

14. Sugar City



Plate 14.1: The modern city of Mackay, 2021, showing Nebo Road and Field Street in the foreground, looking towards the Pioneer River and the city centre.

Source: (c.) Queensland Museum, Gary Cranitch.

Port Mackay, as the town was originally called, has become Mackay, now a booming sugar-producing district and service centre for the coal mining industry spread out over hundreds of kilometres west of the Pioneer Valley, where once pastoralism dominated. Whereas in the nineteenth century Mackay was given the nickname of ‘Sugaropolis’, it is now often called ‘Sugar City’. Other much smaller urban centres developed in the valley—Walkerston, Eton, Farleigh, Glenella, Marian, Mirani, and Finch Hatton. Sarina is to the south, and Calen, Kuttabul and Bloomsbury to the north. Central Mackay is still divided into its initial suburban wards—South, East, and West, with the North once part of the Divisional Board and later the Pioneer Shire. On the outer fringes what were once sugar plantations are now suburbs. Some have kept their names—Te Kowai, Beaconsfield, and Mount Pleasant etc. Others have disappeared under streets and roads—for instance Alexandra, Balmoral and Meadowlands along the western side of the city. Once isolated beaches—Far Beach, Town Beach, Slade Point, Blacks Beach, Eimeo, Bucasia, and Shoal Point—have become suburbs. Today, Mackay’s urban spread is equally on both sides of the Pioneer, although still hemmed in by cane fields, with the newest suburbs to the north. This urban development began as a few shanties on the muddy banks of the Pioneer River in the early 1860s.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Mackay was a substantial town spread out on

alluvial plains and servicing the valley. Building bridges was part of making the valley more accessible. The first bridge was across Fursden Creek on the Northside in 1876 with the first bridge across the Pioneer at the hospital in 1877, followed by the Sydney Street and Barnes Creek bridges in 1889. The next bridges across the Pioneer River were built at Pleystowe (Balnagowan) in 1888, Marian in 1890, and Mirani in 1922. South of the town, the Bakers Creek bridge was built by CSR in 1882, followed by Sandey Creek bridge in 1888, and Alligator Creek bridge in 1898. There were also separate tramway bridges, although some of the tracks were laid on road bridges. The 1980 Ron Camm bridge is now the dominant crossing at Mackay, reorienting access to the Northside. One thing has not changed—the sense of flatness that dominates the urban area, which is only a few metres above sea level. Fifty-metre-high Mt Oscar, 23-metre-high Mt Bassett at the harbour, and 15 metre Mt Pleasant, all on the Northside, are the only hills close to the city.

The borough of Mackay was proclaimed in 1869, with a Municipal Council, which became a Town Council on 31 March 1903, and the town achieved city status on 17 August 1918. Mackay was surrounded by the Pioneer Division, created in 1879, which was administered by a Divisional Board, and in 1903 became the Shire of Pioneer, with its headquarters in Mackay. The Shire of Sarina was created in 1912 and the Shire of Mirani in 1913. The three shires were all amalgamated with the City of Mackay in 1994, which became the Mackay Regional Council in 2008.

This Local Government system provided a sense of continuity, added to at a commercial level by the plantations and central mills, and several early Mackay firms that survived into the middle of the twentieth century and beyond. In 1962, Mackay's centenary year, 14 had survived: Shepherds Anvil Stores Pty Ltd (founded in 1873, ironmongery, hardware, groceries, and produce); F. Black Pty Ltd (also 1873, general merchants); Marsh and Webster Pty Ltd (1875, merchants, and department store); W.H. Paxton and Co. Ltd (1876, shipping agents, wholesale, and general hardware); Wilson Hart and Co. (1881, timber merchants); Henry L. Black (1881, stock and station agent, and auctioneer); Charles Porter and Sons Ltd (1883, timber merchants); Lamberts Pty Ltd (1883, merchants, and apparel); S.B. Wright and Wright and Condie (1883, lawyers); James Croker and Sons (1889, shipping and general commission agents); J. Michelmores and Co. Pty Ltd (1891, wholesale and retail merchants); H.A. Webster Pty Ltd (1882, ironmongery); Beirne Pty Ltd (1901, drapery); and Fields Pty Ltd (1907, cycles and machines). Pastoral links to Mackay businesses were always strong. Pastoral money from the valley and from over the ranges to the west was also invested in sugar plantations and farms. In the 1890s, J. Michelmores & Co. Pty Ltd teamed up with pastoralist Edward Hannan from Eaglefield (Dabin) station, who began to invest in the sugar industry and Mackay commercial ventures. In the 1900s, the Cook family of Balnagowan joined with J. Michelmores & Co. Pty Ltd in pastoral ventures. If we investigated the companies above, other pastoral and agricultural links would emerge.

1880s: The Boom Years

The centre of Mackay in the 1880s had progressed from that in the 1870s, moving towards permanent concrete and brick shop fronts. There were around 30 hotels in the town and another 35 in surrounding rural areas. Important buildings had been added, such as the AJS Bank in Victoria Street, the Post and Telegraph Office in North Street, and the Court House. A new rendered-brick colonnaded Court House was erected in Brisbane Street in 1886, which became the Mackay Police Station in 1939. These three buildings, and the largest of the hotels, marked Mackay as having come of age as a major town. After the rust disaster of 1875–76, by the end of the 1870s the sugar industry had recovered and new mills were built in quick succession, including CSR's large Homebush mill, the Melbourne–Mackay Sugar

Company Palms Estate mill, and Sir John Lawes' Farleigh mill. The town boomed along with the dominant industry. A pattern emerged amongst the leading 1880s colonists at Mackay. Many residents had entered the district in the 1860s and spent their time developing businesses in the 1870s. By the 1880s, they were financially secure and felt the need to be more involved in the community.

A good example is Evan Davies, born in Carmarthen in Wales in 1841. He trained as a cabinetmaker, married, and migrated to Brisbane in 1863. Davies worked in the capital, then in Bundaberg at a boiling down works, moving to the Hurley's Creek goldrush at Peak Downs. In Gympie, he erected the Caledonian Hotel and theatre. Returning to Brisbane, he chose to go to Mackay in 1868, where he was employed to erect the buildings for Pleystowe plantation. With his partner Edward McKenzie Scott, he became one of Mackay's main builders, erecting the first Customs House, hotels, schools, and many houses over the next two decades. Davis retired from contracting in 1884, built the Commercial Hotel and became its publican. In 1886, he became a town alderman and was re-elected in 1888. He had married Jane Harris before he left Wales, and they had eight children, two of whom died in infancy.

Others arrived in the 1880s. Frederick Homes Mardan Black visited his older brothers in 1881. Maurice Hume Black and Henry Boyer Black began in pastoralism, ran a sugar plantation, then went into politics (Maurice) and became a newspaper proprietor (Henry). Before coming to Australia, F.H.M. Black worked in London for Day, Watson, Son & Watney, wholesale wine and spirit merchants, good training for opening a grocery store in Mackay. He and his wife Charlotte (née Perry), from Adelaide, moved to Mackay in 1883 with their first child. He went into in partnership with Charles Dutailis, then set up as F. Black Ltd, general merchants, in a building opposite the Town Hall. In the 1970s, I interviewed F.H.M. Black's daughter Eva Marian Black several times. Born in 1881, the youngest of the couple's six children, she remembered her earliest years in a house with large verandahs in Alfred Street near the showgrounds, Next, they moved to a house in the centre of the town (built by dentist Mr Doonan, and later lived in by Dr Hopkins), where they stayed until the late 1890s. The final family house, built by Mr Fitzgerald, who had been contracted to build the railway in the 1880s, was the largest. It was two-storey with 10-foot-wide verandahs enclosed with lattice screens, and had eight bedrooms, a big dining room, and a billiard room. Charlotte, the other daughter, married Albert Edmund Atherton, son of Edmund Atherton of Cliftonville pastoral station south of Mackay.

Their mother died in the mid-1890s, and in 1896 Eva was sent to a 'finishing school' in Adelaide, then returned to Mackay to live with her father. In the 1970s, Eva Black recounted to me her visits to many of the plantations and to the homes of leading Mackay families. She attended many parties and remembered dancing with Lord Yarmouth, the gay young aristocrat who was mentioned in Chapter 7.

The Lagoons 'Dress Circle'

Several of the late 1860s settlers stayed on and became successful merchants and professionals. Their homes at The Lagoons on Nebo Road in West Mackay were the equivalent of a 'dress circle' area. Early residents there were Dr Robert McBurney, the first medical doctor, and his wife Maria, Arthur and Emily Kemmis, and William Henry Hyne and his wife Phoebe Margaret (née Smith), part-owners of nearby Meadowlands plantation. William and Elizabeth Marsh, and Charles and Julia Webster, the founders of the best department store in the town, also lived there, as did Alexander Shiels, an auctioneer, accountant and the second mayor. Their memberships of various boards, councils and associations allow us to map the type of lives led by Mackay's male business and professional leaders. There was also a symbiotic relationship between the pastoralist, and the

sugar planters and managers, and the townspeople. By the 1880s it was quite usual for them to have a town house as well as a rural property.

There were also those who struggled to make a living and lived rough, not much better than the first settlers of the 1860s. We know little about this group as the remaining records are from those who prospered.

Dr Robert McBurney

In 1869, Dr Robert Campbell McBurney (known as ‘Old plaster’) became Mackay’s first medical practitioner. Before McBurney, the only medical advice available was from the town pharmacist David ‘Dal’ Dalrymple. Born in Kilkeel, County Down, Ireland, in 1845, McBurney studied medicine at Queen’s University College, Belfast, graduating in 1868, sailing to Brisbane the same year as a ship’s doctor. Early the next year he arrived in Mackay, setting up a private practice. When the Mackay District Hospital opened in 1872, he became the Medical Superintendent, and in the same year he became Government Medical Officer, while keeping his private practice.

In 1872, McBurney purchased 10 acres of land just north of Balmoral plantation on what is now the corner of Nebo Road and Webberley Street, and later built his residence there. In April 1874, he married Maria Emma (née Palmer) and they built their home ‘Kaliguil’, which is thought to have been the Aboriginal name for The Lagoons area. They had two daughters. McBurney also invested in urban and rural land and was part owner of a plantation and a labour trade schooner, the *Lavinia*.

In 1885, Dr McBurney took his family back to England for a holiday, which included a tour of major American cities. Returning to Mackay late in the year, he resumed his hospital, government and private practices. His health seems to have declined as he took three months leave early in 1889 and resigned as surgeon at the hospital. The family left Mackay, with McBurney once more travelling as a ship’s doctor, but he died at sea in April.

His non-medical interests centred on the Mackay Turf Club and the local branch of the Queensland Volunteer Defence Force. Maria McBurney was a talented watercolour artist.



Plate 14.2: Dr Robert McBurney
Source: State Library of Queensland.

