A Short History of Thuringowa

Peter Bell

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THE CITY of
THURINGOWA

1901-2001

Centenary of Federation
Queensland

Cover photograph: Ted Gleeson crossing the Bohle.   Gleeson Collection, Thuringowa

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Forward

To celebrate our nations Centenary, and the various Thuringowan communities' contribution to our sense of nation, this book was commissioned.

Two previous council publications, Thuringowa Past and Present and It Was a Different Town have been modest, yet tantalising introductions to facets of our past.

This history adds to this body of work. It's author, Peter Bell has strong links to our city and an extensive literary pedigree. With research assistance from our historian Gai Copeman and previous research by Lyn Henderson, he has produced an easily read book. It provides an overview of our region beginning well before the memory of mankind and touches on all the important milestones in our history to date. As a factual account it will be a valuable resource for students of history as well as the inquisitive reader and points to a range of source material for further study.

In marking this important publication, I would like to acknowledge the vast numbers of people from all walks of life and disparate origins whose perseverance; innovation and sense of adventure have together been responsible for our current good fortune.

Although progress and development will always remain in the eye of the beholder, equally they cannot be held back. Despite the new knowledge that we have, with our vastly improved communications and technical resources, it is important to maintain a sense of humility that awareness of our history can bring.

We can be proud of our past while recognising the previous inhumane treatment of Aboriginals and the horrors of war. An acknowledgment of history is a prerequisite to meaningful and peaceful progress.

This is an important contribution to Queensland's and Australia's record, while not purporting to be the definitive history. That was beyond the scope of this project and remains a challenge for the future.

With continuing growth and a commitment to a sustainable egalitarian society we can, together, look forward to the next 100 years.

I commend the book to you.

Les Tyrell
Mayor of Thuringowa City

Setting the Scene

The City of Thuringowa is one of the "Twin Cities" which, with the City of Townsville, make up the largest urban settlement in the northern half of the Australian continent. It has only had the name Thuringowa since 1879; before that it had many names, most of which we do not know. We also do not know when the first people came to live here, but it was thousands of years ago, probably long before anyone lived in the places that are now called London and New York. However, because Europeans like to keep records of their activities, we know exactly when the first person from Europe arrived, rowing a little boat ashore on Cape Cleveland on a mild winter day in 1819. About 1862 he was followed by many more people arriving from Europe, and they have been busy shaping the history of Thuringowa ever since.

The Thuringowa landscape, like most of eastern Australia, consists of a coastal plain rising to inland mountains. A hundred kilometres offshore in the Coral Sea, parallel to the coast, is the Great Barrier Reef. The coast here runs generally from south-east to north-west, but in detail swings in and out around a series of steep rocky headlands interspersed by shallow open bays: Upstart Bay, Bowling Green Bay, Cleveland Bay, Halifax Bay and Rockingham Bay. The headlands and a number of isolated peaks on the coastal plain rise to as much as 1000m altitude. The mountains to the south-west form a lower wall about 600m high, running roughly parallel to the coast.

The plains between these ranges and peaks are dissected by a number of river systems. The largest, the Burdekin, drains an enormous area of central and northern Queensland, including all the country over the range west of Thuringowa. It flows north through the coastal range and out to sea in Upstart Bay, pushing the coastal plain out in a great fertile delta. To its west is the Haughton River, which also cuts a gap through the range and flows north into Bowling Green Bay. A succession of smaller streams flow across the plain; Alligator Creek and Ross River into Cleveland Bay, then the Bohle River - an old mouth of the Ross - Alice River, Black River, Bluewater River, Rollingstone Creek and Crystal Creek, which all flow into Halifax Bay.

Located between 19° and 20°S latitude, Thuringowa is on the southern edge of the tropical monsoonal zone, but for most of the year its climate is modified by its coastal location and the prevailing south-east winds. Daily temperatures near the coast are typically 15-24°C in winter and 24-30°C in summer, but these temperatures quickly become both hotter in summer and colder in winter as one travels inland. With low mountain ranges producing little orographic rain, the region is relatively dry compared with other parts of the Queensland coast, averaging about 1000mm rainfall per annum. The greater part of this rain is monsoonal, falling within the wet season, which usually happens between about January and April. The rest of the year is typically mild and sunny with low humidity, and rain falling on average less than one day in five. Extreme weather is usually associated with the high winds and rain brought by tropical cyclones in the summer months, and these have been very destructive on several occasions since the first recorded in 1867. Cyclones or rain depressions can also bring very heavy local rainfall, the heaviest recorded fall bringing 660mm in 21 hours at the Upper Ross in 1946. (Hopley 1978, p. 8)

The Thuringowa Division of 1879 took in a very large, roughly triangular area, stretching 170km along the coast from the mouth of the Burdekin to Crystal Creek, and inland to the ranges. In the east its boundary followed the Burdekin River, taking in modern Ayr, up to beyond Millaroo, then west to the Leichhardt Range. It followed the ranges north-west, running along the skyline past Mingela, along the Hervey Range and the Paluma Range past the town of Paluma, then down Crystal Creek past Mutarnee and back to the coast. Within that sprawling district, the tiny coastal municipality of Townsville was a separate local government area. In the 122 years since, Thuringowa has been much reduced in area, losing land to the Dalrymple Shire, the Burdekin Shire, and especially to the growing City of Townsville. The City of Thuringowa today is roughly the western third of the division's original area.

This account tells the story of Thuringowa, treating it as the land it once occupied. Many places mentioned here are no longer within the City of Thuringowa today, but were within the boundaries of the Thuringowa Division (later Shire) when it was created.

Making the Land

owever much Thuringowa may have altered in the past 120 years, these changes are nothing compared to what happened in the distant past, when the mountains, the climate and even the sea were all changing, creating the land we see today. The first things we know about events in Thuringowa start a few hundred million years ago, although there are rocks much older than that further west in other parts of North Queensland, which suggest that this region may once have formed part of a great ancient mountain range along the shore of what was then the Gondwana supercontinent, later reduced to hills by immensely long periods of faulting and erosion. We can now see very few signs of this ancient era in the Thuringowa landscape today.

The coastline we know today began to be recognisable about 360 million years ago, when great upwellings of molten granite and related igneous rock during the late Palaeozoic era pushed up a new generation of mountains, now the ranges of the eastern coast. These too were once mighty mountains - perhaps comparable to the Himalayas or the Andes today - forming parallel chains running roughly north-west to south-east. The next few hundred million years saw many climate changes, and long periods in which there was spectacular rainfall and very rapid erosion, events too big and too long ago for us even to imagine satisfactorily.

However, we can see the results of these events on the modern map, for the eroded stumps of the ancient parallel granite ranges are still visible. Running up the coast, Cape Upstart, Cape Cleveland, Magnetic Island, the Palm Islands and Hinchinbrook Island were parts of the furthest range east, once forming a continuous coastline. Inland from that coast, Mount Elliot and Mount Stuart are vestiges of the next range. The third range is still more or less intact, although faulted and eroded down to a fraction of its original size: the escarpment that runs up the Leichhardt Range, Hervey Range, Paluma Range and Seaview Range, forming Thuringowa's western wall. The evidence of erosion is found between all these surviving peaks, in the deep alluvial deposits of the seabed, the river valleys and the coastal plain, which represent some of the material removed from the ancient ranges by millions of years of erosion. Most of these old eroded granite soils are not very

fertile. Apart from a few patches of older sedimentary rocks, all the land surface visible in Thuringowa today is either the stumps of the mighty Palaeozoic granite ranges, or their eroded debris on the plains.

When these events began, there were no plants on earth; they had not yet evolved. Later, when the plants arrived as the mountains were eroding, they too transformed the land in amazing cycles of growth and decline. The first trees in the region were the primitive Araucaria, which covered the whole of the north in a mighty forest of Hoop pines so long ago that there was not yet a single eucalypt in existence. Then in a later hot wet period, modern rainforest covered most of North Queensland. These cycles too have left their traces on the land: Cape Cleveland and Magnetic Island have preserved patches of the Hoop pine forest, and Mount Elliot and the Paluma Range are among the surviving parts of the great rainforest.

Although the huge granite mountains and the Hoop pine forest were gone long before there were human beings on earth, people have lived in Thuringowa long enough to see some spectacular natural changes. Another highly variable element of the environment has been sea level, and on several occasions between 18,000 and 100,000 years ago, the level of the Pacific Ocean has been much lower than it is today, sometimes as much as 100 metres lower. At these times, the entire continental shelf must have been dry land, and it was possible to walk to the outer reef, whose edge formed the shoreline. To a person standing on that ancient coast, Myrmidon Reef, now 125 kilometres out to sea, was an island just offshore, and the granite ranges were out of sight inland across the coastal plain. It takes an effort of the imagination to realise that, for some of the time Aboriginal people lived in Thuringowa, their land included what is now the Great Barrier Reef.

As the sea level rose and fell, and eroded sediments flowed out to sea in every wet season, the tides and currents moved the alluvial material in different ways, changing the coastline. Many features of the modern coast have only been there a relatively short time, and were certainly shaped since people have occupied it. The mouths of the Burdekin, Haughton and Ross rivers have shifted sideways across the plain, probably on many occasions. When the rising sea arrived at near its present

level, about 15,000 years ago, Cape Upstart and Cape Cleveland were both offshore islands, probably looking very much like Magnetic Island, and between those islands Cape Bowling Green and the plains of the Burdekin Delta simply did not exist. All have been shaped by the soil flowing down the rivers, and the northward-flowing coastal current. The long spit of Cape Bowling Green has been formed by alluvium from the Burdekin flowing north along the coast, and it grows a little longer every wet season. Cleveland Island became a cape when it was joined to the coast by another growing sand spit only in the last few thousand years. Once the coastal current was cut off, the mudflats and mangroves of Alligator Creek formed behind the spit in the newly-sheltered water of eastern Cleveland Bay. These dynamic natural processes are by no means in the past, for the coast of Thuringowa is still changing.

Magnetic Island with it's ancient Araucaria cunninghamii was part of the ancient granite ranges.
Godwin Collection, Thuringowa

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The First People

t some time thousands of years ago, probably while Cape Cleveland was still an island off the coast, people came to live in Thuringowa. We do not know when those people first arrived. The scientific methods of dating the human occupation of a place all involve analysis of remains found by archaeological excavation. So far, the oldest direct evidence from archaeological digs in this district gives dates of only about 4,000 years ago, but that does not seem long enough, because there are other places in North Queensland where dates of 37,000 years ago have been recorded. (To put that length of time in perspective, archaeologists say that there were no human beings living in England or America 37,000 years ago, and not for thousands of years afterward.) There is no reason to believe that people came to Thuringowa later than the rest of the north, so it seems safe to assume that their stay here probably began much earlier, and there is more evidence yet to be found.

The historical records of the first people in Thuringowa only started when Europeans began to write down what they saw, so most of what we know about the Aboriginal people comes from the written accounts of the last 230 years. Norman Tindale summed up much of this information in his book *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia*, and attempted to identify the many different groups who lived in different parts of the country. According to Tindale, Thuringowa was occupied by five Aboriginal language groups:

- the Bindal people who lived on the plains of the lower Burdekin,
- the Wulgurukaba people who lived on the plains of Cleveland Bay, and on the offshore islands,
- the Warakamai people who lived on the coastal plain of Halifax Bay,
- the Nawagi people who lived in the rainforest of the northern ranges, and
- the Warungu people who lived on the tablelands and ranges to the west. (Tindale 1974)

The boundaries and identities that Tindale attributed to these groups are highly controversial, and no-one today agrees with them completely. Tindale himself warned that the available evidence did not enable him to make complete sense of the tribal groups and their boundaries. Some modern writers have queried whether there were really any

such thing as "tribes" in the European sense, and whether Aboriginal groups recognised land boundaries in the same way that Europeans do.

It is certainly a mistake to think of Aboriginal people sitting passively within tribal boundaries, for all early accounts describe a society in which travelling was a part of daily life. There are many descriptions of people travelling throughout the region, to obtain food, to trade goods, and to attend ceremonies, and the different groups must have shared their traditional territories to some extent. People from the offshore islands constantly travelled to the mainland, and inland people made journeys to the coast to obtain shells to use as ornaments or as water containers. Goods such as woven fibre bags and bark suitable for making huts were traded over long distances, and the rainforest people sometimes traded their large wooden shields to people who lived in drier areas where the trees were smaller.

The daily life and material culture of the Thuringowa people is fairly well described. Most accounts suggest they normally lived in clans or related family groups of about thirty to sixty people, who often moved around independently in smaller groups for hunting or food gathering. Sometimes large groups of hundreds of people came together for ceremonies. Camp sites would have a number of small huts of branches and bark for shelter, each hut large enough to sleep two or three people. In areas rich in food such as river estuaries, clusters of these huts probably formed large semi-permanent villages. Rugs sewn together from possum skins were used as blankets, or worn as cloaks in cold wet weather. They used many tools of wood as well as stone: spears and throwing sticks, clubs, axes, yam digging sticks and boomerangs, and small knives and scrapers of bone or stone. Some people were skilled at weaving bags and nets from plant fibres. The people of the wet rainforest areas used distinctive large wooden clubs that Europeans described as being like swords, and oval wooden shields carved and painted in geometric patterns. Those on the coast relied on fish and shellfish for much of their diet, and used fibre fishing lines with hooks made from shell. The coastal people also travelled in canoes, which in this region took two forms: the canoe of thin bark sheets found throughout much of Australia, and the solid wood dugout canoe with an outrigger, which is restricted to the northern coast.

Early written descriptions of the people often stressed their "fine physique and confident bearing". The accounts of early explorers and administrators use phrases such as "of well-proportioned features and muscular habit", "tall, athletic men, bold and confident in their manner" and "stout, broad-shouldered, stalwart fellows". (Brayshaw 1990, pp. 23-24)

These are expressions of approval and admiration, using words that the European observers would be very pleased to hear someone use to describe themselves. They tell us that the first contacts between the two peoples began with positive impressions.
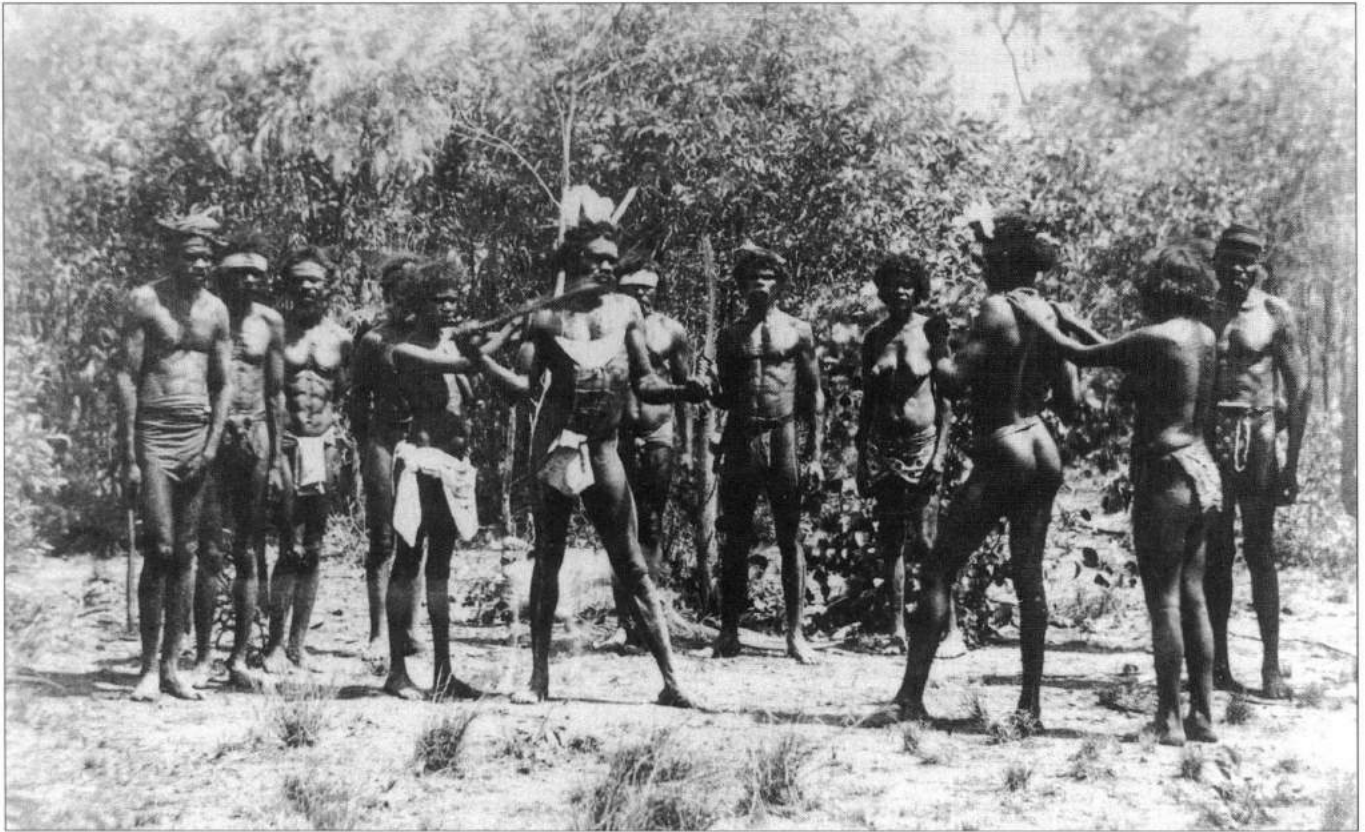
Aborigines from the Alice River, 1870s.

John Oxley Library

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People from the Sea

The first Europeans saw Thuringowa 230 years ago, toward the end of the eighteenth century. Before taking up the story from that point, it may help us to understand their reactions if we briefly consider why they were here, and how much they already knew about this new world. It is important to remember that the first wave of new settlers arriving in the north were not Australians born in the south; the great majority of them had been born in the British Isles. The arrival of people from Europe in North Queensland is sometimes told as part of a process that began with the voyage of Captain Cook, but it was really the continuation of a movement that had commenced a thousand years ago. Beginning in the tenth century, Europeans had begun spreading out by sea for a variety of reasons: to find goods to trade, to do business, to grow crops, to establish religious missions, or to seize and occupy other lands for their own use. As time went on, the expansion accelerated, because it was driven by a simple economic imperative: Europe was filling up with people, and there was no new land available for an expanding population to settle.

The solution was to go out and find new lands where there was land available for farming, trees to fell, animals to hunt and minerals to exploit. The process was described by the Europeans themselves as exploration and colonisation, and usually presented as a brave movement into unknown and unoccupied seas and lands, although it almost always meant "discovering" lands that someone else already knew about, and "claiming" land that was already occupied. They had begun by colonising empty islands in the North Atlantic, in the process finding North America, then over the next few centuries Europeans explored the coast of Africa, and found South America. Whereas most of the world's people were content to occupy their own lands, Europeans had developed an economy which compelled them to sail the oceans in search of wealth. By the sixteenth century their ships were in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, and the Spanish and Portuguese had established trading ports and were occupying colonies on the coasts of southern and eastern Asia.

We do not know precisely when Europeans first saw the Australian coast. The competing empires were secretive about their early voyages of discovery, and navigation and map-making remained very imprecise sciences. As a result, there are a number of enigmatic maps about which historians have debated for a century; some say they show the coast of eastern Australia as charted by a Portuguese expedition in the early sixteenth century. If that theory is correct, then the first Europeans to see Thuringowa's coast may have been Portuguese sailors led by Cristavao de Mendonca in about 1521, but if there really was such an extraordinary voyage, nothing ever came of it.

The first Europeans who left written evidence of their arrival in Australia were the newly arrived imperialists the Dutch, commencing with a party of seamen from the *Duyfken* who rowed ashore on the west coast of what is now Cape York Peninsula in 1606, to meet a fierce reception from the Wik people which may have left as many as nine sailors dead. By 1644, Dutch ships had charted more than half the coastline of what they called New Holland: all of the north and west, some of the southern coast and part of Tasmania. Then, without ever seeing the east coast, the Dutch abruptly lost interest. Disillusioned by endless mangroves, sand dunes and limestone cliffs - and also deterred by the loss of several expensive vessels on those uninteresting shores - they decided there was nothing of economic value here, and abandoned their exploration program.

In the eighteenth century, the maritime initiative in the Australian region passed to England, although in a state of constant rivalry - and occasional warfare - with France. Thus it was British and French explorers who would fill in the remainder of the Australian coast, and the earliest Europeans to arrive on the east coast of North Queensland were very nearly the French. On 6 June 1768 Louis de Bougainville, commanding the ships *La Boudeuse* and *L'Etoile*, approached the unknown east of Australia in about the latitude of Cooktown, seeking a shortcut through Torres Strait, a passage no European had used since its discovery by Torres in 1606. It was one of those moments when historical events seem to hang in the balance; were the members of a French naval expedition about to hoist their flag on a North Queensland beach? No, far offshore the expedition encountered what is now called Bougainville Reef. Confronted by a threatening line of surf in the open ocean, his sailors suffering from scurvy and short of food, Bougainville turned north toward the longer but well-charted route around the north coast of New Guinea.

Only two years later in 1770, James Cook's voyage of discovery in the *Endeavour* filled in the east coast of the Australian continent. This was the first known sighting of Thuringowa by Europeans. On 5 June 1770, *Endeavour* was cruising northward through Bowling Green Bay, a few miles from shore, and Cook wrote that "some very large smokes were seen rise up out of the low land". (Wharton 1893, p. 270) He named Cleveland Bay and its flanking capes, Cape Cleveland to the east and Barren Head to the west, which he later re-named "Magnetical Head or Island" after his compass played up. Cook did not stop or go ashore, and his botanist, Joseph Banks, gloomily summed up what he saw of the coast in the distance as "Barren rocky capes". (Beaglehole 1963 vol. 2, p. 75) Banks would have ground his teeth in jealousy if he had known that the pine trees growing on those barren capes, unknown to European science, would be named after the next botanist to see them.

Cook's voyage was of the utmost importance in shaping Australia's history, because it made known the more welcoming east coast, transforming Europeans' perception of the unknown land. This led directly to the first European settlement in Australia. In 1788 a party of sailors and marines landed at Sydney and took possession of eastern Australia in the name of King George III of England. Thuringowa was part of New South Wales, but no-one in the district knew it.

Now that the people from the sea had a closer base, they began arriving in greater numbers. With the settlement of Sydney, communication with Asia depended on ships travelling up the passage inside the Great Barrier Reef, and west through Torres Strait. These waters were extremely hazardous and only roughly charted, so the needs of shipping inaugurated several decades of hydrographic surveys by small naval vessels in northern Australian waters to improve the accuracy of navigational charts. In 1802 and 1803, Matthew Flinders undertook the enormous task of surveying the entire Australian coastline, which had been cobbled together on the charts by a dozen earlier navigators. Flinders passed the Thuringowa coast in October 1802, but he had taken the leaking *Investigator* outside the Barrier Reef, and was too far out to sea to record anything of interest on shore.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the British and New South Wales governments were engaged in a nearly continuous process of maritime surveys. These voyages were neither as dramatic nor as well-known as the earlier international ones, but they gave their participants the opportunity to stay longer in local waters, and to observe more thoroughly. A steady procession of small naval vessels passed the Thuringowa coast. Hydrographer Philip Parker King carried on the methodical task of filling in the spaces on the charts in two voyages

commanding the *Mermaid* in 1819 and the *Bathurst* in 1820, and was responsible for accurately charting much of the northern coast in detail for the first time. He discovered Cape Bowling Green, and from four miles offshore commented:

Between Cape Bowling-green and the back mountainous ranges, a distance of nearly thirty miles, the country appears to rise gradually, and gave us reason to regret that the nature of my instructions did not warrant our making a more particular examination of this part of the coast, for it appears to offer a much greater degree of interest and importance than any part of the [coast north of] the tropic. (King 1827, vol. 1, p. 190)

On 13 June 1819, the *Mermaid* anchored under the shelter of Cape Cleveland, and King sent Mr 8edwell ashore in a boat to look for water. He was the first European that we know of to set foot in Thuringowa, somewhere south of where the lighthouse stands. King himself came ashore two days later, with botanist and later distinguished explorer Allan Cunningham, and climbed the headland. They found Aboriginal huts and tracks, but saw nobody. Cunningham took many botanical specimens, including what he thought were Norfolk Island pines growing abundantly on Cape Cleveland. In fact they were Hoop pines, remnants of the ancient forest, later named *Araucaria Cunninghamii* in his honour.

The *Beagle* - famous for having carried Charles Darwin on the world cruise which led to his theory of the evolution of species - made a series of hydrographic studies in Queensland waters under Captains Wickham and Stokes in 1839-1841. While anchored in Upstart Bay in June 1839, John Wickham discovered the mouth of a large river, and sailed a small boat for ten miles up the channel, until he was not far from the site of Home Hill. Here the stream narrowed down to a trickle, and they found it had been dammed to trap fish. Two years later, the *Beagle* returned to spend a few days in Cleveland 8ay under John Lort Stokes, who went ashore and climbed Many Peaks Range. To this time there had been no contact between Aborigines and Europeans in Thuringowa, except for fleeting glimpses recorded by Wickham and Stokes. Captains Blackwood and Owen Stanley carried out several surveys of northern waters in the *Fly* and the *Rattlesnake* during 1842-46. A succession of voyages by the *Rattlesnake*, the *Tam O'Shanter* and the *Bramble* brought zoologist John MacGillivray and biologist Thomas Huxley to North Queensland waters in the years 1848-49.

The next party of Europeans to come ashore in Thuringowa was led by John Beete Jukes, a geologist, during one of the voyages of the *Fly* under Captain Blackwood. On 2 May 1843, the *Fly* anchored off Cape Upstart, and Jukes led a small party north in a cutter to explore the coast.

We landed on the south-east side of Cape Cleveland, the geological constitution and the aspect of which is just like that of Cape Upstart. Cape Cleveland, however, is still more broken and abrupt, and also more woody than Cape Upstart, having fine pines in many of its gullies. We followed a native path for some distance along the beach, towards the point of the Cape, and in one cove behind the beach we found a pool of fresh water. In this we enjoyed what in Australia is a rare luxury, a fresh-water bath, and while dressing, we saw suddenly a column of smoke rise up over the trees near the foot of the hill, and quickly disappear again. This we took for a signal, and had no doubt that every motion of ours was followed and watched by the natives, although we could not perceive them ....

