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Chapter 3

Agriculture 1873 to 1999.

Agriculture in North Queensland has had mixed results. In many areas the early European settlers had reasonable success with a variety of crops, and this led to predictions that the north would have a bright future in agriculture. Unfortunately, little scientific investigation was undertaken to determine how fertile the soils really were, and how reliable the rainfall was. Even in the 1950s, despite the Government having scientific advisers available, departmental officers and individuals were promoting farming in areas that later proved not suitable.¹⁹⁶ Frawley saw this "blinkered" view as a reflection of the Government's policy of fostering agricultural development as a means to promote "traditional rural values". He also regarded it as influenced by the "populate or perish" mentality that promoted growth in the rural areas of North Queensland as good defence policy.¹⁹⁷ It is no surprise that the history of agriculture in the Cooktown district included euphoric predictions of bountiful harvests and export potential. As with other districts, little attempt was made to investigate the potential of the area scientifically.

¹⁹⁶ Between the 1920s and the 1950s the Maalan area on the Atherton Tableland was promoted as having "very rich" soil, but after farming commenced much of it proved poor. Kevin Frawley, 1987. The Maalan Group Settlement North Queensland 1954: an historical geography, Department of Geography and Oceanography, University of New South Wales Australian Defence Force Academy, Campbell, pp. 11-12; Davidson also argues that in general soils in the tropics lack nutrient due to leaching from high rainfall. Bruce Davidson, 1966. The northern Myth: A Study Of The Physical And Economic limits To Agricultural And Pastoral Development In Tropical Australia, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, p. 49.

¹⁹⁷ Frawley, The Maalan Group Settlement, p. 129; Davidson also debunked the argument that the failure to expand agriculture in the north would make Australia a target for invasion. Davidson, The Northern Myth, pp. 6-7.

Although gold was undoubtedly the staple product that underpinned the beginning of Cooktown's economy, early attempts were made to develop secondary staples like agriculture. Some sections of the Colonial Government initially viewed Cooktown as merely a port to supply the Palmer gold field, but other members of the administration saw the need for a broader economic base. There was an early recognition that some form of agriculture was needed to augment the provisions supplied by ships. In addition to the fresh fruit and vegetables necessary to maintain a healthy population, a considerable amount of grain and fodder was needed to feed the horses servicing the gold fields. Early success in supplying these products led to the belief that Cooktown could become a "breadbasket" and an exporter of agricultural produce, providing an alternative economy for the district. Despite many attempts to establish an agricultural economy, the Cooktown area failed to reach its potential.

A number of factors contributed to this failure, including distance from the markets, and a lack of local expertise. However, most areas in North Queensland had similar disadvantages. Cooktown's natural resources like rainfall and soil quality were about average for coastal North Queensland, being superior to areas like Townsville, but inferior to Cairns and its hinterland.¹⁹⁸ The most significant factors in the failure of Cooktown's farmers to achieve the same success as those in other areas were the declining population, the cost of transport to markets, and the lack of meaningful Government assistance. While State Governments assisted primary producers in other areas with infrastructure and expertise, the level of assistance offered to Cooktown district farmers was limited. The lack of Government help for

¹⁹⁸ For instance, Davidson said that yields of maize and peanuts were less in the Cooktown district than on the Atherton Tableland. Davidson, The Northern Myth, p. 115.

agriculture is intriguing, given that many politicians regarded gold mining as unreliable, and favoured agriculture and pastoralism for economic development.¹⁹⁹ The little help that was offered served only to raise expectations. The history of agriculture in the Cooktown district is a story of heightened expectations followed by bitter disappointments. In the final analysis, though, it is probable that even with Government help agriculture could never have been very successful in the Cooktown district. Agriculture in all northern areas declined after the surge of the 1880s, and never recovered until after 1900.²⁰⁰ Given that Cooktown was by this time in decline, there was virtually no local market, and farmers would have had to compete with producers closer to the southern markets.

Subsequent investigations of the viability of farming in tropical Australia by agricultural economists such as Bruce Davidson suggest that farming in remote areas like Cooktown could never be economically viable. Davidson contends that "the agricultural techniques which have been developed in tropical Australia are uneconomical and development there could only proceed at tremendous cost to the nation".²⁰¹ However, he did concede that crops like peanuts might be grown economically in the red-brown soils of the lower Cape York Peninsula area if broad acre methods were used for economy of scale.²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ Christine Ray Doran, 1981. North Queensland Separatism in the nineteenth Century, PhD Thesis, Department of History, James Cook University, p. 109; Frawley claims that the view that closer settlement and agriculture were central to all Queensland Governments for the first century after separation. Kevin Frawley, 1985. Past Rainforest Management: A Background To The Daintree Road Issue, Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, Australian National University, Canberra, p. 1.

²⁰⁰ Frawley, The Maalan Group Settlement, p. 20.

²⁰¹ Bruce Davidson, 1965. "Why Develop the North", Develop The North?, Series II, People The North Committee, Townsville, p. 2.

²⁰² Davidson, 1966. The Northern Myth, p. 133.

The Cooktown area was capable of producing a wide variety of crops. This was acknowledged in 1949 when a State Government report said that in earlier years the Cooktown area had produced "good maize, peanuts, cotton, sorghum, rice, tobacco, tropical fruits, pineapple, citrus and vegetables".²⁰³ However, the decline in population associated with the end of the Palmer gold rush adversely affected local consumption. With the local market gone, agriculture was further disadvantaged by the distance to southern markets, and the poor service offered by shipping companies to freight primary produce to these markets.

When the first permanent European settlement was established on the Endeavour River, early provision was made to ensure a supply of fresh fruit and vegetables. In 1874 James Reid was sent to the Endeavour River to make the first permanent survey of the new town. Soon after he commenced work, the Colonial Government ordered him to reserve land for Chinese gardens.²⁰⁴ Given the important part played by Chinese gardeners in the survival of other Australian mining fields, the Colonial Government knew they could be relied on to provide the vegetables necessary to sustain the growing population. In addition, the Chinese introduced a range of "new " varieties of fruit and vegetables.²⁰⁵ Some of the Longan trees planted by Chinese gardeners are still evident in Cooktown.

However, larger blocks of land were soon needed for fodder and grain crops to feed the numerous horse teams employed in carting goods to

²⁰³ Sixth Annual Report Of The Bureau Of Investigation 1949. Under "The Land and Water Resources Development Acts, 1943 to 1946", Government Printer, Brisbane, p. 6.

²⁰⁴ A.C. Gregory, Surveyor General, to James Reid, Cooktown, 24 March 1874, (1500), SUR/28, Q.S.A.

²⁰⁵ Chinese were also the principal market gardeners on mining fields in California. Warwick Frost, 1992. "Agricultural Baggage" European And Chinese Migrants And

the gold fields.²⁰⁶ Consequently, Reid was again diverted from residential allotments to survey blocks of five to twenty acres close to Cooktown.²⁰⁷ These were soon followed by some eighty-acre lots within a six-mile radius of the town, and a larger parcel of 1,280 acres for Mr. Beardmore, a local entrepreneur.²⁰⁸ This followed the land settlement pattern established around most North Queensland towns, and satisfied the expectation that market gardens and dairies would spring up to serve the town.

By the end of 1874 twenty-two acres of land was under a variety of crops. This was quadrupled the next year, when the first grain crop, seven acres of sorghum, was harvested. However, maize was found to be more suited to the area, and it remained a mainstay of the district until the end of the horse era. Production of maize in significant quantities began in 1878, when the Cook district produced over 6,000 bushels of maize from 189 acres.²⁰⁹ Farmers were soon producing grain up to thirty miles north of Cooktown, with two farms growing grain maize in the Mount Web area near McIvor River in 1879.²¹⁰ As more wheat and other edible grains were imported into the district, maize was used primarily for stock feed, although some was ground for

Farming In Nineteenth Century California And Victoria, Department of Economic History, La Trobe University, Bundoora, p. 12..

²⁰⁶ Maize was the principal crop grown in the district for many years but as the population declined local requirements decreased. Wright, Cook Shire Handbook, series 6-5.

²⁰⁷ A.C. Gregory, Surveyor General, to James Reid, Cooktown, 26 June 1874, (3077), SUR/28, Q.S.A

²⁰⁸ A.C. Gregory, Surveyor General, to James Reid, Cooktown, 28 July 1874, (3669). Ibid., 10 August 1874, SUR/28 (3825), Q.S.A. Beardmore was given the land in exchange for a flood-prone property in Cardwell. John Kerr, 1995. Northern Outpost. Mossman Central Mill Limited, Mossman, p. 20.