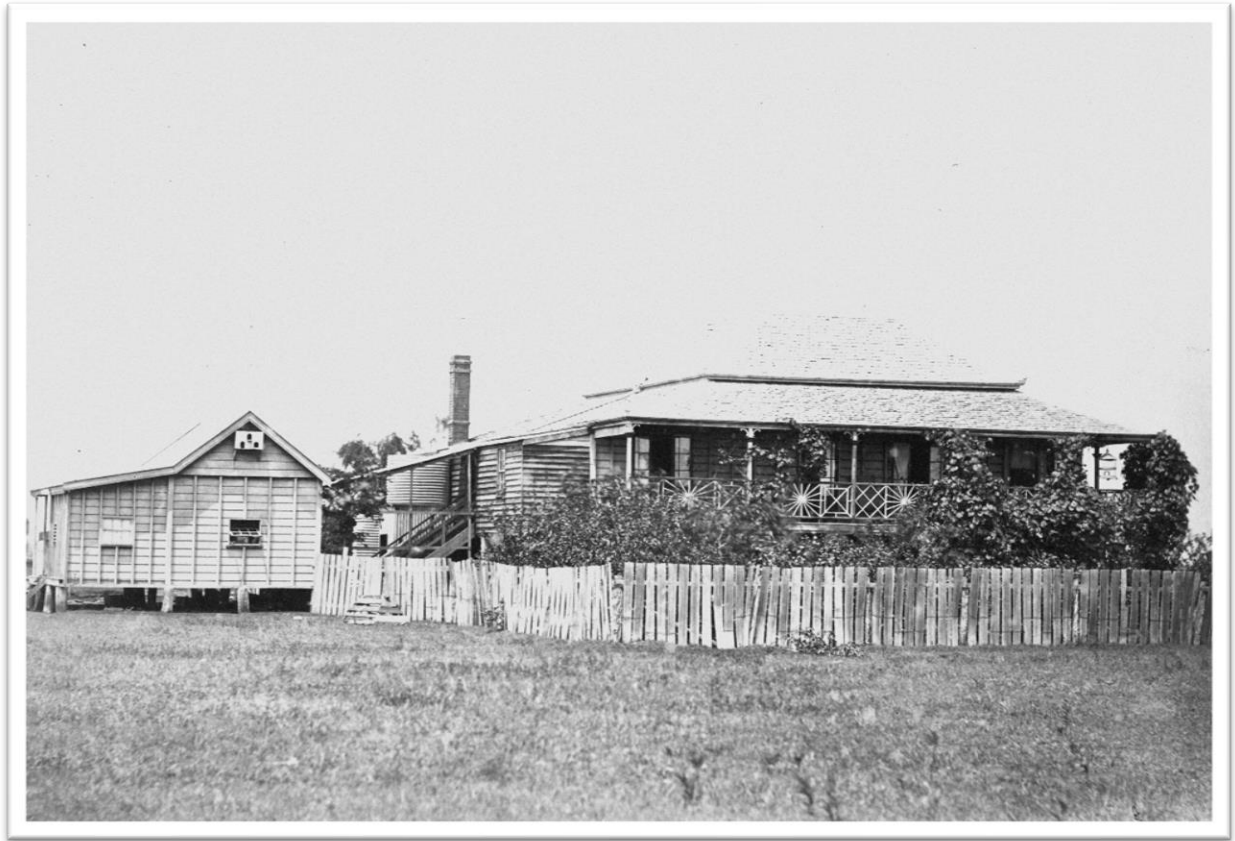


Plate 14.3: McBurneys' home 'Kaliguil', built in West Mackay at The Lagoons.

Source: State Library of Queensland.

William Marsh and Charles Webster

When I was growing up in the 1950s and 1960s, Mackay's most prominent department store was Marsh & Websters on the corner of Sydney and Victoria streets in the centre of town. The shop sold the best quality range of everything one could wish for. Eventually it sold out to the David Jones department store chain in 1963. Marsh and Webster, the founders, were 1869 settlers in Mackay who built up their store and lived in a style befitting their wealth.

William Marsh was born in Somerset, England, in 1837. He left England for Queensland in 1863, with two young friends, William Seaward, and Henry Genge. They had all worked for Leafe Sons and Co., a London textile warehouse. After arriving in Brisbane, they moved to Port Denison (Bowen) where they purchased a small building from Richard Symes Warry, a grocer and merchant from Queen Street, Brisbane. The trio traded as Seaward, Marsh & Genge, chemists, druggists, and general storekeepers. Small Bowen was then the leading northern port, servicing the surrounding pastoral district. They bought a schooner, plying north to the Burdekin River and began a branch of their store in Dalrymple (a former town near the Cape River goldfields) on the Burdekin, carrying supplies in, and wool out to Bowen. Another branch opened in Townsville. Genge disappeared while travelling to Burdekin Downs station, thought to have been killed in an Aboriginal attack. Soon after, they moved to Sydney to join Farmer & Co., and Warry, now mayor of Brisbane, joined the partnership as a financier and sleeping partner, which created a new company, Marsh & Warry. When the first blocks of land at Mackay were sold in Bowen in 1863, Seaward, Marsh, & Genge purchased half an acre, on which in 1869 they established a branch store, with Charles Webster as manager. In 1866, Marsh had married Elizabeth Seaward, sister of his partner.

Webster purchased the Mackay business from Marsh and Warry in 1872, then Marsh sold his share in the wider business to Warry in 1873, returning to England for two years. Webster continued to operate on his own at Mackay, with a branch at Walkerston. When Marsh returned in 1875, he went into partnership with Webster. They built a brick store, later known as Marsh & Webster's 'The Corner Store'. The business sold drapery, clothing, groceries, alcohol, and acted as commission agents.



Plate 14.4: Marsh & Webster's 'The Corner Store', on the corner of Sydney and Victoria streets. A brick building was constructed in 1875.

Source: State Library of Queensland.

In 1878, the Marsh couple began to develop 'Summerlands', their home and estate overlooking The Lagoons in West Mackay. The house was a fine colonial villa with deep verandas, a coach house, stables, tennis court and croquet lawn. 'Summerlands' was in a pleasant position, far enough away from the town centre to be a semi-rural retreat, but an easy buggy ride to Marsh & Websters store in the centre of the town.



Plate 14.5: Members of the Marsh family on the front steps of 'Summerlands'.
Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 14.6: Members of the Marsh family in front of 'Summerlands', on their croquet lawn.
Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 14.7: Members of the Marsh family on the front steps of 'Summerlands'.
Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 14.8: Interior photograph from 'Summerlands'.
Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 14.9: The living room of ‘Summerlands’, in typical Victorian style.
Source: State Library of Queensland.

Marsh became mayor of Mackay in 1878 and was for many years a member of the Mackay Harbour Board and the Municipal Council. He was involved in setting up the Mackay Chamber of Commerce, and the Fire Brigade, and was a leading member of the Kennedy Chapter of the Masonic Lodge. Elizabeth Marsh died in 1879, followed by William Marsh in 1909. They had two sons and four daughters, a boy and a girl dying in early childhood within a day of each other in 1872.

Charles Webster, four years younger than Marsh, was born in Packington Place, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, England, in 1841, the son of a grocer. The family—the parents, Charles, and his elder brother Henry—migrated to Sydney in 1853 and as mentioned above, by 1865 Charles was in Bowen. In 1873, Webster married Julia Garcia, from Sydney and 15 years his junior. They lived at ‘Eulamere’, a villa on five acres overlooking The Lagoons in what was Marsh Street, (now Holland Street), close to the Marsh home. They had ten children, eight of whom survived to adulthood. Like Marsh, Webster interested himself in his local community, serving on the Municipal Council and the Pioneer Divisional Board. Over years he was on the boards of the hospital, the benevolent society, the Separation League, and the Employers’ Association, as well as president of the Chamber of Commerce, and chairman of the Harbour Committee. Like Marsh, a staunch Anglican, he was a warden of Holy Trinity Church. He died in 1895, and Julia remarried to William R. Onslow Hill, an ex-Native Police Sub-Inspector, Police Magistrate, Gold Field Warden, pastoralist, and author of *Forty-Five Years’ Experiences in North Queensland, 1861–1905*. She died in Southport in 1921, and her second husband died in 1923.

Henry and Georgiana Brandon

While some residents stayed in Mackay for decades, one of the most financially successful remained only for nine years. The leading bank manager in the 1870s and 1880s was Henry Brandon, born in Rotherhithe, Surrey, England, in 1845. His family migrated to Sydney,

where he began work in the office of engineering company P.N. Russell & Co. Next, he went goldmining for two years, and then began work with the International Royal Mail Co. By 1866, he had joined David Jones and Co., before moving on to the Australian Joint Stock Company (AJS) Bank. Posted to Bowen, he met and married Georgiana Jane Wills (1851–1923) born in Adelaide, the eldest daughter of Louisa (née Hunter) and Korah Halcomb Wills of Mackay, Bowen, and Townsville. In 1869, he became the AJS Bank manager at Ravenswood, an important goldmining town, then at Bowen, and finally at the age of 30 at Mackay in 1875, where he remained until 1884. The bank was originally in Sydney Street, then a splendid new premises was built in Victoria Street in 1880. The upper floor was the manager's residence, which must have been commodious as 10 of their 14 children lived there with them.



Plate 14.10: Georgiana and Henry Brandon. Henry Brandon was manager of the Australian Joint Stock Company (AJS) Bank at Mackay, 1875–1884.

Source: State Library of Queensland.

Brandon rode the sugar boom skilfully. His bank had lent money to ambitious planters in the early 1870s, then foreclosed on some of them after the rust disease ruined their cane. Thomas H. Fitzgerald and Edward M. Long were amongst the AJS Bank debtors who went broke in the process. Brandon teamed up with John Spiller, investing in Pioneer plantation on the Northside, financed by AJS Bank money. One wonders about the probity of a bank manager becoming a partner in a leading plantation. They sold out in 1881 for an incredible

£95,000 (\$20 m), moving on to begin a new Pioneer plantation on the Burdekin River, which they sold to the Drysdale brothers. They sold River Estate plantation in 1887 for £40,000 (today \$6.7 m). Brandon also bought over 4,940 acres (2,000 ha) of land at Louisa Creek south of Mackay. The Brandons left Mackay in 1884 at the peak of the boom years and returned to England, where Brandon invested his considerable wealth in the Berlin stock exchange. He altered his focus to mining and became a director of the London board of Broken Hill Proprietary Ltd. Henry Brandon died in 1899, Georgiana surviving him until 1923.

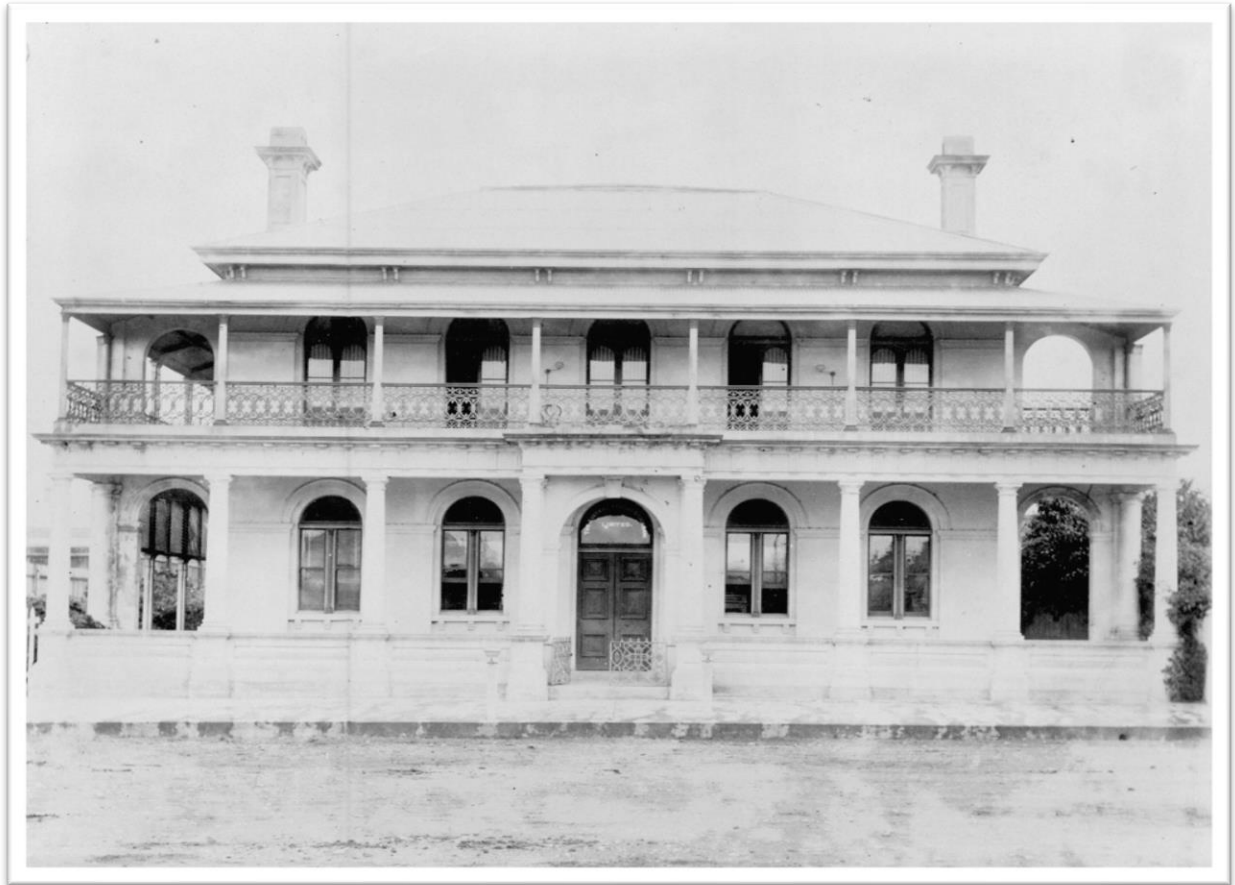


Plate 14.11: The AJS Bank in Victoria Street, Mackay, was constructed in 1880. The top floor was the manager's residence. The building still stands, the most substantial commercial building from 1880s Mackay, although now empty and derelict.

Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 14.12: Georgiana Brandon and seven of her 14 children in 1883.
Source: State Library of Queensland.

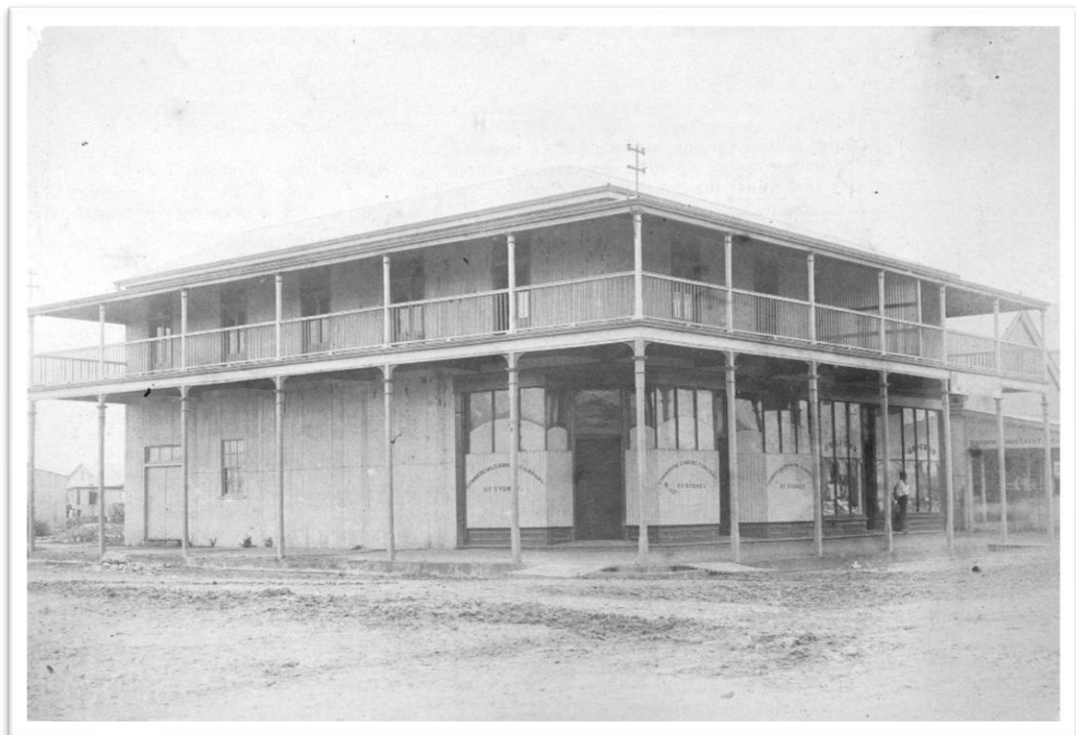


Plate 14.13: The Commercial Bank in Mackay in the 1880s, next in importance to the AJS Bank.
Source: State Library of Queensland.

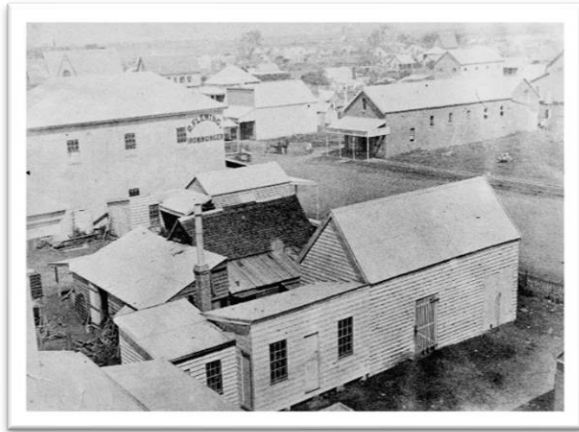


Plate 14.14–15: The view from the AJS Bank manager's residence in Victoria Street, 1883, looking southwest and south-east.

Source: State Library of Queensland.

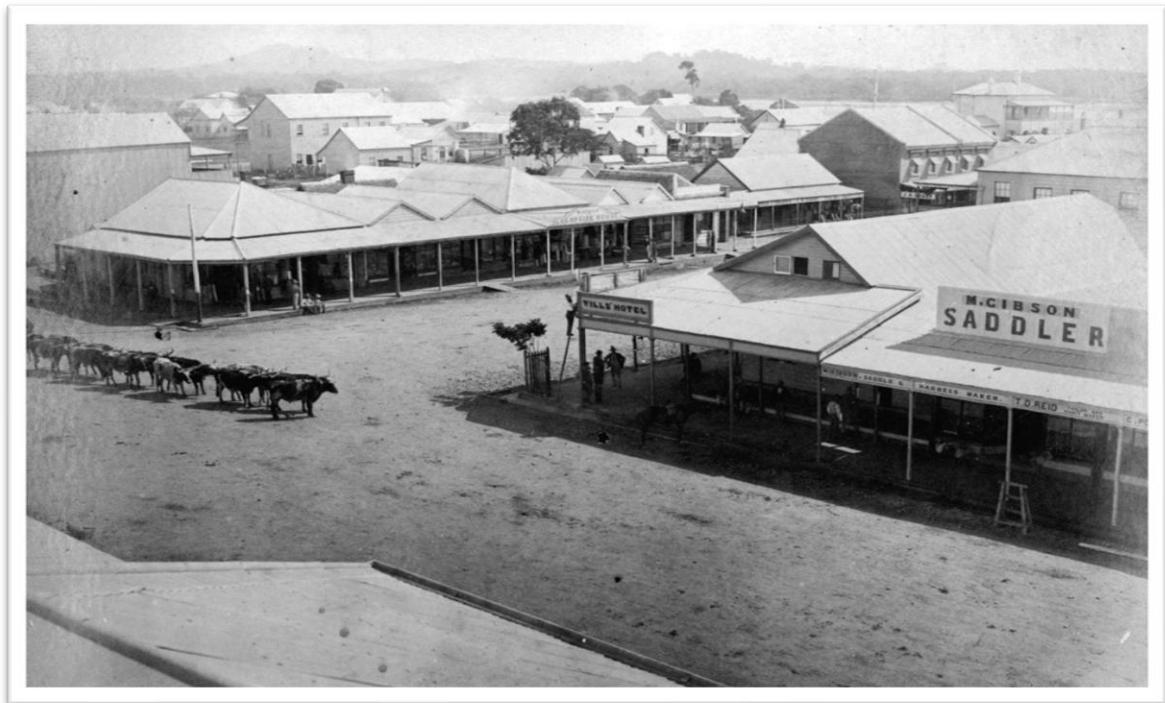


Plate 14.16: The east side of the corner of Victoria and Sydney streets in the early 1880s. The bullock team is crossing Sydney Street. The low building on the left corner is the Robert Burns Hotel, with W. Spear's Cheapside House next door, then J.H. Sharp, draper, and tailor. Wills Hotel is opposite, with M. Gibson's saddler's shop next door.

Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 14.17: J.H. Sharp, draper, and tailor, occupied the low building on the left and the two-story building in the middle of the west side of Sydney Street, 1883.

Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 14.18: The north end of Sydney Street in about 1883. J.H. Sharp's two-story building is to the left. Further along is Hensel & Thomson's store, Moffat's boarding house, George Walker's store, and Tattersalls Hotel at the river end of the street.

Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 14.19: The Prince of Wales Hotel, 1883, on the east side of the corner of North and Sydney streets. It began under this name in 1881. The street showing is River Street, looking down towards the wharves and warehouses along the river. Hossack's store is the building adjoining the hotel.

Source: State Library of Queensland.

Post and Telegraph Office

The first Mackay Post Office opened in Wood Street in the 1860s. The first mail services out of Mackay were to Nebo and Avon Downs. The overland electric telegraph line from the south reached St Lawrence at Broadsound in May 1865, then was extended to Bowen via Fort Cooper (Nebo) and Mackay, where it was operating by mid-1866. Residents no longer had to rely on erratic shipping services for communications, although, at six shillings for each ten words of morse code, telegraph messages were expensive for private individuals.

Nevertheless, the new service speeded up government communications between Brisbane and the new settlements. The first dedicated building was constructed in North Street in 1874, with the Postmaster's residence adjoining (Plate 13.32). The new Post Office was built in 1883–84, a grand building which dominated North Street on the river. Mackay's first telephone exchange was built in 1899, providing a service for richer residents.



Plate 14.20: The first section of the Mackay Post Office (the two-story building) was built in North Street in 1883, just down from the corner with Sydney Street. The first Post Office and manager's residence is visible next door, which became the Customs House and residence.

Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 14.21: The main Post Office was built from masonry in two stages. The building pictured here is the first stage, completed in 1883. It is the left side of the current building (Plate 14.22). The Telegraph Office side and the clock tower were added in 1884. Originally, the lower level was for post and telegraph services, a kitchen, and servants' quarters, while the upper level was the Postmaster's residence. The only other 1880s building of equivalent grandeur was the AJS Bank in Victoria Street, constructed in 1880. Both were designed by the Government Architect Francis D.G. Stanley and were a sign of the growing importance of Mackay.

Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 14.22: The completed Post and Telegraph Office in North Street. The Postmaster's residence is in the upper story. The clock tower, used to regulate time at Mackay, replaced the Council clock.
Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 14.23: John G. Barnes' Cremorne Gardens and the Cremorne Hotel, across the Sydney Street Bridge from the town. Barnes built his cottage there in 1865. The hotel opened in 1884; it began as Cremorne Gardens Hotel, four years before the bridge was completed. Barnes was the licensee from 1886 to 1889, after which the name changed to the Cremorne Hotel, dating this photograph as sometime after that. The hotel was demolished in 1965.
Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 14.24: Wills Hotel on the corner of Sydney and Victoria streets burnt down in 1889. This was the first major fire in the town, which destroyed more than half the buildings on the eastern side of Sydney Street between River and Victoria streets. Here, firemen are dowsing the still smouldering remains. The two-story AJS Bank is shown opposite.

Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 14.25: The new Wills Hotel on the north-east corner of Victoria and Sydney streets, opened in 1892 after the previous building burnt down in a fire in 1889. A substantial building, the iron lace balustrade along the verandah was unusual as it contained Aboriginal figures in the pattern. Swanson Brothers new store is next door.

Source: State Library of Queensland.

LAND! LAND!
GRAND SALE
38 ALLOTMENTS (WITH CHRISTMAS GIFTS ADDED),
ON SATURDAY, DECEMBER 16, 1882.

