an area adjoining the west side of Greenmount, which he pledged to James Starr. This area seems to have been what was officially known as Abington, but usually called Sleepy Hollow or The Hollow.

Hamilton Robinson selected land which he named Lochnagar (later changed to Hamilton), on the north bank of Cattle Creek in the upper reaches of the valley, opposite Abington. Once they had surveyed their land, both men rode north to Bowen, lodging their claims on 30 January 1862, then returned to New England. Registered in July 1864, these land leases were forfeited as neither McCrossin nor Robinson fulfilled stocking requirements. This is further discussed in Chapter 4 in relation to Hamilton, Abington (The Hollow), and Shamrock Vale. It took the Governor-in-Council in 1867 to sort out overlap and duplication of these leases.

On 26 July 1861, John Mackay left Armidale with Starr's 1,400 cattle, 50 horses, two bullock teams with drays, and a party consisting of four stockmen, two drivers, a cook, a carpenter, and two Aboriginal stockmen. The expedition included Starr's second son, David, sent along to look after his father's interests, though he seems to have left the group at Fort Cooper. This remarkable feat of droving reached Connors Range in early December, entering

the Pioneer Valley in early January 1862. They began to set up Greenmount pastoral station, centered on a lagoon and a small hill, which provided a clear view of the surrounding forest and could easily be guarded against attack from the Yuwibara people. However, Starr was in financial trouble, and as well, one-third of the stock died on the trip north, which may in part explain Starr's seeming lack of compassion with John Mackay's tight financial situation.

The first camp on Greenmount was under two tarpaulins, while the Aboriginal employees built their own bark gunyahs. By March, the group had constructed slab huts, the stockyards were complete, and another hut was in use for their provisions, which was soon empty. More supplies expected by ship from Rockhampton in April did not arrive until 25 June. Between April and June, Mackay tried to obtain news of his missing supplies. He and his men had planted sweet potatoes, pumpkins, and melons at Greenmount, trying to conserve what few supplies remained. They killed cattle for food and learnt to eat cabbage-like palm-tree tops. When Dalrymple, the Commissioner of Lands, arrived early in the third week of March they were out of tobacco, salt and sugar, and little flour or tea remained.

Another issue still had to be settled: although Mackay had stocked Greenmount he had no valid lease. When Dalrymple visited Greenmount he had been exploring the coast from Bowen to Rockhampton. Coming down the coast he named Mt Blackwood and Mt Jukes. (Francis Price Blackwood was the captain of survey vessel HMS *Fly* in the 1840s when it sailed along the coasts of Queensland and New Guinea. Joseph Beete Jukes was the naturalist on the voyage.) Historians presume that Dalrymple carried Mackay's Greenmount and Cape Palmerston lease applications to Rockhampton. Mackay's application for the Greenmount lease reached the Rockhampton Lands Department on 27 March 1862. There is no way it could have got there so fast without being carried by Dalrymple. A licence was granted on 5 July at an annual rental of £50. The lease was granted in January 1863, after a declaration by Mackay that the property had been stocked. Ownership of Greenmount was transferred to James Starr on 29 September 1864. The name of R.D. Mansfield (Mackay's Rockhampton debtor) was included in Mackay's application for the Cape Palmerston lease, south of the river and estimated to cover 62 square miles. It was accepted on 13 October 1862.

While secure tenure was obtained, the failure of supplies to arrive caused problems. The cutter *Presto* sailed from Rockhampton on 12 May 1861, stopping off at Broadsound on its way to the Pioneer River, which Captain William Hart could not locate, as the mouth was hidden by a sand bar. Instead, on 30 May the *Presto* anchored near Slade Point. Some passengers went ashore and one, Roberts, and a member of the crew, were probably killed by the Yuwibara people; certainly, they disappeared. Hart departed, sailing the *Presto* to Broadsound, from where he rode back north to Collaroy to tell the Native Police officers about the incident, and then sailed on to Rockhampton where he informed Police Magistrate Jardine.

Not knowing what had happened, Mackay tried to investigate. At the end of May he set out for Port Denison (Bowen) with his two Aboriginal stockmen. They met with hostility from local Aboriginal groups and turned back. Next, he set off for Fort Cooper station. The day after leaving Greenmount he met three Europeans, Pringle, Sadlier, and Barr, travelling north from Rockhampton. They had followed his dray tracks from the Isaac River and into the ranges, telling Mackay that the *Presto* had left Rockhampton in late May. In June, they all returned to Greenmount, then went to what is now Mt Bassett on the north side of the river (near the current Mackay harbour) watching out for the *Presto* for the next three days. Nothing further is known about the three horsemen. Then Mackay's party split up, Mackay starting for Fort Cooper again, and others scouting the coast towards Broadsound.

On his way to Fort Cooper, Mackay was surprised to meet up with Dick Spencer, camped with his party in the headwaters of Denison Creek in the ranges south-east of Fort

Cooper. Spencer had been there about two weeks, knew of Mackay's presence and was able to tell him what had happened to the *Presto*, and that the cutter was returning with supplies for both of them. They had a lot in common. Neither had access to sufficient finances to begin their own pastoral station and both were primarily explorers and facilitators for others. Other than Fitz and Conner's outpost at Collaroy onwards from 1857, Mackay's Greenmount was then the most northerly pastoral base. Spencer had arrived to reconnoitre in mid-May, without cattle but intending to establish a station.