When we had returned to the boat and dined, we saw eight or ten men come out of the bush on to the sands, about half a mile off, point to the boat, make several gestures, and come towards us .... When about 200 yards off they stopped, coeyed, and gesticulated, all which we returned, when, seeing them to be without arms in their hands, I, with Captain Blackwood's permission, stepped ashore, and went up to them, with a red night-cap as a present. One man advanced to meet me, on whose head I placed the red cap, and then dancing "corrobory fashion" to each other, we immediately became good friends, and the rest came up. Captain Blackwood and Ince now joined us, bringing some biscuit, and we all sat down and held a palaver, laughing, singing, grimacing, and playing all kinds of tricks. (Jukes 1847, vol. 1, pp.56-57)

The party from the *Fly* remained on the beach for several hours in a friendly encounter with a growing party of men, women and children. The location Jukes describes in this account is clearly Cape Ferguson, now the site of the Australian Institute of Marine Science.

Thus far, all European contact with Thuringowa had come from the sea, but that was about to change. Two years after Jukes' visit, the first Europeans came overland. By 1824, settlement had spread up the coast to Moreton Bay, now Brisbane, and in 1844 that became the starting point for an exploring expedition led by Ludwig Leichhardt, that was intended to cross the continent, heading north-west to Port Essington, near what is now Darwin. Following the river systems, Leichhardt and his party found and named the Burdekin River, which Wickham had rowed up six years earlier. They travelled along the great river for two months. They did not see Thuringowa, but for a week in April 1845 the party was travelling parallel to its western boundary, about 40km away. Leichhardt's glowing description of the Burdekin valley after a good wet season was to bring many more Europeans, and shape the coming settlement of the region. The Gregory brothers passed down the same valley in 1856, on an epic journey droving cattle to the east coast from the Kimberleys, and a number of graziers from the south made private reconnaissance visits to the region in the 1850s. The Europeans were coming.
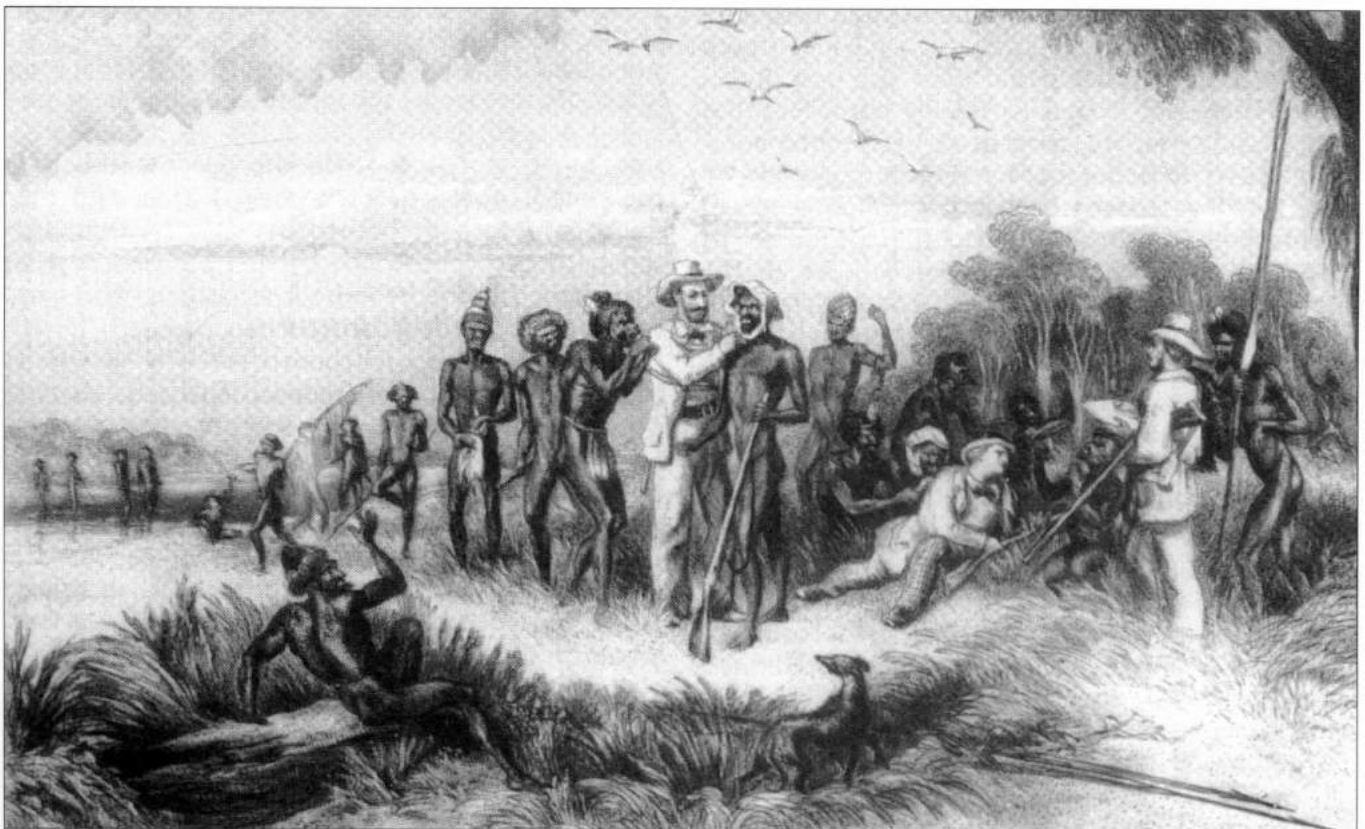
John Beete Jukes meeting Aborigines on Cape Cleveland.

From "The Surveying Voyage of HMS Fly"

James Morrill

The first European residents of Thuringowa arrived in 1846. They arrived very unhappily, stumbling ashore from a makeshift raft as the few starving and exhausted survivors of an appalling shipwreck. James Morrill had spent only a few days ashore in Australia before he arrived so unwillingly in Thuringowa. Aged only 24, he had shipped from London to Sydney as a seaman. Since its establishment in 1788 the European settlement at Sydney had become an important economic centre, and a focus for shipping routes spreading out all over the Pacific. Looking for adventure in exotic places, Morrill next crewed on a return voyage to Auckland. Back in Sydney, he set out on his biggest adventure, joining the barque *Peruvian* on a trading voyage to China.

Morrill never saw China. Three days out from Sydney, the *Peruvian* struck Minerva Reef. Her boats were destroyed or swept away, and for days the crew struggled to lash together a raft out of spars and rigging. With twenty-one survivors aboard, the little raft was launched into the Pacific Ocean, 500 miles from land. What followed was one of the classic shipwreck stories of hideous suffering and desperate survival. The raft drifted slowly north-west for weeks, its occupants living on a spoonful of tinned meat and a few sips of water each day. One by one they began to die, and the survivors used the severed limbs of the dead as bait to snare sharks to eat. After nearly six weeks the raft drifted through the Great Barrier Reef in calm seas and floated helplessly northward, parallel to the shore in sight of Cape Upstart.

When the *Peruvian*'s raft finally came ashore on a beach near a rocky headland there were seven left alive, too weak to walk. The landing place was described as "the Southern Point of Cape Cleveland", now known as Cape Ferguson, the site of AIMS. They were at almost exactly the same spot where Jukes had waded ashore and met the group of Aboriginal men three years earlier. If Morrill's record of the length of the voyage and the captain's record of 42 days on the raft are both correct, the day they came ashore must have been Monday 20 April 1846. The nearest Europeans were at the military settlements of Moreton Bay to the south and Port Essington, far to the west. Three of the people on the raft died in the next few days. The other four lived on oysters and slept in a rock shelter until they were found by two different Aboriginal groups - perhaps the Bindal and the Wulgurukaba, although Morrill

James Morrill on his return to European Society.
John Oxley Library

did not use those names - and taken in and cared for. Three more died in the next two years, leaving Morrill as the sole survivor of the *Peruvian*. He was to live in Thuringowa for the next seventeen years.

Morrill was determined not to die like the others, and he understood that his survival depended on his success at adopting the Aboriginal way of life. He succeeded very well. Morrill was accepted into Aboriginal society, learned the language quickly, and in his later years seems to have been respected as an elder. It is likely that he married and had children, but he did not say so on his return to European society. He moved around a large area in his time with the Aborigines, from Cleveland Bay to the Burdekin, and inland to the rainforest around

Mount Elliot. When he re-joined European society after settlers with flocks of sheep arrived in the area, his extensive knowledge of Aboriginal language and culture became available to the settlers, and was a means of ensuring harmonious relationships between the two groups.

Regrettably, we really know very little about Morrill's extraordinary experiences. He was interviewed at some length by a Brisbane journalist, and his story was printed in a booklet and serialised in the *Port Denison Times*, but it stressed Morrill's adventures rather than his insights into Aboriginal society, about which he knew more than any other European alive. He was only 41 when he returned to European society, and people no doubt thought his knowledge was there to be drawn on in the future. He found a job in the Customs House at Bowen, married and had a son, and was present at the founding of Cardwell in 1864, and involved in setting up the government stores in Townsville in 1865. Then abruptly, he died of fever in October 1865, leaving most of his wisdom unrecorded.

The story of James Morrill is remarkable not only for the length of time he lived in Aboriginal society and the degree to which he adopted that culture as his own, but also for the use he made of his Aboriginal culture in seeking to achieve communication and understanding between Aboriginal and European societies. His own experience bridged two cultures, and he sought to bring about conciliation between the two groups, for both of which he had understanding and empathy.
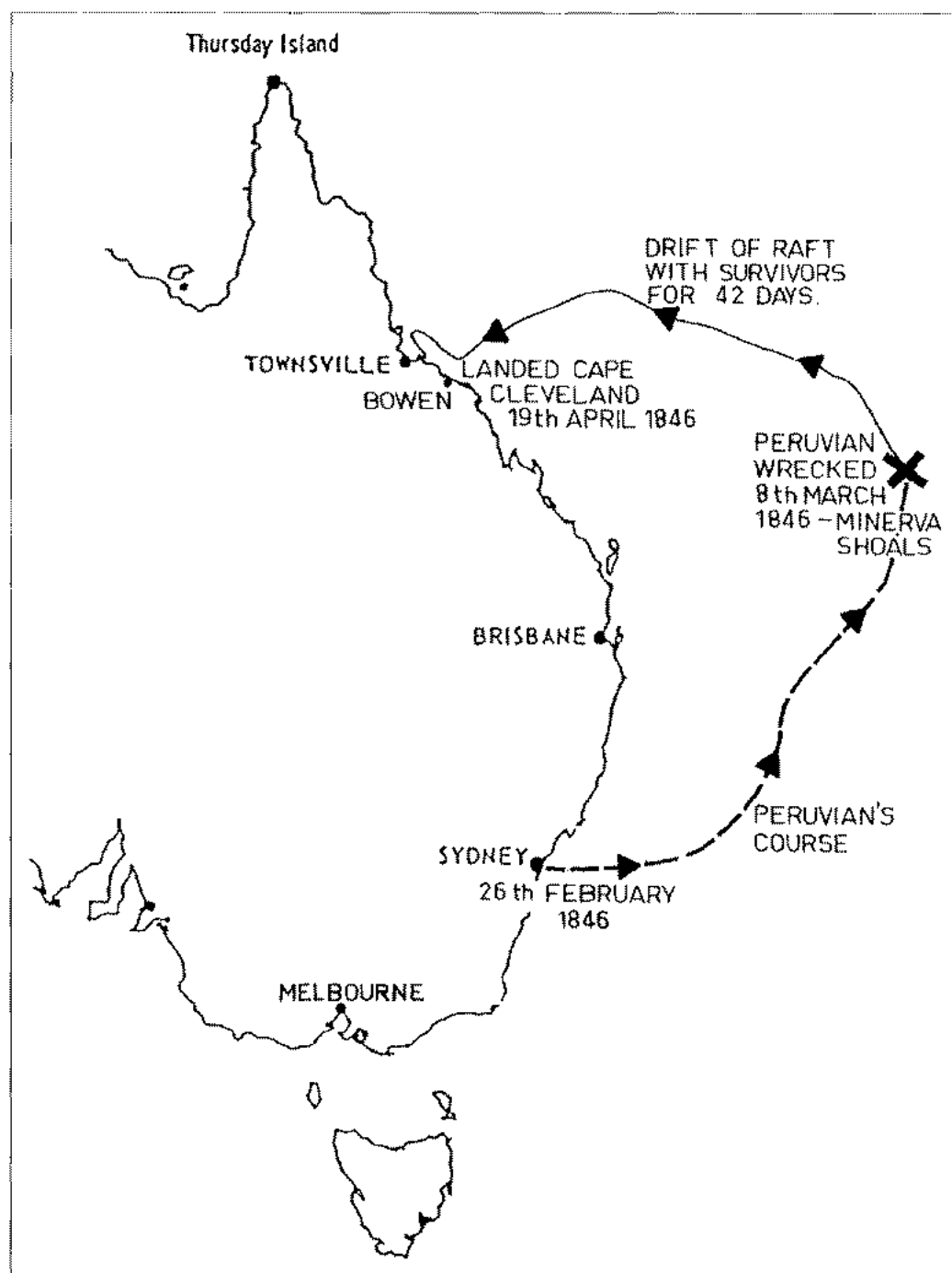
Map of Peruvian's course and raft voyage. in 1846.
Maritime Museum of Townsville

$\mathcal{F}$armers

$\mathcal{S}$ince 1788, Thuringowa had been part of New South Wales, although it was over 2,000km from the seat of government at Sydney. During the next seventy years, although many ships sailed past the coast, the only people from the outside world who visited it were a handful of sailors, a botanist, a geologist and a raft full of shipwreck survivors. In 1859, Queen Victoria proclaimed that it was part of the new colony of Queensland, but still no-one in Thuringowa knew that it had happened.

New South Wales had never encouraged the settlement of the north. It was too far away, and would cost too much to administer it and supply the infrastructure of settlement: the roads, bridges, wharves, police stations, post offices and schools that were needed. Hence, in a deliberate policy of discouraging intending settlers, northern land had been made available for lease or purchase only very slowly; the Port Curtis and Leichhardt districts around Gladstone and Rockhampton had only just been opened in the 1850s, seventy years after the settlement of Sydney. But the new Queensland government saw things very differently; they wanted settlers to occupy the land as quickly as possible, and begin producing commodities for sale to Europe. They were also very short of cash, and the quickest way for a government in those days to raise money was by selling or leasing land. To achieve both these aims, the new administration began opening up new pastoral districts for graziers to take up leases. Between 1861 and 1864, the Mitchell, Kennedy, Flinders and Cook districts were declared, opening up all of western and northern Queensland for settlement in just three years. Bowen, just 80km east of Thuringowa, was established as the administrative centre of the North Kennedy district in 1861.

The first settlement of North Queensland by Europeans coincided with the American Civil War of 1861-65. This was not coincidence, for the war had created commercial opportunities for tropical agriculture. The Union naval blockade of the Confederate ports virtually cut off trade with the southern states, which the cotton mills of Britain depended on for their supplies of raw cotton, and which also supplied other important commodities such as sugar, tobacco, coffee and indigo. The first settlers in the north were seeking to supply the market created by the war in America, and the first things they planted were crops like cotton, sugar

and coffee. Shrewder minds realised that the northern climate was not likely to be suitable for cotton, but that wool was a possible substitute. From 1861 onward, sheep flocks were being driven north to the new grazing districts.

Even before Bowen was founded, exploring parties had ridden north on private expeditions to find good grazing land for cattle and sheep, and in 1861 and 1862 a rush of graziers filled the new district. They had all read Leichhardt's glowing praise of the Burdekin valley, and it was quickly taken up from Mount McConnell, west of Bowen, all the way up to the Valley of Lagoons, west of Cardwell. Others spread out to the west and east of this axis. Lessees were generally required to stock the land within a year, whereupon they could apply for a fourteen year lease. Very quickly it was found that sheep would not thrive in the wetter country near the coast, and reluctantly many graziers turned to cattle, which were much less profitable. There was no beef industry as we know it today; before refrigeration came into use, cattle had to be shipped or driven to an abattoir near the market at very great expense. On the remote northern runs with no nearby customers, most cattle could only be boiled down for their tallow and hides.

All the less rugged land in Thuringowa was taken up very early, John Melton Black taking up Woodstock on the Haughton River and also the Fanning River run. Edward Cunningham and John Wickham took up Woodhouse, and Philip Somer and John Hervey took up Dotswood, just to the west. John Allingham's Halifax Bay run occupied the northern coastal plain. In the Burdekin delta, John Graham Macdonald took up Inkerman Downs, but was soon forced to sell to Robert Towns and Alexander Stuart. Nearby E.S. Antill took up Jarvisfield, and gave his name to the Antill Plains south of Mount Stuart. The property was later owned for a time by Black and managed by Andrew Ross.

Pastoral leases were very fluid, sometimes changing name, area or ownership by the year. Many of the early runs changed hands rapidly, for several reasons. Some owners over-estimated their short-term earnings and their ability to repay their loans; the Bank of New South Wales foreclosed on Dotswood within three years. Other lessees never intended to stay long; the land increased greatly in value once a fourteen year lease was granted, and

John Melton Black, 1866.

Townsville Jubilee Carnival Programme

"stock and sell" was the motto of some of those who took up land in the North Kennedy. (Allingham 1977, p. 19)

Black was involved at least briefly in many of the runs of the district, occasionally in questionable circumstances; in the uncertainty created by the unsurveyed run boundaries, neighbours sometimes found his sheep grazing on their runs, an innocent mistake at first but which, when repeated a few times, began to look like claim-jumping. Innocent as all his mistakes may have been, Black became known around the district as "Jumping Jack". (*Cleveland Bay Express* 29 September 1866; Allingham 1977; Kerr 1994)

The homesteads on these early runs were scattered across large distances, typically perhaps two days ride apart, with a few huts in between. They were occupied predominantly by men in the early years, owners or more usually managers at the big house, surrounded by a few overseers, blacksmiths, saddlers, bullock drivers, stockmen, perhaps an accountant, with wellsinkers, carpenters, shearers and others coming and going as required. There were no fences at first, except timber ones around stockyards, for steel wire would only become economical about twenty years later. Sheep were sent out in small flocks of perhaps a thousand, with a pair of shepherds to look after them, make sure they were on good feed and water, and protect them from dingoes. The shepherds lived in small huts, usually built of bark, and existed on a monotonous diet of damper and mutton. Cattle runs were less labour intensive, but they too had stockmen permanently living at outstations across the run.

The first generation of European settlers in North Queensland found they were vulnerable to new and unfamiliar illnesses. Many accounts of the early years describe a high mortality from fevers, and greater numbers of people suffering bouts of weakness and debilitation lasting weeks or months. Mrs Adelaide James wrote from Nulla Nulla homestead in 1865:

My own health seems completely broken, and it is with the utmost difficulty some days that I am able to wash and dress the two babies. Every day I have this weary fever .... The men on the place are no better than we are, and the strangers who call are as bad, no matter which way they come from .... The deaths have not been so many as one would imagine where so much sickness existed, but it seems to utterly prostrate every faculty of mind and body. (Bolton 1972, p. 34)

People soon observed that fever attacks became more frequent in the hot wet summer months, and those settlers who could afford it began to take the steamer south for the summer. For decades there was a seasonal exodus of women and children to stay with relatives in a temperate climate. These fevers are not described clearly in contemporary accounts, and medical historians still debate precisely what they were, but it is generally believed that a number of insect-borne diseases such as malaria, leptospirosis, dengue fever and Ross River fever were implicated. There was no way of treating these illnesses; their causes were not even vaguely understood until more than thirty years after settlement, and some of them are still endemic in the north today. The impact of unfamiliar diseases went two ways; in those first years while Europeans were being struck down by the organisms of their new environment, Aborigines were also dying in epidemics of the common viral diseases of Europe, such as influenza, measles and smallpox.

It often took two or three years to set up a run and stock it. J.G. Macdonald had applied for Inkerman Downs in 1862, and spent the next year stocking it

with sheep. On Sunday 25 January 1863, two of his shepherds named Wilson and Hatch were carrying out their domestic chores in their hut when they heard a voice yelling outside. One went to investigate, and found they were being hailed by a strange-looking naked man, who was standing on a stockyard fence for fear of their dogs. The shepherd called to his mate, "Come out Bill, here is a red or yellow man standing on the rails naked, he is not a black man, and bring the gun." The naked man was struggling to remember how to speak to them. At the mention of a gun, he blurted out, "Don't shoot me, I am a British object, a shipwrecked sailor." It was James Morrill, sole survivor of the long-forgotten *Peruvian* wreck of seventeen years earlier.

The words "bring the gun" make a very clear statement about what was happening on the pastoral frontier. The settlers droving sheep up from the south were also bringing with them a legacy of decades of violent conflict with Aborigines, and were arriving expecting to have to use firearms to occupy the land. Dispossession of the traditional owners was already well underway when Morrill arrived in the town of Bowen. The experiences of

Jukes and Morrill had already shown that the Aboriginal people of Thuringowa showed no hostility to European visitors, but were prepared to treat strangers kindly. Morrill brought with him a proposal for sharing the land:

*... almost their last wish to me was with tears in their eyes that I would ask the white men to let them have **some** of their **own** ground to live on. They agreed to give up all on the south of the Burdekin River, but asked that they might be **allowed** to retain that on the other, at all events that which was no good to anybody but them, the low swampy grounds near the sea coast.* (Morrill 1863)

This proposal was of course ignored, as Morrill knew it would be. His attempts at conciliation were almost a complete failure, and the process of European pastoral settlement rolled on without pause. Morrill had already predicted the outcome of his plea on behalf of the Aboriginal people. He had told them about the Europeans before he left: "there were a great many people, many more than themselves, and plenty of guns, and that if they went near they would be killed before they got there. I told them the white men had come to take their land away."

"Greenbower", 1947, now part of the suburb of Kirwan.   Kelso Collection, Thuringowa

Taking the Land

hat followed in the next few years was a shameful episode in Australian history. Although every contact between European and Aboriginal people during the early years of exploration had been peaceful, and there was every reason to believe that ways could be found to share the land, the arrival of the pastoralists brought a new policy of ruthless dispossession. What happened to bring about this change? Historian Bruce Breslin has drawn attention to the role of George Elphinstone Dalrymple, explorer and government administrator at Bowen, in shaping the new attitudes. He had taken a reconnaissance expedition to the Burdekin aboard the Queensland Government schooner *Spitfire* in 1860, which led to the first violent incident that we know of in Thuringowa. (Oddly, Dalrymple had been sent to find the mouth of the Burdekin, apparently in disregard or disbelief of both Wickham's report of 1839 and Jukes' of 1843.) Dalrymple approached the Aboriginal occupants of the land fearing them from the outset, and he later reported that a party from the *Spitfire* had been attacked, and had fired in self-defence.

This is one of the few occasions of European-Aboriginal conflict in which we hear the story from the other side, for James Morrill, although not present at the *Spitfire* incident, knew the people who were, and heard first-hand accounts. He said that a group of Aboriginal men had been yelling and waving to attract attention because they wanted to tell the Europeans about Morrill, when the party in the boat opened fire, killing one man and wounding another.

From that time, irrational fear spread through the new arrivals, and the European occupation of the North Kennedy district was conducted like a military campaign. Nearly all Europeans carried firearms, and unprovoked violence became regarded as normal behaviour. Antill and his employees had shot a group of fifteen Aborigines on Jarvisfield only a few days before Morrill contacted the shepherds; in fact, it was partly the proliferation of violence that drove him back to European society, to try to negotiate a better way. Aborigines retaliated,

killing isolated shepherds, raiding huts and stealing stock, sometimes by the hundreds. There were several attacks on Inkerman and Jarvisfield stations between 1865 and 1868, which were probably carried out by the same people with whom Morrill had lived peacefully for seventeen years. John Ewen Davidson, living at Woodstock in 1865, wrote that he kept a watchful lookout, "and my pistol handy as the blacks about here are very dangerous and have killed many men". (Breslin 1992, p. 88)

The war that was fought in the North Kennedy district certainly delayed European settlement; and perhaps went very close to stopping it. The Queensland Police Commissioner wrote in 1868, "On some of the stations north of Bowen, such as Woodstock ... it is almost impossible to keep any cattle on the run." (Henderson 1991) Some accounts estimated between ten and thirty percent of the European population was killed, and many intending settlers were deterred from coming north by news of the violence. (Breslin 1992, p. 85) But the settlers retaliated by calling in the secretive para-military Native Mounted Police, and whole families of Aboriginal people were massacred in brutal reprisals. We have no idea how many died. No official accounts of these murders survive, if any were written at the time, but independent European witnesses came upon the aftermaths of several, and described massacre scenes very much like ones we are familiar with in our own time from Bosnia and Rwanda.

By 1869 the worst of the violence was over. The Aboriginal people had been subdued, not only by direct violence, but also by epidemic disease, and by sheer dispossession from their land, with disruption of their traditional food sources and way of life. In the rainforest and the ranges there was as yet no European presence, and traditional life continued for much longer. But in the river valleys and on the coastal plains - the grazing land - Aboriginal owners were reduced in numbers to a few hundred people, and the fighting died down. The survivors began to be "let in" to work on pastoral properties and in the townships, and a new phase of their relationship with Europeans began.
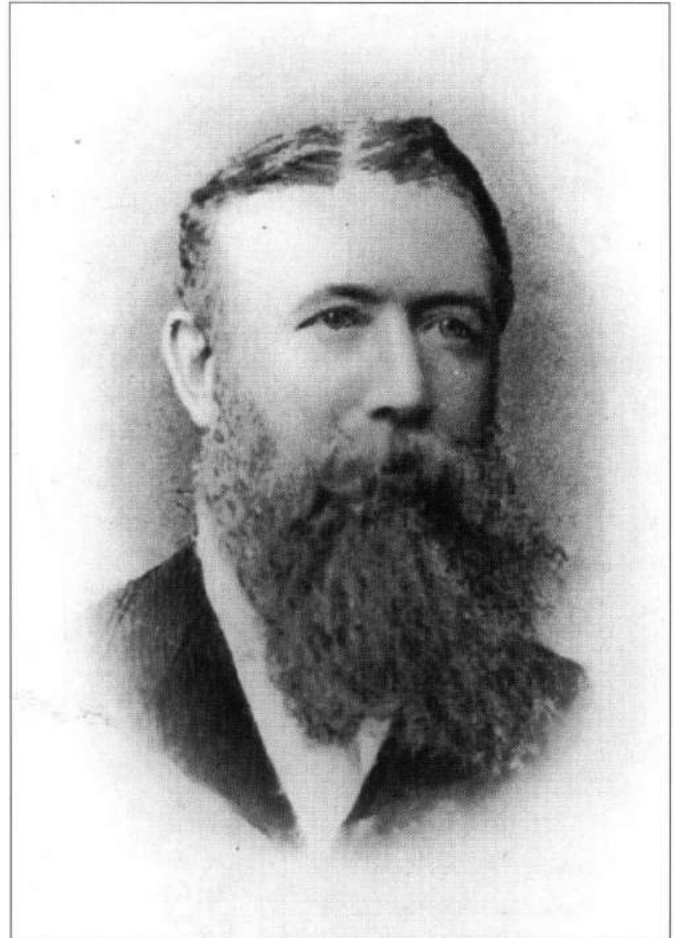
A Port for Thuringowa

As settlement spread hundreds of kilometres north from Bowen, it became obvious that other ports were needed to serve the grazing properties of the North Kennedy district. Besides the distance, access from Bowen was restricted by the winding course of the Burdekin River during the wet season. Early in 1864, government parties established new ports at Wickham on the Burdekin and Cardwell on Rockingham Bay, but neither was very satisfactory.