HENZELL & THOMSON will submit for Public Competition, at Auction, in their City Auction Mart, Sydney Street, Mackay, at Half-past Two o'clock, sharp, **THIRTY-EIGHT VALUABLE ALLOTMENTS** of Land, being Subdivisions of Allotment 3 of Section 60, Town of Mackay. The Allotments are well situated on high and well-drained ground, are in close proximity to the National School, and within a few minutes walk of the Post and Telegraph Offices, the Wharves, and Business centre of the Town.

The Auctioneers would especially call the attention of Mechanics, Working Men, and persons of limited means, to these Allotments, as affording an opportunity which may not soon again occur, to secure a first-class site for a residence, the value of which will increase enormously as soon as the Railway Works commence.

The Terms of Sale will be upon our usual liberal scale, viz. 1-£5 Deposit upon purchase, and thereafter by Instalments of £2 per month. No Interest will be charged, and the Purchaser of an Allotment will have the option of taking one or more Allotments-contiguous (not being corners) at the same price.

In Addition, this being the Festive Season of the Year, the Auctioneers have determined to present to the person purchasing the greatest number of Allotments the sum of £5 sterling; also the highest bidder purchasing an Allotment, not being the purchaser of the greatest number, will be handed back his Deposit of £5, on payment of all his Monthly Instalments.

Lithographs can be had gratis at the Auctioneers' Rooms; and intending Purchasers are invited to inspect the Land. **TITLE UNDER THE REAL PROPERTY ACT.**

HENZELL & THOMSON,
 AUCTIONEERS, &c.
319 SYDNEY STREET, MACKAY.

REMEMBER DAY OF SALE, SATURDAY, 16th DECEMBER, 1882.

LOCAL SKETCH
 PART OF TOWN OF
MACKAY.

HENZELL & THOMSON'S
ALMANAC FOR 1883.

HENZELL & THOMSON,
 Auctioneers,
 Land and Commission Agents, &c., &c.,
 SYDNEY STREET, MACKAY.

ADVANCE MACKAY.

M. Ballie, Lith. Elizabeth St., Brisbane.

Map 14.1: More urban subdivisions occurred during the 1880s, expanding the areas available for housing. This is the 1882 sales poster for the subdivision that ran between Hamlet Street and the edge of the town area (now George Street), bordered by Clarence (now Othello) and Romeo streets. Later, Hamlet Street bordered the railway station reserve, which was accessed from Boddington Street. Sydney Street, one street to the right, is not on the map. Source: State Library of Queensland.

Mackay in the 1890s

Mackay in the 1860s and 1870s was primitive, although by the 1870s some of the private houses were extremely comfortable 'Queenslanders' with shady verandahs. By the 1880s,

substantial business premises and private houses were being built and the town had taken on a respectable air. Most of the surviving photographs are of the central buildings and the homes of the elite, ignoring seedy Chinatown, which was more reminiscent of the higgledy-piggledy make-do buildings of the 1860s and the early 1870s, and the homes of the working class.

Between the 1880s and 1930s, the western end of the town in Victoria Street, and cross streets Macalister, Nelson, and Wellington, became Chinatown. In 1868, there were 13 Chinese living at Mackay; by 1881 there were 58; and by 1884 there were 500, with the addition of Singhalese (Sri Lankans) and Malays in the 1880s, and Japanese in the 1890s. Chinatown had boarding houses, cheap hotels, barbers, billiard rooms, brothels, and what were known as 'Kanakan stores' which specialized in selling cheap goods to the Islanders. Similar racial ghettos existed in most Queensland towns.

By the 1890s and 1900s, some of Mackay's citizens had lived there for 30 to 40 years and even if they began with almost nothing other than an ability to make do and work hard, they were living in comfortable surroundings no different from other parts of the Australian colonies. Some of the concrete facades above today's shops in Sydney and Victoria streets date from the 1890s and 1900s. The buildings were mainly constructed from wood, with galvanized ripple iron roofs. Stone was in short supply, but bricks were made locally, and a few concrete-block buildings graced the central business area. The rich used ice boxes to keep food cold, while poorer residents used Coolgardie safes, cooled with hessian cloth and trickling water. Living room decorations were typical of the crowded Victorian style, and as elsewhere the more fashionable adopted Chinoiserie and a mixture of decorative styles. There were local newspapers and many different associations and societies to join, about 24 hotels, and substantial churches. The smaller towns in the Pioneer Valley were growing fast, although Mackay was an overwhelming central focus.



Plate 14.26: Sydney Street in the late 1890s.
Source: Clive Moore Collection.

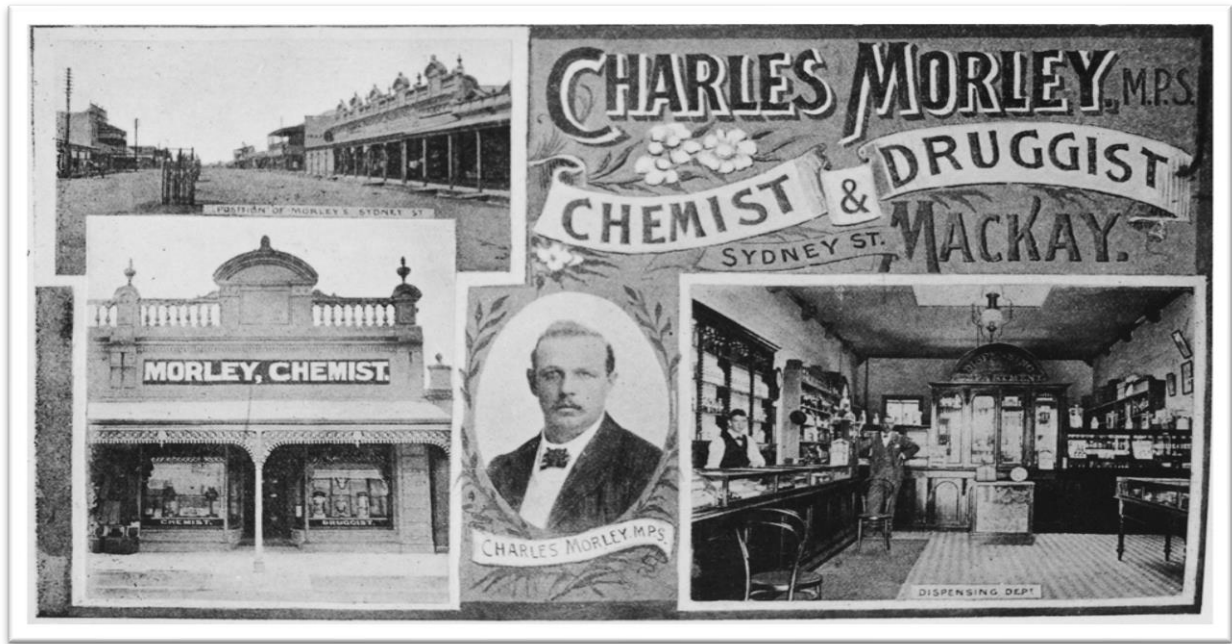


Plate 14.27: Charles Morley's pharmacy in Sydney Street. He was mayor of Mackay in 1900.
Source: Extract from *Pugh's Almanac*, 1899, State Library of Queensland.

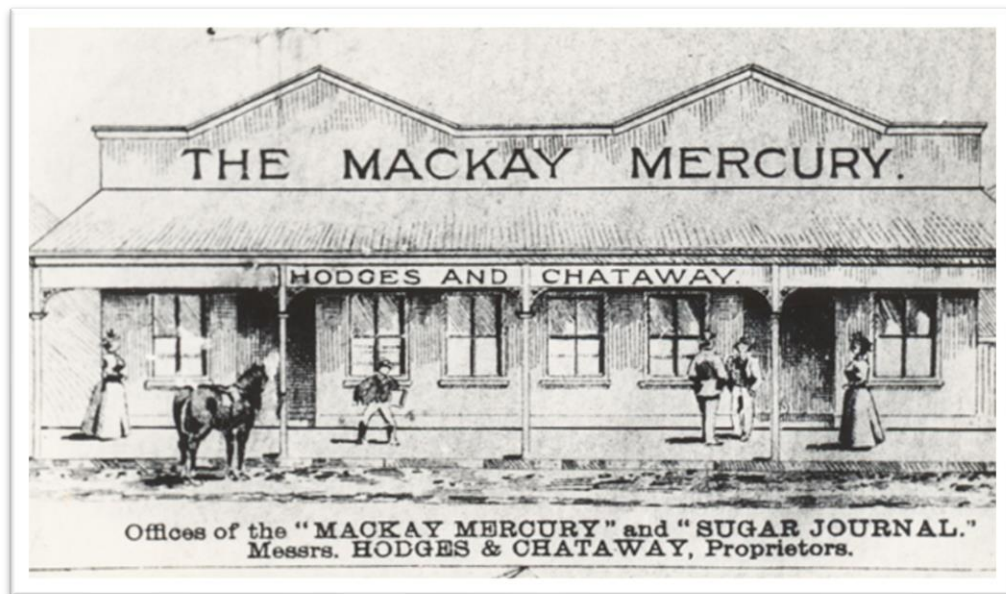


Plate 14.28: The Mackay Mercury office, 1896.
Source: Clive Moore Collection.

Newspapers

The *Mackay Mercury and South Kennedy Advertiser* was begun in March 1866 by William Oswald Hodgkinson, who ran it for 11 months, selling out to his employee Edward Wright, who owned it outright onwards from 1874 and for the next 12 years, selling to W.G. Hodges and J.V. Chataway. In the mid-1880s, Hodgkinson was the man called upon to investigate

possible sites for the first government-financed central mills in the colony.

The main rival newspaper was *The Mackay Standard*, more conservative, pro-planter and anti-Irish, begun in 1877 by Edwin J. Welch and Henry Boyer Black, brother and one-time partner of Maurice Hume Black, Member for Mackay (1881–93). Welch was also a partner in a local photographic business. He sold his share in the newspaper to H.B. Black in 1879. The *Mackay Free Press and Pioneer Advocate*, a bi-weekly, was published briefly in 1880. In 1888, the *Banner*, a weekly paper, was launched as the mouthpiece of the Mackay Advanced Progress Association, edited by W.C. Andrade, supported by locals Patrick Maurice Hayes, Charles Kelly and W. Martin Forster, the latter a well-known pharmacist. The *Banner* lasted only nine months. *The Gilbert Gogger, or Australasian Veritas* was published by James A. Edwards during the mid-1870s, although little is known about it. *The Daily Chronicle* began in February 1895, the first daily paper at Mackay. Its proprietors were A.F. Williams, Hugh George Williams, and Alfred E. Hatfield. The *Chronicle* was published daily for six months as a demy folio, then became a double sheet issued three times a week.

A monthly, the *Sugar Journal and Tropical Cultivator*, was published between 1892 and 1905 by James V. Chataway, and his brother Thomas D. Chataway through the *Mercury*. The *Sugar Journal* had an international distribution. In 1905, the *Chronicle* and the *Mercury* amalgamated, under A.F. Williams and Thomas D. Chataway. A paper version of *The Daily Mercury* continued to be published until it went digital in 2020, then a Friday print version was returned in August 2021. The other nineteenth century Mackay paper was the *Pioneer*, a weekly published by the Labour (now Labor) Party for about five years, by A.E. Hatfield.

Local Businesses

By the 1880s and 1890s, there were numerous commercial enterprises in Mackay and the smaller surrounding towns. All the necessary services were available, occasionally in odd combinations. Perhaps the most bizarre combination of speciality services was Grant's shop in Victoria Street, which was an undertaker and sewing machine depot.



Plate 14.29: M. Barron (later, Barron Brothers) steam aerated waters and cordial factory, Mackay, 1896.