Together they rode down to the coast and set out for Broadsound, locating the *Presto* anchored off Llewellyn Bay (near Sarina). Mackay sent his two Aboriginal stockmen to Greenmount with the horses and he and Spencer joined the vessel, entering the river and disembarking the stores just west of the present Mackay Base Hospital. Mackay then chartered the ship and used his navigation skills to survey the mouth of the river, aiming to get the river declared as a port of entry, which was officially proclaimed on 5 February 1863. After the *Presto* departed, Mackay, Spencer, his young Jamaican employee William (Billy) Coakley, and James Ready, and Ben Reynolds, set out to find a better track across the ranges. This became the new road from Mackay to Nebo across the Eton Range, first used to return to The Retreat with the drays.

Eventually, John Mackay did travel all the way to Fort Cooper in August 1862, where he met James Starr's son David and received the bad news about Starr's finances. James Starr had arranged to provision Greenmount via the *Presto* and repaid promissory notes to P.D. Mansfield, a Rockhampton businessman and the mayor in 1862–63. However, Starr refused to refund £175 owing to Mackay. The young Scot's world began to fall apart. He had no choice other than to pay off most of his employees.

In 1887, Mackay said that he returned from Fort Cooper to Greenmount with Edward B. Cornish, Edward Cridland, and a man named Vince, then an overseer on Princhester station. At another time he said that, after finding out about Starr's insolvency, he returned from Fort Cooper to Greenmount with Edward Cridland, Andrew Henderson, William Bovey, and engaged Vince to take charge of the station. The latter account contradicts Henderson's 1912 memory of his own arrival, recounted in Chapter 13. Whichever is true, once Starr was declared insolvent, the sheriff sold the Greenmount and Cape Palmerston leases to Edward B. Cornish and Arthur Kemmis of Fort Cooper.

In 1866, 50-square-mile Homebush station to the west of the Cape Palmerston run was taken up by John Walker, brother of Glen Walker, both connected to How, Walker & Co. in Sydney. By 1869, a large New South Wales investment company had taken control. John Young and William Oswald of Gilchrist, Watt, and Co., a Sydney pastoral, mercantile and shipping business, purchased Greenmount, Homebush and Cape Palmerston, consolidating Homebush and Cape Palmerston. Young and Gilchrist also had connections to How, Walker & Co. Ten years later, Walker repurchased Homebush and Greenmount.

The relationships between Mackay, Starr, McCrossin and Mansfield, well-debated by Kerr and Kennedy, will never be unravelled. Kennedy was suspicious that Mackay had fallen out with McCrossin, and that Starr and Mackay's versions of their financial arrangement differed. Kennedy concluded that the probity of John Mackay was in question, and that he was no more than an employee. Mackay never offered a satisfactory explanation of why Starr withdrew his backing, although Starr's insolvency seems a good enough reason. A bailiff sold Starr's stock on Greenmount for £2,000 to Frank Bridgman, Cornish's nephew. Even though Mackay arrived in Rockhampton with Cornish and handed over the £300 owed to Mansfield from the sale of Cape Palmerston, Mansfield still went ahead with his legal action and was awarded £95. John Mackay quit Greenmount in late August 1862, although the lease was not transferred until September 1864, and legally Cornish and Kemmis did not formally take possession until July 1865. By 1866, with his Armidale runs heavily mortgaged, and his

Pioneer Valley speculation a disaster, Starr retreated to his Mihi Creek property.

On his way back south overland, Mackay met up with Louis G. Ross and James Muggleton at Denison Creek. They were in the final stages of droving a mob of 1,000 cattle north for John Cook of Tamworth. Henry Roth's account suggests that they had previously been sold an 'imaginary run' by one of the Allingham cousins, possibly Christopher, who had first travelled to the Burdekin and through the Leichhardt district in 1851–54. In 1859, Christopher was back again with his cousins John and Johnstone, having driven stock north. They met John Mackay at Broadsound Range on his way south, leaving the Pioneer Valley. The Allinghams had tendered successfully for Hillgrove and associate runs in 1861, near what became Charters Towers. In a later version of his diary Mackay said:

> I then told him [Ross] that the run taken up by me on the north side of the river, Shamrock Vale, now called Balnagowan, was as yet unstocked and was at his disposal. I hurriedly agreed with him as to its purchase for what he considered a fair value to be paid for after the run had been secured; pursuant to this I gave him all instructions by which he was enabled to take possession, thus forming the second station on the river.[9]

Mackay tried to sell Ross the lease over McCrossin's Shamrock Vale for £600, which historians Kerr and Kennedy argued was illegal under the 1860 Act. The lease was unstocked, and Mackay did not have McCrossin's permission. Perhaps he did have some arrangement with McCrossin, as Lands Department files show that McCrossin applied to have his Shamrock Vale payments transferred to his 'Abington' lease further down the valley, fulfilling his agreement with Starr, to whom it was later transferred on 1 April 1865. As explained in the next chapter, the Rawson brothers' The Hollow station was originally called Shamrock Vale. They never used Abington as its name, although it appears under this name in Lands Department records. To make it even more confusing, the Abington name clearly comes from the Martin brothers of Hamilton and Hopetoun.