To this point, every settlement in North Queensland had been established by a government expedition, but that pattern was about to change. From his base at Woodstock, "Jumping Jack" had taken up virtually all the arable land of Thuringowa fronting the shores of Cleveland Bay, where there was as yet no European settlement in existence. He had also formed a partnership called Black and Company, with financial backing from Sydney entrepreneur Robert Towns. In the short interval between 1864 and 1867, Black and Towns dominated the grazing land of Thuringowa, and made a number of shrewd decisions that would continue to shape its settlement until our own time. In 1864 Black's managers on Woodstock, Andrew Ball and Mark Reid, investigated the foreshore of the bay, looking for a suitable place to build a boiling down works. Most of the shoreline was either steep rocky cliffs or mangroves, but they reported that at the foot of Castle Hill there was a flat area adjacent to Ross Creek, where a landing could be made for small vessels.

Andrew Ball.　　　　　Townsville Jubilee Carnival Programme

Black realised the implications of this: he need no longer be dependent on the overland road to Bowen, but could form his own port on his own land, greatly cutting his transport costs. During 1864 a wharf and some rough buildings went up at the muddy entrance to Ross Creek, and the port for Thuringowa took shape. There was debate over the new town's name for a while; sailors arriving by sea naturally called it Cleveland Bay, while the jealous people of Bowen sneeringly called it "The Creek". Some called it Blackstown in honour of its founder, others Castletown for its most conspicuous landmark, Castle Hill. In deference to his partner in Sydney, Black called it Townsville, and that was the name which the Queensland government adopted when a township was surveyed in 1865.

With the location of the new port decided, Black went through the motions of planting coffee on the plains nearby - according to one later account, what he planted was actually roasted coffee beans - but this was probably nothing more than a cynical ploy to claim the land he needed beside the Ross River for a port and boiling down works; there was a provision that agricultural land could be granted for growing sugar and coffee. There were also experiments with planting cotton, sugar cane and maize along the Ross River, with Pacific Islanders imported as agricultural labour.

These all sound like Robert Towns' interests, because for Black the main game was grazing in the hinterland. He started with sheep, then when it became obvious that the country was unsuitable he reluctantly turned to cattle, although he knew it was a much less profitable product. The cattle industry of the 1860s was very different from that of today. Some graziers of the first few years made

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Mark Watt Reid.   Townsville Jubilee Carnival Programme

fat, used for making candles and soap, which was extracted by rendering the carcasses down in large iron pots. The hides and hooves were economic by-products, but most of the boiled meat was discarded as waste. This unbelievably wasteful and smelly process was the fate of almost all beef cattle bred in the north until the advent of commercial refrigeration plants in the 1880s.

The site Black chose for his boiling down works was beside the Ross River, near what is now Queens Road in the suburb of Hermit Park. He had chosen the site by September 1864, but it took some time to build. There was an undignified incident in June 1865 when the schooner *Amherst* arrived with Black's machinery, only to go aground in Ross Creek, a story that was told often and with great delight in Bowen. It was April 1866 before the plant was designed, imported, constructed and in operation, its first job rendering down a mob of 500 cattle driven down from Dotswood. The *Port Denison Times* reported in July that the sale of the tallow and hides in Sydney had fetched £5 per head, a very satisfactory result. The commencement of processing commodities for export made Thuringowa the scene of the first secondary industry in North Queensland.

John Melton Black retired in 1867 and left the district. By that time, the few European residents of the north had reached the first round of objectives that the settlement of the North Kennedy district had set out to achieve. Thuringowa, with its primary industry, port and boiling down works established by 1866, had a stronger economic base than most of the surrounding region. Indeed, that economic base was even more robust than it first appeared. Although there were only a few grazing runs actually within the boundaries of Thuringowa - principally Woodstock and Woodhouse, and parts of Fanning River, Inkerman Downs, Jarvisfield, Dotswood, Hillgrove and Halifax Bay - the district was strategically located to command the commercial activity of many more. To the south and west stretched the stations of the Burdekin valley - Strathalbyn, Ravenswood, Merri Merriwa, Burdekin Downs - and across the basalt tablelands runs such as Bluff Downs, Maryvale, Lolworth and Nulla Nulla stretched further west all the way to the Flinders River. The landing on the Ross Creek estuary was to become the port for all these stations, and within a few years, all traffic to and from them passed through Thuringowa.

quite a lot of money breeding cattle to sell to other graziers who were stocking their runs, but that was clearly not an activity that could be sustained for long. We regard the main product of beef cattle as meat, but beef was almost unmarketable in Black's time. There was simply no way to get the meat to an urban market, except by droving or shipping live cattle, either of which was expensive and reduced the condition of the beasts. The process of canning meat had been invented in the 1840s, but was also expensive and unreliable, and the product was unattractive to consumers.

Hence the need for a boiling down works. The most profitable product of beef cattle was their tallow, or

Travellers

The first road inland from the wharves headed around the north side of Castle Hill, keeping to firm ground well away from Ross Creek, then went west across the plain, crossing the Bohle River, then the Alice River. The steep section of road up to the plateau was built by the Queensland government in 1866. It climbed Hervey Range at Thornton Gap near the head of the Black River, a little to the north of the modern road. From there it diverged, one road going west, but the main road heading southwest down Keelbottom Creek past Dotswood homestead. The little township of Dalrymple was established on the Burdekin where Keelbottom Creek joined it: the first inland town in North Queensland. The town is long gone now, but the road that once led to it across the plains which are now the suburbs of Thuringowa is still called Dalrymple Road.

People and goods travelling the roads generated economic activity. First, they needed wagons, drays, coaches and horses, which employed drivers and bullockies, fodder merchants, blacksmiths, wheelwrights and saddlers. A heavy wagon could only travel about fifteen miles (25km) in a day, so the roads had frequent hotels and eating houses, usually located beside a creek with a permanent waterhole. By 1866 there were hotels at the Alice and Bohle crossings. The climb up the range was a major obstacle for teams, and there were two hotels there: the Range to fortify travellers at the bottom, and the Eureka to help them recover at the top. These establishments offered meals, drinks, stabling for horses, and accommodation for travellers, although this was usually no more than a bush stretcher in a calico-walled cubicle: what John Kerr described as "no-star accommodation". (Kerr 1994, p. 43)

The government employed a road maintenance gang who lived in a camp at the foot of Thornton Gap, swelling the population of the little settlement there. The social habits of the road gang were not

Carriers at the top of the Range.

John Oxley Library

very attractive, and in one session presumably fuelled by the produce of the Range Hotel, one of the workmen flew into a drunken rage and shot a fellow road worker dead. The spot became a landmark for travellers on the range road, remembered for decades as "Dead Man's Gully", although its location is now forgotten. It was not the only death beside that road; near the foot of the climb is a little cemetery in the bush, with three marked graves and an unknown number of unmarked ones.

This simple pattern of transport to the west was disrupted within a year. In October 1867 the Queensland government, seeking to raise funds to help pay for the road, established a toll gate at the foot of the climb up Hervey Range, and required road users to pay a fee. There was a scale of charges, from sixpence for a horse, to three shillings for a wagon. These were hefty charges, the equivalent today of about $2 for a motorbike and $15 for a semi-trailer. The problem with the government's plan was that teamsters didn't wish to pay a fee,

and being resourceful people, they quickly found another road to the inland. About 25 miles south of Thornton Gap was an even better gap through the range, worn by the Haughton River. To reach this, the teams detoured south up the Ross River, across the plain past Woodstock homestead, crossed the Reid River, named after Black's manager Mark Reid, and climbed up to the tableland through what became known as Reid Gap.

Traffic on the Thornton Gap road dwindled dramatically. Within months the government realised their mistake, and the toll was reduced in July 1868, and later lifted altogether, but the damage was done. Travellers came to prefer the new route, and the town of Dalrymple faded away to nothing over the next decade. The geography of Thuringowa had been transformed, and the Reid Gap route would be the principal road to the inland; to this day the track pioneered by the teamsters in 1867 is followed by the Mount Isa railway and the modern Flinders Highway.

Detail from Robert Logan Jack's map of Charters Towers Goldfield and the Coast.

Votes and Proceedings of the Queensland Legislative Assembly, 1879

Miners

eid Gap was confirmed as the new road to the west by the appearance of a completely new industry. 'At first, the only form of economic activity anticipated by the official proclamation of pastoral districts was grazing, and the first years of occupation by Europeans were devoted to establishing this industry. However, the economy of the north was not to conform to this simple model for very long. The new immigrants had already learned from events in the southern colonies that the accumulation of wealth through mining was much faster than that offered by grazing, and from the beginning of European settlement in the north, there were attempts to encourage the discovery of minerals, especially the most valuable mineral, gold.

As a warning for future investors, the very first instance of mining activity reported in the north occurred under a cloud of deceptive behaviour. In September 1865 the small business community of the port of Townsville offered a reward of £1,000 for the discovery of payable gold in the hinterland. Only two weeks later George Osborne and Michael Miles reported gold on Duabar Creek, a tributary of Keelbottom Creek. They claimed to have found 4 to 5 ounces of gold in every load of alluvium washed, but the circumstances suggest that there was more behind this discovery than prospecting. Robert Towns, who had invested heavily in his new port, was backing them financially, and gloated privately that their goldfield "will swamp both Port Denison and Cardwell". (Gibson-Wilde 1984, p. 57)

Most curious of all was that Miles' letter to the Queensland government reporting the discovery was written not from his new goldfield, but from Sydney, where the head office of Towns and Company was located. Osborne and Miles never received a reward for their suspiciously rich-sounding claim, and there was a general feeling throughout the north that this dubious report of gold was a transparent attempt by Towns to drum up business for his port.

Even so, others were encouraged to follow up the report, and by November 1865, traces of gold had certainly been found over a large area. A Brisbane newspaper reported: "The field is supposed to be of very large extent, namely, from the head of the Fanning River to that of the Star River; a distance taken north and south of fifty miles, and east and

west between the Coast Range and the Burdekin." (*Brisbane Courier* 4 November 1865)

A three ounce nugget was put on public display in Townsville.

The following January, overseer James Gibson of Star River station claimed the reward, and was paid £500, perhaps implying that the Townsville entrepreneurs were only half-impressed by his find. He said he had been working on his prospect for three months, and had found 36 ounces of fine gold and 60 ounces in nuggets. The location of Gibson's discovery was described as: "at the head of a small tributary of Keelbottom Creek, about two miles from the junction of Speed's Creek, and between that and Keelbottom", south of the hill now named Mount Gibson. Geologist Richard Daintree, experienced on the Victorian goldfields, visited the field soon after and identified an extensive gold-bearing area: "This tract of auriferous country seems to be bounded by the Star River on the one side and Keelbottom Creek on the other." The Bowen newspaper lamented that "wealth untold is lying scattered around us, and there is no-one to gather it." (*Port Denison Times* 28 March 1866) However, careful readers of Daintree's published report would have noted that while the area he described was impressively large, the amounts of gold so far found were in fact very small.

There was a rush from Townsville, Bowen and other places to the field in the early months of 1866, described by one newspaper correspondent as "large numbers of diggers from this and even the other colonies". (*Port Denison Times* 24 March 1866)

Their true numbers are unknown, but the rush probably amounted to a few hundred people. It was an unusually dry summer, the diggings were inaccessible and waterless, and no-one found much gold. Daintree believed that the country could only be worked successfully by large groups of miners cooperating to build dams, and warned intending miners to come well-equipped for the conditions: "I would warn all those who may wish to prospect these districts that a preliminary outlay must always be incurred before an adequate return can be hoped for, as water will be very scarce except for about four months in the year, and that simply a pick, shovel, dish, and hope, are not the only things required for a start". (*Port Denison Times* 28 March 1866)

One writer warned that the district was flooded with "unemployed and in many cases penniless people":

The real facts are that men who have been working for months have been unable in some cases to make a bare subsistence, while the most fortunate have not been able to realise sufficient to pay them for their labour. Doubtless there is gold, only there is one fatal drawback, viz, want of water, or rather there is no water at all. (*Port Denison Times* 24 March 1866)

This was the reality of alluvial gold mining. Despite the legendary stories of sudden wealth, most people on a gold field found barely enough to buy food, and a lot of people found nothing at all. Another digger writing from the "Star River Supposed Gold Field" to complain that there was no water and not much gold, mentioned significantly that there was also no sign of Gibson, the discoverer. (*Port Denison Times* 7 April 1866) By mid-April, carriers had stopped taking supplies to the Star, as there were only about a dozen diggers left there. "On the Star there is not water enough for drinking purposes. At all the neighbouring stations the disappointed diggers may be seen loafing about, sitting for hours on the rails speculating what to do next." (*Port Denison Times* 18 April 1866)

Those disappointed diggers sitting on the rails and their many colleagues were to become very important people in the economy of North Queensland for the next fifty years. None of them sat on the rails for long; some returned south, others drifted away to a succession of other small alluvial finds around the region - some at forgotten places such as Bald Hills and Wolfgang Springs, then at Strathalbyn on the Burdekin, on the Clarke River and the Fanning River, then near Mount Wyatt - culminating in the discovery of the Cape River field in July 1867. The two newspapers of the north, the *Port Denison Times* of Bowen and the *Cleveland Bay Express* of Townsville, engaged in a battle of words over which town was to be the port for the new goldfield. The business community of Bowen offered their own reward to lure the prospectors further south.

But the battle of the ports had only just begun; in 1868 there came rumours of an even bigger gold discovery near the Burdekin. By the following year it had been confirmed that the new find was not just another short-lived alluvial discovery, but a reefing field, the first in the northern half of Australia. By 1870 it had been gazetted the Ravenswood goldfield, and had deep mines going underground and steam-powered crushing batteries at work. But the discoveries went on: the Gilbert and Etheridge goldfields further west, and then North Queensland's wonderful Christmas present for 1871, the Charters Towers goldfield, which would prove richer than all the rest put together, and become the greatest goldfield in Queensland.

The population who came to the north in the next thirty years were very different from those who had first driven their flocks into the North Kennedy district. First, while many of them were English and Scottish like the early graziers, a large number came from almost everywhere in the world. Americans and Scandinavians were prominent on all the goldfields, and there were Germans and Italians, New Zealanders and South Africans, and large numbers of Chinese. One important effect of the goldrushes was to greatly increase the ethnic diversity of the Australian population.

The appearance of some of the gold diggers was very distinctive. They were engaged in the greatest adventure of their lives, and in the early years many prided themselves on their flamboyant dress and behaviour, affecting bright red Crimean shirts, moleskin trousers, knee-length boots, brightly coloured sashes and silk scarves, with broad felt or straw hats. Long hair and luxuriant beards and moustaches were fashionable, and most wore revolvers and sheath knives on their belts. Although they were consciously modelling themselves on the legendary and unruly miners of California, they in fact formed a surprisingly orderly population, and violence and crime were unusual on the northern goldfields.

At first, nearly all of the new arrivals were men, and they remained mobile, alert to news of new gold discoveries. As one goldfield warden described their behaviour: "If the northern miner has one besetting sin ... it is his readiness at a moment's notice to sacrifice his all, if required, to enable him to hurry off to the scene of some new discovery - good or bad, authenticated or not". (*Annual Report of the Department of Mines* 1878, p. 21)

But when first Ravenswood and then Charters Towers were established as underground reefing fields, they grew into settled communities where miners worked for wages in big mines, and women and children made up a large proportion of the population. No longer tent encampments, they became large towns with schools, public libraries and brass bands, and the few men who still wore Crimean shirts and knee boots were looked on as nostalgic relics of the past.

By the late 1870s the economy of the north had been transformed; the greatest industry was mining, and for the time pastoralism had faded into the background. There were never significant gold discoveries made within Thuringowa's borders; the fringe of the Star River rush, a toe of the Ravenswood goldfield extending over the Leichhardt Range at Hillsborough, and a little alluvial gold from the creeks in the Mount Stuart range made up the district's modest contribution to the great gold rushes. But Thuringowa's strategic location between the goldfields and the coast meant that travelling to the goldfields itself became an important industry.

Horse transport created a demand for feed, and maize-growing became an important agricultural industry. A large proportion of the people living in Thuringowa were involved in serving the needs of transport and communication, and those needs in turn shaped the map of settlement. The first mineral discovery, the Star River field, had been conveniently located beside the old road inland, but as the gold discoveries spread south they increased traffic on the new Reid Gap road, and a new generation of road-side settlements arose along it at Upper Ross, Antill Plains, Woodstock, Double Barrel Creek, Reid River at the foot of the range and Cunningham's Waterhole at the top of the climb.

The needs of transport brought other changes to the district. As shipping increased on the northern coast, the Queensland government began to pay attention to shipping hazards. The treacherous low-lying sandspit of Cape Bowling Green was first to be marked with a lighthouse in 1874, two years after it claimed the *Isabella*. It was a prefabricated timber and iron structure imported from England, with a kerosene lamp rotated by a clockwork mechanism. The lightkeepers had the loneliest job in Thuringowa, and also had to battle the shifting sands of the cape; on two occasions the tower had to be moved to new sites because it was threatened by erosion. (The Cape Bowling Green light remained in service until 1987 when it was replaced by a modern strobe. The 1874 light is now at the Australian

Maritime Museum in Sydney.) In 1879, the rocky entrance to Cleveland Bay was marked with another lighthouse on Cape Cleveland. Another requirement of every nineteenth century port was a quarantine station, and this was built on Magnetic Island, at first just a squalid collection of huts and tents with inadequate food and water.

Thuringowa was fortunate in receiving a telegraph line from Brisbane within a few years of settlement, so that rapid - but expensive - long-distance communication became possible. This was not the result of the Queensland government's concern for its northern citizens, but part of an inter-colonial race to receive the telegraph line to Europe. Queensland and South Australia made competing bids to be the Australian landfall for an undersea cable from Singapore that ultimately linked all the way to London. A telegraph wire came all the way up the coast to Townsville in 1869, then went north to Cardwell, over the ranges to Georgetown and on to Karumba on the Gulf of Carpentaria by 1871. Queensland's line was finished first, but the English telegraph company chose Darwin as the cable landfall when the South Australian government completed its Overland Telegraph Line across the middle of the continent from Adelaide. An important compensation for Queensland's failure was that settlements throughout the north were in telegraph communication with the rest of the world very early.
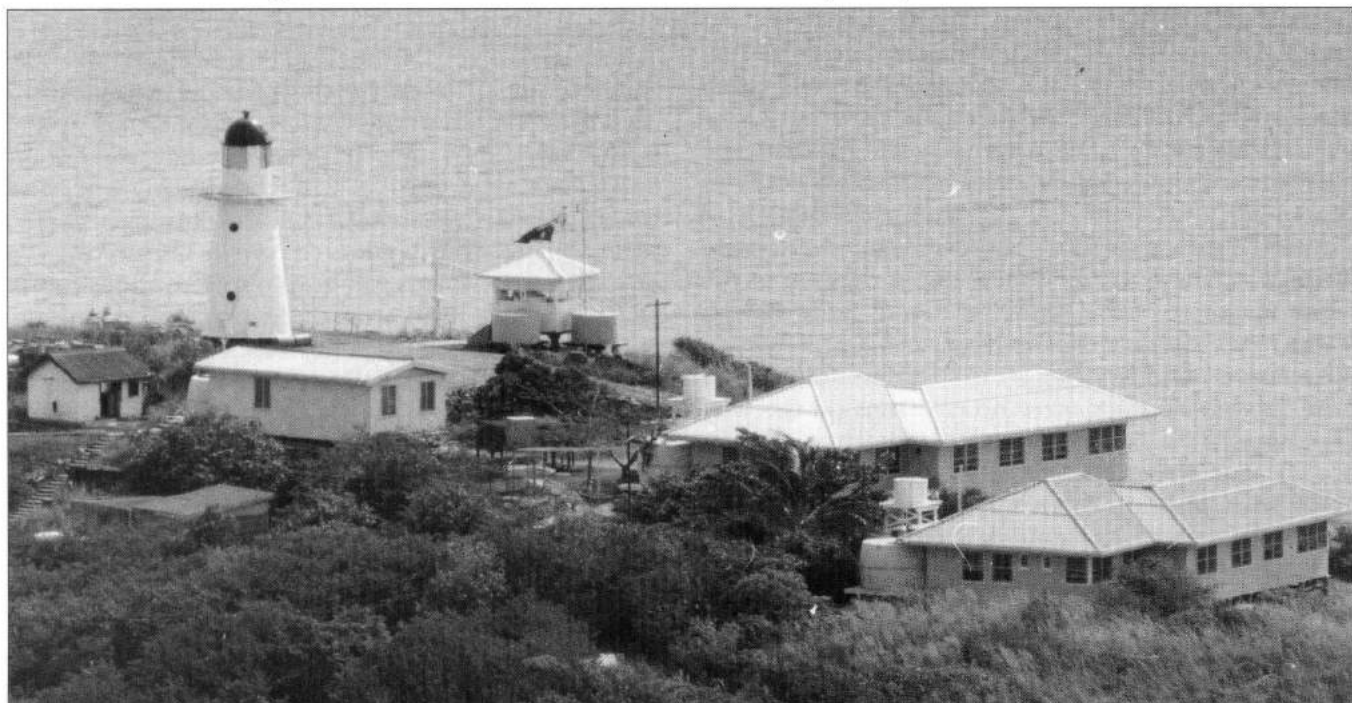
Cape Cleveland Lighthouse, 1972.

Barry Laver

The Great Northern Railway

Transport on land remained the main concern. Sea transport in the nineteenth century was relatively cheap and efficient, but transport overland in drays and wagons on rough roads was slow, expensive and unreliable. In the Victorian era, the state of the art in land transport was the steam engine running on an iron railway. By the mid 1870s, as the Charters Towers goldfield blossomed into Queensland's greatest economic asset, the old rivalry between Bowen and Townsville broke out even more energetically as both ports attempted to persuade the Queensland government to build them a railway to the goldfield. The Bowen newspaper took every opportunity to insult its rival, referring to "the little puddle-hole of a creek which serves as a port for Townsville." (*Port Denison Times* 21 August 1870)

There were only two railway lines in the colony at the time, both commenced in the 1860s - one west from Brisbane to the Darling Downs, the other inland from Rockhampton - so the decision to start Queensland's third line was a major event. It also had highly political implications, and in considering the proposed routes, the government was very conscious of the number of voters who would be pleased by each of the alternatives. In 1877 the government made its decision; the railway was to be built inland from Townsville, up through Reid Gap to Charters Towers. The deciding engineering factor was where the goldfields lay in relation to the winding course of the Burdekin River. From Bowen it was necessary to cross the river once on the way to Ravenswood and twice to get to Charters Towers, but from Townsville there were no crossings on the way to Ravenswood and only one to Charters Towers. Bowen was devastated by the decision, and was never in a position to compete economically with Townsville again. As Geoffrey Bolton put it, "Bowen had the better harbour, Townsville had the better politicians, and was on the right side of the Burdekin." (Bolton 1972, p. 161)

Construction of the Great Northern Railway, as it was called, began in 1879 along a new route to the inland. From Townsville it went south across Ross Creek and Ross River, then to the east side of Mount Stuart. Once out on the plain, the line went due south to join up with the road near Woodstock homestead, and from there to Charters Towers it closely followed the road alignment up through Reid Gap. By December 1880 the line was open to Reid River. Construction of the winding route up the range was very slow, as the deep cuttings through the granite all had to be drilled by hand for blasting a cubic metre at a time, and it was November 1881 when the line opened to Cunningham's Waterhole at the top. From there it went south-west across the plateau, bridged the Burdekin at Macrossan, and opened to Charters Towers in December 1882. It arrived there as newly-opened silver mines were booming just outside Ravenswood, and so a branch line was built south across the tableland to Ravenswood in 1884.

The railway brought another transformation to Thuringowa's economy, and created new settlements along its route. Steam locomotives needed water tanks at regular intervals, besides the stopping places for passengers and freight, so there were sidings stretching across the plain at Oonoonba, Cluden, Stuart, Roseneath, Brookhill, Stanley, Antill Plains, Toonpan, Woodstock, Double Barrel and Reid River. At the top of the range where the two railways diverged, sleepy Cunningham's Waterhole took on the much more business-like name of Ravenswood Junction. Road travellers still used the old road to the west of Mount Stuart up the Ross River, but as often happened, a new road gradually developed parallel with the railway line, and the little settlements at the railway sidings began to cater for road travellers as well. The railway brought new forms of employment, and many people on the land worked in a mixed economy, perhaps farming on a small block part of the year, and employed as a railway fettler the rest of the time.