Source: Clive Moore Collection.



Plate 14.30: W.H. Cox, cabinet maker and upholsterer, Sydney Street, 1896.
Source: Clive Moore Collection.

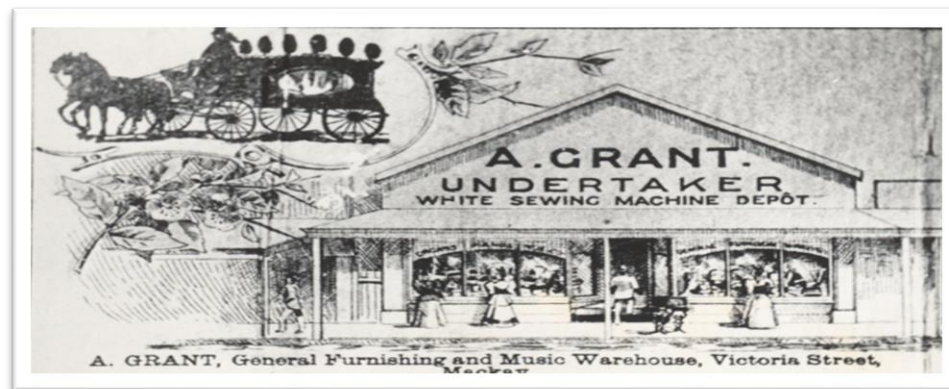


Plate 14.31: A. Grant, undertaker and sewing machine depot, Victoria Street, 1896.
Source: Clive Moore Collection.



Plate 14.32: S. Maslem, family grocer and confectioner, Victoria Street, 1896.
Source: Clive Moore Collection.



Plate 14.33–34: Club Hotel, and Pearce & Co., railway store, Mirani, 1896.

Source: Clive Moore Collection.



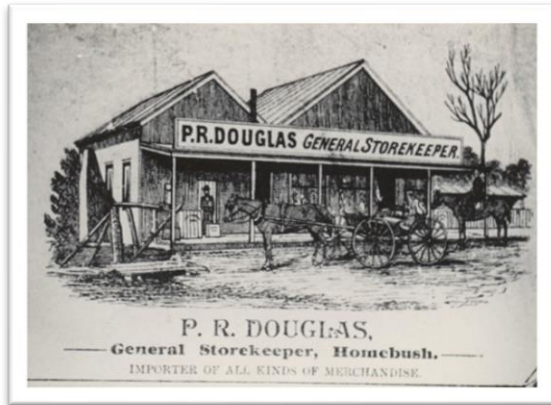
Plate 14.35: H. Mann, wheelwright, general blacksmith, horse shoeing, Marian, 1896.

Source: Clive Moore Collection.



Plate 14.36–37: Eton township; E.A. Pearson, general storekeeper and produce merchant, Eton, 1896.

Source: Clive Moore Collection.



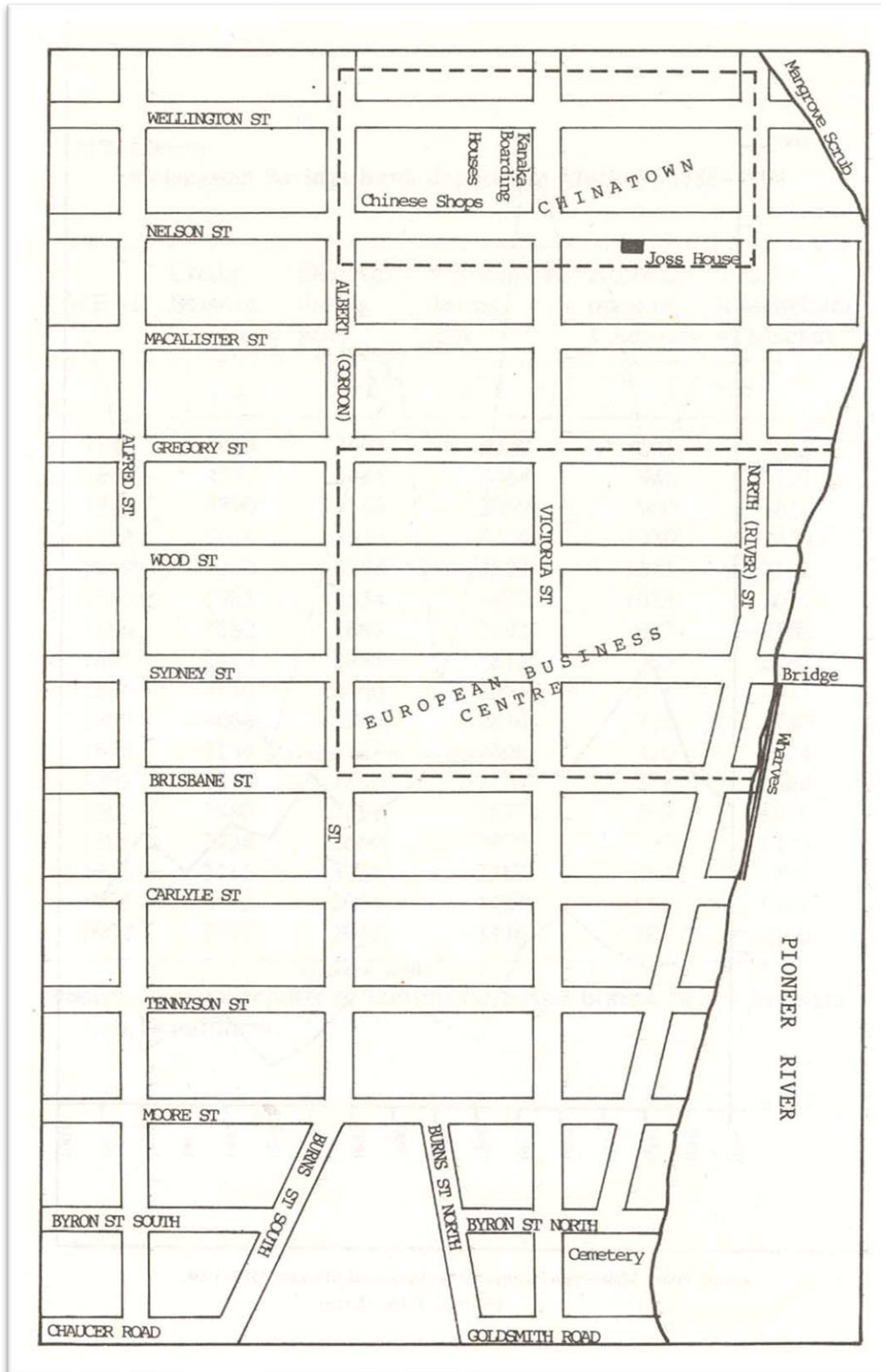
Plates 14.38–39: P.R. Douglas, general storekeeper, Homebush; and R. Kippen, Hill Side store, 1896.
Source: Clive Moore Collection.



Plate 14.40: Duke of Edinburgh Hotel, Walkerston, 1896.
Source: Clive Moore Collection.

Mackay in the 1900s

Only four nineteenth century buildings of distinction and substance have survived: the Australian Joint Stock Company (AJS) Bank, built in 1880; the Post Office completed in 1884; the 1886 Court House (later the Police Station); and the Customs House, completed a little later, in 1902. Compared with Rockhampton and Townsville, Mackay was never a regional centre of government and did not have a substantial range of government buildings.



Map 14.2: A plan of Mackay in the late nineteenth century.

Source: Clive Moore Collection.



Plate 14.41: Victoria Street, Mackay about 1905. The AJS Bank is on the left, along with Marsh & Websters on the corner with Sydney Street. Wills Hotel, also on the corner, is diagonally opposite.
Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 14.42: Sydney Street, Mackay at the entrance to the bridge, 1900s. The Prince of Wales Hotel is on the left and the new Commonwealth Customs House, completed in 1902, is on the right.
Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 14.43: The new Commonwealth Customs House, on the corner of Sydney and North streets, was completed in 1902. An important part of Mackay's city heritage, it was sold in 2004.

Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 14.44: The medical profession began to build grand homes close to the centre of town, which usually also contained their consulting rooms on the bottom floor. This is dentist Vince Perry's residence and surgery on the corner of Sydney and Albert (Gordon) streets, in 1904. It was later the home of Dr Henry Taylor, next to the Civic Theatre, also owned by the Taylor family.

Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 14.45: Dr C.E. Williams' residence on the corner of Albert (Gordon) and Brisbane streets.
Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 14.46: 'Carmilla', the home of John and Matilda Swanson and their six children. It was built *circa* 1902 in Beach Road (now Evans Street), East Mackay. The house has been relocated to Penn Street, East Mackay. The Swansons owned Yabba station near Kilcoy in the 1850s, where John was born in 1854. John and his brother William James came to Mackay in 1883, purchasing Edward Dimmock's saddlery business as well as the business of George Walker. They erected a premises in Sydney Street, next to Wills Hotel. John Swanson was an alderman of the Mackay Municipal Council, and later a member of and chairman of the Mackay Harbour Board. He purchased *The Standard* newspaper in the 1910s.
Source: Mackay Regional Council Libraries.



Plate 14.47: The Swanson and Wright families at Mackay.
Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 14.48: The Hamilton family home in James Street in 1979. The lattice screens around the verandahs are typical of the grand late nineteenth century houses.
Source: Clive Moore Collection.



Plate 14.49: This stately 'Queenslander' was photographed in Mackay in 1979.
Source: Clive Moore Collection.



Plate 14.50: This typical middle-sized Mackay 'Queenslander' with three verandahs was photographed in 1979.
Source: Clive Moore Collection.



Plate 14.51: These houses at Etowrie on the Northside in 1979 are typical of the many small workers' cottages that once existed around Mackay. The exposed studs on the outer wall were quite usual, and the style was repeated on the verandah inner walls.

Source: Clive Moore Collection.



Plate 14.52: This small Walkerston house on the corner of Creek and Dane streets was once the Live and Let Live Inn, built around 1876. It became the home of the Dowling brothers (my great uncles). The house, the oldest in Walkerston, and possibly in the Pioneer Valley, was demolished in 2001. This photograph was taken in 1979.

Source: Clive Moore Collection.

Public Institutions

The Hospital

The Mackay District Hospital opened in 1872 and was rebuilt in 1889. As noted in Chapter 9, in the 1880s, a separate Kanaka Hospital was built in the grounds. After this closed in the early 1890s, the wards were racially segregated, a practice that continued well into the twentieth century.

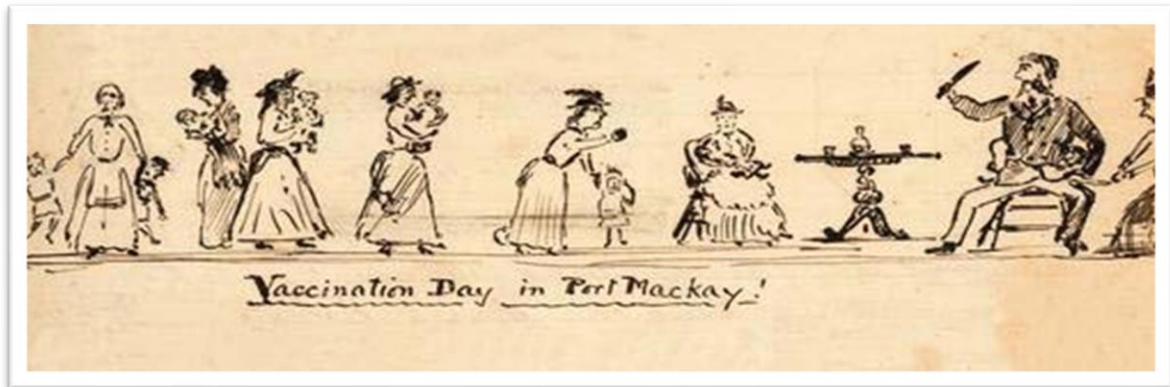


Plate 14.53: Smallpox vaccinations were the first bulk immunization. Here, the women of Mackay are bringing their children to receive their smallpox vaccinations in 1875. The process involved cutting the skin and using a vaccination made from cow pox, hence the knife-wielding doctor, presumably Dr Robert McBurney.

