

CATHERINE ROBINSON

1838 - 1934



A woman known for her spirit and independence

One of the first European women in the newly created and as-yet-unnamed town, Catherine Colvin was a true Townsville pioneer.

Catherine was born in County Armagh, Ireland in 1838. Catherine and her brother left Ireland for Australia in 1862. She arrived in Brisbane alone, her brother having perished en route. Initially she worked for Lady O'Connor in Brisbane. In June 1865 she arrived in Townsville aboard the SS Policeman to join three other women in work at the Criterion Hotel, then the only structure in town.

While working at the Criterion, she met Heinrich Fredrich Rubinstein (who was later known as Henry Robinson) a German immigrant who had previously worked on the Victorian goldfields. They married at Bowen on 30 November 1865, and began married life at Kissing Point, attempting to set up a vineyard, which failed due to lack of water.

When Robert Towns paid his only known visit to Townsville in early 1866, a trip to Magnetic Island was organised. At Towns' suggestion the women drew straws, with the result that Catherine became the first white woman known to step ashore on Magnetic Island. Catherine recounted in a 1932 Townsville Daily Bulletin interview, on the occasion of her 94th birthday, how she "readily recalled preparing the tables for a banquet held (at the Criterion Hotel) in February 1866 to celebrate the proclamation of the municipality of Townsville".

Catherine and Henry's next move was to a part of Townsville known at the time as Chinese Gardens. Due to Henry's influence the area became known as German Gardens, until the name was changed again during World War I, to Belgian Gardens. At German Gardens the Robinsons operated a market garden, before moving out to Ingham Road in 1874, and operating a dairy of 100 head at what is known today as Mount St John. Between 1868 and 1881, Catherine gave birth to ten children, with five surviving to adulthood: Amelia b.1868, Henry b.1872, St John b.1876, Sid b.1877 and Catherine b.1881, with many descendants still living in North Queensland.

Catherine became well known for the dependability of her milk deliveries and her business prospered. She was also known to travel to Woodstock to purchase stock. As business grew she bought numerous properties around Townsville and began earning a large income in rentals. She expanded her property interests by buying in the Halifax area eventually leasing blocks to cane farmers. The Robinsons ran a hotel in Halifax but apparently Catherine found this disagreeable and returned to Townsville. In 1900 her husband died at Halifax and Catherine lived for many years thereafter with her son St John in Paxton Street, North Ward. She was well known for doing the rounds collecting her rentals and was active until her death in 1934 at 95 years of age.



Criterion Hotel 1868 - 1903
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