²⁰⁹ Statistics Of Queensland, 1879, Government Printer, Brisbane, 1880; This reflected the situation on the Atherton Tableland, where grain was the most important crop for many years. Warwick Frost, 1993. Australia's Wet Frontier: The Agricultural Development of The Heavy Forests of the Atherton Tableland, King Island and the Otway Ranges, 1880-1920, Department of Economic History, La Trobe University, Bundoora, p. 16.

human consumption until after the Second World War. Any surplus was sent by boat to Cairns for sale.²¹¹

The Government encouraged agriculture by supplying seeds and cuttings for experimental planting. From October 1889 the Department of Agriculture offered prospective farmers seeds of Giant Honduras Sorghum, Yellow Millo maize, Early Orange Sorghum, Kolbsgen water melon and edible gourd.²¹² Seeds of olive, Liberian coffee and Annatto were also distributed to Cooktown farmers.²¹³ Although there was some success with many crops, no one variety was grown in enough quantity to provide a viable industry. Despite the enthusiasm of its supporters and the investment of much hard work and cash, there was less agricultural production in the Cooktown district at the close of the century than in 1880.

Individual farmers showed considerable initiative in experimenting with a variety of crops. James Dick, who was a member of the Daintree Divisional Board, was one of the people instrumental in promoting an agricultural economy for Cooktown. From the mid 1880s he urged the Government to supply seeds of various crops to test their suitability. From 1888 Dick tried growing Liberian coffee and Annatto, or *Bixa orellana*.²¹⁴ Annatto is an evergreen tree, the seeds of which produce a bright yellow to orange red dye. Although it has traditionally been used as a food colouring agent, Annatto could also be used to dye

²¹⁰ Cooktown Herald, 12 February 1879.

²¹¹ Keith Miller, interviewed at Cooktown by Peter Ryle, 29 October 1998. Miller said that his father grew maize on his farm at Boiling Springs near Hopevale from when it was purchased in about 1929.

²¹² Cooktown Courier, 1 October 1889.

²¹³ Q.V.P. 1888. Vol. 3, pp. 783-786.

²¹⁴ Ibid., p. 786.

material.²¹⁵ Anecdotal evidence shows that Dick produced some dye from Annatto and used it to colour most of the linen and clothing used by his family. He also processed coffee and sold it through his general store in Cooktown.²¹⁶ Both products had a ready export market, but Annatto in particular had potential as a good staple product, as dye was in strong demand, was well priced, and was light to transport to markets. Unfortunately, neither product was grown in sufficient quantities to take advantage of the export market.

The success of a variety of local produce was demonstrated at the yearly agricultural shows. Exhibitions at the 1893 show included apple, lime, custard apple, jack fruit, tamarind and granadilla. One grower, E.E. Crowley, displayed coffee, pepper, and a variety of sauces and chutney. The local press reported proudly that his home-manufactured *Kangaroo Hunt Sauce* was judged to be equal to its imported competition, and was much cheaper.²¹⁷

James Dick proved to be the most innovative of farmers. His property, *Excelsior Farm*, produced many crops, including tea, sugar, coffee, rubber, cinnamon, dates, peanuts and cotton.²¹⁸ Dick also proved adept at improvisation. In the absence of the appropriate implements, he manufactured his own machinery to pulp and grind his coffee crop.²¹⁹ In his endeavours to gain access to a wider variety of seeds

²¹⁵ Mrs Dick displayed material dyed with annatto at the Cooktown Show in 1893. *Cooktown Courier*, 30 May 1893.

²¹⁶ Myrtle Jenkins, interviewed by Peter Ryle at Aloomba, 22 February 1999.

²¹⁷ *Cooktown Courier*, 30 May 1893. The sauce was equivalent to Wostershire sauce.

²¹⁸ A visitor to Excelsior Farm recorded a list of 98 different types of plant grown on the property. D 244, Cairns Historical Society Archives.

²¹⁹ *Cooktown Independent & Northern Sun*, 2 October 1937. The first official record of coffee grown in the Cooktown district shows that ten acres was planted in 1895, and twenty nine acres in 1899. *Statistics of Queensland, 1895, 1899*, Government Printer, Brisbane.

July 1883		Kind of trees planted in 1883	No.
1.	Fig Smirnia	named by a botanist	19. Wampoe
2.	Mulleberry English		20. Tamarind
3.	Pannafraxat.		21. Nerium
4.	Moanga Brazil.		22. Moanga early
5.	Guava Apple		23. Cinnamon
6.	Medlar.		24. Teu (black)
7.	Nectarin early		25. Raffer Apple.
8.	Moanga large		26. Orange St Michael.
9.	Moangiarua		27. Lemon common
10.	Moangostin.		28. Tineidion - large sort.
11.	Nutmeg.		29. Lime West. Indian
12.	Tack fruit.		30. Loquat.
13.	Apricot Bush. Reich.		31. Citron Bengal
14.	Peach early		32. Shaddock Moanilla
15.	Nectarin large new		33. Apricot large Reich.
16.	Ly Chy China Fruit.		34. " Peach
17.	Pepper black common		35. " Moore park.
18.	Cinchona		36. Almond Tordean.
			37. " Brandons Tordean.

(3)		(4)
38.	Almond Nonparelle	57. Vanilla
39.	Peach flat China	58. Pepper Cuban.
40.	Quince large Tortuga	59. " black common
41.	" " early	60. Indian Scent Tree (Petchouly)
42.	" " sweet Orange.	61. Date palm. (date) Three
43.	Fig black Genoa.	62. Allspice (Allspice)
44.	" brown Koski	63. Citron common
45.	" large blue	64. St. Michael
46.	Queensland Nut	65. Citron early
47.	Wan tree (Paus chirochana)	66. " "
48.	Tallow Tree.	67. Peramatta
49.	" "	68. Lemon Lisbon
50.	Flcourtie Catefrestar	69. Shaddock
51.	Nutmeg.	70. Moandurin Canton
52.	Cinnamon	71. Shaddock Blood
53.	Cataplan new Tort.	72. Pis
54.	" " China	73. Pomegran
55.	" " large early	74. Grape Fruit
56.	Cocoa.	75. Knotta

List of trees planted on James Dick's farm, 1883. (Cairns Historical Society).

and plants, Dick was sometimes frustrated with the bureaucratic process. In 1889 he complained to the Director of the Brisbane Botanical Gardens that some seeds he had been promised had not arrived. These included "Cocaine", allspice, nutmeg, cocoa, capal, and gum tree.²²⁰ Although Dick was particularly aggressive in promoting an agricultural alternative to gold, other people also cooperated in experimental planting. These included Mrs Hawkins of Cooktown, who planted tamarind, carob and sweet potato, and Otto Seidel, who grew almost as many varieties as Dick.²²¹ Although Cooktown produced such a range of agricultural products, the area under crop was, by 1890, decreasing.

Lack of Government support.

Following the decline in gold production, Cooktown tried to interest Governments, both Federal and State, in providing more incentives to agricultural settlement in the district. Most of the time they promoted specific crops, but were not averse to making a general application for assistance. For example, a public meeting in 1922 organised by the Cooktown And District Progress Association petitioned the Prime Minister to supply funds to foster land settlement in the area. However, the Federal Government dodged the issue by pointing out that assistance for such projects was supplied by State Governments, and the Commonwealth could not get involved.²²² Successive Federal

²²⁰ A great variety of seeds was supplied to the Cooktown area in the period 1887-1889. These included Liberian coffee, gingelly (sesame), black gram, sweet potato, carob, watermelon, sorghum, Japanese flour maize, black wattle, Spanish peanut, Russian sunflower and tobacco. *Q.V.P.* 1889, Vol. 4, pp. 459-469, 698-699.

²²¹ P.E. Deane, Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, to G. Schipke, Secretary, Cooktown Progress Association, Cooktown, 11 October 1922, CP703/6. 7, Australian Archives.

²²² P.E. Reane, Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, to G. Schipke, Secretary, Cooktown Progress Association, Cooktown, 11 October 1922, CP703/6. 7, Australian Archives.

Governments continued to ignore the defence and social benefits of closer settlement of areas like Cooktown, and failed to make funds available for the development of isolated areas.