Source: Rawson Family Archive, State Library of Queensland.

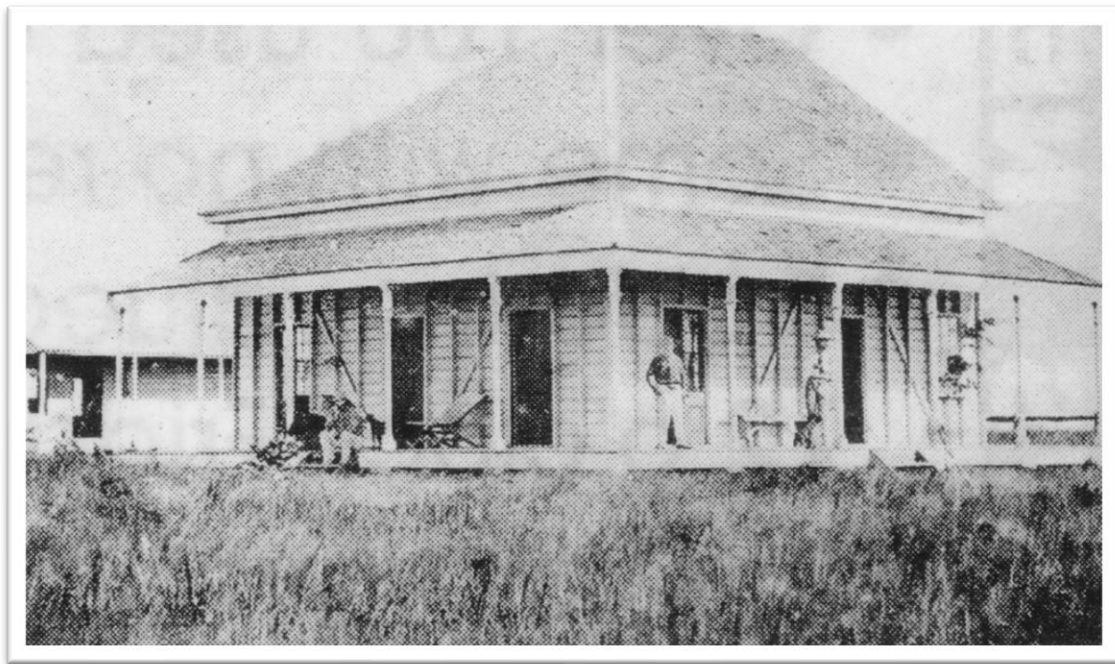


Plate 14.54: Mackay District Hospital, a simple building, opened in 1872.

Source: Mackay Family History Society.



Plate 14.55: The 1872 District Hospital was rebuilt in 1889. Note the lone Black man in the centre of the photograph. This may be a Fijian, Antonius Tui Tonga, later the founder of the Pacific Islanders' Association in 1901 (see Chapter 11), who, in 1889, worked as a wardsman and pharmacy dispenser at the hospital.

Source: State Library of Queensland.

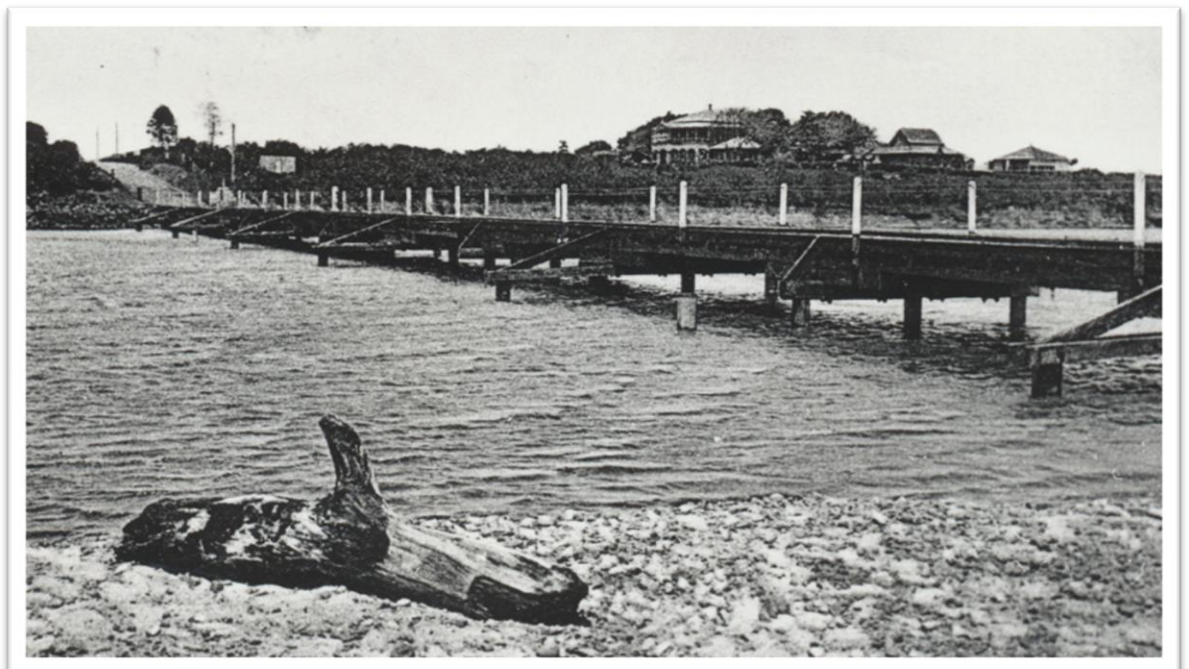


Plate 14.56: Mackay Hospital next to the second Pioneer (Hospital) Bridge built in 1902. The original 1872 hospital building is behind the two-level 1889 building.

Source: Clive Moore Collection.

The Queensland Ambulance Transport Brigade

Mackay's ambulance service began in 1903, based at the fire station. In 1909, the Brigade moved to the newly constructed building on the corner of Sydney and Alfred streets. The building was replaced in 1959, which remained the Ambulance Headquarters until 2006.



Plate 14.57: The first Queensland Ambulance Transport Brigade building, built in 1909 on the corner of Sydney and Alfred streets. It was replaced in 1959.

Source: Clive Moore Collection.

The School of Arts

The School of Arts Movement, also known as the Mechanics' Institute Movement, had its origins in Glasgow, Scotland, and spread through the English-speaking world during the second half of the nineteenth century. The aim was to foster an educated and scientifically literate artisan class that could then take part in improving industry and society. The movement held public lectures, and provided reading rooms, and libraries. In Mackay, a reading room opened in 1874 in the Municipal Council Chambers, with a separate building constructed in 1879. William G. Hodges, a Dublin Trinity College graduate, was the first president, and Gilbert Pearce was the first secretary. From 1912, the School of Arts occupied premises on the corner of Gordon and Gregory streets. The Mackay School of Arts held public lectures, ran debating clubs, supplied a meeting place for societies, maintained an extensive reading room and eventually became the lending library for the city. Its functions were eventually absorbed into the Council Library system.



Plate 14.58: The new School of Arts reading room and meeting place in Wood Street was completed in 1879. This photograph is from *circa* 1882.

Source: State Library of Queensland.

Clubs and Associations, Formal and Informal

Often historians are left wondering how various individuals first knew each other. Chapter 5 suggested that some of the leading planters knew each other from their days at Oxford University or came from the same areas of England. Once at Mackay, there were many local networks. Sports clubs were dominant: the Mackay Turf Club, as well as rifle, sailing, cricket, and other clubs. There were also Benevolent, Friendly, or Oddfellows societies (mutual associations for the purposes of insurance, pharmacies, pensions, savings or co-operative banking), church groups and councils, the Independent Order of Good Templars, and the Freemasons Lodge. Town businessmen joined the Chamber of Commerce, founded in 1887. Christian denominations were strong forces that brought individuals together, as were political parties and co-operative movements in the sugar industry and the town.

It is easier to trace the links for the men than for the women. Although the men mentioned constantly in this book interlink over decades, often women's groupings are not clear as there is little evidence of them in the sources of the time. However, as biographical details in this chapter show, one of women's major 'occupations' was pregnancy and bringing up infants. If we average out the birth rates of the women mentioned in this and other chapters, 10 to 14 births per woman were quite usual, spread over 15 to 20 years, accompanied by two or three deaths among their children during their infant years. Some women also died in childbirth. Most women married in their twenties, often to men 10 to 15 years their senior. On average, they were involved in raising children for at least 20 to 25

years of their lives, and, even if they had servants, they were involved in domestic activities to look after their menfolk and children. As outlined in Chapter 5, there were few household devices to speed up domestic work: washing was done by hand, helped by a mangle to squeeze clothes, sheets, and towels dry. Ironing used a fire-heated iron, cows were milked, butter was churned, and kitchen fires used wood. Clothes were mended, sewing was mainly by hand (only the rich could afford the primitive sewing machines available, or the work of a seamstress or milliner), and there was knitting, crocheting, or other decorative work to be done on clothes. It all took time. Women's names seldom crop up in business situations, unless they were publicans, although there is an invisible group who ran business ventures or farms because their husbands were away working elsewhere, or were incapacitated, incompetent, alcoholics, or had died. A few women show up as landowners.

Volunteer Militias

There were military scares in colonial Australia. Russia had territorial interests in the Pacific and early Australian fortifications—for instance in Sydney Harbour, Newcastle, Brisbane, and Thursday Island—were built to repel Russian naval ships. Between the 1860s and the 1890s, British colonists in Australia felt the threat was real. There was also fear about the French, who, onwards from the 1850s and 1860s began a near-by colony, New Caledonia, and fear of the Germans, once unification occurred in 1871. Germany had territorial interests in Samoa and north-east New Guinea, which began in the 1870s. These progressed from merchant investors to a company-colony in New Guinea, and finally government-run colonies in both places. Queensland colonists were uncomfortable with these developments, and men often joined voluntary military groups.

After Britain withdrew their garrison of troops from Australia in 1870, the colonies established their own defence forces. 'N' Company, a Volunteer Cavalry Corps was formed in Mackay in 1881, under commanding officer Captain Henry Brandon, followed by Captain von Freudenthal when Brandon left the district in 1884. Queensland's defence was haphazard until the *Volunteer Act* and the *Defence Act* of 1884. These Acts created a volunteer defence force, and a militia. In 1885, the Queensland Defence Force was established, with a Mackay company, formalized as 'F' Company in 1886, within the Kennedy Regiment. Town Clerk W.G. Hodges was the commanding officer. Kennedy was one of three regiments, supported by three volunteer units: the Queensland Volunteer Rifles, the Queensland Scottish Volunteers, and the Queensland Irish Volunteers. Rifle shooting became an organised activity, with a Mackay Rifle Club formed in 1884, feeding members into the volunteer forces.

Ex-pastoralist and ex-planter Albert Throckmorton Ball became the next captain. The Mackay Cavalry Corps was added to the general Queensland military establishment in July 1886. Captain Henry William Antill followed Ball as the next commanding officer, with James V. Chataway as lieutenant, who succeeded Antill in 1887. In 1891, Chataway was followed as commander by town jeweller and clock- and watch-maker Frederick Riechelmann. In that year, 100 members of the Mackay Mounted Infantry saw 'action' in Barcardine during the Pastoral Strike. Until 1897, the company was known as the Mackay Mounted Infantry, then it became 'M' Company, Queensland Mounted Infantry, until 1901. Under the Commonwealth Government, it became 'B' Company, 4th Battalion. All Mounted Infantry Regiments then became known as Light Horse, and the companies were known as Squadrons.