The economic effect of the railway was exactly what the local business community had hoped for. It focused a large proportion of the trade and commercial activity in North Queensland on the port of Townsville, which began to grow at an extremely rapid rate. Townsville had been surveyed in 1865 as a small area of allotments close to the mouth of Ross Creek and along the Strand. Its population in 1870 was only a few hundred, climbing steadily to about 4,000 by 1880. With the opening of the Great Northern railway it began to rise dramatically, reaching about 12,000 by 1887. The little timber shops, warehouses and hotels along the bank of Ross Creek that made up early Townsville were completely rebuilt during the building boom of the 1880s:

So rapidly are new and handsome edifices replacing the buildings in which the "pioneers of the wilderness" labored and lived that it will be impossible to recognise the Townsville of five or six years ago in the well-built city that will be in existence in but a short time to come. Merchants and tradespeople ... are vieing with each other for excellence in their business premises. Perhaps the greatest change in appearance has been effected in Flinders-street by the erection of buildings on the Ross Creek side of the street, shutting out from view the slimy mudbanks through which that by no means limpid stream "flows onward to the sea." (Townsville Herald 24 December 1887)

Originally confined to the creek bank and the little basin between there and Stanton and Melton hills, the built-up area grew outward in the 1880s to encircle Castle Hill with the suburbs of North Ward, German Gardens and West End, and across the causeway toward Hermit Park. The urban fringe of Thuringowa had some gracious homesteads, a few of which still stand; *Currajong* was built in 1888 as the residence for the manager of the Australian Joint Stock Bank, Alfred MacKenzie, in what is now Fulham Road, although the house has now been re-located to the Historic Houses precinct in Castling Street. Another very beautiful house still standing is Andrew Ball's house *Rosebank* at Mysterton, built in 1886.

A few people lived on Ross Island and rowed boats across the creek, but they were connected to the mainland by the railway bridge in 1880. Then in 1889 the Victoria Bridge spanned Ross Creek, opening the island up to intensive development. Jumping Jack had died back in Britain five years earlier, but his landing place was on the move.
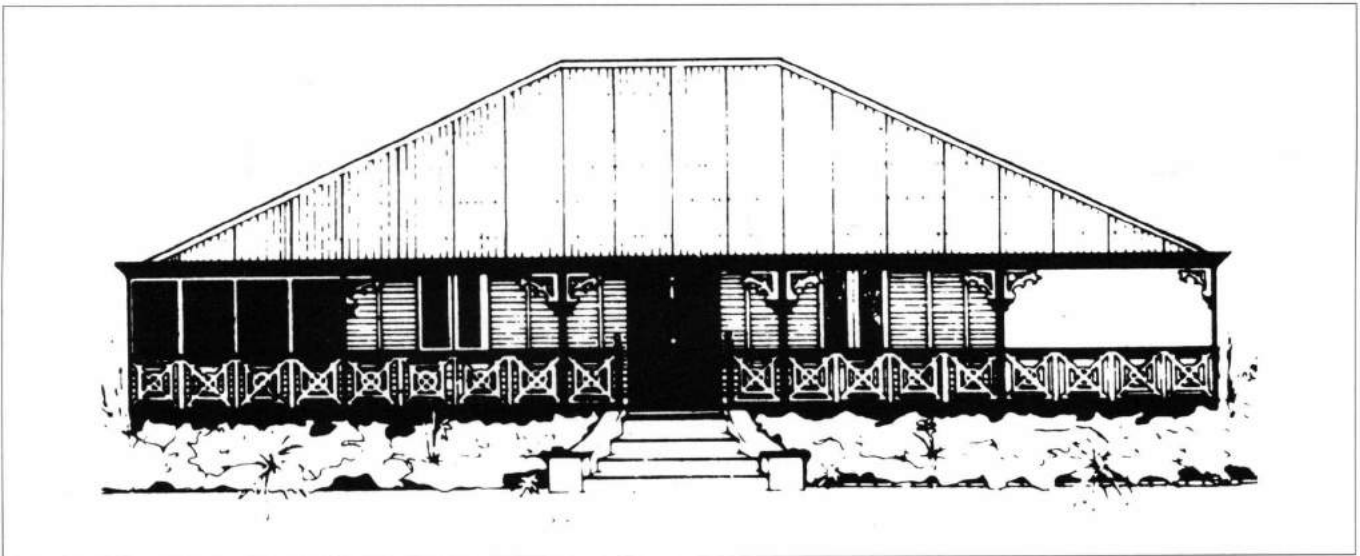
"Currajong" originally in Mundingburra, now a National Trust historic house museum. Gai Copeman

Growth of a Community

During the 1880s, nearly all of this new urban development was no longer occurring in Townsville, but in Thuringowa, a place which had not previously existed, but which was created by the Queensland government in 1879. Townsville had been declared a Municipality early in 1866, giving it an elected government with responsibility for the local issues that Lyn Henderson has eloquently summed up as "rates, roads, and rubbish". (Henderson 1991) John Melton Black, the town's founder, had appropriately been elected the first mayor in May 1866. But the municipality of Townsville occupied only a tiny area, consisting of the west bank of Ross Creek, Castle Hill and the foreshore west to Kissing Point: today roughly the suburbs we call the City, North Ward, and part of West End and Belgian Gardens. Even by the 1870s the urban area was already extending outside this administrative boundary.

For many years, there was no form of local government in the rural areas of the north, only in the towns. The rest of the land was simply divided up into Police Districts, and the police, Clerks of the Court and officials of the Queensland Lands and Works departments between them were vaguely responsible for administrative matters in country areas. There had been an attempt to create another level of government in 1866, but it was never followed through. In October 1866, only seven months after creating the municipality, the Queensland government declared a Province of Townsville. It was not the only province; Cardwell, Clermont and Springsure were also declared, and these also had members appointed to a Provincial Council the following year. The Province of Townsville never had a council appointed. In fact, nothing else ever happened, and the province was quietly forgotten. This rather mysterious episode was apparently an early attempt at a form of regional government which the government dropped for unknown reasons; perhaps because it was feared that the provinces would provide a forum for regional separatist ideas. (Tucker 1991, p. 67)

The Police Districts were not a satisfactory arrangement, and in 1879 the Queensland parliament provided for local government in rural areas by passing the *Divisional Boards Act*, and declaring most of the settled land in the state to be organised into Divisions. No fewer than 74 of the new Divisions were created in one day, and in the resulting flurry of gazette notices, the Thuringowa division was described as:

Commencing at the southern mouth of the Burdekin River, and bounded thence by that river upwards to its junction with the Bowen River; thence by a line due west to the coast range; thence by that range northerly to the head of the Star River; thence by a spur range easterly to Halifax Bay; thence by the sea-coast southerly to the point of commencement, - exclusive of the Municipality of Townsville. (Queensland Government Gazette 11 November 1879, p. 1006)

The new Division had an estimated population of 638. Its neighbouring local government areas were Wangaratta on the east, Dalrymple to the west and Hinchinbrook to the north. A Divisional Board was elected at a public meeting in January 1880, with nine members, all farmers and graziers, who elected William Aplin as their first Chairman.

We might pause to consider why the new Division was called Thuringowa. The simple answer is that nobody is quite sure, as no correspondence or minutes from the time survive. Some people assume it is an Aboriginal word, but it is almost certainly European in origin. The best theory about its origin centres on John von Stieglitz, government surveyor for the Townsville district and local landowner, who would soon be elected to the first Divisional Board. Although Australian-born, von Stieglitz was from a German-speaking family who had spent some time in Russia. Thuringowa appears to be a variation of the name of the central German province of Thüringen, known in English as Thuringia. However the ending -owa suggests an eastern European language. Was von Stieglitz, as District Surveyor, consulted on a suitable name for the Division? Did he for some nostalgic reason suggest the most appropriate name would be the Russian name for a German province? And why did others agree with him? It sounds unlikely, but we have no better theory. If this is really its origin, the name von Stieglitz had in mind would have been pronounced something like Too-ring-gover.

With local government in place and a name for the district, people in Thuringowa for the first time had a sense of belonging to a community. And almost immediately that community began to grow, because nearly all of the development of the Townsville urban area outwards from the port after 1880 was happening in the Thuringowa Division.

Right from the time of its creation, Thuringowa had a distinctive mixed character created by the combination of a large rural area and a small

John Charles von Stieglitz about the time he lived in Thuringowa. Von Stieglitz Collection, Thuringowa

suburban area within its boundaries. For administrative convenience, it would be more practical to have the whole urban area within one local government area, so one might think the obvious solution would have been to abolish the tiny municipality. But no, the Queensland government did the exact opposite; in 1882 it excised Ross Island from the Thuringowa Division and included it in the Municipality of Townsville. When it was barely two years old, the division had already lost its first piece of territory and a significant number of people.

This event set the pattern for the relationship of the Townsville and Thuringowa local government areas ever since. For all of the last 120 years, as the contiguous built-up area has continued to grow, a significant proportion of it has been within the boundaries of predominantly rural Thuringowa. The government's response to this on several occasions has been the same: to take away some of the urban area from Thuringowa and add it to Townsville. Thuringowa has shrunk in size with almost every boundary change since 1882; Townsville has increased in size every time. But right to the present day, the urban area continues to be divided between the two cities.

Closer Settlement

The growth of a population centre in the middle of Thuringowa's coast brought about a change in agricultural practice away from broad-acre grazing to small farming, to supply produce for the local market. The large pastoralists were still powerful - Edward Cunningham, now the owner of Woodstock, and John Carr his manager were both on the Divisional Board - but most of the other members described themselves as selectors or freeholders. Farms subdivided out of the first generation of pastoral leases were filling up the coastal plain and extending up the river valleys. Small holdings like Jorgen Rasmussen's dairy were established on the plains of the Upper Ross by 1871.

A good example of the smaller landholders who followed after the first generation of graziers is John von Stieglitz, and we know a fair bit about him because his letters and family papers have been preserved. He was born in Tasmania in 1844, the son of a wealthy landowner in the Midlands. After training in surveying, he moved to Queensland in 1868, practising as a private surveyor for several years. He was attracted north by the gold rushes, tried his hand at mining on the Ravenswood goldfield without much success, but was given the government contract for surveying the town plan of Ravenswood in 1870. This led to a succession of government jobs which were obviously satisfactorily carried out, for he was appointed as District Road Inspector and Engineer for Roads, Northern Division in 1871, and subsequently became Government Surveyor for the Townsville district in 1873, an important public service position. He took up an area of grazing land which he called Bereberinga on the south bank of

the Ross River under the face of Mount Stuart in 1872, and later bought another property which he called Saint Heliers on Cape Cleveland in 1876. He bred draught horses on Bereberinga and grazed beef cattle on Saint Heliers. (Stieglitz 1994)

In one of his letters home to his family shortly after his arrival in Thuringowa, von Stieglitz described the view from Bereberinga:

There is a very nice view from the top of this little hill, looking north at the foot of it there is a plain for about a mile, with just a nice number of trees on it. From there to the Town it is timbered country, flat, with a river running through it, called the Ross. Over the timber, one can see the houses in Townsville. The one that can be seen best is the Church of England which is on the top of a rise, and over this there is a high island in the sea. All this is looking Northward, and South there is a high rocky mountain, which is not unlike Mt Wellington at Hobart, only there is no snow on it. (von Stieglitz letters 21 May 1873)

Of particular interest in this correspondence are von Stieglitz's comments on the house he built at Bereberinga, as they are among the few written descriptions we have of the first generation of houses in the north. In an early letter actually written from his property he wrote, "there is a nice stony hill where I am at this moment, and here I intend to put up a bit of a cottage." His plans were delayed by the wreck of the schooner *Alma* which was bringing the timber, but two months later he reported that work was in progress. He described the distinctive North Queensland house that was evolving in the first decade of settlement: simple, symmetrical, built of sawn timber with a corrugated iron roof, raised on stumps, with verandahs on the front and back walls and a detached kitchen at the rear:

I have not done much to my cottage yet, only the foundation laid, as the vessel that was bringing the timber was wrecked, but there is another due here now, so trust will soon have it up. I dare say you would like to have an idea of what it is to be like, so will give you an idea of it. The front is to be twenty four feet long and twelve back, divided into two rooms, the parlour will be about two feet longer than bed room. In front of these two rooms there will be a verandah, six feet six inches broad, at the back there will be a similar verandah, but instead of leaving it open, there will be a bedroom nine feet long on the west end and an office six feet six inch square on the other end, so there will be only a little porch left open between the two. The roof will not be hipped, as it will be roofed

Jorgen and Bodild Rasmussen.

"Bereberinga" ca 1873 drawn from letters and plans by John Charles von Stieglitz. Gai Copeman

with iron. *The whole of it will be raised off the ground about one foot and a half, and all built of sawn timber. It will cost about seventy five pounds, painting it and all.* (von Stieglitz letters 13 July 1873)

As a public official and a landholder, von Stieglitz played a prominent part in the community and took part in many business and civic activities. He was one of the members elected to the first Thuringowa Divisional Board, and we have seen that he probably suggested its name. He was one of the founders of the Townsville Show Society Committee, and was a shareholder in the North Queensland Meat Preserving and Boiling Down Works. He lived at Bereberinga until 1885, for the first eight years as a bachelor, then early in 1881 he married in Tasmania and returned with his wife to live at Bereberinga, where a son was born in 1882. However, his wife Mary contracted tuberculosis, and died early in 1885. By that time von Stieglitz's meatworks investment had failed, and he began selling off some of his interests in the Townsville district. He moved back to Tasmania in 1887, where he continued in public life as a member of parliament, eventually dying in 1916.

In his fourteen years residence in Thuringowa, von Stieglitz made a valuable contribution in several fields of activity. He also summed up something of the distinctive spirit of Thuringowa in the way he divided his life between rural and urban activities, farming and administration. Like many cattle farmers, he invested in the new meatworks, hoping to add value to the northern beef product, but was disillusioned by the outcome. The early death of his first wife is a reminder of how frequently infectious disease touched the lives of the first generation of Europeans to live in the north. Bereberinga, the house that von Stieglitz built in 1873, was still standing in the early 1890s, but was probably demolished soon afterward. Today, only the stone base for the kitchen fireplace can still be found on his "nice stony hill" which is now within the grounds of Lavarack Barracks, an attractive spot overlooking the view of Townsville very much as von Stieglitz described it nearly 130 years ago.

Fredrick von Stieglitz born at Bereberinga 1882.
Von Stieglitz Collection, Thuringowa

Towns

ooking back from our position in history, it seems obvious that Townsville is the major port for the Thuringowa region, and always has been. However, that was not what it looked like in the early years of European settlement. Remember that the government ports of Wickham and Cardwell were established just to the north and south a few months before Townsville, and to people at the time they appeared to have equal, or even better, chances of flourishing. But it was not to happen, because both had serious geographical disadvantages.

Cardwell was established by a government expedition, including James Morrill as interpreter, in January 1864. Its location was officially intended to serve the pastoral stations of the upper Burdekin, and Governor Bowen personally enthused about its beautiful harbour, which rather improbably reminded him of the Greek islands, predicting that Cardwell "will one day become the capital of the new colony, which may probably at no distant date be formed out of the northern districts of the existing colony of Queensland." (Bowen 1865, p. 191)

The reality was that Cardwell had an indifferent harbour in a shallow bay with its access to the interior blocked by a wall of rainforest-covered mountains. And there was in fact only one station on the upper Burdekin, the Valley of Lagoons, a one-third share of which was owned by the Premier of Queensland, Robert Herbert, which undoubtedly helps to explain the government's enthusiasm for the new port. Cardwell never became more than a small administrative centre and later a tourist town.

Wickham is remembered in folklore for having been washed away by a disastrous flood a year after it was founded, but in reality the story was not quite as dramatic and biblical as that. The site of Wickham, on the north bank of the Burdekin below Jarvisfield station, was actually selected in 1863 and was being surveyed by government surveyor Clarendon Stuart in early 1864, a few months before Ball and Reid had found the landing place on Ross Creek. It can only ever have been intended for small boats, as Captain Wickham had reported in 1839 that the river "has two entrances, both very shallow, and is of little importance, being on a lee shore and fronted by a bar, which seems to break at all times of the tide." He had also warned that the river banks were "subject to inundations" as he had seen flood debris six feet up the trees. (Stokes 1846, vol. 1, p. 330)

In the four or so years it was occupied, the site was a miserable spot, notorious for its mosquitoes. It certainly proved vulnerable to flooding, and was damaged by a severe storm in 1865, but the real reason for its abandonment was more likely that it was useless as a port. Wickham, right down in the estuary, was too far from most of the places it was intended to serve, and it was impracticable to establish a landing any further up the river. For most of a typical year the Burdekin was a trickle of water across the sand, then for a few weeks it became a raging flood, and for perhaps a few months at most it might flow at a navigable level. Like nearly all of Australia's rivers, the Burdekin was simply too unreliable for shipping.

It was not the only attempt at establishing a port for the stations of the Burdekin delta. As Wickham fell into disuse, a new landing was opened on Baratta Creek, an old mouth of the Burdekin.

In our advertising columns will be noticed that the cutter Spec will sail on Monday next for the landing place at Barrata Creek, Bowling Green Bay. This new place of shipment will be of undoubted value to the extensive stations in the neighbourhood; and we are informed that some hundreds of bales of wool will be shipped from there to this place in the course of the next few months. We predict an important future for this spot providing all the reports we have heard of the richness of the soil on the Delta of the Burdekin proves correct. According to Mr Dalrymple's account published in our last issue, this place ought to become a great emporium for the shipment of tropical produce. (Cleveland Bay Express 22 September 1866)

The Baratta landing too faded into obscurity, and today it is uncertain exactly where it was; probably at Huck's landing or Noondoo. Anywhere that a boat could land in the Burdekin delta was a long, difficult, muddy overland slog from any commercial market. The truth was that Jumping Jack's landing place on Ross Creek, for all its shortcomings as a harbour, had the best access to the interior. Once inland railway construction began in 1879, the port of Townsville made all alternative landing places in Thuringowa redundant. It had defeated not only Bowen, but all the other contenders along the coast as well.

As Townsville grew in size in the 1870s and 1880s, it had a curious effect on the development of Thuringowa. The port tended to suppress the development of other urban centres in its vicinity, so none

of the other towns of the district became more than local farming centres or stopping places for travellers. Hillsborough or the Eight Mile on the Bowen-Ravenswood road had a brief life as a diggings township.

The first inland town on the Burdekin was Clare (originally Mulgrave), which started as a pub beside a crossing place, to be followed in the 1880s by the sugar towns of Ayr and Brandon in the delta, and later Giru on the Haughton. The townships on the road up Thornton Gap had a small revival in the early 1880s when there was another brief flurry of mining activity on Dotswood station. Silver was discovered on the old Star River diggings at a place called Argentine.

A syndicate of Townsville investors spent over £5,000 on a large impressive smelter, but like its predecessor the discovery had a short life and left some very disappointed investors. The coming of the railway meant the end of traffic on the old Dalrymple road, and the townships on the Hervey Range road

dwindled away. Stuart, Woodstock and Reid River took over their role as the principal townships on the railway and the new road beside it. In the far northern coastal plain of Thuringowa, under the Paluma Range where the rainfall is high, agricultural blocks were surveyed in 1884. Traffic on the coast road naturally encouraged a pub beside Rollingstone Creek, and the little township of Armidale was formed in 1885. We now call it Rollingstone.

By the late 1880s there were small agricultural and transport townships spread out across the three corners of Thuringowa. The transport patterns that had been established by that time were much as they are today, most of today's towns were already in existence, and the staple industries of beef cattle, sugar growing and servicing mining industry were all underway. In its first 25 years of European settlement, Thuringowa had already taken on a form that we can still recognise today.

Carriers Rest Hotel, Clair.

John Oxley Library

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Sugar

here was a brief experiment with sugar cane on Ross Island in the early days of Black and Towns' settlement, but the real commencement of sugar growing in Thuringowa came when the planters realised the potential of the Burdekin delta. The sugar industry had its origins in southern Queensland only a year or so earlier, although it soon moved north. Significantly, Robert Towns had an investment in the first plantation at Ormiston, south of Brisbane. It was obvious that the coastal plains of the Queensland tropics were climatically similar to those of the Caribbean and Central America where the cane sugar industry had thrived for over a hundred years.

A key player in establishing the northern sugar industry was John Ewen Davidson, an experienced planter from the Caribbean, who at the request of Towns inspected the Burdekin plains in 1865. He was uncertain about the district's rainfall, and moved further north to establish a plantation and mill at Bellenden Plains near Euramo on the Murray River in 1866. The investors lost confidence and the venture collapsed before it crushed any cane, and Davidson moved south again to become a partner in the first sugar mill on the lower Pioneer River near Mackay in 1868.

These events tell us something about the nervousness that surrounded the early sugar industry. With the American Civil War over by 1865, the profits were no longer as great as they had been, and setting up in sugar growing required a large investment and a long wait for a return.
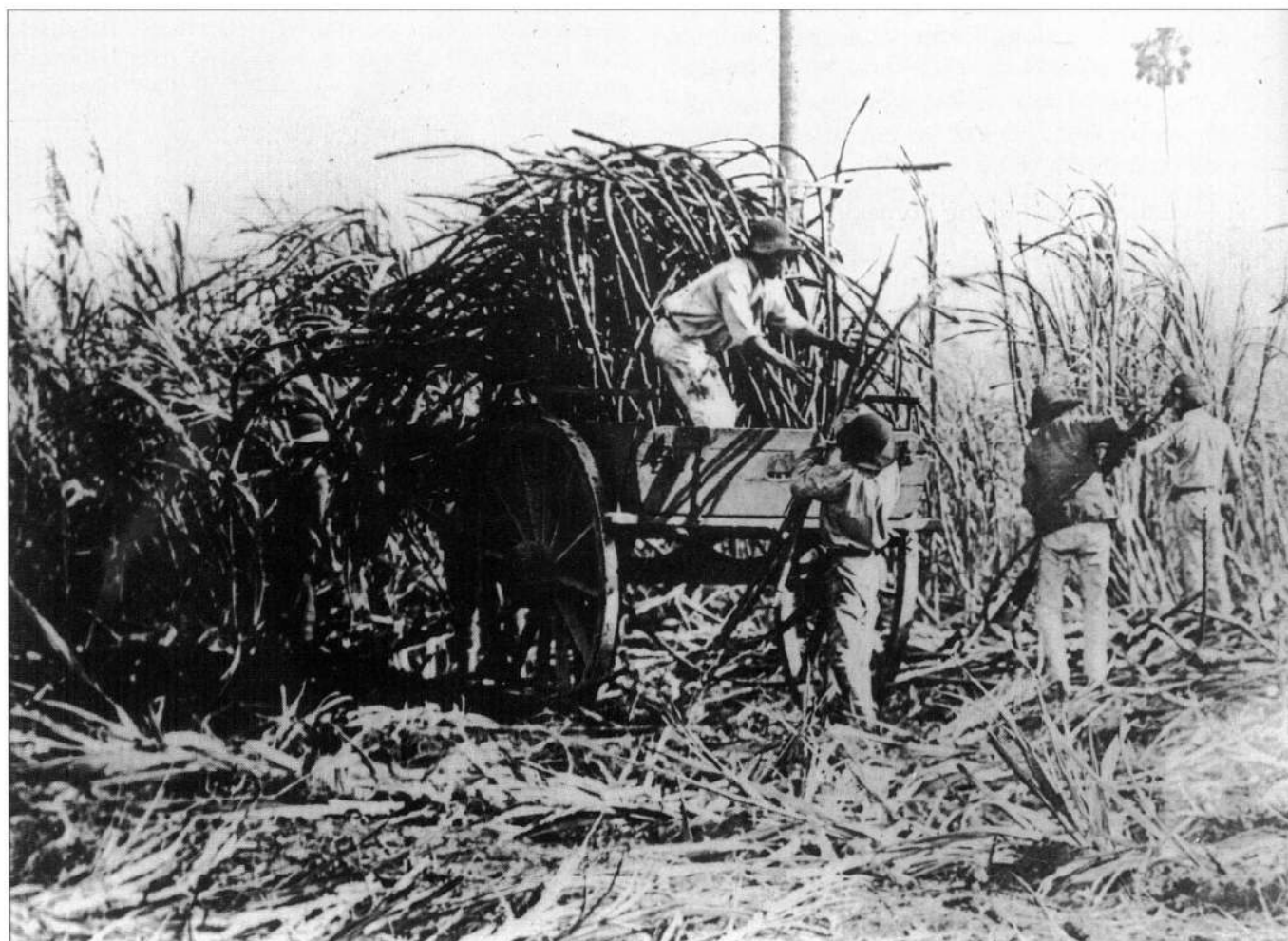
Kanakas at Brandon, ca 1880.

John Oxley Library

Sugar needed an expensive crushing mill, and the cost of the mill demanded that a lot of sugar cane be processed to make it worthwhile, hence a lot of land had to be cleared and cultivated at the outset. In the early years sugar was grown on large plantations, modelled on those of the West Indies and the American South. To keep the cost of wages down, North Queensland planters encouraged the belief that Europeans could not work at manual agricultural labour in the tropics, and some of the early sugar plantations employed Chinese and Malay labour, and indentured labour was brought in from the islands of the South-west Pacific.

Alexander Stuart attempted to grow sugar at Jarvisfield in 1869, but abandoned it before it came to production. Other planters persisted in local experiments, but the rainfall was a problem, and cattle grazing remained the principal activity of the delta. Ten years went by before A.C. Macmillan, Engineer of Roads in the Northern Division, realised the irrigation potential of the freshwater lagoons of the delta, and floated a company to invest in pumping equipment. He established a plantation and mill at Airdmillan in 1879, and the Thuringowa sugar industry was underway. Macmillan was, like von Stieglitz, someone who successfully combined a public service career with private agricultural interests.