The original Shamrock Vale lease, that became Balnagowan, was issued to Ross in September 1863. It remained in his name until 20 September 1869, when John Cook's name was added. John Mackay was never paid the £600 and recorded that when he visited the town of Mackay, before he left to begin his maritime career, there was no money to be had from Ross. Married to John Cook's sister, when Ross died intestate in 1870, this caused further problems. Another of Ross' sisters battled for a share of her brother's estate, complicated further because she and her husband lived near Te Kowai, close by. As with the other runs in the valley, Balnagowan was drastically reduced in size between 1869 and 1884 to allow for agricultural development.

Plate 3.4: Greenmount Station in the late 1860s.
Source: Roth 1908, 42.

Neighbouring Greenmount and Cape Palmerston went through a process of consolidation and were reduced in size. Greenmount was halved in 1869 when a ten-year lease was issued to John Young, and William Oswald Gilchrist, son of John Gilchrist, the founder of Gilchrist, Watt, and Co. Cape Palmerston was sold by Cornish to John Walker, whose leases over 25 square miles at Homebush and 62 square miles at Cape Palmerston date from 1 January 1867. Cape Palmerston was consolidated with the Homebush lease at the beginning of 1869; from then on it was known as Homebush. Greenmount was resumed in 1875 when Young died, and reinstated to Gilchrist alone in 1877, who sold it back to John Walker in 1879. When Walker died in June that year, he also owned the Fort Cooper and Mt Britton leases. By 1882, Greenmount covered only 20.5 square miles, having lost its best land to smaller selections. The advantage to pastoralists on the renegotiated and ever-shrinking leases was that they were entitled to make pre-emptive selections for which (for a payment) they received freehold title after ten years of development.

The river (or creek, as Mackay called it; see Map 3.2) was renamed the Pioneer, after HMS *Pioneer*, the naval ship which surveyed the anchorage in November 1862, to stop any confusion with another Mackay River further north. (In the 1870s, this was renamed the Tully River). The township that developed carried the Mackay name. A few years later in 1865 sugar cane plantations began to be established, and onwards from 1867 Pacific Islands indentured labourers became the main labour force. The major industry in the Pioneer Valley and the neighbouring coastal plains began to change over to agriculture. Understandably, John Mackay, who could have been part of the successful pastoral and agricultural web that developed, was bitter about his failure. He was broke, and, despite his protests, even the river named with his family surname was unnecessarily renamed. After such a momentous exploration trip, and the slow but fruitless return with cattle to stock his pastoral run, John Mackay was terribly unlucky. Unfortunately, he had little money of his own and was dependent on others. Instead of becoming a prosperous young pastoralist like John A. Macartney at Waverley, or his stepcousins at St Helens, the 24-year-old John Mackay was

left to find a new future for himself. He remained obsessed by this failure all of his life.

The Land Grant

In 1863, Queensland's first Governor, Sir George Bowen, is said to have promised John Mackay a future grant of 2,000 acres (809 ha) of agricultural land as a reward for his explorations. Mackay's memory was that Sir George, in reply to his request for compensation, said:

> Were the Government to acknowledge your services many less deserving applicants would come forward, but you can rest assured Mr Mackay that if the place ever becomes of any importance it will be the bounden duty of the Queensland Government to remunerate you.[10]

When Mackay met with the Governor he was accompanied by Gordon Sandeman, a pastoralist and the new Member for Leichhardt in the Queensland Legislative Assembly. Mackay may have misinterpreted the Governor's careful words, which were a vague future promise. Nevertheless, he kept trying, as his initial success in helping locate the Pioneer Valley and then his disastrous short period as a pastoralist, set him on a defensive path over his failure to gain the expected land grant. He rewrote his 1860 diary in 1878 and began a long, ultimately unsuccessful campaign for recognition. There is a letter from Colonial Secretary Arthur (later Sir Arthur) H. Palmer, dated 8 September 1879, acknowledging that Mackay was the leader of the expedition. Palmer knew John Mackay as a young man at Armidale before the expedition to the Pioneer Valley. The letter was solicited by Mackay while he was based in Fiji during the 1870s. John Mackay also wrote to the *Mackay Mercury and South Kennedy Advertiser* in March 1881 to stake his claim. He complained that he was no further advanced in gaining compensation than in 1863. He hinted about financial problems, saying that Palmer had offered him financial support. John Mackay always kept an eye on his own reputation. This 1881 declaration is typical:

> In January 1860, I was chosen leader of a party organised in New England, New South Wales, with the view of proceeding to Northern Queensland and look for country adapted for pastoral purposes.[11]

At this stage, only two others from the expedition were still alive: Andrew Murray at Inverell; and John McCrossin at Uralla, who was ill and died later that year. McCrossin's death made it easier for Mackay to proceed with his claims. The diary was also rewritten in the early 1880s, and again when published in 1892 as *Discovery of the Pioneer River*, which became the standard version, the one that Roth relied on for his 1908 book on the Mackay district. Each time that John Mackay reworked his diary, changes were made. As John Kerr said, 'There is a sadness in having to expose the weakness of a fine and respected man who had been denied the land grant he thought he deserved.'[12]

In 1877, William Landsborough was granted £2,000 by the Queensland Government as a reward for his exploration work. Although Landsborough's feats were much greater than Mackay's, this may have been part motivation for the latter's falsification and long quest for compensation. In October 1882, he was in Fiji where he had a plantation. He persuaded John Stevenson, Member for Normanby in the Legislative Assembly, to introduce a private member's Bill to grant him 2,000 acres of land in the Mackay district. As Map 10.1 makes clear, even by that stage the Government would have been hard put to find him a suitable central package of land in the valley. The matter was debated in Queensland Parliament in

1883 after John Mackay had taken up a position as Harbour Master at Cooktown. A land grant was proposed and passed through the House without division. Unfortunately, soon after there was a change of government, and the award was never made. Premier Sir Thomas McIlwraith, a pastoralist and businessman, had been in support, but the Executive Council seems to have declined to make the grant, their reasoning being that Governor Bowen had no right to make the promise, and there was no written record of the agreement. McIlwraith was defeated in the November 1883 elections. Mackay's campaign for a land grant continued solidly for the next ten years and intermittently until his death in 1914.