The State Government was responsible for development infrastructure such as roads and irrigation, but little attempt was made to assist the orderly development of farming lands near Cooktown. Although sporadic efforts were made to foster some settlement in the district, little aid was offered to help settlers overcome the recognised disadvantages of poor transport facilities and lack of farming and marketing expertise. Successive Governments were generous with rhetoric, but not with the necessary investment. The farming that occurred in the district relied principally on the resources and finances of the individuals concerned. It is obvious that the Government was willing to offer only enough encouragement to secure the votes of the local population.

Owners' failure to use land.

However, the Government was not entirely to blame for the lack of progress in agriculture. It faced repeated requests from various interested organisations to release more land on the McIvor and Morgan Rivers, despite the failure of people who already owned property there to actually farm the land. This area, about thirty miles north of Cooktown, was renowned for its large areas of fertile volcanic agricultural land. The Government first released land there in 1889, with 2,065 acres offered for rent or purchase. It could be had for an annual rent of 8 pence per acre, or purchased outright for £1/5/0 per acre.²²³ During this year the Government received thirty-eight

²²³ Cooktown Courier, 18 October 1889.

applications for agricultural land in the Cooktown area, comprising 11,311 acres. Of these, twenty-seven applications, covering 7,145 acres, were successful.²²⁴ Despite the initial enthusiasm, few of the landowners used the land productively.

After the First World War many blocks were surveyed and reserved for Soldier Settlement, but few were taken up.²²⁵ However, when the Government moved in 1935 to purchase a block of 602 acres to expand the Cape Bedford Aboriginal Reserve (later called the Hopevale Mission), the local European population condemned the proposal. The Government wanted the land to "protect" the Aboriginals from the influence of doubtful European neighbours. The Chief Protector said, "it is not desired it [the land] should be occupied in future by an undesirable neighbour".²²⁶ Despite the previous owner's failure to improve the land, the Council was opposed to it being incorporated into the Aboriginal Reserve. It said that the Mission already occupied most of the good farming land, and the loss of more could be an impediment to farmer-settlers showing an interest in the area.²²⁷ The Council also feared that a lack of new settlers could influence the Commissioner to revoke the Main Road status of the road that serviced the area.²²⁸ This reaction is curious, given the fact that the road in question was a road in name only, and was barely useable.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 10 January 1890.

²²⁵ Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, to Chief Protector of Aboriginals, Home Secretary's Office, Brisbane, 12 March 1935. The Soldier Settler blocks were incorporated into the Hopevale Mission. Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, to Minister for Lands, Lands Dept., Brisbane, 13 March 1935. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

²²⁶ Deputy Chief Protector of Aboriginals, Home Secretary's Office, Brisbane, 25 February 1935. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

²²⁷ Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, to Chief Protector of Aboriginals, Home Secretary's Office, Brisbane, 12 March 1935. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

²²⁸ Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, to Minister for Works, Brisbane, 13 March 1935. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

In answer to its critics, the Land Administration Board explained that the Mission needed the land for growing crops. Although the original Mission reserve consisted of a large area of land, most of it was infertile.²²⁹ However, to placate the Council, the Board promised that if an influx of settlers arrived, any land "not put to reasonable use may be excluded from the reserve and settled by white selectors".²³⁰ It is interesting to note that while the Council members had reservations about the Mission acquiring more land, it did not appear to have any such concerns about the failure of European land holders to improve their properties. The Council might have justified its stand on the grounds that it would lose rateable land, but this ignores the poor record of European landholders as ratepayers. Despite the Council's concerns, the Mission retained all its land. The "new" land acquired by the Mission was put to good use. Many Aboriginals were allocated small farming areas and grew cotton and peanuts, as well as other crops. However, the Mission administration, probably wary of a loss of influence over the people, insisted they live in the settlement and travel to the farms daily. This was impractical, as there was no transport available, and the farms were gradually abandoned. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the Aboriginal farmers were reasonably successful, but received little return for their produce. As all Hopevale Aboriginals were under the 1897 Act, most of their income was withheld and banked in accounts they had difficulty in accessing. There was little incentive to continue farming. These small farming lots are still easily identifiable as cleared areas near the present Hopevale

²²⁹ The original Cape Bedford Mission occupied land adjacent to the coast and was for the most part sand ridge country of dubious fertility.

²³⁰ H. Ralston, for the Secretary, Land Administration Board, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, to The Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, 15 April 1935. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

township. The descendants of the original Aboriginal farmers now occupy some of these areas.

Rice.

The earliest crop to promise an economic return was rice. From soon after its establishment, Cooktown had a relatively high Chinese population. As a result, it was a significant importer of rice.²³¹ However, the area was soon producing much of its own. The first planting officially recorded was in 1886, when an area of seventy-one acres yielded 2,635 bushels.²³² Production fluctuated after this but never rose above 3,000 bushels in any one year. As Cairns replaced Cooktown as the centre of influence in Far North Queensland, it also surpassed Cooktown in rice production. Statistics for 1888 show that Cooktown had only thirty-five acres under rice, while the area planted by Cairns growers had risen to 216 acres.²³³ Although the Cooktown district was capable of producing good rice, a number of factors, including the absence of milling facilities, caused the demise of the industry.²³⁴ In Cairns, Europeans provided rice mills to process crops grown mainly by Chinese, but Cooktown entrepreneurs appear to have been less adventurous.

Although rice production had limited success in several North Queensland towns, the crop was never really suited to tropical Australia. Even when mechanised production methods allowed a renaissance of rice farming in the Burdekin Delta and the Mareeba

²³¹ In an attempt to restrict the number of Chinese entering Queensland the Colonial Government introduced an additional duty on imported rice. The Chinese of Cooktown petitioned the Legislative Assembly against this move. The Townsville Herald, 5 August 1876.

²³² Statistics Of Queensland, 1887.

²³³ Ibid., pp. 619-624.

area in the 1960s, yields were much lower than in the temperate zone.²³⁵

Bananas.

Other crops in the area suffered a similar fate as the population of the mining fields drifted away. The first significant area planted to bananas, in 1875, was sixteen acres. Banana production peaked in 1887 at 117 acres, but fell in 1888 to 95 acres. In contrast, during the same period Cairns saw an increase from 309 acres to 524 acres.²³⁶ In the period from 1888 to the end the century, the area under bananas in the Cook district fluctuated, but continued to decrease overall. By 1900, less than fifty acres was planted to bananas.²³⁷ The decline in production was influenced by several factors. Among these was the fall in the local market following the decrease in the gold field population. Also critical to the farmers in the Cook district was the increased production around Cairns, which severely restricted Cooktown's market in that area. Some fruit was transported to southern markets on ships operated by the A.U.S.N. Company, but growers said a combination of high freight charges and pilfering made the exercise unprofitable.²³⁸ Banana growers in Cairns and Innisfail faced similar problems, but managed to establish a major industry.

It is interesting to note that many of the banana growers in Cairns and Innisfail were Chinese who had come from the Palmer River area.

²³⁴ Wright, Cook Shire Handbook, section 1-3 & 1-4.

²³⁵ Davidson, The Northern Myth, pp. 37-38.

²³⁶ Statistics are available on the level of production each year. However, the information is given in some years as total bunches produced while at other times production is given in dozens of bananas. It is difficult to offer valid comparisons using these statistics. Q.V.P., 1888 Vol. 3, pp. 619-624.

²³⁷ Statistics Of Queensland, 1900.

²³⁸ Q.V.P., 1889. Vol. 4, pp. 74-75.

Although Cooktown was closer to the Palmer and had adequate arable land, these farmers chose to go elsewhere. It is possible that they were attracted by the higher rainfall in Cairns and Innisfail, and by the willingness of Europeans there to lease them land. Undoubtedly they were also aware of the population growth in those areas, which was in contrast to that of Cooktown. There is no evidence to support either hypothesis, but their decision undoubtedly had a detrimental effect on the town's economy. Cooktown again became a commercial banana producer in 1975, when Bielek and Mink began production on the Endeavour River. This farm continues to provide fruit to the Cairns market to the present time.

Pineapples.

Although pineapples were never a significant part of the agricultural output of the Cooktown district, they did contribute to the economy of the area. The production of this fruit showed a similar trend to that of other crops. The first available record of pineapple production shows that sixteen acres were planted in 1879.²³⁹ Although the area under crop had doubled by 1887, little further increase occurred. Pineapple production ranged between twenty-five and forty acres until 1900, after which time little information is available.²⁴⁰

When Bielek and Mink began farming bananas on the Endeavour River in 1975 they also planted a quantity of pineapples. Although the farm produced good fruit, it has since ceased to supply the market. The failure of farmers to increase the area planted to this fruit in the period prior to 1900 is interesting. Pineapples are less subject to damage

²³⁹ Statistics Of Queensland, 1879.