The next few years were an auspicious time for sugar growing in the north; mills were also being built around Cairns and Innisfail in the early 1880s, and the Mackay industry was booming. Once the initial threshold of nervousness had been passed, other investors rushed to the Burdekin. Before 1882 was over, there were four more mills on the delta: Kalamia and Pioneer which have not only survived but had highly successful careers, and Drynie and Seaforth, which have long closed. Davidson returned from Mackay to inspect the Burdekin at the height of the sugar excitement, and revised his earlier doubts: "There are five Mackays here", he enthused. (Kerr 1994, p. 61)

Sugar growing transformed the economy of the district. For one thing it raised the value of land enormously. The sugar industry was fundamentally different from cattle grazing in being far more intensive, that is producing a large crop from a small area, and creating a lot of value in a short time. It also employed far more people, and created towns and subsidiary industries. The old Jarvisfield and Inkerman Downs runs were cut up for sugar plantations, and there were shrewd investors at work in this process too. A syndicate headed by Queensland Premier Sir Thomas McIlwraith - another public figure who certainly did not shrink from private enterprise - freeholded much of Inkerman and sold the land to growers at the height of the boom. When a new town was surveyed in the sugar lands in 1882, the grateful buyers named it Ayr, after McIlwraith's birthplace in Scotland. (Bolton 1972, p. 136)

Like the older plantations further south, the early sugar growers throughout most of North Queensland employed Pacific Islander workers, along with some Chinese, Malay and Javanese labour. But the Burdekin industry was highly capital-intensive from the outset, and less dependent on cheap labour; Macmillan even used steam ploughs for cultivation, something that was unheard of in the 1880s. Small farmers played a part in the Burdekin sugar industry alongside the large plantations earlier than in many other places. Chinese and Pacific Islanders were employed on Burdekin plantations, but never in such numbers as in the Mackay district, where Islanders dominated the workforce.

The rise of the sugar industry also helped to shape North Queensland's domestic architecture. From about 1870, visitors were commenting on a new kind of house that was appearing on the sugar plantations of the Herbert and Pioneer rivers. These were raised on tall timber posts two or three metres from the ground. People who asked the reason were usually told that this was avoid fever by sleeping above the miasma which arose from damp ground. John Ewen Davidson comes into our story again here, for he was very probably the originator of the idea. He had experience in the West Indies, where the same thing was being done for the same reason, and the first highset building in North Queensland was probably the house he built at Bellenden Plains in 1866. (Roderick 1999) The reasoning behind the practice owed more to superstition than to medical science, but the highset house had a number of other advantages, especially for people who lived in a hot wet climate among sugar cane fields. In the 1880s the idea of elevating houses spread to the towns, and by the turn of the twentieth century it was widely adopted throughout the north, and spreading to southern Queensland.

The Burdekin sugar industry quickly grew into a powerful economic force in the north. The great boom of the early 1880s subsided within a few years, but the industry went on to other prosperous times. In the early twentieth century it was to boom again, bringing another expansion, and new mills at Inkerman south of the Burdekin at Home Hill, and at Invicta on the Haughton. There the new sugar lands were subdivided out of the old Woodstock run. The town of Minkom (earlier Donaghue's Siding) was surveyed in 1914, but the name never caught on, and was changed to Giru two years later.

The success of sugar growing was to have two dramatic effects on the Thuringowa Division. The first was to lose it a lot of territory. As the population increased in the sugar lands in the far east of the division during the 1880s, it was not long before residents of the delta began to complain that their local government centre was too far away, and unresponsive to their needs. The town of Ayr was
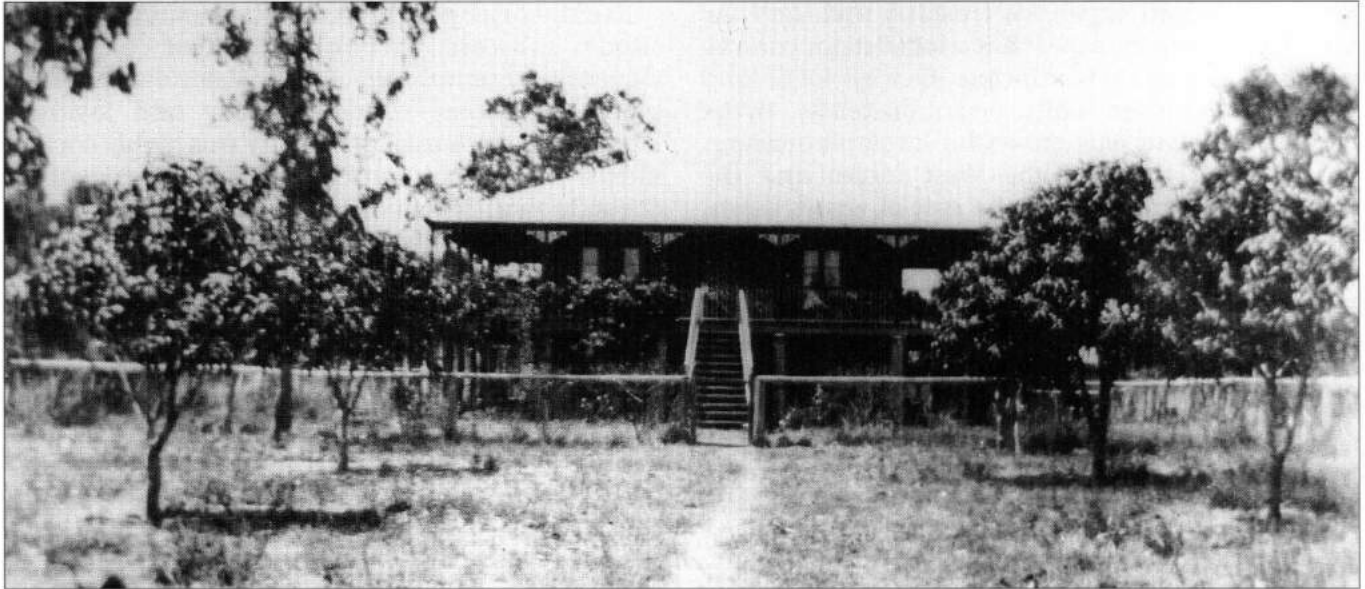
Gleeson Residence, ca 1900.   Gleeson Collection, Thuringowa

the focus for discontent. The Thuringowa Board made the Burdekin a separate subdivision (or ward) with its own elected members, but they complained that just getting to meetings in the Divisional Board's office on the outskirts of Townsville was a major journey for them. In January 1888 the Queensland government responded to a petition from ratepayers by creating the Ayr Divisional Board, in the process granting it all the land in Thuringowa east of the Haughton River. The Thuringowa Board wearily agreed to the boundary change, although it cost them nearly half the division's land area and a whopping loss in rate revenue from the delta: the largest single land loss Thuringowa has experienced since 1879. Later Ayr also gained a similar area from Wangaratta to its south, and was subsequently renamed the Burdekin Shire.

Worse was to come. Another slice of Thuringowa was granted to the Ayr Board in 1893, the area taking in the Haughton plains and Major Creek, as far as Mount Elliot and the line of the Charters Towers railway. Thuringowa protested vigorously, and this time the circumstances were highly controversial; the boundary change was brought about by the North Australian Pastoral Company, owners of Woodstock station, who wanted to take advantage of the lower rates of the Ayr Division. A major shareholder of the company was none other than Sir Thomas McIlwraith. The transfer went ahead, but the Ayr Board had bitten off more land than it could chew, and before long there were complaints from the ratepayers in the transferred area that they were being neglected because they were too far from Ayr! In 1916 the land reverted to Thuringowa. (Kerr 1994, p. 89)

The growth of the Burdekin delta also brought another impact, this one much more positive. The problem with the new sugar activity in the lower Burdekin was, as always, that the district had no reliable access by sea. The Pioneer mill had revived the tidal landing on Baratta Creek, but it was not very satisfactory for handling the bagged sugar product. The only alternative was to haul the sugar in to the port of Townsville by road, a journey of over 70km. The port of Bowen was only a little further from the sugar growing lands, and already had a railway extending part of the way; the old rivalry was still there, and there was a fear that Bowen might capture the Burdekin. Obviously a railway to Townsville harbour was needed urgently.

The Queensland government had begun offering Treasury loans to local government to build their own tramways, and the Cairns Divisional Board had opened the Mulgrave Tramway to the Mulgrave and Hambledon sugar mills in 1897, with the economic benefit of linking their business to the port of Cairns. (These lines were called tramways because the Queensland *Railways Act* defined a "railway" as a line operated by the Commissioner, i.e., one owned by the state. The council-owned lines were exactly the same as government railways, but had to be given a different name.)

In 1900 the Townsville Municipal Council, Thuringowa Divisional Board and Ayr Divisional Board formed themselves into the Ayr Tramway Joint Board and successfully applied for a Treasury loan. Work on the new line started in June. It branched off from the Great Northern Railway at Stuart, skirted the north side of Mount Elliot, and travelled east across the plains to Ayr. On level going all the way and with no major bridges, the Ayr Tramway was completed in March 1901. As a Federation present, Thuringowa had a second railway. The Ayr Tramway was operated by the joint board for ten years, until it was bought by the Queensland government to become part of the North Coast Railway in 1911. (Kerr 1990. pp. 101-102)

New Industries

Throughout the 1880s, Thuringowa was thriving, with the railway to the west, traffic to the goldfields, agricultural development in the Burdekin delta, and a local market for maize and other farm products. There was a new specialised grazing industry developing in places: breeding horses for military use, or "remounts" as they were known in army jargon. The British army in India and Africa had a continuous large demand for horses, and some stations specialised in supplying them. But this was not a large industry; except for the sugar lands of the delta, the beef industry still dominated land use in the district. With the growing populations of Charters Towers and Townsville to feed, beef was becoming an increasingly profitable industry. However the northern beef industry was about to undergo a radical transformation, made possible by technological developments which opened up a much larger market.

Originally, beef cattle could only be processed at the Ross River boiling down works, which closed in 1870. Later a second similar works was established on Alligator Creek by a group of northern pastoralists in 1879 to deal with a glut of cattle. This too only lasted about five years, and through the 1880s the local fresh meat market was the only outlet for the cattle industry.

The great breakthrough was refrigeration. After years of experimentation, the first cargo of frozen Australian beef was successfully shipped to London in 1880. The implications of this were extraordinary; for the first time, the entire population of Britain could form part of the market for beef. A new kind of meatworks was developed in Sydney and Melbourne over the next few years, in which butchered carcasses were frozen in large refrigerated chambers for shipping in special freezer ships.

The first freezing works in Queensland were built at Lakes Creek near Rockhampton and on Poole Island near Bowen in 1883, but they both had appallingly bad luck; the Lakes Creek plant burnt down before it could ship any beef. At Poole Island, just as the first cargo of frozen beef was being loaded in January 1884, a cyclone struck, beaching the ship, destroying its cargo and seriously damaging the works. The two plants struggled on, but both were closed by 1886. Like sugar mills, freezing works were a big investment which faced big risks.

Cattle on "Laudham Park", 1948.

In June 1890 a meeting of pastoralists in Brisbane formed the Queensland Meat Export and Agency Company, which planned to build a new meatworks and freezing plant in Thuringowa. The plan was to locate it where the Great Northern Railway crossed Ross River. The chairman of the meeting, and of the board of the QME Company, was none other than Sir Thomas McIlwraith, then Queensland Treasurer, former Premier and soon to be Premier again. He had a family connection with the export business, for his brother Andrew was one of the partners in the shipping firm McIlwraith McEachern Ltd, which had shipped the first cargo of frozen beef ten years earlier.

The QME meatworks were in operation by 1892, with their imposing brick smokestack rising from the plain, a landmark for travellers on the railway. The first cargo of 600 tons of frozen beef left the port of Townsville for London on the *Otarama* on 22 August 1892. It was a great day for Thuringowa. The *North Queensland Register* exclaimed, "In times to come, freezing works will be established in every port of this coast, and the annual return from exported meat will rival those of gold, wool and other products of North Queensland." (May1990, p. 25) The following January, the company hosted a grand banquet in London, and the guests dined for the first time on North Queensland beef.

The 26 years from the opening of the QME meatworks to the end of the First World War were the heyday of the northern cattle industry. The boom in production made possible by the freezing works brought the greatest prosperity that most cattle growers ever knew. Even so, there remained serious problems for producers; the market was still over-supplied, for the capacity of the meatworks and the demands of the market could not consume all the cattle that were being produced, and many were still sold for low value products such as tallow. In the mid-1890s a shadow fell over the industry when cattle ticks arrived in Thuringowa from the west, reducing the herds and raising production costs with a new regime of dipping and quarantine. Then the turn of the twentieth century brought severe drought, and stocking rates fell everywhere. The worst-affected grazing land with no underground water was abandoned for several years.

The QME's only competition in the district at first was the North Queensland Meat Export Company which took over the old Alligator Creek works in 1889 and established a meat extract and canning works. Meat extract was a brown paste formed by boiling and reducing meat; although unattractive, it was used as stock. The canning works was the only alternative to fresh meat before freezing was developed, but while the product could be exported,
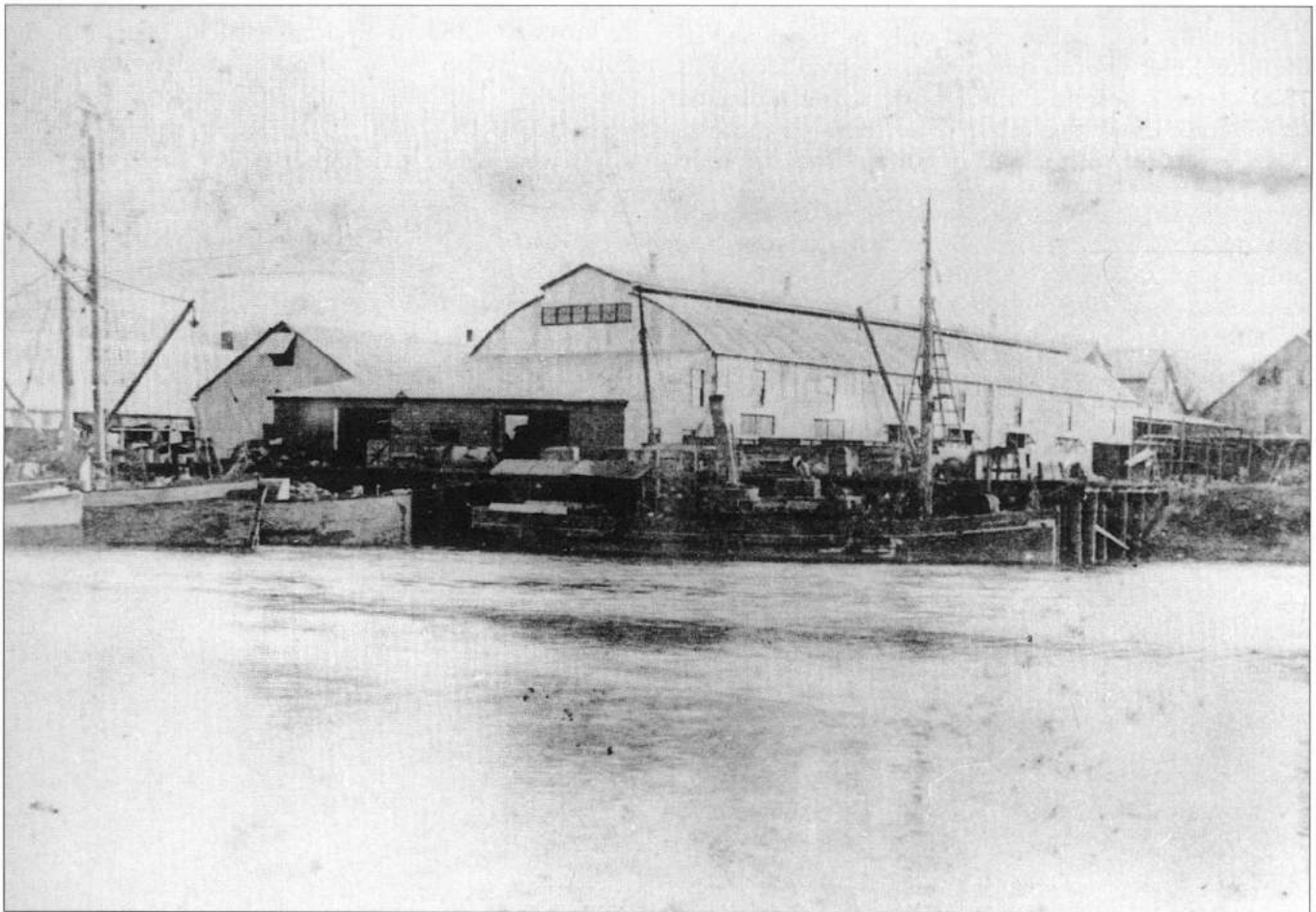
Alligator Creek Meatworks, ca 1890.

Mr. C. Cordingly

it was still not popular with consumers, being tough, expensive and prone to spoiling. The Alligator Creek meatworks concentrated on the fresh meat market, until they were eventually bought by the American company Swifts in 1914 and converted to Thuringowa's second freezing plant.

Besides bringing employment and export income, the meatworks also helped to shape the Thuringowa landscape. The works required extensive holding and fattening paddocks, and the new demand for grazing land near them slowed down the process of breaking land up for closer settlement that had commenced in the 1880s. As a result, extensive areas of land remained in use for grazing on the outskirts of the Thuringowa-Townsville urban area for decades after economic forces would normally have made them attractive for subdivision. Most of John von Stieglitz's old Bereberinga paddocks along the Ross River were bought by the QME Company. We have seen that Sir Thomas McIlwraith's North Australian Pastoral Company bought what remained of Woodstock for grazing, and Sir Thomas personally also bought Dotswood in 1890, shortly after the QME Company was formed.

However, Sir Thomas was about to make his exit from the Thuringowa story. During an economic downturn in 1895, the Queensland National Bank nearly collapsed, and had to be rescued by government intervention. The resulting investigation into the bank's financial affairs discovered that Sir Thomas, while a Cabinet minister and a Director of the bank, had financed his extensive investments in land, shipping, mining, railways, brewing and grazing by running up loans from the bank totalling £267,000, most of it unsecured. This put an end to McIlwraith's political and business career, but by the time it became public knowledge, he was safely in retirement in Germany.

There was a wide range of other economic activity in Thuringowa. Dairying, fruit and vegetable growing and chicken and pig farming all provided a livelihood on small family farms supplying the urban area. Fuel was another small industry, not requiring much by way of plant or capital, in an age when almost everyone cooked over a wood stove. There was a market in carting both domestic and industrial firewood, and another one in burning charcoal to provide the hotter fires in blacksmiths' forges. Early in the twentieth century, traces of coal were discovered not far from the railway between Stuart and Antill Plains, and the North Queensland Collieries Company and the Townley Coal Company were formed by local syndicates. They both spent several years putting down trial bores and shafts, but nothing of commercial value was found.

There were also small base metal mines high up in the rainforest of the Paluma Range. In the early 1890s, prospectors found deposits of wolfram near

Ollera Creek and tin at Crystal Creek. These provided employment for small number of miners for some years. Another mineral which created more industrial interest was calcite, or limestone, discovered at Double Barrel Creek during the construction of the Great Northern Railway. In a predominantly igneous district, the lime deposit was a precious commodity, and it was conveniently located beside the railway. For years it was quarried on a small scale and burned to make quicklime, used by brick-layers to make their mortar. The township that grew up near the lime kilns was at first called Double Barrel, but that was too colourful for an official name, so when a post office was opened there it was called Manton. It was only in the mid-twentieth century that the lime deposits were exploited on a large scale. The locality is now known as Calcium, and a very large quarry provides the raw material for the Stuart cement factory.

The pressures which the Charters Towers goldfield, the sugar industry and later the meat export trade put on the port of Townsville had led to major engineering works, and the muddy little creek that the people of Bowen loved to sneer at was now in the distant past. For the first 15 years, only small vessels could put into the channel of Ross Creek, and larger ships had to sit at anchor in the shelter of Magnetic Island, and be unloaded and loaded slowly from lighters. The Townsville harbour works had begun in 1880 with the construction of granite breakwaters on either side of Ross Creek to create a sheltered basin, then were extended by land reclamation on both sides to create wharf storage areas. Improvements to the harbour have gone on at intervals to the present day. By 1892 when the QME works started exporting beef, large international steamers were able to tie up at the Townsville wharves. A few months later, a spur line was built from the Great Northern Railway, running the length of Ross Island to the east side of the creek, so beef and other cargo could be loaded directly from railway wagons into a ship's hold. The Townsville Harbour Board, formed to manage the port in 1896, had representatives from each of the local government bodies in the hinterland, including the Thuringowa Divisional Board.

As the urban centre of Townsville steadily grew, some old activities were no longer appropriate in new suburban areas, and the railway south to Charters Towers provided a geographic focus for them to be relocated into the Thuringowa division along its route. The race track was moved in 1883 from German Gardens to a new site at Cluden, which would become the principal centre for North Queensland horse racing to the present time. The old Townsville gaol at North Ward closed when the prisoners were shifted out of town to the new Stuart Prison in 1890, creating an industry that not everyone welcomed, but which

provided more employment in the local area. The relationship between Thuringowa and Townsville had developed into an interesting mixture of sharing facilities, co-operating in infrastructure projects, but also jostling each other for land and ratepayers.

Cluden Race Course, 1905.

John Oxley Library

Empires

y the prosperous 1880s, a generation had gone by since European settlement, and the composition of the northern population had changed since the North Kennedy land rush. The Aboriginal population was probably only a few hundred people, a few still living in the bush, but most working on cattle properties, living at homesteads or on the edge of townships. While many of the European population were born in the 8ritish Isles, there was now a significant minority of Australian-born, including a number of young people who had been born in the district. Distinctive Australian accents could now be heard alongside the English and Scottish voices of the early pastoralists and their employees. But the goldrushes and the sugar industry had brought a great variety of people into the district, and there were also Pacific Islanders, Malays and Filipinos. Chinese worked in the sugar fields, and were also involved in market gardening and fishing off the Burdekin delta.

Despite increased cultural diversity, most people of European descent still consciously identified with the British Empire. One of the great anomalies of Australian popular speech was that thousands of people habitually referred to a country on the other side of the world as "home", although they had never been there, and most would never see it. There were radical expressions of support for Australian nationalism and socialist economic policies, particularly from the labour movement, but it was easy for conservatives to cast doubt on these views simply by labelling them as Irish Fenianism or American republicanism. Popular culture in the form of books, songs, newspapers and theatre overwhelmingly stressed the ennobling qualities of being British.

One aspect of being British was the urge to engage in the defence of 8ritish interests rather than Australian national interests; a striking feature of Australian military history is that, of the ten or so occasions when Australian troops have engaged in combat, only one - the Second World War - was in defence of Australian territory. When the Australian colonies were formed, they all had British troops as their defence forces. These were withdrawn in the 1870s, and the colonies were expected to raise their own military units. The first military presence commenced in the Thuringowa-Townsville district in the 1880s, in response to external events. There was first the German annexation of New Guinea, just to the north, in 1883, and then tension between 8ritain and Russia on the frontier between Pakistan and Afghanistan, which, while seemingly a very long way from North Queensland, led to fear that a war between the two empires might bring a Russian naval attack on Australia. The European empires that explored the Australian coastline from the seventeenth century onward were still active, and their activities could still affect the lives of people as far away as Thuringowa.

The Queensland Defence Force was established in 1884, a militia artillery force called the Garrison Battery was raised in Townsville soon afterward, and a battery of two 6 inch coastal defence guns was built at Kissing Point in 1891, with another nearly identical battery on Magazine Island at the eastern breakwater of Townsville harbour. The Garrison Battery was housed in barracks near the Kissing Point fortification, with a parade ground and kitchen and canteen buildings. A large vacant flat area nearby called Norman Park was used for training. The Kennedy Regiment was also formed about 1885, with detachments in Charters Towers and Townsville. The regiment was composed of mounted infantry, soldiers who travelled on horseback, but were trained to fight on foot as infantry. Because the volunteers were expected to provide their own horses, a high proportion of the recruits were from rural areas, and many of the Kennedy Regiment's troopers must have been Thuringowa farmers and station hands. Much of their training in skills like tent-pegging - picking up a tent peg from the ground at the gallop with the point of a lance - would have been very similar to their own forms of bush recreation.

It was 1899 before the Empire first needed the skills of Australia's station hands. War broke out in South Africa between the British provinces of Cape Colony and Natal and the Dutch-speaking republics of Transvaal and Orange Free State, who had divided the land between them over sixty years earlier. The British explanation for the war was quite straightforward: the Dutch had invaded their territory. To the Dutch, the war was an attempt to hold onto their Transvaal province which was being gradually taken from them by predominantly British miners attracted by the discovery of the world's richest gold and diamond mines ten years before.

The South African War, or Boer War as most Australians called it, was an extraordinary event in our history. First, for the enthusiasm with which thousands of Australians volunteered to fight overseas for a cause which had no relevance to Australia at all. Their mixture of imperial patriotism and childish excitement was a forerunner of what would happen in the first year of the Great War fifteen years in the future. Second, for the fact that Australians overwhelmingly sided with Britain, choosing bonds of language and ancestry in a conflict against the Dutch farmers, who in fact had so much in common with Australians in their way of life, their colonial mentality, the landscape in which they lived, and their suspicion of authority. And third, because the Australian colonies actually federated while the war was in progress. At the beginning the six colonies sent their forces to serve in the British army, but by the war's end the Commonwealth of Australia was sending detachments of the newly-formed Australian Commonwealth Horse to serve alongside the British.

Thousands of volunteers from all over Australia enlisted to help the Imperial cause, and the farmers of Thuringowa were no exception. The first Australian contingent arrived in Capetown in November 1899, and they and later reinforcements were continuously involved in hostilities until the war ended with the surrender of the last Dutch forces in 1902. In all, over 16,000 Australian troops were sent to South Africa. The war was seen by most people in Australia as a heroic imperial adventure to be celebrated rather than mourned, as casualties were few, and the nation as a whole suffered very little. Only 251 Australians were killed in action in the South African War, 1.5% of those who volunteered. (Field 1979)

The principal economic impact of the war on Australia was a brisk upturn in the trade in army remounts. Britain sent 484,000 horses to South Africa in the course of the war, and 326,00 of them died. (Yarwood 1989) A large proportion of these horses were supplied from Australia, and the North Queensland Horse Export Company flourished in Thuringowa. Another lasting impact was to leave many Australians with a taste for volunteering for foreign wartime adventures. In South Africa the outcome was a disaster for the Boers; their land was absorbed into the British Empire, and their frustration and resentment have shaped their country's history ever since.

Military encampment Kissing Point, 1911.

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We can be our own country

ver since Governor Bowen's time in 1864, there had been an expectation that the colony of Queensland was only the forerunner of more colonies to be divided off from within its territory, just as Victoria and Queensland had been divided from New South Wales. As the northern community strengthened in the 1880s, the urge for separation from Queensland grew stronger. The arguments that North Queenslanders put forward for separation were exactly the same as those that the Ayr cane growers used to argue for a new local government area: our government is too far away; it doesn't understand our point of view; it takes our money, but doesn't meet our needs; we are being neglected, and would be better off looking after our own affairs.