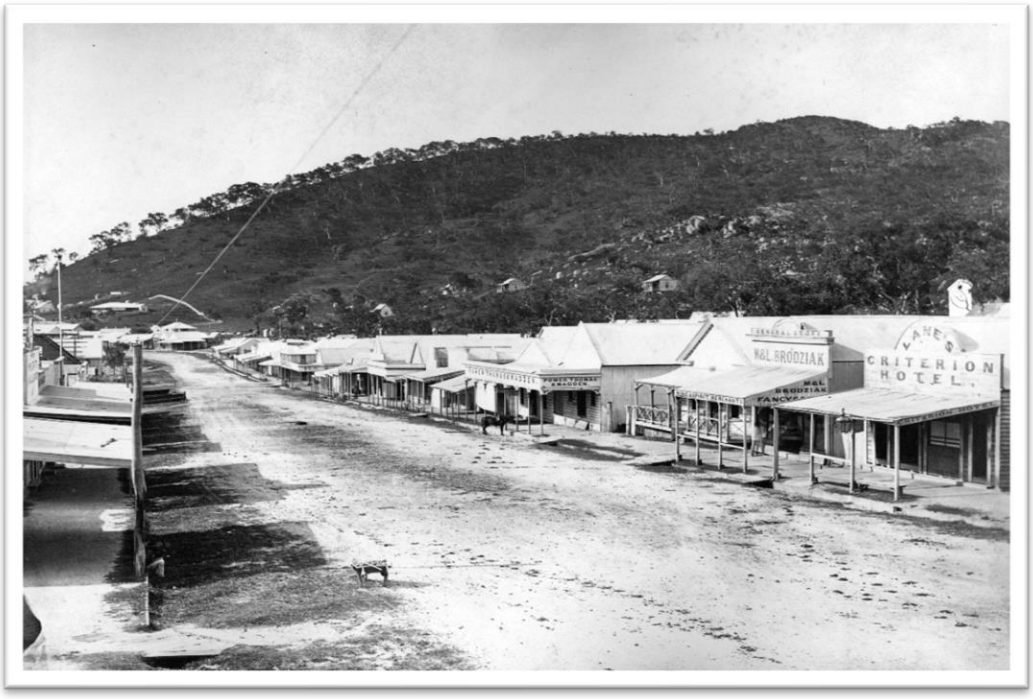


Plate 3.5: Charlotte Street, the main street in Cooktown, 1890. John Mackay became the Harbour Master in 1882.
Source: State Library of Queensland.

In late 1882, Mackay was offered the position of Harbour Master at Cooktown as direct compensation for not receiving the grant. He took it up on 19 July 1883. The letter of offer was forwarded via John Stevenson (the Member of Parliament who had pleaded his case) on 18 October 1882, an indication that Stevenson may have organised the Cooktown appointment. Mackay tried again to convince the parliament in 1887, again with support from his friend Sir Arthur Palmer, now the Member for Burke, which included Cooktown. The new Premier, Sir Samuel Griffith, offered no support, saying that Mackay's involvement in the expedition was for his own betterment. Griffith considered it a bad precedent to reward exploration. He thought that the Cooktown appointment was sufficient recompense and that 'whatever claim he might have had, has, I think gone…'.[13] The motion was lost by a majority of one.

Mackay's finances between 1863 and 1883 were insecure while he made his living as an itinerant ship's master and plantation owner in Fiji. After 1883, he became an increasingly senior Queensland public servant, which gave him a comfortable salary, although never the pastoral wealth accumulated by his contemporaries.

John Mackay's Maritime Career

As a teenager, Mackay seems to have travelled on a few voyages to Holland and the Baltic ports on a schooner owned by his uncle Rainey Munro, and at sometime after 1854 he may have made one Pacific voyage as supercargo (a purser). Mackay's background, which included some training in navigation, led him to go back to sea. The 1962 *City of Mackay Centenary Edition* of *The Daily Mercury* provides details on John Mackay, presumably provided by his son Rainey Hugh Mackay, as does his own account to the Geographical Society of Queensland in its 1887–88 volume. After he left the Pioneer Valley, he went to Sydney, returning to Queensland in 1863. The next year he went droving with Nat Buchanan (a famous horseman, friend, and distant relative), probably while Buchanan was manager of Bowen Downs station, 49 kilometres east of Muttaburra in central Queensland.