²⁴⁰ Statistics Of Queensland, 1888-1900.

during transport than most other tropical fruit, and should have had great market potential. It is unclear whether the market failed to expand because of the inferior quality of the fruit at that time, or that the market for pineapples was not sufficient to warrant more production. The success of pineapple farming is usually reliant on having a cannery in close proximity, and even then it is not assured. For instance, a cannery was built in Cairns when that town's population was close to twenty thousand, but attempts to keep it operational failed.

Citrus.

The Cooktown district was also a significant producer of oranges. Although domestic planting commenced at an early date, commercial production of oranges was first recorded in 1878, with one acre planted. The area increased steadily, but no yields were reported until 1881, when 424 cases were harvested. By 1893 seventy-three acres of oranges were in production.²⁴¹ For many years the district continued to produce more oranges than Cairns, despite the larger area planted there.²⁴² This can be explained by the relatively long time lapse between planting and harvesting of oranges, especially as most citrus trees were then propagated from seed instead of graft. Despite the general decline in fruit production, a survey of the area in 1930 reported that a banana plantation, a citrus orchard, and a market garden were showing good results in the Annan River district. In addition, four citrus orchards in the South Endeavour River area were

²⁴¹ Statistics Of Queensland, 1893.

²⁴² Q.V.P., 1888, Vol. 3, pp. 619-624.

visited by N.D. Allom, the District Forestry Officer, and found to be "exceptional".²⁴³

Despite the decline in farming, the area retained the potential to export. In spite of the wartime restrictions on fuel, and the boost in local consumption by the presence of army personnel, Cooktown still managed to export 2,500 cases of oranges and mandarins in 1943.²⁴⁴ The decline in agricultural products in Cooktown was in contrast to Cairns, where a rise occurred. This was an indication of the expanding population in the Cairns hinterland, and the more favourable access it had to other markets. Without doubt Cooktown growers were also adversely affected by the gradual decline in shipping services.

Sugar.

The crop with the best potential to provide a permanent viable industry for the Cooktown district was sugar. In addition to having a ready market, both locally and as an export product, it was relatively easy to process. Another factor in its favour was that unlike fruit and vegetables, it was less subject to damage from shipping. Unfortunately, although sugar was one of the first crops grown successfully in the area, it never achieved its potential. Cane growers in other areas were assisted by the State Government through the provision of technical expertise and finance to erect cooperative sugar mills. In contrast, Cooktown district farmers were offered no help to establish a sugar industry. Ironically, although a sugar mill was operating at Weary Bay

²⁴³ Royal Commission On Development Of North Queensland, 1931, Submission From Cook. 541. N.D. Allom to The Secretary, Provisional Forestry Board, Report on land traversed and served by Cooktown-Laura line, 21 April 1930, A/6420, Q.S.A.

²⁴⁴ Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, to R.D. Rex, Local Authority Representative, State Labour Exchange Board, Cairns, 20 March 1944. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

near Bloomfield River before any were built elsewhere in the district, it was only mentioned in the 1889 Sugar Royal Commission as being on the verge of being abandoned.²⁴⁵ By this time any support on offer would have been "too little too late".

Interest was first expressed as early as 1879, when the Cooktown Courier published a letter to the Editor from a correspondent writing under the pseudonym "MALUA". The writer advised selectors to plant sugar cane in the Mclvor River area. They were told that each selector should plant at least seventeen acres, which would give a nett return of £382 per year. If enough selectors settled in the area a sugar mill could be erected for an outlay of £5,000.²⁴⁶ Although interest was shown in the closer settlement of the Mclvor area, the proposed sugar industry did not eventuate. In October the same year the Cooktown Courier announced that Mr Fitzgerald would report on the prospects for sugar cane.²⁴⁷ No copies of this report remain, but interest in sugar production was stimulated by the offer for sale of cuttings of a superior variety of cane.²⁴⁸ Small trial areas were planted until 1883-1884, when a mill was built in the Bloomfield River area, and cane was processed locally.²⁴⁹

The Vilele sugar mill was built by the Bloomfield River Sugar Company in 1883-1884. The Company was financed by Victorian interests who

²⁴⁵ Report Of The Royal Commission Appointed To Inquire Into The General Condition Of The Sugar Industry In Queensland, And To Report Upon The Causes Which Have Led To The Present Languishing Condition Of The Industry Throughout The Colony, The Best Means To Be Adopted For Reviving And Maintaining Its Prosperity, And, Generally Upon The Prospects Of Tropical Agriculture In Queensland, Q.V.P., 1889, Vol 4, p.37.

²⁴⁶ Cooktown Courier, 10 May 1879.

²⁴⁷ Ibid, 11 October 1879.

²⁴⁸ Ibid, 19 November 1879.

²⁴⁹ Wright, Cook Shire Handbook, sections 1-3 & 1-4. The discrepancy in statistics was caused by a different method of accounting by the various departments.

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Vilele sugar mill, Bloomfield River. Note steam engine on right. (Kerr, Northern Outpost).

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Accommodation units, Vilele sugar mill, Bloomfield River. Note rail line
in foreground. (Kerr, Northern Outpost).

borrowed £35,000 to establish the project.²⁵⁰ However, by 1886 the Company had over-extended its resources and went into liquidation. It was reconstructed as the Weary Bay Sugar Company, which secured the assets of the former Company for nominal cost.²⁵¹ At its peak, the Vilele mill sent a weekly cargo of up to 40 tons of sugar to Port Douglas by sea during the sugar season. From here the sugar was sent to southern ports.²⁵²

Although it was situated in one of the more remote areas of Queensland, the plantation and mill could boast the latest technology.²⁵³ The Australian Handbook for 1887 reported that it was one of the largest mills in the Colony. After processing, the sugar was delivered to the river by a railway that connected the mill with the wharf, a distance of four miles. The plantation also used mechanisation where possible. In an era when most farmers were still using horses, the Vilele plantation employed two steam ploughs to break up the heavy soil.²⁵⁴ The Company also built a steam-operated sawmill to provide the timber for the project.²⁵⁵

By 1888, the cane farms in the Bloomfield district had been amalgamated, with 529 acres under cane.²⁵⁶ Although the plantation initially appeared to have a bright future, by 1889 it was in trouble.²⁵⁷ A rescue plan was promoted by the former manager, who advocated the introduction of German share farmers from South Australia, each of

²⁵⁰ Kerr, Northern Outpost, p. 24.

²⁵¹ The assets were secured for £35,000. Ibid., p. 26.

²⁵² Cooktown Courier, 15 November 1889.

²⁵³ The Vilele mill was capable of producing 2,000 tons of sugar per year. In comparison, the first mill erected at Mossman was only capable of treating hundreds of tons each year. Kerr, Northern Outpost, pp. 25-30.

²⁵⁴ Australian Handbook, 1887, pp. 527-528.

²⁵⁵ Kerr, Northern Outpost, p. 26.

²⁵⁶ Q.V.P. 1888, Vol. 3, pp. 438-439.

²⁵⁷ Cooktown Courier, 2 August 1889.

whom would be allocated fifty-acre blocks. He said that about two hundred people would be employed on these farms.²⁵⁸ However, the plan never eventuated. The plantation continued to have problems, including cane diseases, which caused production losses. The project was also plagued by labour problems. Initially the Company imported workers from Malaya, but they proved unsuitable for farming, and also came into conflict with the local Chinese.²⁵⁹ A combination of sickness and disenchantment with working conditions eventually led to their dismissal.²⁶⁰ They were replaced with Aborigines for some time, with about two hundred being employed. However, after the Weary Bay Company took over they again imported Asian labour, with people coming from Malaya and Java.²⁶¹

The sugar industry faced a number of problems in the latter part of the century, including the campaign to ban the import of cheap indentured labour and a fall in investment capital.²⁶² The Weary Bay Company

failed to combat these and other problems, and closed the plantation and mill. A prospective buyer from the Maryborough area inspected it in 1892, and it was eventually removed to the Isis.²⁶³ The plantation's collapse was a great disappointment to the Daintree Divisional Board, which saw its early success as a sign of a bright future for sugar production in the area. The Board was convinced that production

²⁵⁸ Cooktown Courier, 23 August 1889, 24 September 1889.

Kerr, Northern Outpost, p. 24.