A Separation League was formed in Townsville in 1882, ushering in twenty or more years of intense debate on political independence for North Queensland. Meetings, debates, books, pamphlets and newspaper editorials on the subject formed a bewildering mass of information and opinion. Retail marketing was just as opportunistic then as it is now, so North Queenslanders could even show their enthusiasm for the cause by drinking Separation beer and using Separation soap!

The movement failed, and North Queensland never achieved self-government. The reasons are not hard to find, because the north never achieved the unity it needed to press its case convincingly.

There was in fact never one North Queensland community, there were several. Working people were suspicious that a separated northern colony would increase the power of the northern graziers and especially the sugar planters, with their policy of employing only cheap imported labour. On the other hand, people on the land were wary of the political power of the prosperous mining towns - already they were able to dictate where the railways would be built - and could not see that it was in their interest to create a colony dominated by Charters Towers mining interests.

Perhaps most damaging to northern unity was the debate over where the capital of the new colony would be. Townsville people naturally said it should be Townsville, but everyone else in the north disagreed. Bowen, the first town in the north, flatly refused to support a colony with its capital at Townsville, and separationists from Cairns, Mackay and Charters Towers all produced arguments to show why their town would make the best capital. Nothing happened, and all the separation arguments have continued at intervals to the present day. What all the participants in the debate agreed on was the necessity to reduce the control that Brisbane governments had over their lives, and the most important result of the separation debate was probably to make North Queenslanders highly receptive to the idea of joining all the Australian colonies into one federation.

Federation

fter a hundred years of European settlement in Australia, the continent was divided into six colonies with their capital cities spaced at intervals around the coastline. They were completely separate administrative units, each reporting independently to their head office in London, overseen by the Secretary of State for the Colonies. Each colony had its own army and navy, post office and customs service. Officially, they had no more in common than say Canada and Hong Kong. Yet most of the people in these six colonies were virtually identical in their language, culture, history and political ideas, and referred to themselves as "Australians" although the word had only a geographical meaning, not a political one.

The movement toward federation of the colonies into one nation began back in the 1850s when James Morrill was the only European living in North Queensland, but it only really gathered momentum in the 1880s. A Federal Council was set up to discuss cooperation between the colonies, however it was little more than an ineffectual debating society. The annexation of New Guinea by Germany and the defence scares of the 1880s made the colonies start talking for the first time about joint defence measures. Then in 1891 a Federal Convention of delegates from all the Australian colonies and New Zealand met in Sydney to begin drafting a federal constitution. Over the next eight years there were three more conventions, and referendums approving the constitution were held in all the colonies. New Zealand dropped out of the process, but by 1899 all the colonies except Western Australia had agreed to federate.

In Queensland, there was resistance in the south, where many people thought the federation would be dominated by New South Wales and Victoria. However, a majority of North Queenslanders were enthusiastic about federating for exactly that reason: it would reduce the power of the Queensland government. Working people in the north also supported Samuel Griffith, who had been Queensland's delegate to the first Convention and played an important role in drafting the federal constitution. Griffith, a former Queensland Premier, had been strongly opposed to the sugar planters and their imported labour, and there was a public expectation that the Australian federation would reduce the power of the planters and stop the indentured labour trade.

In 1900 the British parliament passed the *Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act*, Western Australians voted to join at the last minute, and a new country called the Commonwealth of Australia was created on 1 January 1901. While there were speeches, excitement, fireworks and street celebrations throughout the country, the real impacts on people's daily lives in Thuringowa were very slight, and slow to happen. A new word appeared in the Australian vocabulary; under the federal constitution the colonies had ceased to exist, and people now had to get used to calling them "states". Elections were held in March, and people faced the unfamiliar task of voting for their federal representative and their state senators. New postage stamps were issued, but otherwise the state postal system continued in operation. It was several years before the paperwork was done to hand property like post offices, lighthouses and Townsville's handsome new customs house over to the Commonwealth. Likewise, the Queensland Defence Force was officially placed under the control of the Commonwealth Minister for Defence in 1901, but all that meant was that the Kennedy Regiment placed new Australia badges on their khaki uniforms; the drill halls, coastal defence guns, barracks, parade grounds and firing ranges did not become Commonwealth property until 1908.

However, within months of Federation, things were happening in the temporary Commonwealth parliament in Melbourne that would shape the lives of many people in Thuringowa. One of the immediate effects of federating the colonies was to provide an effective mechanism for institutionalising racism within Australian law and administration. The Chinese and Pacific Islanders in particular, but also anyone else who the Commonwealth chose to discriminate against, would find life becoming more difficult in future.

In quick succession in 1901, three acts of federal parliament set the scene for the new era of racial discrimination. First the *Commonwealth Franchise Act* excluded all Asians and Australian Aborigines from voting, while simultaneously it gave the vote to British subjects resident in Australia. Black Australians could not vote, but white foreigners could. The Aboriginal people of Thuringowa still numbered a few hundred people, many living on

pastoral properties where the men worked as stockmen. They had never been allowed to vote in any case, but now their new country had taken the trouble to pass a law saying they couldn't in future. Only four years before, Queensland had passed the curiously-titled *Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act*, which allowed for the creation of reserves on which Aboriginal people could be confined against their will. That would not happen for some years.

The second discriminatory measure was the *Immigration Restriction Act*, which provided that a customs officer could require any person wishing to live in Australia to sit for a dictation test, in which a few sentences were read out aloud, and the immigrant was required to write them down. It was a very simple and elegant means of discrimination, because if immigrants happened to be literate in English, then the test could simply be given again, in French or Swedish or Welsh for example, until they failed. Although the dictation test could be - and was - used against anybody at all, its main aim was to restrict Chinese immigration. The Chinese had been controversial in Australia since the 1850s, and their restriction was one of the issues that had driven the federation movement. One of the first examples of effective collaboration between the Australian colonies had been blanket Australia-wide legislation discriminating against the Chinese in 1888.

The new measures were described as the White Australia Policy. For Chinese people already resident in Australia, they made life very difficult. Under the new legislation, they could not become naturalised Australians. They could not visit China to fulfil family obligations, or they would almost certainly be prevented from returning. Nor could they bring out relatives to Australia. The traditional practice of single men earning some money in Australia and then returning to China to marry a woman from the village and bring her back to live in Australia now became impossible. The only alternatives were to return to China, which many did, or to stay, cut off permanently from contact with family and village. With no new members arriving, the Chinese population throughout Australia shrank and aged after Federation, and within two decades many of those who chose to stay in Australia carrying on the traditional occupations of fishing, carting, mining and market gardening were solitary old men.

The third new Commonwealth discriminatory measure was the *Pacific Labourers Act*, under which all islanders were to be repatriated to their homes. This was one of the reasons why North Queenslanders had voted for Federation. To accelerate the process, the Commonwealth also imposed an excise on all sugar produced, with a rebate on sugar produced entirely by European labour. The rebate was paid until 1913, by which time these powerful incentives had achieved their aims, and the sugar industry no longer employed any significant amount of non-European labour. This meant the end of the plantation era, and brought about the rise of the modern Australian sugar industry, based on the independent small farmer. The joint effect of all these measures was to strengthen the position of European Australians at the expense of all other groups. White Australians overwhelmingly supported the new legislation, for it worked to the economic advantage of European farmers and employees. The White Australia Policy was to remain in force for nearly seventy years.

Shortly after federation, and completely unconnected with it, Thuringowa was given a new title. The form of local government which had been created in 1879 had been called a Divisional Board. In 1902, new Queensland legislation called the *Local Authorities Act* did away with the old divisions and re-named them shires, so at the beginning of 1903 the district became the Thuringowa Shire.

War in Europe

A few people in Thuringowa could boast that they had fought in a war. The impact of the war in South Africa had been very slight; more a source of excitement than suffering. The one that came next was very different; the Great War that was fought throughout Europe and the Middle East and on the seas all over the world in 1914-1919 was more destructive and horrible than anyone had ever imagined a war could be. The First World War killed millions of people, far more than any other war in history. It redefined warfare in the public imagination, and for the remainder of the twentieth century the images of trenches, barbed wire and machine guns would be associated in most people's minds with the word war.

The jealous tangle of imperial politics that led to the Great War has been described in many books. The complex links that dragged countries all over the world into a war that almost no-one wanted can be summarised into a sequence of events that would sound like a comic satire if it had not really happened. Because a Serbian anarchist assassinated the heir to the Austrian throne in Bosnia, Russia declared war on Austria, Germany invaded neutral Belgium on the way to attack France, as a result England declared war on Germany, and eight months later Australian soldiers who had volunteered to fight for their Empire were, to everyone's amazement, sent to invade Turkey at a place called Gellibolu which probably no-one in Australia had ever heard of before. Gallipoli - its Greek name which the English preferred to use - has become one of the legendary events of Australian history and folklore, as our country's first experience of modern war: the dawn landing, the eight-month defence of bare rocky hillsides, the bungles by the commanders, the individual courage and suffering, the pointless infantry charges on the Turkish trenches, the 8,000 Australian dead, the silent evacuation, and perversely, the friendship between Australians and Turks that has grown stronger ever since. Most Australians remember Gallipoli as an almost personal battle in which we and New Zealand fought the Turks and lost, and are surprised to learn that India, Britain and France were not only fighting alongside us, but all lost far more dead than Australia.

That is the Australian legend. But in Thuringowa, the Great War had a very different beginning. With Britain's declaration of war on Germany in August 1914, the Australian government followed automatically. To most Australians, Germany was a distant country in central Europe, but to North Queenslanders, it was the country which had annexed New Guinea thirty years earlier, and the German flag flew over Rabaul, only 1,000 miles north-east of Thuringowa, not much further away than Brisbane. The Kennedy Regiment, raised for defence against foreign empires in the 1880s, had a specific task allocated to it on the outbreak of war: it was to ship to Thursday Island and garrison the strategic port in Torres Strait. The regiment mobilised within days of the outbreak of war, requisitioned the SS *Kanowna*, and sailed for Thursday Island as ordered.

At the same time, an Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force was being formed in Sydney to take over German possessions in the South Pacific. On its way north, this force anchored off Palm Island, then rarely visited by anyone, and spent the week 24-30 August practising landing troops from small boats. They sailed on for Port Moresby.

Once established on Thursday Island, the regimental officers of the Kennedy Regiment decided their orders did not go far enough, and it was clearly their duty to seize Rabaul from the German empire! They called for volunteers, and 500 soldiers of the Kennedy Regiment steamed for Port Moresby, their enthusiasm not shared by the *Kanowna's* by now alarmed and unwilling crew. Sadly, enthusiasm was not enough. In Port Moresby the volunteers met the official Expeditionary Force sent from Sydney, whose officers were horrified that a band of untrained and hopelessly ill-equipped volunteers, without orders, had planned to take on the German empire. The war was only a month old when the Kennedy Regiment was sent back to Townsville, while more professional soldiers went on to take Rabaul from the Germans after a few days of skirmishing with very few casualties.

The incident tells us a lot about the people of North Queensland. By 1914 a population with many first- and second-generation North Queensland born, many of them still identified with Britain, and were prepared to join in a war for no other reason than that their Empire was at war. But their view of the world was different, not only from that of Britain, but from that of southern

Australians. They were focused on events to Australia's north in South-east Asia and the South-west Pacific much more clearly than people of the southern capitals, who had no near foreign neighbours, and still saw the world through European eyes. Hence their view of the immediate needs of Australia's defence was different, and they saw no need to await orders from distant commanders before setting out to do what obviously needed doing. It is fascinating to speculate what a military legend might have been made if the *Kanowna* had steamed straight to Rabaul, and it was North Queensland's small force of youthful half-trained farmhands and shop assistants - with not enough boots for everyone - who had accepted the German surrender.

Many of the volunteers went on to join the Australian Imperial Force. Some joined the Light Horse and fought in Gallipoli and the Middle East. Many more enlisted in the 31st Battalion of the 8th Infantry Brigade AIF, and embarked for the Western Front to join in the trench warfare which would last for another three years. The Great War had few direct effects in Thuringowa; on one hand it increased demand for canned and frozen beef, so that the two meatworks did a roaring trade, but on the other it brought about a shortage of labour, and disrupted shipping so that some imported commodities became costly and difficult to obtain. These economic strains were the final straw for the ailing mining industry, and all the big gold mines of Charters Towers and Ravenswood closed down while the war was in progress. By that time beef and sugar production had already displaced mining as the north's biggest industries, so these closures had little impact on the surrounding region; displaced workers had no difficulty obtaining jobs. In the big manufacturing centres of the south, the war contributed to a greater acceptance of women in industry, but in a rural district such as Thuringowa there was little economic impact beyond a shortage of farm labour.

The biggest impact was the casualties. During the fighting at Gallipoli the newspapers began publishing lists of those Killed in Action, Wounded, Died of Wounds and Missing. In 1916 the AIF was thrown into Britain's great offensive on the Western Front, and the casualty lists grew longer. These lists were sometimes in print faster than the official telegram notifying the next of kin could arrive from Europe, and anxious relatives scanned every published column, hoping not to find any familiar names. Australian soldiers gained a reputation with their British commanders for being ill-disciplined but impetuously brave - precisely the qualities which the Kennedy Regiment had demonstrated in the first month of the war - and they were used more and more as

shock troops who would carry out an attack with a skill and enthusiasm that few European armies could match. The AIF was not alone in this, for troops from the other former colonies, New Zealand and Canada, had the same reputation and were used in the same way.

The 31st Battalion included soldiers from all over Australia, but many were recruited in the Townsville region, which meant that the majority of its troops came from Charters Towers, the biggest urban centre of the north. Others came from Townsville and some from Thuringowa. Those who expected it to be like their vision of the South African War, fought by mounted troops galloping across grassy plains, were to be very disillusioned. They arrived in Egypt early in 1916, too late for the Gallipoli campaign, and were shipped on to France in time for the July 1916 offensive on the Somme. They were in the thick of the battle of Fromelles, where in a few days in July 1916 the battalion's casualties were 16 officers and 528 men. A year later they were at the battle of Polygon Wood in September 1917. They defended Amiens from the great German offensive of August 1918, and the next month joined in the attack on the Hindenburg Line which led to the German collapse and the Armistice of 11 November.

Probably the worst single episode in the battalion's experience was their defence of the village of Pozieres from a German counter-attack on 20 July 1916. The northern newspapers reported a glorious victory for our heroic boys:

With bulldog tenacity they held on against an inferno of shellfire, and by a series of rushes drove back the enemy with bomb and bayonet from the northern end of the village. We have the range exactly, our shells burst in the midst of the enemy, only a few yards from our right. When a momentary lull in the barrage occurs, the Anzacs advance with a "coo-ee", and the Teutons fall back in sullen retirement. There is often man to man and hand to hand combat with no quarter. In this in-fighting, the Germans are no match for the Australians, who simply love it. It is the thing they are waiting for. One and all the Anzacs are sterling fighters, making the name of Australia more honored throughout the Empire, and more dreaded by the enemy. (North Queensland Register 31 July 1916)

But for a more accurate picture of the fighting around Pozieres, it was necessary to continue reading the paper every morning over the next few weeks as the daily casualty reports trickled in from the confusion of the battlefield

189th CASUALTY LIST

Brisbane, August 3.

The 189th casualty list was issued this morning. The summary reads:-

Officers.- Killed in action 1, wounded 3, severely wounded 3, ill 10, injured 1.

Staff. Nurses - ill 2.

Others.- Killed in action 48, died of wounds 21, died of illness 1, died of injuries 1, died (cause not stated) 2, wounded 119, severely wounded 94, missing 1, ill 139, seriously ill 6, dangerously ill 18, injured 14, seriously injured 4, total 495.

QUEENSLAND

Killed in action:- Private G.E. Gibbs, Sapper J.K. McLennan, Privates T. Rabnett, E. Richardson, E.T. Allender, W. Ellsdale.

Wounded:- Gunner A.E. Lynch, Sapper J. Creamer, Gunner P.J. Bourke, Privates P. McCoy, G. Bilby, H. Walters, Sergeant A.J. Page, Second-Lieut. L.M. Lyons, Privates R.J. Cane, D.J. Hollands, W.J.K. Crane, Corporal K.A. Robinson, Privates G.A. Wigley, S.J. Lander, W.R. Luxmore, H.M. Price ... and so on for half a newspaper column every day. (*North Queensland Register* 7 August 1916 - extracts from the list)

Feelings of anger and helplessness in Australia caused governments to exact a strange symbolic revenge on Germany. All over the country there were towns with names like Marburg, Rosenthal and Hahndorf that had been given by German settlers in the nineteenth century and used for generations by their honest and loyal descendants.

Now all of these were officially changed to English names. Thuringowa was probably a German place-name, but oddly it seems to have been overlooked. Instead, attention focused on the suburb of German Gardens, named for Henry Bartels who had farmed there for a while. This could not be tolerated, so in honour of "brave little Belgium" whose invasion by Germany had brought the British Empire and the soldiers of the 31st Battalion AIF into the Great War in the first place, it was renamed Belgian Gardens, surely one of the strangest placenames in Australia.

The physical impact of the war on Australia came in the 1920s, when white marble war memorials appeared in country towns all over the country. The first war memorial in Queensland was unveiled in Brisbane on the first anniversary of Anzac Day in 1916, establishing a tradition which spread through both urban and rural communities in the coming years. Monuments and honour boards appeared in the larger towns such as Ayr. No other country in the world erected as many memorials to the dead of the First World War, perhaps reflecting the fact that Australia, with New Zealand, suffered the highest proportion of casualties of any of the combatant nations; about 20% of the Australians who volunteered to fight overseas died there. The bodies of the dead were not returned, but buried in the countries where they fell, so the memorials first provided a tangible focus for the personal grief of families, and then took on a community significance as the place for ceremonies of remembrance.

Depression

The Great War ended in public displays of patriotism and celebration, but for tens of thousands of Australian families it was a time of silent but inconsolable grief. 60,000 Australians were dead, and at least as many more were physically and mentally shattered, and would never have a job again, would never work a farm, and never marry. As a result of the war, hundreds of thousands of what should have been Australian babies were never born.

The diggers returned from Europe to a Thuringowa increased in size by the return of the Haughton district, but much reduced in numbers. The steady extension of the built-up area into Thuringowa had given the shire a population of 7,000 by 1917. Then the Queensland government again transferred most of the urban area to Townsville. The foreshore north as far as Cape Pallarenda and all the land north of the Ross River as far west as what is now Bamford Lane were lost. Thuringowa dropped to a population of 2,500, losing the suburbs of Belgian Gardens, West End, Pimlico, Hyde Park and Hermit Park, and the riverside farming areas of Mundingburra and Aitkenvale. To add insult to injury, the Thuringowa Shire office at the corner of Charters Towers Road and Ingham Road was now within the boundary of the Townsville municipality!

Unseen by most of the European population, there were also major events affecting many of the Aboriginal people of Thuringowa. The Queensland government's policies toward Aborigines since the nineteenth century had been based on the assumption that as a people they would either die out, or become assimilated into European society to the point where they were invisible. Either way, at some time in the future Aboriginal people would not exist as a distinct group. By the First World War it had become obvious that this was not happening. Aboriginal people had not only survived the disease and dispossession that had begun in the 1860s, but they still existed as a cohesive cultural group. Camps of Aboriginal people were established near most towns, and the people in them were increasing in numbers. In 1919, the Queensland government exercised its powers under the *Aboriginal Protection Act* of 1897, and police began rounding up Aborigines near the major population centres, and removing them to reserves. Palm Island, off the Thuringowa coast,

was chosen as the site for one of these reserves. By the early 1920s, a large proportion of the Aboriginal people of Thuringowa had been removed to Palm Island or one of the other reserves such as Yarrabah or Woorabinda, where they were not permitted to leave without permission. Generally speaking, only employees such as stockmen on cattle stations were exempted, although even their families were sometimes sent away.

The decade that followed the war, the 1920s, is sometimes portrayed as a glittering prosperous time, the Jazz Age, the era of Rudolf Valentino movies, the Charleston and the Model T Ford, which was followed by the New York Stock Exchange crash and the darkness of the Depression. This is a stereotype which may have been the experience of a few people in America, but bears little resemblance to anything that happened to most Australians. There was no 1920s boom in North Queensland, instead the end of the war commenced a long decline in rural industry, so that much of the economy was in serious depression long before the stock exchange crash.

When the Great War ended, the mining industry had virtually ceased to exist. All of Ravenswood's gold mines had closed, and by 1930 Queensland Government Railways closed its branch line; Ravenswood Junction went back to being only a siding, and was renamed Mingela. Of the traditional staple industries of the north - beef, wool, mining and sugar - only beef had emerged from the war economically healthy; even sugar production had declined. But as wartime demand eased, beef and most other rural commodities were about to run into a price slump which would last for twenty years. 1919 saw an episode of industrial unrest in the meatworks as production fell and labour became more plentiful. Just as sheep had proved unsuccessful early in European settlement, now cattle grazing was also giving disappointing returns. People who looked at the big economic picture must have been wondering whether any form of grazing in Thuringowa had a future.

Sugar returned to viability - encouraged by government assistance in the form of a sugar bounty paid to growers from 1920 - and the industry even expanded during the 1920s and 1930s as Britain began to buy most of Australia's production. The Invicta mill, recently returned from Ayr Shire, was one of the main sources of economic activity in

Thuringowa. In the twenty years that the Haughton sugar lands had been in Ayr, there had been dramatic changes in the northern sugar industry. The sugar lands that had been taken away from Thuringowa in 1888 and 1893 had been farmed under the old plantation system by gangs of indentured foreign labourers. Now the foreign workers had been repatriated, the plantations were broken up, and most sugar cane was grown on small family farms, as it is to the present day.

The demand for farm labour in the sugar fields had partly been met by an influx of Italian immigrants into North Queensland in the 1920s, particularly in the Herbert and Johnstone districts. During the 1930s Italian canecutters and farmers became more numerous in the Haughton district too, but here they never formed more than a minority group among a larger Anglo-Australian community. During the 1920s sugar growing also commenced in the far north of the shire, as the Herbert River sugar district expanded southward to Mutarnee and Rollingstone. Construction of the North Coast Railway as far as Rollingstone in 1915 enabled the cane crop to be railed to Invicta.

But other rural industries remained stagnant. Much land in the shire was showing signs of degradation as a result of past over-stocking on the poor soils. There were experiments in growing tobacco at Major Creek and at Hervey Range in the 1930s. In a campaign to make more Closer Settlement blocks available to tobacco growers at Thornton Gap, one advocate went so far as to claim the district could become "the Rhodesia and the Virginia of Australia". (*Townsville Daily Bulletin* 11 December 1930) In fact the list of crops which have been farmed in Thuringowa is impressively diverse. Lyn Henderson summarised all the agricultural products recorded as being grown commercially in the district between 1864 and 1980:

cotton, sugar, coffee, tobacco, potatoes, tomatoes, pineapples, citrus fruits, watermelons, pumpkins, beans, capsicums, cucumbers, egg fruit, zucchinis, bananas, rockmelons, grapes, pawpaws, peaches, maize, sorghum, wheat, hay, arrowroot, ginger, peanuts, yams, tapioca, sisal and Townsville stylo. (Henderson 1991)

Some of the growers expanded into processing; for years Forno's Tomato Sauce was bottled at Major Creek. But long as the list is, most of these crops were experimental, and only a few staples, notably sugar and some of the domestic fruits and vegetable, have ever been grown in Thuringowa for more than a few seasons. Lyn Henderson also pointed out that there was a depressing tendency for growers to keep going back to experiments with crops such as cotton, tobacco and maize long after experience had shown that they were unsuccessful.

Ernie Kelso's potato farm.

Kelso Collection, Thuringowa

As the 1920s progressed, many farm workers were laid off, and some went on the road looking for casual employment, forced to keep moving by an ingenious welfare system designed to prevent unemployed people congregating in one place. It allowed men to draw a daily Sustenance Allowance voucher worth 2/6d from a police station - enough to buy a day's rations - but no-one could receive two vouchers from the same police station. The roadsides became a long line of men carrying their swags, walking to the next town. Women were not entitled to any benefit as a result of being unemployed.

In 1929 things became worse when the New York Stock Exchange crashed, investment capital and credit plunged, and all over the western world banks and financial institutions went down, taking manufacturing industry with them. Factories and businesses closed, and during the early 1930s the depression spread through the cities and towns. By 1934, nearly a third of the Australian workforce was unemployed.

There were a few things that governments could do about the Depression, and one of them was to create work. In Thuringowa, there had been a move for many years to open up the inaccessible northern corner of the shire, the plateau in the rainforest around Mount Spec. Now in 1934 came government funding to build a road up the

Paluma Range. The Main Roads Commission took on willing workers, and in the moribund economy of the 1930s, the road building exercise up the range was the most exciting activity in the district. The bridge where the road crossed Crystal Creek was built in the form of a stone arch, a romantic structure which still stands. The form of the bridge reveals the reason it was built, for it is a highly old-fashioned and labour-intensive way to make a bridge; road bridges all over the world had been built of reinforced concrete for the previous twenty years. Likewise, much of the work of excavating the road into the mountain side was deliberately done with hand tools, rather than earthmoving machinery.

The Paluma Range road opened in 1937. It was not simply an exercise in making work, for it had several ongoing economic functions. First, it was to open the rainforest up to logging, and provide a means to carry logs down to the North Coast railway at Moongobulla. Second, it would make the mountains accessible to tourists, and the little township of Paluma would become a popular resort for holiday makers and daytrippers. In later years the Paluma Dam would also provide much of the Thuringowa-Townsville region's water supply.

Construction of the Paluma road was an asset to Thuringowa, as it opened up the potential of much

The Paluma Range Road being opened by C.G. Jesson, 18 July 1937.   Paluma Collection, Thuringowa

Crystal Creek Bridge under construction.   Paluma Collection, Thuringowa

of the shire's previously inaccessible land. However, almost as if balancing out this good fortune, in 1937 the state took away another chunk of Thuringowa's territory and gave it to Townsville. This time it was all the land south of the Ross River and east of Mount Stuart, taking in Oonoonba, Cluden and the railway south to beyond the junction at Stuart.