Mackay also attempted, with Lieutenant William Cotgrane of the British India Naval Station, to arrange an expedition to explore New Guinea, which failed to eventuate. The first attempt to form a private Australian colony in east New Guinea seems to have been in 1845, with exploration and colonisation pursued more seriously in the 1860s and 1870s. Sydney-based political activist Rev. Dr John Dunmore Lang lent his support to several attempts. One New Guinea colonisation company was formed in 1862, which is too early to have involved Mackay. In 1867, a Sydney trading and colonisation association headed by A.C. Collins requested the loan of a ship from the New South Wales Government to help form a settlement in south-east New Guinea. Backed by Lang, they had plans to raise £20,000 capital (today $2,940,000) to settle the Purari River in the Gulf of Papua and trade along the southern coast. Presumably, this is the plan in which John Mackay was involved. The Mackay family story is that the exploration venture received no support from the British, New South Wales or Queensland governments. Collins died, and Mackay abandoned the project.

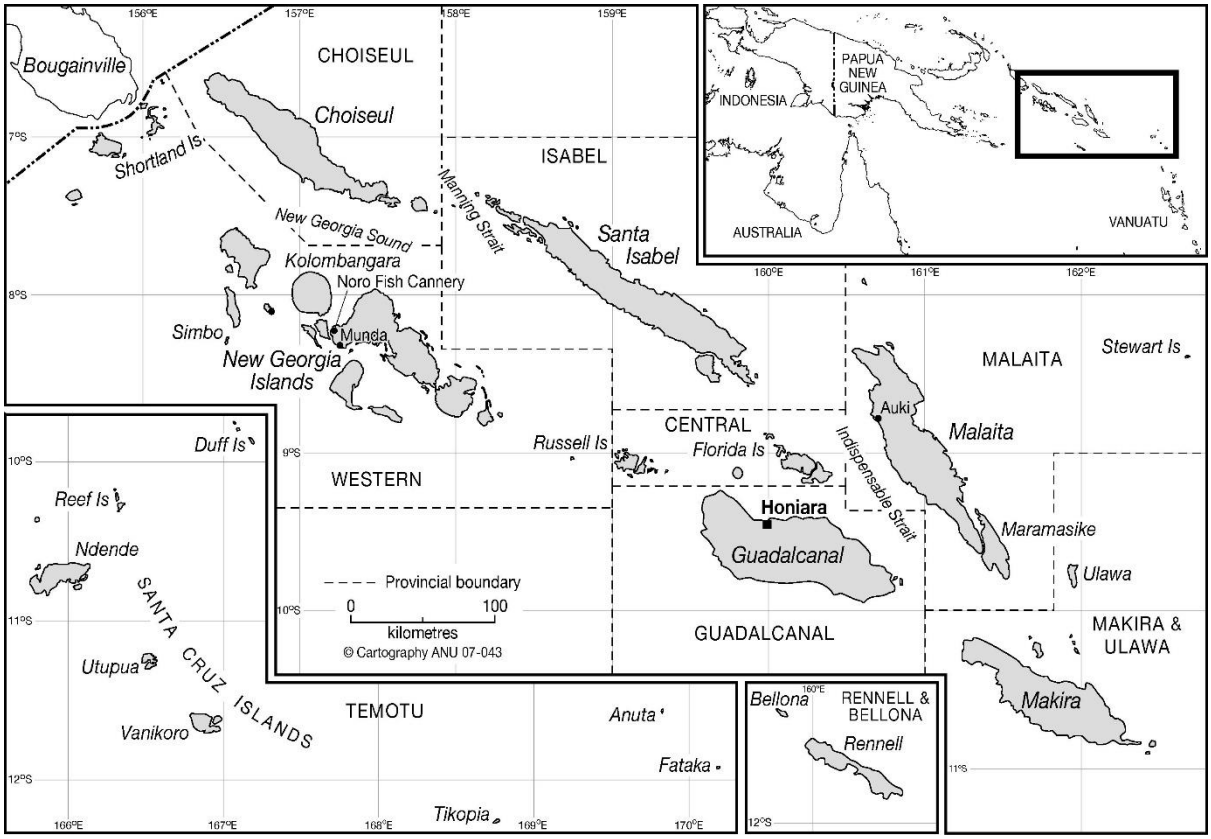
With his options narrowed, in 1865 he became a professional seaman, gaining his master's certificate and for the next 18 years commanding vessels in the South Pacific, New Zealand and American trades under British, American, and French flags. He also acquired land in Fiji, and 4,000 acres at Puget Sound in the USA. Family records suggest that the American land was on the Oregon side of the Sound, and that he sold it in 1883.

The Mackay family has created an outline of what they know of his sea-going career, based on quite patchy sources, often fly-leaves of books, addresses on letters, and memoirs written by his son Rainey Hugh Mackay. His career began as a junior ship's officer, moving up the ranks to be a ship's master by 1869. Although there is no evidence, he may also have worked on Australian coastal ships as an officer but not the master, which makes tracking him difficult. Foreign-going masters certificates were not issued in Australia until 1872; John Mackay's qualification was granted in 1874. Many of his early voyages were on trading vessels in the Pacific, dropping off cargo and calling at far away islands for marine products, hardly plumb jobs. Initially his ships were not large, mainly brigs and barques of a few hundred tons. Then he moved on to a Pacific clipper ship and finally to larger steam-assisted sailing ships. During the late 1860s and 1870s, Mackay seems often to have had to take whatever position was on offer, earning a precarious living, while also trying to begin plantations in Fiji.