²⁵⁹ Kerr, Northern Outpost, p. 24.

²⁶⁰ The manager feared that some of the Malay workers who got sick had Beri-Beri. Cooktown Courier, 17 July 1888. The Malay workers were reported to be headed for Cooktown after they were all dismissed from the plantation. Ibid., 8 February 1889.

²⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 26-27.

²⁶² Investors saw the proposed ban on imported labour as critical, as they received only 25% of European wages. Marjorie Pagani, 1972. T.W. Crawford: politics and the Queensland sugar industry, Department of History, James Cook University, Townsville, pp. 20-21.

²⁶³ Cooktown Courier, 10 May 1892. Kerr, Northern Outpost, p. 27.

between Bloomfield and Cooktown would expand when a bridge was constructed over the Annan River.²⁶⁴

There is no evidence that any other attempts were made to resurrect the sugar industry in the area until the First World War. In 1916 a concerted effort was made by members of both the Town Council and the Daintree Shire Council to secure funding for a sugar mill in the area. The Cooktown Chamber of Commerce was also active in supporting the project.²⁶⁵ However, the State Government remained uninterested, and the project failed.

Despite the failure of the 1916 bid, the citizens of Cooktown refused to admit defeat. Agitation for the establishment of a sugar industry surfaced again in 1922, with the imminent visit of the Sugar Commission to North Queensland. The Commission regulated the sugar industry to ensure that production was geared to market requirements. This eliminated overproduction and ensured a reasonably stable industry. If Cooktown could convince the Commission to recommend a mill for the area, the town's future would be secure. The Town Council asked the Commission to visit the area for at least one week. It claimed that Dr. Belloro, an agriculturalist from Babinda, had reported that the McIvor Lands were "FIRST-CLASS SUGAR LANDS with fully 40,000 acres available, sufficient for four (4) SUGAR MILLS ".²⁶⁶ The claim was false, but the Councillors of Cooktown had proved previously that they were capable of "gilding the

²⁶⁴ Daintree Divisional Board Minutes, 1 December 1883, Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

²⁶⁵ Geo. Schipke, Secretary, Cooktown Chamber of Commerce, to The Town Clerk, Cooktown and The Clerk, Daintree Shire Council, Cooktown, 2 June 1916. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

lily" to achieve their aims. The Commission was unimpressed with the appeal, and did not visit the area.

Queensland's production and export of sugar was regulated to protect the industry from adverse reactions to market fluctuations, and from cheap imports. An increase in quota could be authorised to take advantage of any increase in the world demand for sugar. When such an increase was approved, it sometimes provided the opportunity for new areas to join the sugar producing "community". The announcement of an increase in quotas in 1949, and the possibility of some new sugar mills, prompted the Cook Shire Council to again promote Cooktown as a sugar-producing district. It asked the Government to declare Cooktown a sugar growing area, and to allocate one of the proposed new sugar mills to the district. Supporters claimed that a sugar industry would stabilise the population, and possibly reverse the decline. It would also use the existing railway to carry cane, which would help decrease the annual losses incurred by the line.²⁶⁷

The Shire Council decided to establish a trial plot of cane to prove that the area was suitable for sugar production, and to determine the varieties most suitable for the area. In what the Shire Clerk termed "a first step in the battle of tactics", the Council enlisted the help of Rupert Howe, an officer of the Mossman Mill Company, to supply several varieties of plant cane.²⁶⁸ Howe told the Council he was willing to help, but that most of the cane land at Mossman was in quarantine for

²⁶⁶ Town Clerk, The Council of the Town of Cooktown, Cooktown, to The Honourable The Treasurer Of Queensland, 16 October 1922. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

²⁶⁷ Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, to Hon. H.H. Collins, M.L.A., Parliament House, Brisbane, 20 December 1949. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

²⁶⁸ Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, to Rupert Howe, Mossman, 29 December 1949. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

Gumming Disease. No plant cane could be supplied until permission was granted by the Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations to transfer cane from the area.²⁶⁹ This was granted, but the Bureau warned the Council that even if the land were found suitable for cane, the area faced major problems. The foundries and factories that supplied milling machinery were behind with orders, due in part to post-war shortages of materials, and it was unlikely that a sugar mill could be constructed within five years. Planting of seed cane should be deferred until a firm decision was made to construct a mill. It also warned the Council that it should consider that the trend was towards larger mills, requiring about 20,000 acres of cane in close proximity to the factory.²⁷⁰ These conditions did not augur well for a mill in the Cooktown area. Despite the claims of 40,000 acres of land on the Mclvor, suitable cane land occurred in patches over a large area.²⁷¹ A sophisticated transport system would be needed to service a central mill from widely scattered farms. This would require railway feeder lines, a much improved road system, or a combination of both.²⁷²

Despite the Bureau's warning, the Shire Council proceeded with its plans, although it made no attempt to determine what variety of cane was best for the area. The Shire Clerk merely asked Howe to send "two

²⁶⁹ Rupert Howe, Mossman, to J. Landy, Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, 14 January 1950. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

²⁷⁰ Director, Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations, Department of Agriculture, Brisbane, to The Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, 17 February 1950. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

²⁷¹ A report in 1948 identified only 5,000 to 6,000 acres of land between the Morgan and Mclvor Rivers suitable for intensive agriculture, but even this would need irrigation. Report: Cooktown Lands, Areas Suitable For Cultivation, 6 September 1948. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

²⁷² Director, Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations, Department of Agriculture, Brisbane, to The Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, 17 February 1950. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

or three bags of whatever plants you can obtain".²⁷³ Mossman growers were happy to help out, and three farms contributed the plant cane free of charge.²⁷⁴ The trial plots were planted on farms owned by several farmers, including Messrs Woods, Holzapfel and Buhmann.²⁷⁵ There are no official reports on the success of the trial plots, but anecdotal evidence suggests that the cane grown was of a very high quality.²⁷⁶

Support for the establishment of a sugar mill at Cooktown also came from other industries, anxious to benefit from the better infrastructure that would result. Cairns solicitors, MacDonnell, Harris & Bell urged the Council to promote the flow-on effects to other industries, such as grazing, from the establishment of a sugar mill in the area. They suggested the Council concentrate on the possibilities for live cattle exports once the wharves were developed for sugar exports.²⁷⁷

The State Government was under considerable pressure from interest groups in many areas intent on gaining one of the proposed new mills. In 1950 it decided to establish a Royal Commission to report on the development of the sugar industry, no doubt hoping that a recommendation from an "independent" body would be less damaging politically. Cooktown saw the hearings as another chance to present its credentials. Most of the farmers and graziers in the proposed sugar

²⁷³ Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, to R.S. Howe, Mossman Central Mill, Mossman, 14 March 1950. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

²⁷⁴ Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, to J.M. Pringle, Mossman, 10 October 1950. (Also to W.H. Crawford of "Brie Brie" and W.S. Johnston of "Drumsara"). Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

²⁷⁵ Bill Holzapfel, interviewed by telephone by Peter Ryle at Cooktown, 27 October 1998. The Holzapfel family has been farming in the Cooktown area for over seventy years.

²⁷⁶ Bill Baker, interviewed by Peter Ryle at Cooktown, 27 October 1998. Baker claimed that the cane achieved a higher C.C.S. (sugar content) than comparable cane from other areas.

²⁷⁷ MacDonnell, Harris & Bell, Solicitors and Notaries Public, Cairns, 22 May 1950. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

growing areas gave evidence. Cooktown's bid was also supported by Robert Howell, a tobacco farmer of Laura who had experience in all aspects of farming.²⁷⁸ The Commission was told that Cooktown had sufficient rainfall and an abundance of good land, with at least 20,000 acres of first class volcanic land on the Mclvor and Morgan Rivers.²⁷⁹ Supporters recognised that rainfall was lower than around Cairns, but pointed out that several local rivers were capable of providing sufficient water to irrigate the crop in the periods when rainfall was lower. Another advantage was that the price of land on the Mclvor and Morgan Rivers was less than in other areas, and this would help compensate for the cost of irrigation. They also pointed out that an excellent mill site existed on Isabella Creek, which could provide sufficient water for sugar processing and for turbine generators for electricity.²⁸⁰

The Royal Commission was not impressed. Although the area had sufficient arable land, it decided that the rainfall was irregular and that there was insufficient water for irrigation. It also found that the transport network could not support the industry, and that the labour supply in the district would not be sufficient to either grow the cane, or to manufacture the sugar.²⁸¹ The decision was patently political, as cane crops in many areas have to be irrigated, and most of the labour force for the sugar industry at that time was itinerant.