There were other events in the decades of depression which would have a profound effect on Thuringowa in the future. The remote north-west of Queensland had never had much influence on events on the east coast. There had been a sparse sheep and cattle grazing industry there from the 1860s, and copper was discovered in the arid rocky ranges around Cloncurry and mined from the 1880s onward. In 1908 the Queensland government had extended the railway west from Richmond to Cloncurry, and a mining boom had created mines, smelters and towns at places like Mount Elliott, Kuridala and Mount Cuthbert. The Cloncurry field had enjoyed a brief boom from high copper prices during the First World War, but then fell quickly into decline as soon as the war ended, and the last mine closed in 1922.

Only a few months after the Cloncurry copper mines had fallen silent, in early 1923, a prospector travelling through the district found samples of silver-lead ore at a place which he called Mount Isa. The miners who followed him found that the ore deposits were scattered over an enormous area, but a newly-formed company, Mount Isa Mines, managed to consolidate all the leases on the field under one management, and persuaded the Queensland government to extend the Great Northern Railway all the way to Mount Isa in 1929, increasing traffic on the line through Thuringowa. There was no sudden success story, for the field presented formidable obstacles to development; it was 1937 before the mines made their first profit, but in the meantime they brought British and American investment capital to the north and created employment during the Depression years. During exploration work it was discovered that Mount Isa was not only a silver-lead mine, but deep underground there was a very large deposit of copper ore. Mount Isa was the sleeping giant of North Queensland, whose full impact on Thuringowa's economy would not be felt until 35 years after it was discovered.

War in the North

The first Europeans who came to the north thought of themselves as very isolated, but throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Thuringowa was drawing steadily closer to the rest of world. For the first forty years, the only railway line went inland, and all travel to and from the district was by ship, mostly through Thuringowa's port of Townsville. Then progressively the railway opened up the district to the south, first to Ayr in 1901, then with the construction of the great bridge across the Burdekin, all the way to Bowen in 1913. Another line went north toward Ingham, reaching Rollingstone in 1915. When soldiers from Thuringowa waded ashore at Gallipoli, it had just become possible for their families at home to travel by train between the three corners of their home shire, to Ayr, Reid River and Rollingstone. Further south, other links were being added to the railway chain, and by 1921 the railway extended from Brisbane north to Mackay. Then with the completion of the Bowen-Mackay section in 1923, the North Coast Railway extended without a break from Brisbane to Ingham. Sixty years after the first European settlers had spent months droving their sheep north to Thuringowa, their grandchildren could catch a train to Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide or Perth. A year later the railway would extend north all the way to Cairns.

Almost simultaneously with the rail link came air travel. Aircraft had become available in Australia after the First World War, their potential for long-distance travel highlighted by epic flights such as that of Ross and Keith Smith from Britain to Australia in a Vickers Vimy ex-bomber in 1919. The first airfield established in the Thuringowa Shire was an east-west strip in a grazing paddock south of the Ross River, in what is now the Townsville suburb of Murray. It steadily saw more and more use during the late 1920s, and it was licensed by the Department of Civil Aviation in 1930. However, as aviation demands increased, the Ross River site proved unsatisfactory. It remained boggy after rain, and it did not have space for runways orientated into the prevailing north-east and south-east winds, so a new site was adopted in 1938. It was north of Ingham Road on the Town Common within what had become part of the City of Townsville, near the Garbutt railway siding. Two 800 yard gravel runways were constructed - long enough for commercial aircraft of the time - and scheduled civil aviation operations commenced at the new airport on 1 February 1939 when a Stinson airliner of Airlines of Australia landed in front of a mayoral reception. The modern aviation era had begun, although for the next thirty years it would only be for the wealthy. A flight to Brisbane took

Stinson aircraft at Ross River Aerodrome, ca 1930.

Armstrong Collection, Thuringowa

nearly a day and a half, but that was two days faster than the train.

These improved transport facilities brought Thuringowa into faster and more efficient contact with the outside world, and were to have a profound impact on the district during the coming Second World War. The impact of the war on Australia occurred in two phases. Australia again declared war on Germany in September 1939 as an act of loyalty to Britain, and for the next two years Australian forces fought in Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, in circumstances very similar to those of the First World War. The war was happening a long way from Australia. However, during this remote phase of the war, there were moves to improve Queensland's northern defences.

In 1938, the Department of Defence, already realising the likelihood of war between Japan and the USA, had begun planning to improve defence preparedness by establishing or upgrading military establishments across northern Australia. Even before the war began in 1939 it was planned to base aircraft at the newly-established Townsville airfield to provide for the fighter defence of the district. Extension of the runways and construction of basic facilities was completed before the end of 1940, and Wirraway fighters of No.24 Squadron were based at the Garbutt field. On 14 October there was much excitement in Townsville when an advance party of RAAF personnel arrived by train, and marched down Flinders Street, led by the municipal brass band. It was a few weeks after the Battle of Britain, and the newspapers were full of stories about gallant fighter pilots defending their homeland against enemy bombers.

The main body of the Royal Australian Air Force squadron to be based on the Townsville aerodrome at Garbutt, arrived on Monday morning, and are now quartered in the fine new buildings on the aerodrome site.
(Townsville Daily Bulletin 15 October 1940)

Exciting as this event was, no-one realised that it was just the beginning of a whirlwind of wartime turmoil that would sweep across the north for the next five years. The first impact on everyday life in Thuringowa was the internment of enemy aliens. There were very few German citizens in the district, but with the entry of Italy into the war in 1940, police began to round up men of Italian descent, principally in the sugar-growing districts. Most were sent to the internment camp at Loveday in South Australia for the next five years, leaving women and children to run the farms. The process was carried out in bureaucratic ignorance, with little thought for the danger to Australian security that the individuals actually represented; people who vehemently opposed the Fascist regime and had come to Australia to escape it were interned, while some open supporters of Mussolini inexplicably remained free.

The following year, as events moved inexorably toward war in the Pacific, the United States Army Air Force (USAAF) became concerned about securing air routes to re-supply their forces in the Philippines, and negotiated for space at the Garbutt air base to develop their own facilities. The first American uniforms appeared in the north in October 1941 when USAAF officers arrived to plan the expansion of the Townsville field to take much larger aircraft and heavier traffic than the airfield had been originally designed for. The field expanded into three sealed runways, extended to 5,000 feet long to take heavy bombers and transport aircraft. The expansion was completed by mid-December 1941.

A week earlier, on 8 December 1941 Australian time, the nature of the world war had changed completely. The expected war in the Pacific had abruptly begun with surprise attacks by Japanese forces on the US naval bases in Hawaii, the Philippines and Guam, and Britain's base in Hong Kong, while troops landed in Malaya and Siam. In the next three months the Japanese army swept through South-east Asia, taking Hong Kong and invading the Philippines, Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies. Everywhere the Japanese landed, the British, American and Dutch armies fell back before the onslaught. Half of the Australian regular army was fighting in North Africa, but by January 1942 Australian troops were also fighting the Japanese in Malaya and Timor, and on the island of Ambon in the East Indies. The Japanese took Rabaul on 23 January 1942, and then the great British naval base at Singapore - the key to all imperial strategy in Asia and the Pacific - fell on 15 February, with an Australian infantry division captured. The war was very close to Australia, and the Japanese seemed invincible. 20,000 Australians had been taken prisoners of war in just ten weeks since the fighting began in South-east Asia.

On 19 February 1942, the war reached the Australian continent when Darwin was bombed by aircraft operating from four Japanese aircraft carriers in the Timor Sea. Within a matter of days, Timor fell to the Japanese, and the Australian cruiser HMAS *Perth* was sunk during the defeat of an allied fleet in the Battle of the Java Sea. Broome, Derby and Wyndham in Western Australia and Port Moresby in New Guinea were all bombed by Japanese aircraft in the first few days of March. These were the worst weeks in Australia's history; less than three months after the Pacific war began, the whole country had been plunged into an unprecedented defence emergency. While war with Japan had been expected for at least four years, no-one had dreamed that it would be so fast or so terrible. In Thuringowa and everywhere else throughout the north, civilians were evacuated to the south as a Japanese air attack or invasion was expected at any time. Those who stayed dug slit trenches beside their homes, and larger air raid shelters appeared in the towns.

The Americans Arrive

In the face of the Japanese threat, the development of Townsville's little RAAF base during the previous two years was now swamped by military expansion on a scale that no-one had dreamed of, as Australian and American forces poured into the Thuringowa district from January 1942 onward. The Wirraway fighters which had proved inadequate at Darwin were replaced by more sophisticated American-built Warhawks, and the district's aerial defence was supplemented by USAAF Airacobras. However, a single fighter airfield was no longer relevant to the scale of the war that was unfolding. The events of the war so far had demonstrated the effectiveness of naval bomber aircraft, and the best protection against bombers was dispersal; spreading potential targets out so far apart that they became uneconomical to hit.

Thus the new tactics saw military facilities spread out across Thuringowa. Two Australian infantry brigades were stationed in a broad defensive ring around the port of Townsville. There was an RAAF radio direction finding station overlooking the Coral Sea at Moongobulla and a radar station at Alligator Creek, and the Mount Spec road enabled the US forces to build a long range radar station on top of the range at Paluma. The 19th Field Ambulance was based at Calcium, near Reid River. The old civil aviation strip at Ross River was occupied by the RAAF, and throughout the surrounding district a network of new strips for tactical dispersal, ferrying, re-fuelling, supply and maintenance were built at Bohle River (or Mount St John), Woodstock, Antill Plains, Reid River and Giru. Even further south in the Dalrymple Shire, new military airfields were established at Macrossan, Breddan and Charters Towers.

The pace of construction of these airfields was remarkable, and military earthworks provided a fulltime industry for many people in the next two years. Some fields were built by the armed forces, some by shire councils and some by civilian contractors, all overseen by the Allied Works Council. The construction of Giru was particularly memorable for its builders, the 91st US Engineer Battalion.
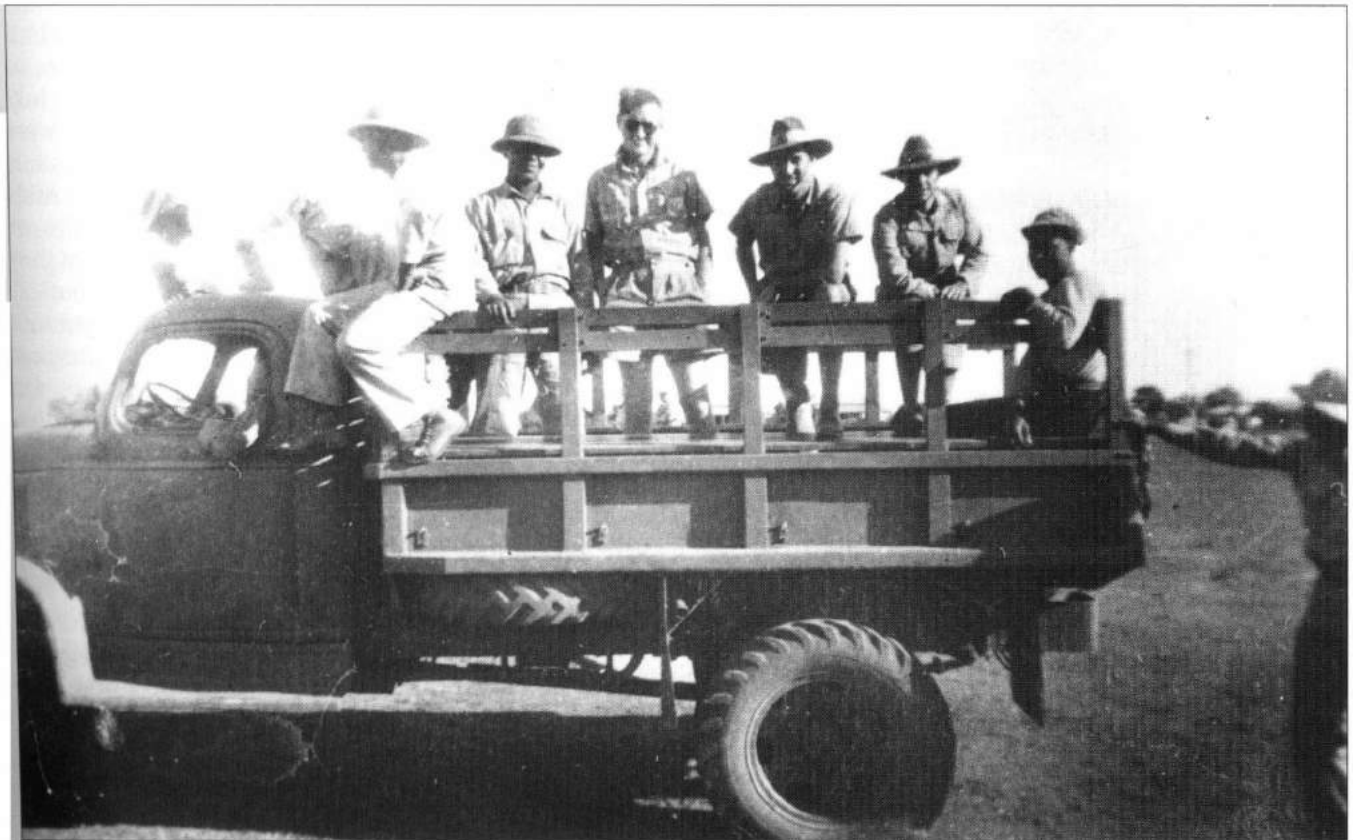
Black American and white Australian defence personnel at Garbutt, ca 1942.
Woodward Collection, Thuringowa

Wirraway, an Australian built trainer at Garbutt, ca 1942.
Woodward Collection, Thuringowa

Their earthmoving machinery and vehicles were lost *en route* to North Queensland, apparently on a vessel sunk by Japanese action, and they built the airstrip by hand between April and July 1942, with borrowed farmers' tools and wheelbarrows made out of beer boxes.

These impressive building efforts were not conducted with complete harmony, and not everything that happened is in the official histories. Black and white soldiers were segregated in the American forces, and many African Americans were drafted into the engineer units carrying out tasks such as airfield construction. Their very presence in Australia was controversial, as the White Australia Policy would have excluded them in normal circumstances. There is a local tradition telling of a mutiny by black soldiers at Laudham Park on the Upper Ross in May 1942, perhaps by construction workers building Antill Plains airfield. No press or official reports of the incident can be found, but oral accounts tell of a night when sporadic distant gunshots were heard, of farmers being told by US Military Police to stay inside their houses, and of at least one black American soldier lying dead.

The role of the airfields soon diversified well beyond the fighter defence of Townsville, to playing a part in the overall strategy of the Pacific war. North-eastern Australia became the operational theatre of the US Fifth Air Force, its headquarters in Brisbane, with the headquarters of its V Bomber Command in Townsville. Large maintenance hangars spread out west and south from the original RAAF base. The facilities required for aircraft assembly and repair work soon extended far beyond the perimeter of the Garbutt airfield, and during 1942, new airstrips were built at Aitkenvale (or Weir) and Stockroute, with a huge complex of hangars, workshops and dispersal taxiways extending across what are now the suburbs of Vincent, Heatley, Mount Louisa, Kirwan and Condon.

For the civilian population of Thuringowa, nothing remained the same. The war had one positive impact: it finally ended the Depression. Now everyone had a job, although it was not necessarily a job they had ever wanted. Non-essential industries such as tourism, public transport, accommodation and most retail shops were closed down, and their participants compulsorily evacuated, or drafted into other industries by the Manpower Committee. The number of women in employment increased dramatically, as men volunteered for the forces, and new jobs for women became available in offices and factories, driving trucks, or working on farms in the Womens Land Army.

Private possessions became public property as buildings, trucks, buses, aircraft and fishing boats useful to the military were commandeered. There was enormous disruption to people's lives with houses, vehicles and vessels being taken over for military use, many never to be seen again. With extraordinary stoicism, many people shrugged and said it must be for the good of the country. Others engaged the country in lengthy legal battles for compensation when the war was over. Some primary industries such as sugar, timber, wool and beef production were deemed essential to the war effort, and life on the land went on more or less as usual. But for the civilian population who remained in Thuringowa, carrying gasmasks and practising air raid drills and the constant drone of aircraft engines overhead became part of what they regarded as "usual".

Fighter aircraft from the Stockroute and Garbutt strips briefly played a role in the defence of Australian territory. On three occasions in late July 1942, targets in Thuringowa and Townsville were bombed by Japanese aircraft. In retrospect, it is clear that all three events were minor nuisance raids and completely ineffectual, with no injuries or significant damage, but that was not the way they seemed at the time. The heavy anti-aircraft battery on Mount St John, west of Garbutt airfield, went into action, and on the second and third occasions, USAAF Airacobra fighters pursued the bombers. On 29 July one inflicted damage on the departing Japanese aircraft. Perhaps because of this increasingly spirited opposition, that was the last bombing raid on the district.

A generation of children grew up enthralled by the excitement of the war. Rodney Cardell has described his childhood living on the fringes of the Stockroute aviation complex, with a small boy's enthusiasm for different types of aircraft; watching the P-38 Lightnings, P-40 Warhawks, B-25 Mitchells and B-24 Liberators being repaired by American mechanics played the same part in his life as collecting frogs and snakes did for other boys. Children at the Weir school were so diverted by the aircraft operating out of the nearby

Lockheed Lightening P38 at Garbutt, ca 1942.

Woodward Collection, Thuringowa

Aitkenvale airfield that the school had to be shifted to a private home further along the river.

The threat to northern Australia had diminished by the second half of 1942, because the strategic initiative in the Pacific was being regained by the Allied side. The dark days of February and March, when Australia appeared under threat of immediate invasion, had in fact seen the extreme limit of Japanese imperial expansion; Japan simply did not have enough ships, troops or fuel to go anywhere else. The Japanese navy received its first setback in the aircraft carrier battle of the Coral Sea, which was fought a few hundred miles over the eastern horizon from Thuringowa in the first week of May 1942. Land-based aircraft from North Queensland bases fought in the battle. Soon after, the Japanese suffered a second decisive defeat at the Midway Islands in June, the two battles seriously damaging their naval air power, which had been the key to their early victories. The Japanese no longer had the capacity to threaten Australia. From late 1942 on, the role of the Thuringowa bases was no longer the defence of Australia, but logistical support for the coming Allied offensive into Japanese-held territory.

Thuringowa also housed a large build-up of Australian and American ground forces moving through to the Pacific theatre of war. From May 1942 the Australian 7th Infantry Brigade was based briefly at Antill Plains, then trained in the bush near Rollingstone for two months. In July they shipped to Milne Bay in Papua, where they distinguished themselves a month later by inflicting the first defeat the imperial Japanese army had ever experienced. In September, the 29th Infantry Brigade was based at Yabulu, practising for the New Guinea campaign in exercises through the Mount Spec rainforest.

There were also more secret exercises in Thuringowa. One night in June 1943 naval authorities in Townsville discovered to their horror that the freighters and warships tied up in the port all had limpet mines attached to their hulls! The mines were harmless, put there in the course of an exercise by the secret Scorpion force, in training to attack Japanese shipping in Rabaul harbour. They had launched their raid from Black River, assembling five collapsible canoes there and paddling silently through the harbour's defences. For the second time in thirty years, a North Queensland force was preparing to strike at the enemy in Rabaul. The raid never went ahead, and the exercise that had badly embarrassed the navy only became public knowledge many years after the war ended.

In October 1942 two large US Ordnance Depots were commenced, one a workshop facility codenamed "Koala" at Stuart, the other for munition storage codenamed "Kangaroo" at Kurukan. Kangaroo had no fewer than 87 ammunition stores dispersed along 22 miles of roadways. Over the next two years, the plains along the railways running south to Reid River and north to Rollingstone would see temporary encampments of many thousands of allied service personnel, and the logistical needs of these troops would require improbable-sounding

military units ranging from cordial factories to pig and chicken farms. At Rocky Springs in the foothills of Mount Stuart an army Remount Depot was set up, employing Aboriginal stockmen to train horses and mules for carrying supplies in New Guinea, although the animals were found to be unsuited to the climate and the terrain.

Thuringowa was also an important military medical centre. In September 1942 the US 2nd Field Hospital was established at Woodstock, a large facility of 2,000 beds, housed in tents and prefabricated wards. The Woodstock hospital was opened to treat casualties from the fighting in the Pacific islands, but as the war progressed, it was devoting more of its effort to treating sexually transmitted diseases, or VD in the language of the time. After 1943 the hospital was wound down, and its role was taken over by the US 44th Field Hospital at Black River.

As the war advanced, operations moved progressively northwards into the Pacific; some of the district's airfields were abandoned, but most were converted from operational use into a huge rear echelon workshop. Taxiways, airstrips, tents, aeroplanes, trucks and sheds filled a landscape where three years before there had been sparse gum trees and grazing beef cattle. The most conspicuous structures were the large prefabricated truss-framed buildings of a design that the Americans had brought with them. Australians called them "igloos" because of their curved roofs. There were about forty of them sprawled across Thuringowa from Mount Louisa to Stuart, ranging in scale from the size of a large barn up to some that would roof two football fields. The official history of the USAAF gives a glimpse into the range and complexity of the

technical work carried out in them for the last two years of the war:

The depots at Brisbane, Townsville and Port Moresby continued to be marked by the variety of their activities. They not only had to overhaul engines, inspect and repair parachutes, paint aircraft, fill oxygen cylinders, and install armament but they were expected to find all sorts of short cuts and to make odd pieces of equipment from material on hand. The machine shop at Townsville produced, among other things, special propeller tools, a jig-filing machine, an indicating apparatus for hollow-steel propellers, and an electric arc welder for high-melting point soldering on armatures. ... By September 1943, the Townsville depot had converted some 175 B-25C's and D's for low-level strafing, and then turned to the B-25G. Between November and the following April, it would add on eighty-two planes two additional .50-cal. machine guns in the nose, two more in the gun tunnel, and a stinger of twin .30's in the tail - modifications requiring 234 man-hours per plane.
(*Craven & Cate 1950, p. 199*)

Life was not harsh for most civilians in Thuringowa, but it was spartan. Staples such as butter, meat, sugar and textiles were reserved for the armed forces, and rationed by means of printed cards, so that something as simple as a sponge cake became a rare treat. On the other hand, many Thuringowa farmers adapted to supplying foodstuffs to the armed forces, and enjoyed three years of a flourishing market for their produce. Most people grew vegetables in the garden, but bacon and eggs or a fillet steak were soon half-forgotten memories. Wearing patched or darned clothes was viewed with approval as supporting the war effort, and mothers became expert at cutting up old curtains to make children's' clothing.

United States 44th Field Hospital at Black River, ca 1942

Parker Collection, Thuringowa

There were constant reminders that Australia was at war; anti-aircraft guns pointing at the sky, air raid shelters at railway stations, armed guards and sandbag walls around government buildings, and long slow convoys of military trucks blocking the roads all became part of the normal landscape. Signs on railway stations and street corners disappeared, and any stranger asking directions was viewed with suspicion. All foreigners were regarded as suspicious, even if they were from Poland or China, or any of the other unfamiliar countries that were Australia's allies in this complicated war. Frightened citizens reported strange occurrences to the authorities, and there are archives full of Military Intelligence files reporting solemn investigations of unusual-looking aircraft, or people with Dutch or Swedish accents who allowed a light to show during the blackout.

Petrol became so scarce that the few people seen driving around in private motor cars were either towing one of the new-fangled, unreliable and smelly charcoal gas producers, or were suspected of being blackmarket profiteers. Bus and train travel was available only to those with a military pass. There was a return to the simple life of horses, bicycles and long walks. Entertainment became very simple indeed, because most places were closed down, few people could drive anywhere, and the streets were blacked out at night. At the camps where American and Australian troops were based, there were cinemas and dance halls if you could get there on a bicycle in the dark and talk your way in, but for most people, wartime evenings were spent at home listening to the wireless by the light of a kerosene lamp.

As the nature of the war changed, troop encampments and other facilities were gradually moving north to the Atherton Tableland and the islands.

The last air raid on Australian soil, at Darwin, was in November 1943. By 1944 the number of troops based in the Thuringowa district was winding down, and combat aircraft were no longer operating from the local airfields, although repair and maintenance work continued. The blackout was eased, and the street lights came back on.

When hostilities ceased with the Japanese surrender in August 1945, activity had already slowed throughout the Thuringowa military aviation complex, and buildings were soon being dismantled and sold at auction. The following years saw the bases being decommissioned as fast as they had been built, and places where thousands of troops had once camped reverted to bare ground, punctuated with neat rows of concrete building foundations. RAAF Garbutt had always been intended as a permanent base, and after the war it shrank back to the size of the airfield originally planned in 1939.

The American soldiers left and the Australian soldiers came home. Although the Second World War came much closer to Australia, its casualties were not nearly as heavy as the first, and the impact on the community of fathers and brothers dead and wounded was not nearly as terrible. But many Australians came back weakened by malaria, and mentally scarred by years of war in the desert and the jungle. Thousands had been prisoners of the Japanese, and their callous treatment would be remembered by Australians, leaving a stain on Japan's reputation for a generation after the war ended. In the years after 1945 most of the wartime igloos were demolished, people went back to civilian jobs, and it gradually became possible to buy petrol again, and to bake cakes with eggs, butter and sugar. But no-one talked about going back to normal; nothing would ever be the same again.

Pineapple farming at Woodstock

Thuringowa Collection

Front and back of a Petrol Ration Card, 1949.

McKergow Collection, Thuringowa

Prosperous Times

The war changed life in the north forever. First, the impetus which the war had brought to the Australian economy, particularly through the growth of manufacturing industry, continued for over twenty years after the war ended. There was no depression after the Second World War as there had been after the first; primary industries also enjoyed a period of unprecedented profitability, as the prices of virtually all rural products soared. The war also left North Queensland physically much better off; wartime damage had been minimal, on the contrary the efforts of years of Australian and American construction schemes had built sealed roads, wharves and airfields that had never existed before, swampland had been drained, scrub had been cleared, and infrastructure such as dams, railway sidings, fuel tanks and radio stations was everywhere. Another legacy of the war was an abundance of war surplus vehicles and machinery. Trucks and earthmoving machinery, once the possessions of the wealthy, were now available to everyone at low prices. The post-war years saw the disappearance of horses from agriculture, although they remained in use for stock work. The last bullock teams disappeared from the timber industry, as trucks became cheaper to buy and operate.