The Mackay Mounted Infantry held regular foot parades every Thursday evening, and occasionally mounted parades on Saturday afternoons. They wore khaki riding breeches and tunics with claret-coloured facings and were equipped with Martini-Henry rifles.

In the 1880s there was also a local infantry company, and the Mackay Naval Brigade, raised by Captain Hugh Adrian, who was a master of Pacific labour trade vessels. The Naval

Brigade had no uniforms or weapons and served more as a sailing club for the sons of early colonists. When Adrian was away on voyages, James Thornber ran the brigade. Its main claim to fame was possession of two cannons, both small and both said to have come off labour trade vessels, which may not be true as their use on labour ships would have been illegal. The larger of them, manufactured in 1850, became Mackay's main ceremonial weapon, fired at Federation in 1901 and as recently as 1988 for the bicentennial celebrations.



Plate 14.59: 'N' Company of the Queensland Volunteer Infantry Brigade, presented to Captain Henry Brandon when he left Mackay in 1884.

Source: State Library of Queensland.

Mackay Turf Club

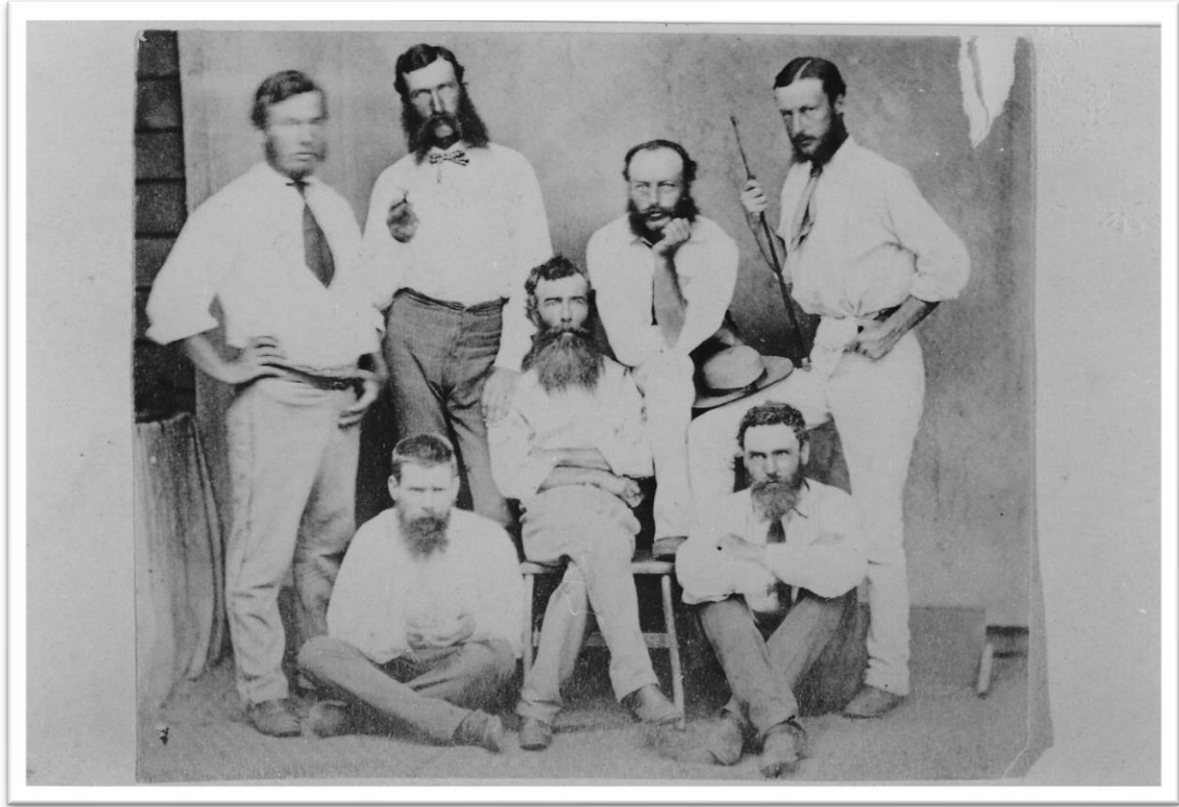


Plate 14.60: The original members of the Mackay Turf Club, formed in 1867. Standing (left to right): Robert (Bob) Martin, Robert McBurney, Charles Rawson, and Edmund (Ned) Rawson. Sitting (left to right): Alexander (Sandy) Shiels, Dan Conner, and John Binney.

Source: Mackay Family History Society Inc.

The Turf Club was established on a Crown land reserve set aside in the 1860s at Ooralea on the road from Mackay to Walkerston. In the 1880s, the area was named Planelands after the railway siding opposite the racetrack. Those associated with the club were some of the most prominent citizens of the district, drawn from pastoralists, planters, and town professionals. The first trustees for the land were A.H. Lloyd, Thomas H. Fitzgerald, Dan Conner, Arthur Kemmis, and John Allen. Charles S. Rawson was the first president, followed by Maurice H. Black, and David H. Dalrymple. The club first met in 1872. In 1873, the reserve was fenced, and a grandstand erected, using money loaned by the AJS Bank on the surety of Charles Rawson, Dan Conner, William G. Macartney, Robert McBurney, Maurice H. Black, and Frank H. Smith. Both C.C. Rawson and his brother E.S. Rawson served as vice-president, as did Henry B. Black (brother of M.H. Black) and J.H. McLean. Alexander (Sandy) Shiels was the first secretary, succeeded by H.F. Morgan, Charles R. Dutailis, and Henry L. Black. Dr Robert McBurney acted as judge for around 20 years. Henry Bell was the first clerk of the course, resplendent in the regulation scarlet coat, top boots, and black plug hat. John Binney followed in this role. The treasurer, timekeepers and clerks of the scales included W.N. Deller, Frank Myddleton, Fred Riechelmann, T.K.

Horse and Fred Clarke. Prizes could be as high as £200 and £300, and the Christmas festive season meeting were the largest, although there were races every weekend.

As mentioned in Chapter 6, a riot at the racecourse in 1883 between drunken Islanders and Europeans led to deaths and injuries amongst the Islanders.

Mackay Show

The first Mackay Agricultural, Pastoral and Mining Association show was conducted in 1870 on the site of the racecourse reserve. In the 1880s, the Lands Department granted the Show Society a block of land on the corner of Bridge Road and Paradise Street. The organisation changed its name to the Pioneer River Farmers' and Graziers' Association. In 1898, Cyclone Eline destroyed the facilities, and the association applied successfully to the Mackay Municipal Council for the use of Alexandra Park, Nebo Road. At this time, Alfred Street extended to Nebo Road, bounding the park. The annual town show attracted exhibits of animals, produce, and domestic activities, joined with fun activities, plus eating snack foods, and drinking alcohol.

Freemasonry

Freemasonry began in Queensland in 1859 when the Provisional Grand Lodge of New South Wales granted dispensation to form the North Australian Lodge in the new colony. The Mackay Lodge, part of the Kennedy Chapter, first met in the Odd Fellows' Hall in Wood Street on 24 June 1875. The Lodge moved to its own two-storey premises in 1880. This building was destroyed in the 1918 cyclone, replaced in 1924 with the current Temple. Many of the leading men of Mackay were members. In the 1890s, William Hodges, Town Clerk, co-owner of the *Mackay Mercury*, and married to a daughter of the original owners of Richmond plantation, was a prominent member. So was James Chataway, the other owner of the *Mercury*, and Mackay's representative in the Legislative Assembly (1893–1901). Other leading Brothers were: Frank Smith, commission agent; James Thornberry, storekeeper; Fred Riechelmann, jeweller and town councillor; William Marsh of Marsh & Websters store; F. Stanley Williams, accountant and general-manager of Williams Agencies; and Frank O'Reilly, a town merchant who also ran a 'Kanaka store', selling items to the Islanders.



Plate 14.61: Mackay's Masonic Temple in around 1880.

Source: State Library of Queensland.

Celebrations

Along with the growth of the town, came formal occasions and celebrations in which everyone could share. There were annual ceremonies, such as the marking of Queen Victoria's birthday, and New Year. Occasional ceremonies were arranged for visits from Premiers, Governors, and finally the Governor-General. There were 'folk celebrations' such as balls and dances, theatre performances and visits from circuses, and St Andrew's and St Patrick's Days. Sports matches also gathered crowds. Christian congregations marked Easter and Christmas, baptisms, marriages and funerals, and other special days, as well as meeting together each week, and for some, daily. One of Wini Rawson's 1870s sketches of a Mackay Ball (Plate 14.62) reminds me of similar functions that I attended in the 1960s, where men socialised separately from women, except on the dance floor, and drinking to excess by males was part of the occasion. Election day for the local parliamentary representatives always drew crowds out into the streets in the centre of town. The whole community was welcome at racecourse meetings and at the agricultural shows, but alcohol was always the key social lubricant. Important days—such as the opening of bridges, the beginning of rail services, the arrival of the electric telegraph, or Commonwealth Day in 1901—were marked by special celebrations.

The Islanders, Asians, and First Nations peoples were there as well, but shadowy on the perimeters, really groups apart. The Islanders made their presence felt commercially as they came into town to shop at the 'Kanaka stores' and partook of alcohol sold to them illegally by storekeepers and hotel proprietors.

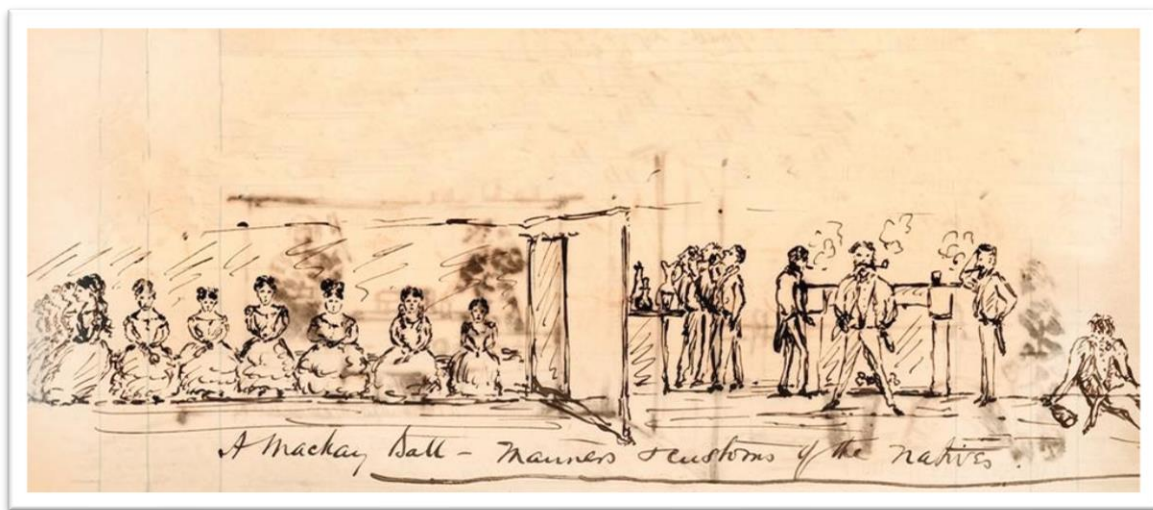


Plate 14.62: 'manners and customs of the natives': a ball at Mackay, 1870s, as observed by Wini Rawson from The Hollow pastoral station.

Source: Rawson Family Archive, State Library of Queensland.