²⁷⁸ Parliamentary Papers of the Legislative Assembly of Queensland (Q.P.P.), 1951-52, Vol. 2. "Royal Commission Appointed to Prepare an Orderly Plan for the Development of the Sugar Industry (1950)", pp. 863-864.

²⁷⁹ It is interesting to note the difference in the area claimed to be available from the 40,000 acres claimed by the Town Council in 1922. "Royal Commission On The Sugar Industry (1950)." Additional Evidence. Miscellaneous II 1950.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Q.P.P. 1951-52, Vol. 2. "Report of the Royal Commission to Prepare an Orderly Plan for the Development of The Sugar Industry (1950)", pp. 863-864.

Despite the rejection of successive attempts to establish a viable sugar industry in the Cooktown area, the local population is still determined to achieve that goal. The present alienation of former cane land for housing development on the coastal strip between Mossman and Innisfail has forced sugar cane growers to seek alternative land for production. This led to the establishment of cane farms in the Atherton Tableland and Mount Molloy areas. Ironically, these crops require irrigation, negating one of the arguments raised against establishing a cane industry in Cooktown. The Cook Shire Council and many farmers in the area see the loss of farming land near Cairns as an opportunity to achieve the long-sought goal of having a sugar mill in their district. The present Council is promoting the establishment of cane farming and processing facilities at Lakeland Downs.

There is no doubt that sufficient suitable land is available in the Lakeland area to supply a sugar mill. An additional benefit is the availability of a deep-water site for a port at Archer Point to export the sugar.²⁸² Provided that enough irrigation water is available to grow the cane, there appears to be no physical impediment to the establishment of a sugar industry in the area. However, as with all previous attempts to achieve this goal, the important decisions will be made from outside the area. As with most of the decisions that have affected Cooktown in its history, the decisions will be as much political as economic.

The establishment of a sugar industry in the Cooktown district could have reversed the decline of the area. It is ironic that the factors intrinsic to an area in decline should be used as evidence against providing a stimulus that could reverse the decline. Many believed that

²⁸² This site was used as a port for the export of grain from Lakeland Downs in the 1970s.

a sugar industry would reverse the decline in population, and lead to the provision of improved physical and social infrastructure throughout the district. The Sugar Commission of 1950 cited the absence of these very items as influencing its decision against the mill. It would be difficult to find a more appropriate example of Myrdal's economic theory on decline.

Tobacco.

Although tobacco would not have provided the same economic stimulus as sugar cane, it nevertheless had the potential to provide a significant boost to the Cooktown district. From soon after the arrival of the first European settlers in the area until the 1950s, various farmers proved that tobacco, like sugar, could be grown successfully. However, as with sugar cane, tobacco failed to realise its potential. This was due to a combination of factors, principal among which were the lack of good road access, and the refusal by Government to take a supportive role in encouraging the industry. There is little doubt that if the Laura district tobacco industry had been offered support equal to that available to the Mareeba-Dimbulah area, it would have shown similar results.

Tobacco was grown as early as 1889, when the Government supplied seeds to J.C. Davis of Kapunda Farm and Hislop & Co., of Wyalla, in the Bloomfield River area.²⁸³ Despite the experimental nature of the crop, the first reports on the tobacco stated that it "looked good".²⁸⁴ Locals expected that the industry would have a big future, with preliminary sales fetching £90 per ton.²⁸⁵ Lands Commissioner Millman

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 459-469.

²⁸⁴ *Cooktown Courier*, 2 August 1889.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 24 September 1889.

confirmed their faith in the local tobacco industry when he inspected the crop and gave a glowing report. He suggested that the growers combine their resources and learn to cure the leaf properly, as the crop had very good prospects.²⁸⁶

Eventually the Wyalla plantation, owned by J. Hislop, produced cigar tobacco of three varieties, Java, Sumatra and Havana.²⁸⁷ The results were impressive, with cigars manufactured at the plantation winning a prize in London for colonial cigars. In reporting this victory for local produce, the Cooktown Courier commented: "We trust he [Hislop] will send a collection to the World Fair in Chicago".²⁸⁸ The cigars were sold in Cooktown under the brand name *Wyallas*. In addition to growing tobacco and manufacturing cigars, Hyslop also offered tobacco seeds for sale to other growers.²⁸⁹ Like the sugar planters, Wyalla used "coloured" labour on its tobacco plantation and manufactory, including people from the Philippines.²⁹⁰ It appears that the plantation shared its success with "persons unknown", but not voluntarily. It obviously suffered from theft of some of its product, as an advertisement in the Cooktown Courier in 1890 warned tobacco buyers that no person could legally sell tobacco from the plantation without the consent of the proprietors.²⁹¹ Unfortunately, the Wyalla tobacco venture suffered the same fate as the sugar plantation and mill, and ceased operations before the turn of the century. Crops like sugar, tobacco and cotton were reliant on cheap indentured labour, and when the Griffiths Government proposed to end the importation of "black" labour many

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 10 December 1889.

²⁸⁷ Australian Handbook, 1892, pp. 411-412.

²⁸⁸ Cooktown Courier, 21 August 1891.

²⁸⁹ The seeds were sold for three shillings per ounce, or forty shillings per pound. Ibid., 1 January 1892.

²⁹⁰ N.A.R. Pollock, [Former Northern Instructor in Agriculture], Scarborough, to The Shire Clerk, Cooktown, 16 February 1949. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

²⁹¹ Cooktown Courier, 29 August 1890.

plantations folded. Any possibility of converting to more expensive "white" labour was confounded by a general slump in world prices.

Tobacco revived in Queensland in the 1920s and 1930s, and a syndicate was formed to farm land near Cooktown. Reports on the quality of the leaf varied. The State tobacco expert, O.L. Hassell, spent two weeks in the district in 1933, advising growers on leaf curing and other facets of production. He said that the tobacco was of very high quality, despite the leaf being smaller than that produced in other areas.²⁹² However, the growers abandoned their farms after a few years, claiming they were unable to produce leaf of high quality. Although there was no scientific explanation for this failure, the general consensus was that the tobacco was grown too close to salt water.²⁹³ The charge appears to have no foundation, as the tobacco was grown at The Sisters, near Boiling Springs, which is at least twenty kilometres from the nearest salt water. A kiln was built at Streamlets, on the upper Endeavour River, to cure the leaf.²⁹⁴

Other areas were also tried. In 1932 an attempt was made to grow tobacco on land between Cooktown and Laura, and in the Laura area itself. The Department of Public Lands issued a Perpetual Lease over 115 acres of land in the Parish of Deighton to the Cooktown Tobacco Group. The land was available on payment of a survey fee of £8/10/0, with a nominal annual rent.²⁹⁵ This area produced better tobacco, and one farmer, G.H. Brooke, grew a crop in 1935 that was described by

²⁹² Cairns Post, 3 June 1933.

²⁹³ Cecil James Murdoch, interviewed by Duncan Jackson, 1984. Transcript in Cook Shire Council Library, Cooktown. Murdoch claimed that three other growers, Miller, Summerhayes and Till, produced tobacco at Cooktown in the 1930s. He rejected the proposition that the tobacco was grown too close to salt water, citing the successful production of this product in Cuba.

²⁹⁴ Keith Miller, interview.

²⁹⁵ Queensland Government Gazette (Q.G.G.), 12 November 1932, p. 1544.

Government advisers as first class.²⁹⁶ The Laura area was also described as having suitable climate and soil to support tobacco production, being similar to the best Dimbulah land. Because of a lack of grower expertise, the leaf quality of initial crops was mixed. Similar disappointments in the Mareeba area led to the establishment of a Commonwealth Commission to investigate the prospects of an Australian tobacco industry, and to determine if tobacco companies were manipulating prices. The Commission concluded that the tobacco industry faced a number of problems, including inconsistent rainfall, lack of knowledge by "experts" and growers, disease control, and lack of capital.²⁹⁷ The Commission held its inquiry in the Mareeba area, but the findings applied to the Cooktown tobacco lands also.

Despite some encouraging results, little progress was made in tobacco production around Cooktown until after the commencement of the Second World War, when J.L. Howell commenced farming his selection in 1941.²⁹⁸ Howell joined the armed forces in 1943, and his father, who had previously acted as an adviser on tobacco production to the Federal Government, took over the farm.²⁹⁹ Howell senior was an experienced farmer who had grown tobacco at Mareeba, and considered that the Laura district was superior to any other area in

²⁹⁶ Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, to H.H. Collins, M.L.A., Parliament House, Brisbane, 23 January 1946. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

²⁹⁷ E.H. Short, 1993. My Affair With Tobacco: poverty and chaos to wealth and stability, Self published, Dimbulah.