The post-war decades also saw the rise of a new industry in Thuringowa: tourism. There had always been a few people with the money and leisure time to travel to offshore islands or mountain resorts, but these pursuits were not for the public at large. However, with the Second World War and its aftermath, the nature and scale of the tourism industry changed. In the 1950s the population of Australia increased dramatically through a combination of immigration and a rising birthrate. It was a time of prosperity, with virtually full employment, higher
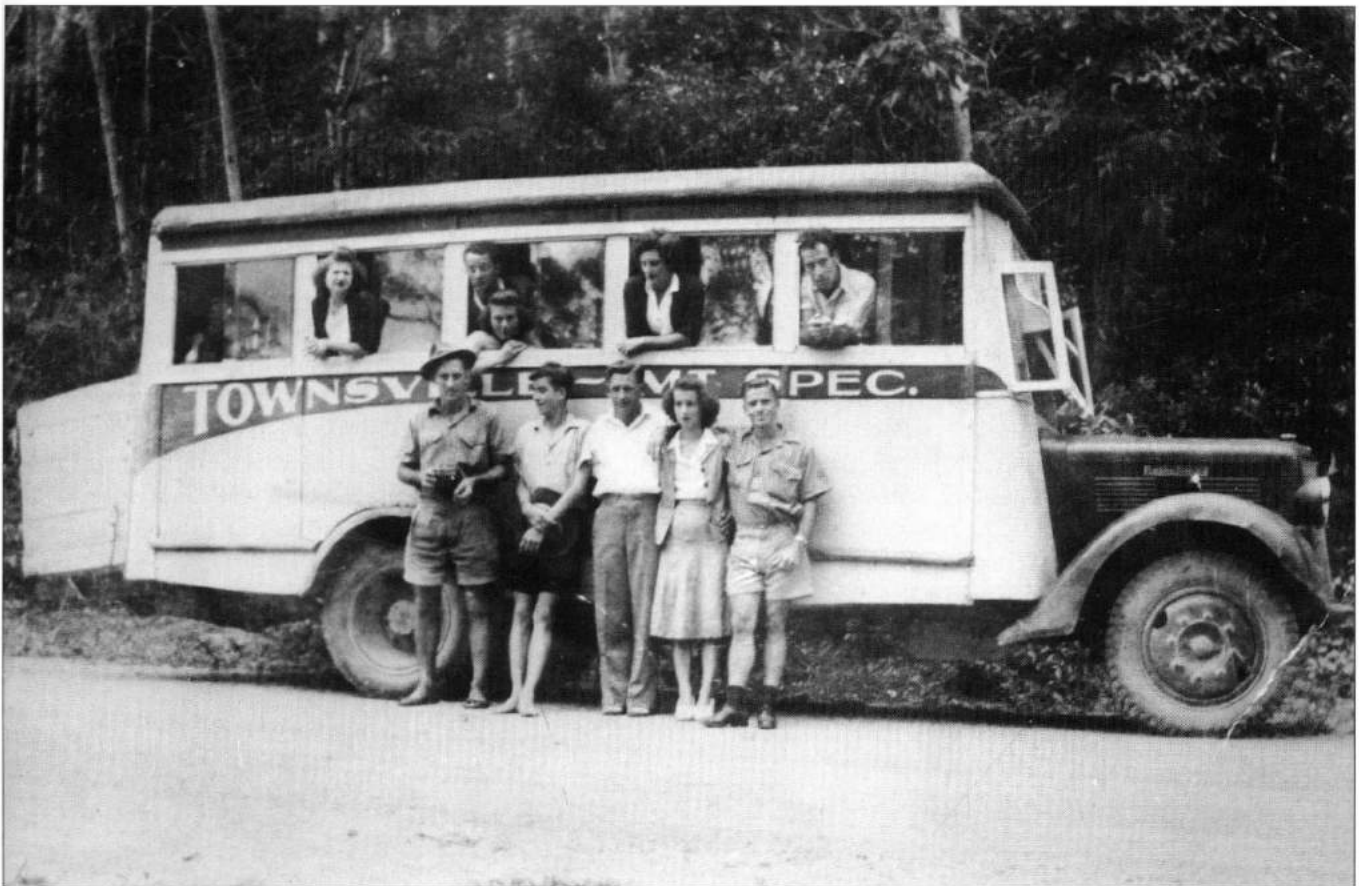
Tourist coach to Paluma, 1945.

wages in nearly all sectors of the economy, and shorter working hours. Australians were becoming more affluent than they had ever been before, and had longer holidays and weekends to spend on leisure activities. The provision of new roads and other wartime infrastructure contributed to development.

Queensland's population increased by nearly 40% between 1947 and 1961; irrigation projects, soldier settlements and land clearing schemes encouraged tropical agriculture, and mining and mineral processing created new jobs. With the steady increase in North Queensland's population, its rising income and greater leisure time, the beaches, the reef and the rainforest all became increasingly popular destinations for tourists. Many arrived by train; from 1952 onward Queensland Government Railways was converting to diesel-electric operation, and the gleaming new air-conditioned train that ran between Brisbane and Cairns was promoted in the tourism market as the Sunlander. But increasing numbers were coming in private motor cars. In 1946, immediately after the Second World War, there were fewer than one million motor vehicles registered in Australia; two decades later in 1966 there were over four million. By the 1960s the wartime roads were inadequate for the traffic, and throughout the north there was a major programming of widening roads and bridges.

The sugar industry was thriving during the 1950s and 60s as European demand for sugar kept increasing, and for the first time Japan also became an important customer for Australian sugar. Despite the prosperity of the sugar industry, its technology had stood still for decades. Tractors had replaced horses for ploughing and cultivating the fields, but otherwise little had changed in the industry; the methods of harvesting and milling were much the same in 1950 as they had been in 1900. Then in the decades following the Second World War, the sugar industry was transformed by mechanisation. First, the prosperous 1950s and 60s allowed capital to be put into bulk handling of the sugar product. For a century, sugar had been bagged and handled manually at railway yards and wharves, but now bulk bins and conveyors began to replace bags. In 1958 Townsville Harbour Board built a bulk sugar terminal, and the whole industry went over to bulk

handling. In 1963, a spectacular fire devastated the terminal, but the setback was only temporary; it was soon rebuilt and within a few years doubled in size. Invicta, like most Australian sugar mills, installed not only bulk handling equipment, but also sophisticated milling machinery as all its processes became increasingly mechanised.

Next the emphasis turned to mechanisation of the harvest. First, in the 1950s, by mechanical loading of manually cut cane, and then in the following decade by mechanical cutting. From the early 1960s, some of the sugar crop began to be cut by mechanical harvesters, and the annual influx of cane-cutting gangs slowly vanished into history by the mid-1970s. In Thuringowa, mechanisation of the harvest began in 1964 and was completed by 1971.

The adoption of mechanical harvesting had a mixed effect on the economy of the sugar districts. Some businesses suffered because of the loss of their canecutter customers, but the general consensus was that the itinerant gangs had relatively little economic impact. In fact, canecutters spent very little of their wages locally, and most of the money they earned was taken out of the region each year at the end of the season. The number of employees in the mechanised industry was smaller, but nearly all of their wages remained in the local district.

Population growth and economic prosperity characterised the twenty years after the Second World War. Immigration also brought new peoples to the north. In the 1950s there were once again indentured labour schemes, this time not bringing Pacific Islanders, but Italians, Maltese, Basques and Catalans to work in the sugar fields. Sugar had always been the most intensive agricultural industry in Thuringowa, creating most wealth, employing most people and in the process providing most cultural diversity. But in that great era of post-war prosperity, few Australia paused to wonder whether they were also sowing the seeds of future economic problems. Technological innovations such as dieselisation of the railways, bulk sugar handling and mechanical harvesting meant that many traditional jobs that thousands of people throughout the north had worked in since the 1880s no longer existed. While the prosperous years lasted and there was plenty of work available, no-one even noticed those jobs had gone, but they would in the future.

A great city

$\mathcal{F}$he past thirty years in Thuringowa have been an era of unprecedented economic development and physical growth, the shire's population roughly trebling each decade from 3,000 in 1968, to 13,000 in 1978, and to 33,000 in 1988. So many changes have happened in that time that it is daunting to describe them all, but the major ones can be identified very easily.

The post-war decades began the process of rapid change. We have seen how general prosperity throughout Australia was reflected locally in the rise of tourism, and in growth and technological change in the sugar industry. State and local government used this prosperity to good advantage by investing in infrastructure projects. Water supply for industrial and domestic consumption in the Thuringowa-Townsville region had often been inadequate in a long dry season, and needed to be augmented to cope with a rising population. The Paluma dam, made possible by the Depression road, augmented the water supply in the short term, and was followed

by the much larger Ross River dam in the 1970s, both built within Thuringowa.

Further south, the enormous annual water flows of the Burdekin River had been attracting the attention of engineers for decades. In 1950 the river was dammed by the Gorge Weir where it reaches the coastal plain, and irrigation allowed tobacco and rice farms to flourish in the southern corner of what had once been Thuringowa, and the towns of Millaroo and Dalbeg grew up there in the 1950s. But a much bigger dam was planned, this one at the Burdekin falls south of Ravenswood. Construction of the dam wall itself commenced in 1984, and the dam filled for the first time in 1987. In recent years a pipeline has been laid to allow water from the Burdekin to supplement the Ross River dam supply, which is reticulated throughout the Thuringowa-Townsville urban area.

Manufacturing industry had never played much part in the regional economy, but the increasing
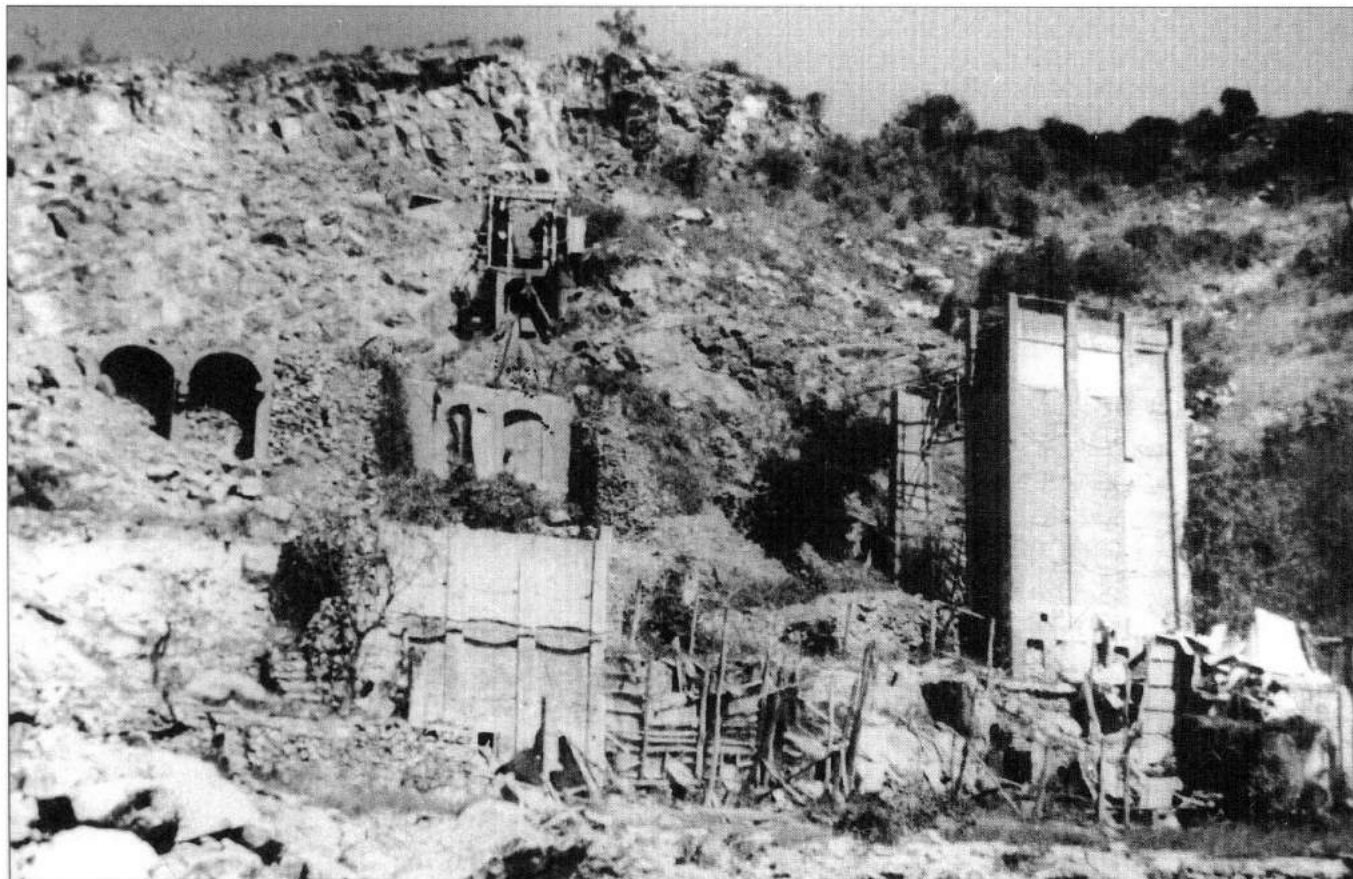
Lime burning kiln, Calcium.

Gleeson Collection, Thuringowa

post-war population base provided a market for a number of products. The Stuart cement factory lowered the costs of northern building projects, and with its limestone quarries at Calcium, created a significant vertically-integrated manufacturing industry in its own right. Engineering and light industrial plants proliferated throughout the southern and western suburbs.

A completely new industry arose from the mines in distant Mount Isa. After years of adversity, the mines had emerged from the wartime era established as a significant base metal producer, making a profit in every year. Mount Isa Mines was on the road to becoming one of Australia's major companies. During the war the company had commenced producing copper at Mount Isa, and in 1953 built a new smelter at the mine, but sent the product to London for refining. Metal prices were high throughout the 1950s, encouraging the company to make the large investment necessary to locate the entire treatment process in North Queensland. In 1956 work began on a state-of-the-art electrolytic copper refinery at Stuart. In production by 1959, the refinery is one of the major industrial enterprises of the Thuringowa-Townsville region, now producing about 250,000 tonnes of copper metal each year.

While these developments were taking place, Thuringowa Shire lost more land to the City of Townsville. These were the largest areas transferred to Townsville so far, although this time they did not involve a large population loss. In 1958 Townsville acquired all the land from Garbutt west to the Bohle River, Mount Stuart, and a swathe of farms and wetland encircling the Stuart industrial area all the way round to Cleveland Bay near Alligator Creek.

Australia has always been a highly urbanised country, with most of the population, industry and cultural facilities clustered near the capital cities. The 1960s saw a move to reverse this trend by decentralising into regional areas, and the Thuringowa-Townsville region was one of the beneficiaries of the policy. In fact, it has been conspicuous that Thuringowa-Townsville has been blessed more often than other regional cities such as Cairns. Some have suggested that this may be a result of the political composition of the Thuringowa-Townsville region, which has always been notoriously volatile, with marginal electorates in both the State and Federal parliaments. If so, this is a very fortunate tendency, because it makes governments of every political persuasion very keen to spend money in the region.

Before the 1960s there was no form of tertiary education available north of Brisbane, then in quick succession the region gained a teachers' college, and the Townsville University College, at first a campus of the University of Queensland, but which became an independent institution as James Cook University of North Queensland in 1970. The university has always attempted to meet the needs of the region, stressing fields of research and teaching such as marine biology, tropical veterinary science, engineering buildings to survive tropical cyclones, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education.

Scientific research was not confined to the university. The Queensland Department of Primary Industries had their own long-established animal research station at Oonoonba, and CSIRO established an agricultural research centre at Woodstock and a regional laboratory at Douglas. But in 1969, the Commonwealth government announced that North Queensland was to have a completely new and prestigious national research institution, the Australian Institute of Marine Science. AIMS arose from a variety of environmental concerns about the Great Barrier Reef that had arisen in the 1960s: fears about the damage that tourists were doing to the reefs, headlines about the crown-of-thorns starfish, proposals to quarry agricultural lime from the reef and to drill for oil under it. The research institute was established in temporary laboratories at the old quarantine station at Cape Pallarenda by 1975, and in 1977 it moved into a purpose-built complex at Cape Ferguson with its own harbour for research vessels. In 25 years, AIMS has made a major contribution to world marine science.

Those same environmental concerns that drove AIMS have also seen the formation of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park in 1975, the progressive purchase of large areas of land as national parks since the 1970s, notably the Bowling Green Bay National Park, and the declaration of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area in 1988. Besides their value for scientific research, these protected areas also provide the basis for a second-generation tourism industry with a new environmental emphasis. Not everybody was pleased, for they put a stop to rainforest logging, and restricted the activities of the commercial fishing industry. However, in doing so they have protected environmental assets which belong to future generations from short-sighted commercial exploitation.

Australia's defence forces were also decentralised in the 1960s, providing the Thuringowa-Townsville region with another new industry. Defence thinking did not move on far between the 1880s and the 1930s, and the Second World War found most Australian military bases still clustered around the southern capital cities where they had originally been built to provide protection from the French or Russian imperial navies. Experience fighting the Japanese, followed by intervention in the civil war in Korea, the Malayan Emergency and the Indonesian Confrontation, had made it obvious that the future role of Australia's defence forces lay in regional conflicts in South-east Asia and the

Pacific. In 1962 Australia sent a training force to a new insurrection in South Vietnam.

In 1964, as the beginning of a general northward shift in the geographical location of the Australian defence forces, the Australian government announced that a major new Army base would be built in Townsville. Construction of Lavarack Barracks commenced in early 1966, and the base opened in July. At the time, Australia had become heavily committed to the Vietnam conflict, and was in the midst of a buildup from one infantry battalion to Task Force strength. Lavarack Barracks became the principal training base for troops prior to embarkation for Vietnam, and by the early 1970s had grown to become the largest army base in Australia.

This population influx was spread across the urban area. The suburbs of Vincent and Heatley were intensively occupied by Army housing in the late 1960s and early 1970s after Lavarack Barracks was established. The Mount Stuart Training Area and the High Range Training Area on Hervey Range were acquired by the defence force simultaneously and developed for training and range practice. A further northward shift in defence policy following the Dibb Report in 1986 brought the need for a much larger Army training area for integrating armour and air support with infantry and artillery tactics. In 1988 the Army took over the Dotswood pastoral lease and incorporated it with the High Range Training Area and some other land into the Townsville Field Training Area, occupying an area of over 3,000 square kilometres. Defence training has become a major industry in the Thuringowa-Townsville region.

Another metal processing industry was established on the northern coastal plain of Thuringowa in the 1970s. Nickel ore had been discovered at Greenvale, about 200 kilometres northwest of Townsville, in 1957 and investigated by geologists during the 1960s. Now, with the price of nickel rising, the industry was entering a boom period throughout Australia. In 1970 the Queensland government entered into an agreement with Metals Exploration Queensland Pty Ltd for the extraction of nickel. This resulted in the first railway to be built in Thuringowa since 1915. Ore was to be railed from the mine along a new State-built railway through Thornton Gap, just south of the old range road, down to a plant to be built on the coast at Yabulu, where the ore would be treated to produce nickel oxide for export. Construction of the processing plant and the railway began in October 1973, and ore was being mined at Greenvale the following June. Yabulu commenced treating ore in October 1974, and in early 1975 the first shipment of Greenvale nickel sailed from Townsville for Japan. Greenvale operated until 1994, when the mine closed and the railway was torn up. Yabulu still

operates, now treating nickel ore shipped from New Caledonia and railed from the port of Townsville.

The Thuringowa-Townsville region's newest mineral processing plant stands on the shore of Cleveland Bay not far from the ruins of the Alligator Creek meatworks, opened in 1999 to treat ore from the Century zinc mine in north-western Queensland. Another major mine in the hinterland was stopped by environmental concerns. In 1975 a major uranium and molybdenum deposit was discovered near Ben Lomond, north of the recently-opened Greenvale railway, and the French company Minatome Australia Pty Ltd spent two years investigating the prospect. Geological tests were encouraging, but production never commenced, initially because the mining warden upheld an environmental lobby appeal against the construction of a treatment plant and tailings dams which could threaten the Charters Towers water supply, and later because of Australian federal government policies on uranium mining. The area is still regarded as commercially viable, is still under a current Authority to Prospect, and at the request of the Queensland government it was not included in the land acquired by the defence force for its training area.

Not everyone in Thuringowa has prospered. The sugar industry, for decades the most reliable form of agriculture in the region, has fallen on hard times since the 1970s. Rising costs and depressed prices - largely because of cheap subsidised beet sugar from the European Community - have brought about a rationalisation in the Australian industry. Many mills have closed, and much former sugar growing land has been turned over to tropical fruits or ornamental horticulture. By the late 1970s, sugar growing ceased altogether in the marginal lands at Rollingstone and Mutarnee.

As the Thuringowa-Townsville region's population continued to grow, the suburbs of the urban area kept going west up the Ross River, until by the 1980s they reached the Ross River dam. The geographic centre of the built-up area was about Aitkenvale, which had been the edge of town thirty years earlier. Almost as many people lived in Thuringowa as lived in Townsville. With a population of 30,000 in its suburbs by 1985, the state government recognised that the name Thuringowa Shire was no longer appropriate. On 1 January 1986 the City of Thuringowa was created, putting the Twin Cities on equal terms in the local government hierarchy.

This did not make Thuringowa immune from losing territory. In 1994 a major reorganisation of local government boundaries slashed the city down to less than half its existing area, leaving it in historical terms as only about the western quarter of the 1879 division. The largest area went to the City of Townsville, the whole eastern side of Thuringowa from Cape Cleveland down through Woodstock to the Reid River, west to the line of the

Ross River. The Haughton sugar lands went back to Burdekin Shire for a second time, and Dalrymple Shire extended down onto the coastal plain to take the land around Reid River.

The City of Thuringowa is a complex mix of landscapes, from modern suburbs housing tens of thousands of people, to undisturbed bushland, tropical grazing farms, lonely beaches and rainforest covered mountains. Once it had sugar cane fields and meatworks, cotton plantations and gold mines, but these are all gone now. The legacy of those days

is the people of Thuringowa, who are descended from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who walked on the Great Barrier Reef when it was their coastline, and people from many other parts of the world: the English and Scottish immigrants who brought sheep and cattle to the north, from the Pacific Islanders who grew cotton, the Chinese who grew the vegetables that prevented scurvy, the Italians and Basques who cut sugar cane, and the Vietnamese and Lebanese whose countries were devastated by war. The story of Thuringowa is the story of all those people.
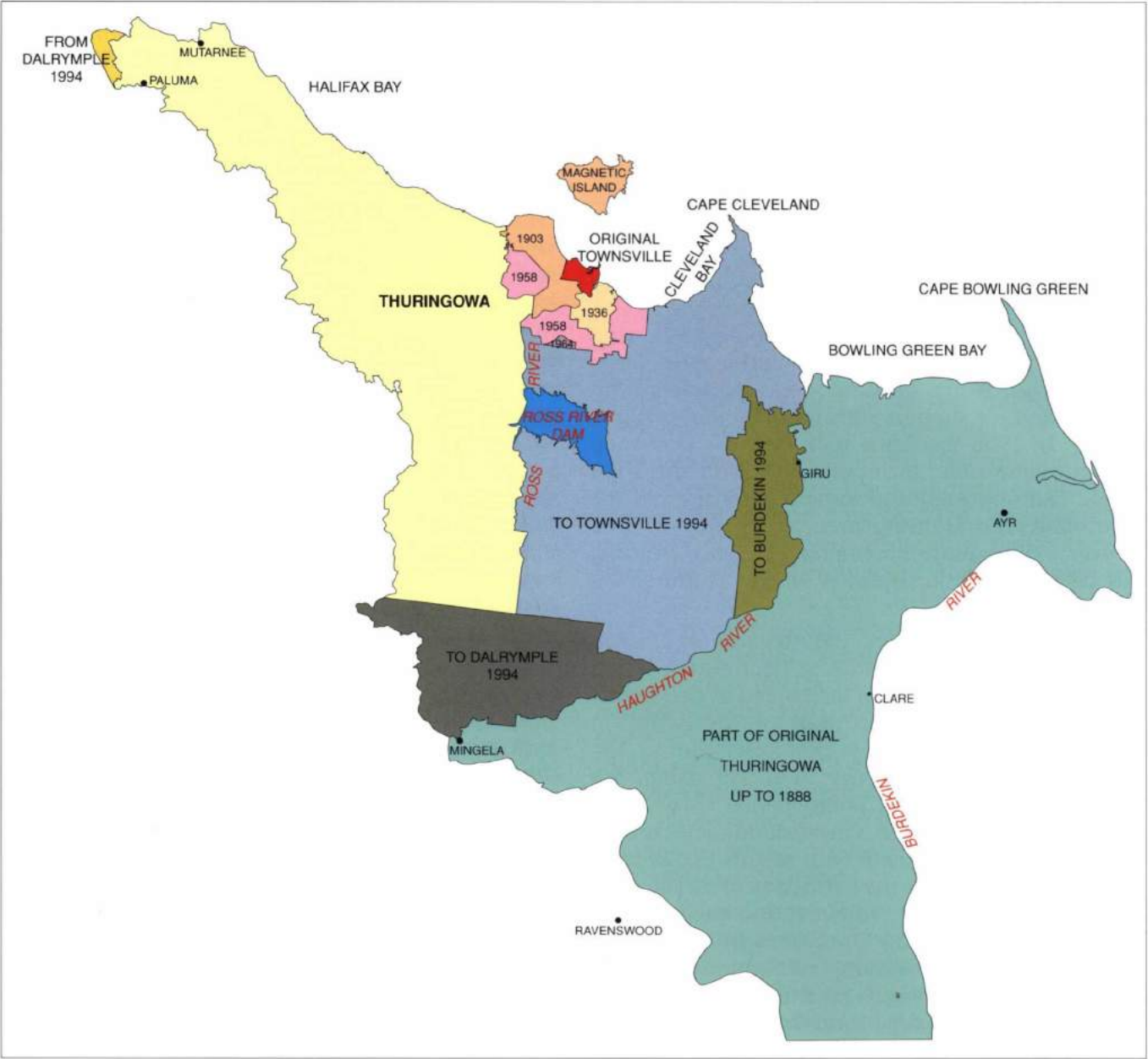
Thuringowa's changing boundaries 1879 - 2000.

Ray Berry

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