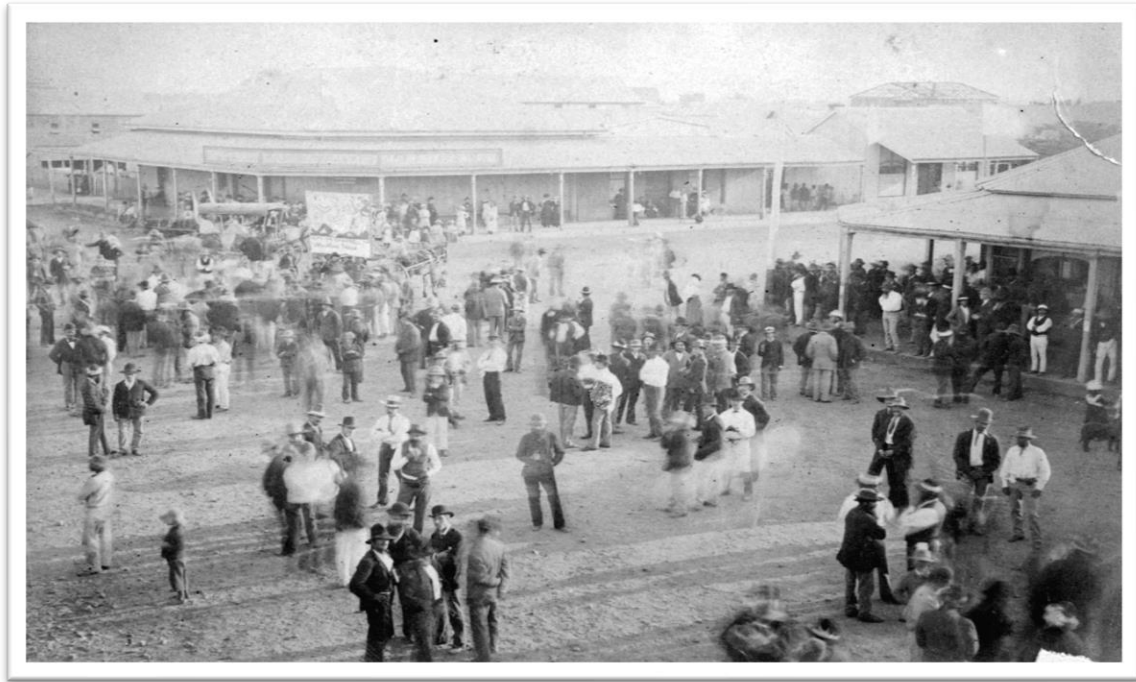


Plate 14.63: Election Day, 1883, when Maurice Hume Black was re-elected to the Mackay seat in Parliament. The crowd is in the intersection of Sydney and Victoria streets, outside Marsh & Websters store and Robert Burns Hotel. The photograph was taken from Wills Hotel on the opposite corner. Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 14.64: Election Day, 1883. The crowd is outside and on the upstairs verandah of the AJS Bank in Victoria Street. Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 14.65: Mackay decorated for the visit of Governor Musgrave in 1883. The two-storey building on the left is the AJS Bank in Victoria Street. The arch is on the corner of Victoria and Sydney streets.
Source: State Library of Queensland.

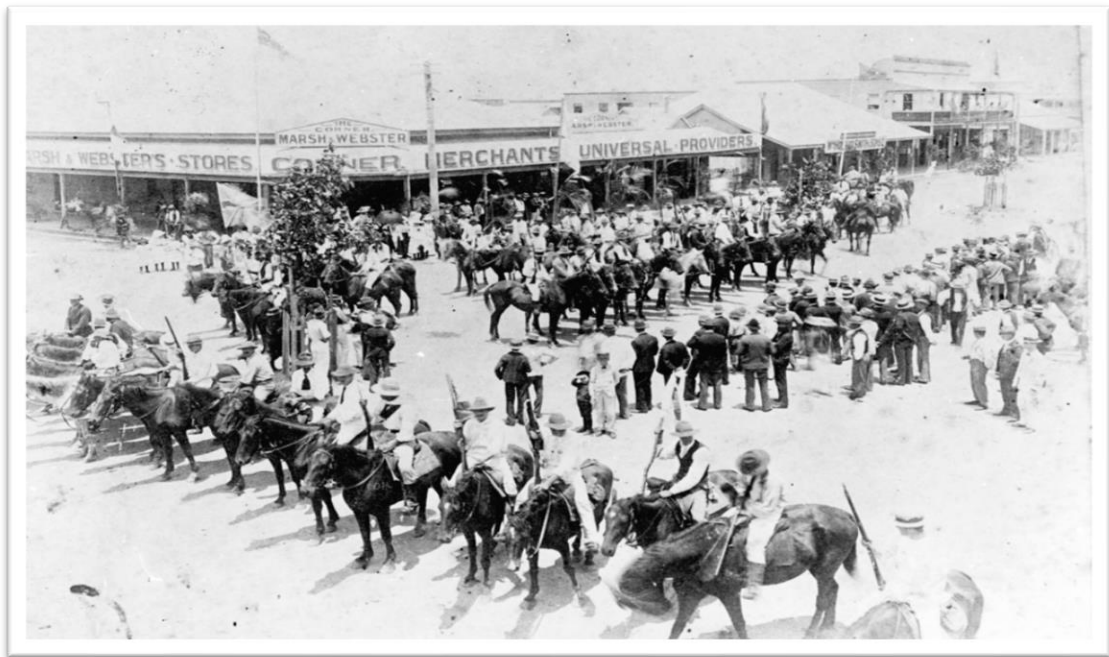


Plate 14.66: Commonwealth Day celebrations in Mackay, 1 January 1901, on the corner of Sydney and Victoria streets, with Marsh & Websters' store in the background. The horsemen are members of the Volunteer Infantry Brigade.
Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 14.67: Commonwealth Day celebrations at Mackay, 1 January 1901, on the corner of Sydney and Victoria streets.

Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 14.68: Commonwealth Day celebrations in Queen Victoria's Park, Mackay, 1 January 1901.

Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 14.69: Commonwealth Day celebrations in Queen's Park, Mackay, 1 January 1901. A Naval Reserve cannon is in the front of the photograph, and on the right the troops are firing a celebratory volley.

Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 14.70: The first aerial photograph of Mackay, taken from a box kite in 1915 by Andrew Brough Milne. The river is showing its sandbanks and rock groins. The two major roads are Victoria (left) and Albert (later Gordon, right)) and the cross streets (beginning from the bottom of the photograph are: Wellington, Nelson, Macalister, and Gregory. St Paul's Presbyterian (now Uniting) Church in Macalister Street is in the centre of the photograph.

Source: Clive Moore Collection.

Conclusion: The River

The Pioneer River dominates the text and provides the title for this book. The Introduction included Marion Healy's photographic essay on the river of today. Usually, it is no more than a shallow stream, tidal for several kilometres, littered with sand banks, and unsuitable for large vessels. Given the river's paucity as a harbour, it is a wonder that the town ever developed, and until the artificial harbour was built in the 1930s, the lack of a safe port was a major drawback. However, the Pioneer Valley was too fertile to ignore. Its size and sub-tropical location, and the alluvial soil plains, created the perfect environment for sugarcane.

It is fitting to end with the river, showing its potential over the last 160 years. Its tributaries feed the river well, even in the driest times. On an average of every 20 to 30 years, destructive cyclones and rain depressions, often striking during the 'king tides' that occur in January and February, have regularly broken through the banks of the river and flooded the town. The 1860s and 1870s were wet decades when the river often flooded, and cyclones were numerous. The town was severely affected by a cyclone in 1898 which straightened the mouth of the river and was changed irrevocably in 1918 when a large cyclone destroyed most of the buildings. The 'Queenslander' style—houses perched on high stumps, with open verandahs, with galvanised ripple iron roofs—remained the same. However, 1920s and 1930s renewal of the town centre used concrete and brick to create an Art Deco streetscape, only equalled in Australasia by Napier in Hawke's Bay, New Zealand, similarly rebuilt after being destroyed by a 1931 earthquake.

Residents of the district who have watched the river in flood, throwing broken railway lines about on submerged bridges, know better than to scoff at the puny stream when it is calm. Having watched my father row his boat down Juliet Street in the 1958 flood has left an indelible impression on me. While various dams, weirs, and levee banks added in the late twentieth century have helped to control the river, nature is always stronger than anything humans can do to impede the flow of water. By the time cyclonic downpours hit the high mountain wall in the west and dissipate on Eungella Plateau, the Pioneer's tributaries feed the river and inexorably the water makes its way to the coast. The Yuwibara—the First Nations people of the valley—always knew its strength, and now, for 160 years, newcomers have learnt to live with the phenomenon.



Plate 14.71: In this undated photograph the Pioneer (Hospital) Bridge over the Pioneer River has disappeared under floodwaters.

Source: State Library of Queensland.

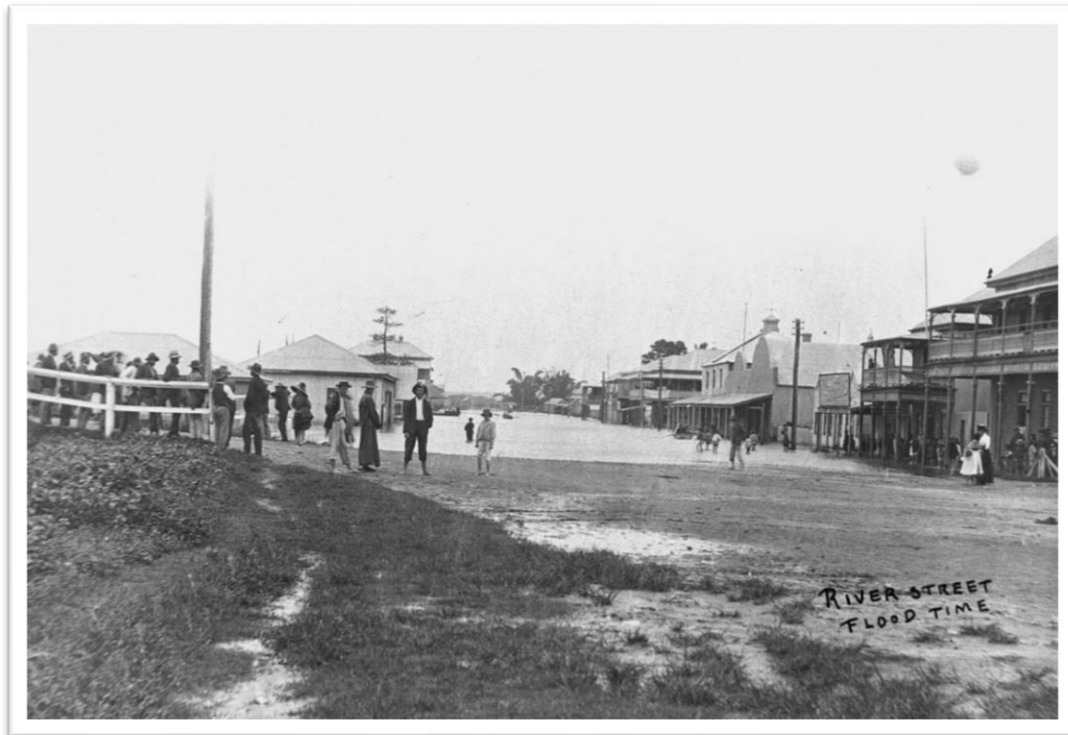


Plate 14.72: The Pioneer River flooding River Street at the corner with Sydney Street.
Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 14.73: Flood waters envelop Armstrong Terraces in Carlyle Street, built in 1882. Paxton's building, built in 1899, is on the left, and on the right ships' masts can be seen at the Adelaide Steamship Co. wharf, erected in 1900. The photograph may have been taken during the flood following the 1918 cyclone.
Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 14.74: A crowd gathers to witness the flood waters at Barnes Creek Bridge in North Mackay, during the February 1958 flood. It was the highest flood ever recorded in the Pioneer River, washing away the settlement at Foulden opposite the Mackay Hospital.

Source: State Library of Queensland.

Bibliography

The bibliographies for all chapters are in a separate file.