²⁹⁸ "Wild tobacco", which was believed to have been seeded from abandoned farms at Deighton, grew along the Deighton River for many years. Jack Jenkins said that when he worked on the railway in Cooktown before the Second World War he picked "wild tobacco" at Deighton and prepared it for smoking. Jack Jenkins, interviewed by Peter Ryle at Aloomba, 22 February 1999.

²⁹⁹ Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, to Hon. A. Jones, M.L.A., Minister for Lands, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, 20 November 1945. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

Australia.³⁰⁰ He was so impressed with the potential of the district that he referred to it as the "Virginia of Australia".³⁰¹

The Shire Council claimed that Howell grew two crops in a twelve-month period in 1945. If the report was correct it would be significant for the future of tobacco, as the production of more than one crop each year was possible in very few areas.³⁰² When the younger Howell applied for release from military service in September 1945 the Council supported his application. It said that Howell's father was producing tobacco under difficulties, and needed his son's assistance. The Council, ever willing to dramatise a situation to support its case, even claimed that Howell's release from military duty was of Commonwealth importance, as the success of the Laura tobacco venture was critical to the closer settlement of North Queensland.³⁰³ A successful tobacco industry could very well bring in many settlers, as there were an estimated 1,000 square miles of suitable land near the town.³⁰⁴ However, attempts to have more land made available for farming fell on deaf ears. The Minister pointed out that 160 farm blocks were released for selection in 1932, but only five blocks had been taken up to form

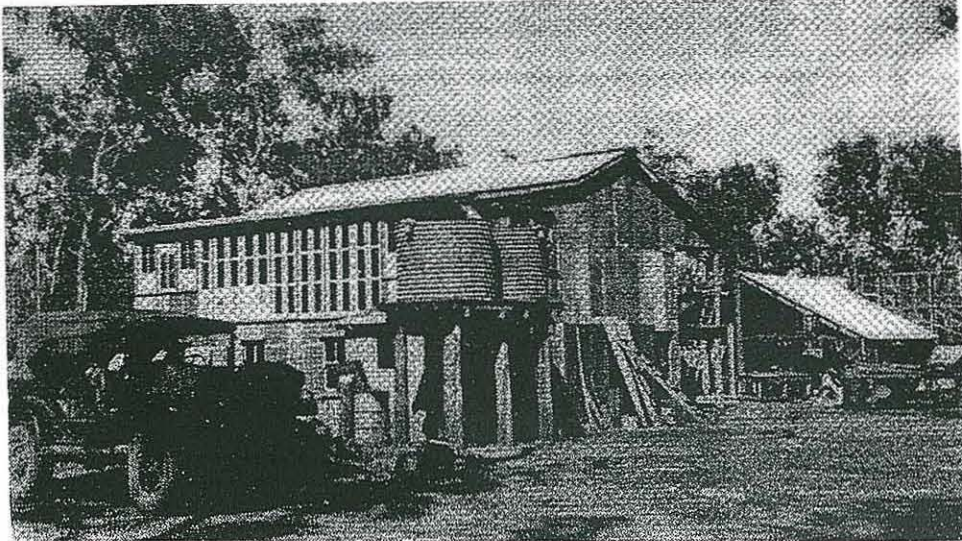
³⁰⁰ Information supplied by The Chairman and Employment Officer, Cairns Employment Exchange Board, Cairns, to Department of Labour & Industry, Treasury Buildings, Brisbane, 1944. Report On Tobacco Land At Laura, Via Cooktown, North Queensland by Cook Shire Council. Transcripts in Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

³⁰¹ Cecil James Murdoch, interview.

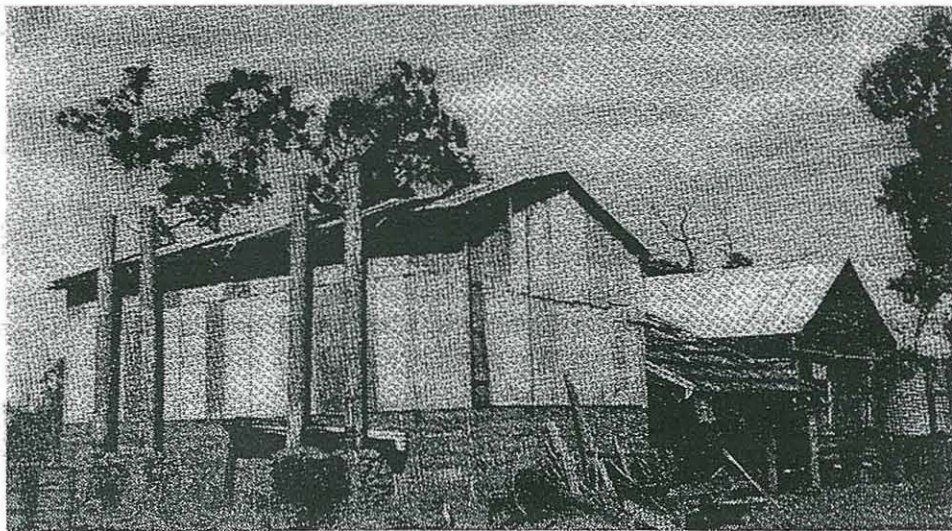
³⁰² Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, to H.H. Collins, M.L.A., Parliament House, Brisbane, 23 January 1946. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

³⁰³ Chairman, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, to Area Officer, Area 51, Cairns, 27 September 1945. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown. (There is no record available to indicate if Howell was given an early discharge).

³⁰⁴ Report On Tobacco Land At Laura, Via Cooktown, North Queensland by Cook Shire Council. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.



Howell's farm house at Laura with kiln under construction at rear, c. 1947. (Gallop, Bush Engineer).



Howell's tobacco kiln, Laura, c. 1947. (Gallop, Bush Engineer).

three farms. No further surveys would be undertaken until the available land was taken.³⁰⁵

There is little doubt that tobacco could have been grown successfully at Laura if the Government had supplied the necessary expertise and infrastructure. However, it is probable that the Government was more interested in concentrating the tobacco industry in the Mareeba-Dimbulah area to minimise costs. Such an attitude would be understandable given that the Government was heavily subsidising the industry. A report by the Senior Adviser in Agriculture conceded that good tobacco could be grown at Laura, but the area had many difficulties. These included poor transport facilities and the absence of a skilled seasonal labour force. On top of the very low prices being offered for tobacco leaf, these disadvantages made tobacco farming at Laura a risky project.³⁰⁶ It is of interest that the Government adviser cited the lack of transport facilities and labour as factors inhibiting the tobacco industry in the area, the same justification used by Government advisers to reject the introduction of a sugar industry to the district in the 1950s. Supporters of the tobacco industry were in favour of the scheme precisely because it would lead to the provision of better infrastructure. An organised tobacco industry would also attract more labour to the district, with a consequent increase in population.³⁰⁷ The Council then asked for Laura to be included in the post-war returned services settlement schemes, but the State Government

³⁰⁵ A. Jones, Minister for Lands, Brisbane, to The Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, 26 October 1945. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

³⁰⁶ Senior Adviser In Agriculture, Department of Agriculture and Stock, Brisbane, to The Director of Agriculture, Brisbane, 2 November 1945. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

³⁰⁷ The Government was not consistent. It encouraged tobacco farming at Mary Farms, between Mount Molloy and Mount Carbine, even though transport facilities were very poor, and labour had to be sourced from other areas.

refused to support the request.³⁰⁸ It was no doubt influenced by its commitment to the Mǎreeba-Dimbulah tobacco scheme, and the irrigation works centred on the Tinaroo Dam.

Local interest in the Laura tobacco lands prompted J.L. Howell to promote a plan, which he claimed would successfully introduce new settlers into the Laura tobacco industry. He suggested that one farm should be set aside and equipped by the Government so that experienced trainers could teach sharecroppers how to farm under the conditions peculiar to the area. As these farmers became proficient, more farms could be made available for training. Howell said that the Laura lands could only be successfully farmed with a "pool" system to share irrigation and farming machinery.³⁰⁹ The Shire Council was impressed, and urged the Government to implement the plan immediately.³¹⁰ As usual, the plan failed to attract Government support, despite its modest scale.