Our John Mackay had a common Scottish name, and he was not the only Captain John Mackay travelling on ships in the Pacific. This has all been complicated by historians, me included, who earlier have made errors in interpretation, misled by multiple ships with the same name, multiple John Mackays, and conflicting documents. Nevertheless, he did take part in the Queensland and Fiji labour trades. He was certainly master of the 120-ton *Flora* on two 1875 voyages in the Queensland labour trade, with J.L. Kirby as Government Agent

on both occasions. The *Flora* voyages seem to have been uneventful (in that there is no evidence in the Queensland State Archives of any disturbance on the voyages) although it must also be said in those early years the whole labour trade was tainted. By his son's admission, he was also involved in the Fiji labour trade.

It is irrefutable that in 1869 Mackay was master of a trading vessel, the *Daphne*, which was involved in a violent incident in the Santa Cruz Group, now part of the Solomon Islands. We have no exact dates for John Mackay's voyage on the *Daphne* and most frustratingly neither I nor the Mackay family have been able to find any record of a naval investigation which they claim occurred, exonerating him. Mackay's *Daphne* was not the schooner *Daphne* which was involved in kidnapping in the labour trade during 1868–70 and was seized by HMS *Rosario* in Fiji waters in April 1869.



Map 3.3: The Santa Cruz Group are small islands in the south of the modern Solomon Islands nation. They appear in the inset section on the map, as part of Temotu Province.
Source: ANU Cartography.

Plate 3.6: Santa Cruz people trading in 1906. The scene would have been similar in 1869 when John Mackay was there on the *Daphne*.
Source: Beattie 1909, 155x. Photograph courtesy of the Diocese of Melanesia.

To their credit, the Mackay family has never tried to hide the Santa Cruz incident. In 1979, Margaret Mackay quoted Professor Archibald Watson's interpretation of the *Daphne* incident, during which 'my grandfather, when captain of the "Daphne" was forced to fire on and slaughter a great number of natives of Santa Cruz while his ship was lying at anchor off that island'. Margaret Mackay went on to say:

> Having obviously studied the writing of my late father, Rainey Hugh Mackay, and myself, Mr. Moore will be aware no attempt has ever been made to conceal what my grandfather later described as one of the saddest memories of his life, because there was nothing to conceal…
>
> Can we not, then, believe:
>
> (a) The findings of a subsequent official enquiry exonerated John Mackay, and which revealed that the islanders had (understandably) been taking their revenge for ill-treatment by the crew of a ship which had previously called in there?
> (b) Professor Archibald Watson, later to become a prominent man in Australia's medical history, who was travelling on the 'Daphne' at the time and who wrote to my own father in 1914, "…your father was entirely blameless…had he not used the ship's guns, the vessel would certainly have been taken and all onboard killed… as the years passed I got to value his friendship more and more…he was one we all admired, respected, believed in and loved…in all his wanderings he never robbed anyone nor did a dishonourable act"?[14]
>
> At first glance, Archibald Watson seems reputable enough. He became the first professor of anatomy at the University of Adelaide. However, he was a young rogue when he knew Mackay in Fiji back in the late 1860s and early 1870s, travelling on the notorious brig *Carl*, and with Mackay on the *Daphne*. As Jennifer Carter makes clear in *Painting the Islands Vermillion*, his evidence is not to be trusted, and without any British naval evidence as corroboration, his comments on John Mackay carry no weight at all.

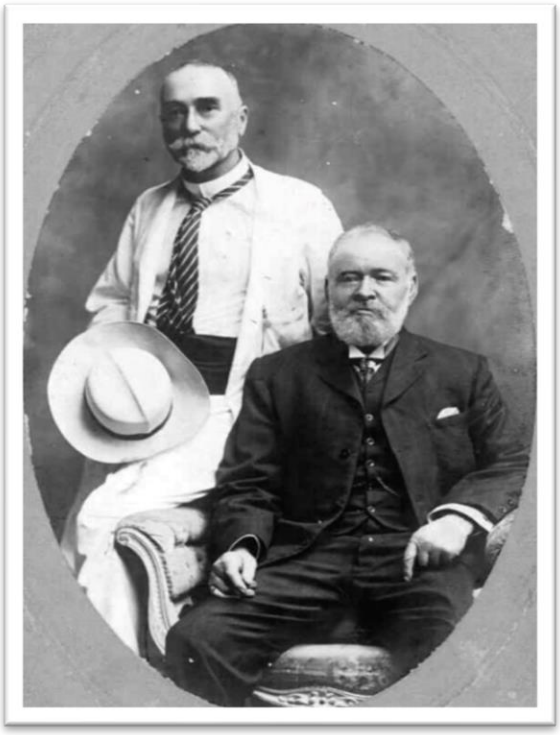


Plate 3.7: Archibald Watson and John Mackay in old age.
Source: Mackay Family Collection, National Library of Australia.

We come now to the European mind-set of the time, which presumes that outsiders had a right to be sailing in the Pacific Islands, and that the Islanders should have behaved in a 'civilised manner' and were at fault if they did not play by the rules expected by foreigners. These culture contact situations were always difficult, but there really is no way to justify John Mackay having to fire on and kill many people to save his ship and crew. Outsiders—in this case on a trading vessel—venturing into the Santa Cruz Group and the Solomon Archipelago during these years were not much different from more openly predatory labour traders and slavers. It was a dangerous pursuit. Mackay's son Rainey (using the language of his era) described how the *Daphne* was 'treacherously attacked by the natives'.[15] Any justification is part of a Eurocentric way of thinking that it is legitimate to be trading in this unregulated area. The British Solomon Islands Protectorate was not proclaimed until 1893, and there was no administrative presence in the Protectorate until 1896. The Protectorate was not proclaimed in the Santa Cruz Group until 1898, and there was no administrative base at Santa Cruz (Nendö) Island until 1923. When Mackay arrived on the *Daphne*, even a minimal European presence was many decades away, except through the British Royal Navy, the ships of which might pass by once or twice a year, and occasional visits from missionaries.

Mackay's Fiji Plantation and Pearling Ventures

At the same time as making Pacific trading voyages, Mackay owned plantations in Fiji. Settlement in Fiji was largely an outgrowth from the eastern Australian colonies. When the American Civil War began in 1861, Britain searched for alternative areas to grow cotton for its manufacturing industries. Fiji, Queensland, and the New Hebrides were pronounced perfect for growing cotton. This brought an initial slow trickle of settlers to Fiji from Australia and New Zealand, then a rush of settlement occurred in the second half of the 1860s

and the early 1870s. The New Zealand wars (against the Maori) had ruined many settlers, who were happy to shift to other colonies. In the eastern Australian colonies, the 1860s land selection Acts were not as successful as hoped and the price of wool was low in Australia and New Zealand, all of which provided the impetus for settlers to move to Fiji. Levuka's foreign population rose from 1,250 in December 1869 to 2,670 at the end of 1872. Settlers purchased land throughout the Fiji Islands. One of them was John Munro Mackay.

Plate 3.8: Levuka in 1870, the first capital when John Mackay was based in Fiji. He would have been a regular visitor.
Source: Image No. a13923, State Library of Victoria.

Mackay had been visiting Fiji on ships and realised the potential. We know little about his plantation ventures in Fiji, nor of his vessels, except for the names of two early ones, cutters named *Waiau* and *Coral*, and that he must have employed indentured Pacific Islanders. His first plantation, purchased in 1870 and sold in about 1872, was at Wailevu, on the Macuata coast of Vanua Levu, the second largest island in the Fiji Group. Next, he purchased 3,600 acres (1,463 ha) of land at Nukuseva, also on Vanua Levu. He may have been growing tea as this was never a cotton or copra-producing area.[16] Mackay seems to have used managers on both plantations. He was short of money and spent some time pearling to make ends meet. Pearling was lucrative, involving gathering pearl-shells (*Pincdara Maxima*), with pearls as an occasional bonus. In the 1870s, it involved skin-diving, not helmet and suit-diving. During Mackay's years in Fiji, pearl-shell sold at between £155 to £180 a ton on the London market, and a single large pearl could net over £200. He would have had to transport his shells and pearls to Sydney for sale. Success depended on finding large banks of the shells. An annual profit of £1,000 was quite conceivable (over $138,000 in today's values). He could have made far more money in a year than his annual salary ever reached in Queensland.

In the first half of the 1870s Mackay probably imported Pacific Islander crews for his cutters and plantations, mainly Loyalty and New Hebridean Islanders. Between 1870 and 1875 he may also have employed Fijians but onwards from 1875 laws forbad law Fijians being employed as labourers. Mackay kept the Nukuseva plantation until his death, when it was sold to the Hedstrom family who were partners in Morris Hedstrom & Co., a large

wholesale and retail trading company which owned a sawmill on Vanua Levu onwards from 1905 and had timber rights on the island.

By the end of the 1870s and into the early 1880s, Mackay was finding better maritime positions. In 1882, at 43 years old, he was offered the already mentioned Cooktown appointment in North Queensland. Although Cooktown, the port for the Palmer River goldfields, had declined since its 1870s peak, it was a safe job with good prospects. He took up the position in 1883 on a middling public service salary of £250 a year. The next year, he married Marion McLennan, eldest daughter of John McLennan of Invervainie near Armidale. John Mackay's wandering days were over, and he began to climb the Public Service, promoted to the position of Harbour Master and Pilot for Moreton Bay (Brisbane) in November 1889 on a salary of £362 a year.

Although class and background counted at the top of the Queensland establishment, in the British colonies it was also possible to succeed by dint of skill and hardwork. Mackay made it to the top in a manner unlikely if he had remained in Scotland. In 1890, he became acting Port Master for Brisbane, and again in 1901 when the incumbent was away. In 1902, he became the permanent Senior Harbour Master of Queensland, head of the Marine Department, and chairman of the Marine Board. This doubled his salary. Sixty-five years old in 1904, he stayed on for almost another decade, an unusual situation. In 1908, he was chairman of an exhaustive Royal Commission into the Torres Strait pearling industry, usually called the Mackay Royal Commission. In 1911, he was awarded the Imperial Service Award, given to long-serving meritorious civil servants. Mackay died in office on 11 March 1914, just short of his 75th birthday. He was survived by his wife and their four children: John Stevenson, Rainey Hugh, Keith Hope, and a daughter Annie Endeavour Munro.

****

Mackay was a man of his times. Given the years of his maritime career—the late 1860s, throughout the 1870s, and into the early 1880s—it is very likely that he was involved in matters that by today's standards are unacceptable. This, however, is true of almost all of the foreign participants in Pacific trade, plantations and labour movement, although for most of them there is not sufficient evidence to draw definitive conclusions. To believe that John Mackay was somehow an innocent participant in a process that involved much illegality in labour recruiting practices, brutality on plantations and farms, and a high death rate from epidemic diseases, is an unlikely conclusion. To argue, as his family continues to do, that this is all guilt by association, and that lack of concrete evidence means that John Mackay is innocent of wrongdoing is not satisfactory, particularly when we have the murky case of the *Daphne* voyage. Europeans moving about in the Solomon Islands, the Santa Cruz Group, the New Hebrides and Fiji waters in the 1860s and 1870s were constantly involved in dangerous situations and were not innocent of all wrongdoing. While it is hard to believe this of a favourite ancestor, treating him like a saint is not realistic.

After three trips in the 1860s, John Mackay did not return to the Pioneer Valley again until 1883, at the peak of its sugar boom. What he saw amazed him as he gazed out on green field of sugarcane. He described himself as a 'stranger in the land'.[17] There was a flourishing town and the region called itself 'sugaropolis', the largest cane-growing region in Australia.

Most of what has been written about John Mackay is laudatory and relates to his 1860–62 adventures on the way to and from, and in the Pioneer Valley. In the late 1880s, with the other contender for leadership of the expedition dead, John Mackay deliberately began to manipulate and advocate his partial account of his Queensland exploration and pastoralist years. This has inflated his minor place in the history and historiography of Queensland and Mackay. His intentions were part ego-related but were also driven by a long

quest for a land grant as his reward for 'discovering' the Pioneer Valley. Until the 2000s, historians unthinkingly accepted the early interpretation of his exploits, written by the man himself, and his descendants. The Regional Council, media and citizens of Mackay still do.

John Munro Mackay became a venerable public figure, held in high regard. He was given a state funeral as a mark of respect. His grave is at one of the highest points in Balmoral Cemetery in Brisbane, a final statement on his special status in early Queensland history.

Plate 3.9: The grave of John Munro Mackay and his son Rainey Hugh Mackay, Balmoral Cemetery, Brisbane, April 2018.
Source: Clive Moore Collection.

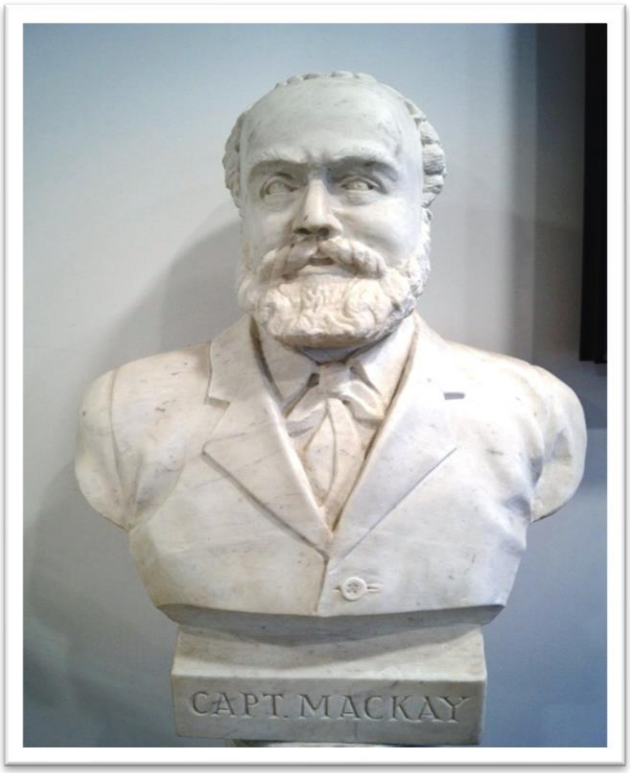


Plate 3.10: Bust of John Mackay at the Mackay Regional Council administration building.
Source: Mackay Regional Council.

Bibliography

The bibliographies for all chapters are in a separate file.

Endnotes

[1] Roth 1908, 29.
[2] Letter from John McCrossin to Andrew Murray, 6 November 1859, MS736, Mitchell Library, Sydney, quoted in Kennedy 2002, 8.
[3] John Mackay, Letter to the editor, *Mackay Mercury*, 26 March 1881, 3; letter to *Uralla and Walcha Times*, 20 July 1881 (republished from *The Queenslander*).
[4] Mackay Regional Council, History of the Mackay Region.
www.mackay.qld.gov.au/about_council/your_council/history/history_of_the_mackay_region
[5] Obituary of John McCrossin, *Uralla and Walcha Times*, 16 November 1881, clipping in Rainbird, n.d.
[6] *Ibid.*
[7] Rainey Hugh Mackay, 'Murray Diary Claims are Refuted', *Daily Mercury*, 18 October 1960.
[8] Mackay diary quoted in Hislop, Booth, Howlett, and Myers 1995, 4.
[9] Roth 1908, 45.
[10] Mackay 1881, 3.
[11] *Ibid*..
[12] Kerr 1979–80, 87.
[13] The 1887 debate is reproduced in Hislop, Booth, Howlett and Myers 1995, 21–25.
[14] *The Daily Mercury*, 25 April 1979.
[15] Mackay, n.d., 21.
[16] My thanks to Brij Lal for his advice.
[17] *Ibid.*