By 1950 the tobacco industry in settled areas like Mareeba-Dimbulah was enjoying some economic success. This encouraged the Government to make more blocks available at Laura for settlement. The land was offered as perpetual lease, and a deposit of £3 was required for each block. To prevent speculation on the land, only one portion was available to each applicant. The scheme also reflected the discriminatory nature of Australian society at the time, as it stipulated that no married women could apply for the leases. As the Government was also eager to prevent the land being taken by absentee landlords,

³⁰⁸ Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, to Hon. A. Jones, M.L.A. Minister for Lands, Department of Public Lands, 20 November 1945. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

³⁰⁹ J.L. Howell, Laura, to The Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, 1 October 1946. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

³¹⁰ Cook Shire Council Minutes, 10 October 1946.

a five-year personal residence provision applied. These conditions proved too restrictive, and like earlier attempts to entice new settlers, it failed.

Another attempt was made in 1955 to start a tobacco industry closer to Cooktown, when a curing kiln was built on the property of H.O. Hallam. The kiln was constructed under the supervision of State Government tobacco experimental station personnel to determine yet again if tobacco could be successfully grown.³¹¹ Following the erection of the kiln, the area was awarded a quota of 20,000 lbs of leaf, to be grown on several farms on the Endeavour River. The crop failed, and experts blamed a combination of poor quality irrigation water and low prices.³¹² Ironically, the Minister for Agriculture visited the demonstration plots and praised the results. He said there was no reason why tobacco would not be successful, and that it had been identified as a "reviver" for Cooktown's economy.³¹³ Another two farmers were issued with quotas in 1965, but the leaf produced was of inferior quality. No further attempts were made to grow tobacco in the area.

Interest in the resurrection of the tobacco industry at irregular intervals is a feature of Cooktown's agricultural history. This phenomenon also applies to other products like sugar, and is similar to the cyclical interest in coal exploration. There is no immediately identifiable reason for this pattern, which might be generational, but it could warrant further investigation.

Although all attempts to establish a tobacco industry in the Laura and Cooktown districts eventually failed, this is not a reflection on the

³¹¹ Cook Shire Council Minutes, 17 December 1955.

³¹² Wright, Cook Shire Handbook, series 6-7.

³¹³ Cairns Post, 9 December 1955.

suitability of the area. Nor is it a reflection on the private citizens and local authority personnel who tried to establish the industry. Initially Laura proved as capable of producing high-class tobacco as the Mareeba-Dimbulah area, and had equal potential as a farming district. Tobacco had the potential to become a viable industry, as the leaf is light and non-perishable, and would present less problems in transporting to market than alternative crops. Tobacco farming at Mareeba became viable only after the intervention of the Government, and the provision of research facilities and an irrigation scheme. It is arguable that had the State Government invested a similar level of funding in the Laura area, tobacco could have become a staple for the area.

Cotton.

Of the many crops grown by Cooktown farmers, cotton was another that, with appropriate help from the Government, might have had more success. The first reliable report of cotton production from the area was when James Dick grew cotton on his property *Excelsior*. A sample sent to the spinning mills at Ipswich was described as excellent, and Dick was presented with two shirts made from his cotton. His failure to produce further crops was blamed on Government obstruction.³¹⁴ It was more probable that Dick was faced with the same problem as other experimental cotton farmers in Queensland at that time - trying to secure cheap labour to cultivate and harvest sufficient area to be economic. Interest in cotton farming was rekindled during the First World War, when the armed forces required cotton for armaments. It was mixed with nitric and sulphuric acids to make gun cotton, an explosive for artillery shells. The Town Council received a circular from

³¹⁴ Cooktown Independent & Northern Sun, 26 September 1938.

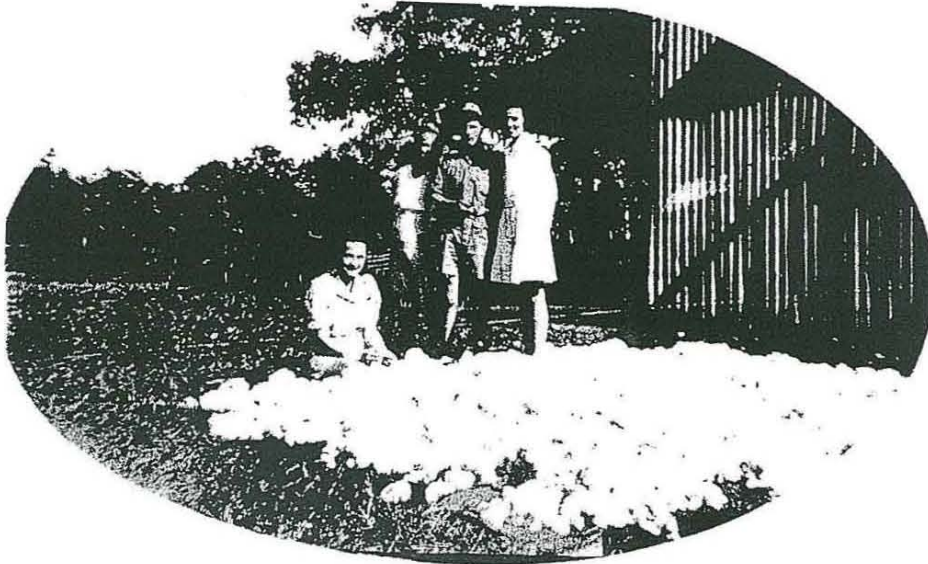
the Mount Morgan Munitions Cotton League advising that farmers would receive free cottonseed from the Defence Department. The League claimed that each cotton plant would "be a gift of £15 to the Nation from Queensland". Local Councils were urged to "have the matter taken up as a patriotic duty by all in your district".³¹⁵ The Council passed on the information to local growers, reminding them that by supplying cotton for the armed forces, they would "be doing a noble thing towards the nation". The Council also saw the scheme as a means of publicising the virtues of the area for farming. Farmers were told to be particularly careful to supply good cotton as it "will be a factor of advertisement of the land from which such supply of cotton has been yielded".³¹⁶ Despite the hype accompanying this project, little cotton was produced.

A national surge of interest in cotton growing in the early 1920s provided another window of opportunity, and the Cooktown District Progress Association lobbied the Queensland Government for two years to start a cotton industry in the district. The Association complained that although it had persuaded the State Government to commission a report on the potential for cotton in the area, it had not been shown the result.³¹⁷ Charles Patching, a local solicitor, believed that the export potential for Cooktown cotton was considerable. Britain alone imported cotton to the value of £175 million, a portion of which

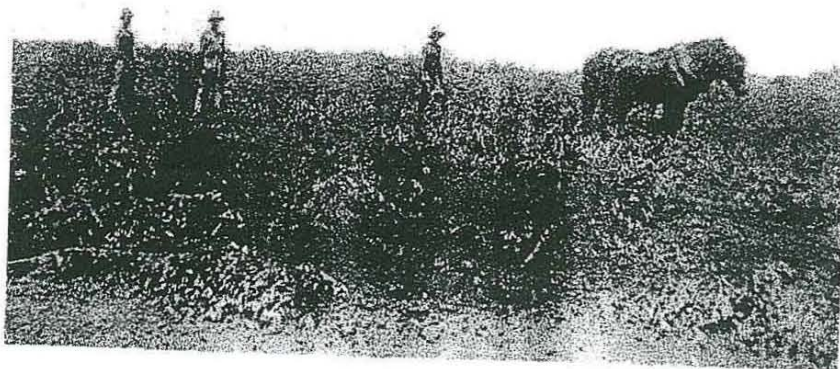
³¹⁵ Circular, Mount Morgan Cotton League. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

³¹⁶ Town Clerk, The Town Council of Cooktown, to Messrs. A. Seagren, J. Holzapfel, Evanson Bros, W.M. Cameron, and W.V. Gorton, 19 October 1915. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

³¹⁷ Geo. Schipke, Secretary, The Cooktown and District Progress Association, Cooktown, to His Worship The Mayor and Aldermen of the Town Council of Cooktown, 16 August 1922. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown. The report identified about 15,000 acres suitable for cotton growing on the Morgan and McIvor Rivers. This land would support a fairly large population. A. Hollingsworth, for Secretary, Land Administration Board, Department of Lands, Brisbane, to The Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, 3 August 1938. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.



Cooktown cotton harvest, c. 1930s. (Jim McDowall).



Farming the hard way, Cooktown , c. 1930s. (Jim McDowall).

could be supplied by the Cooktown area. Patching claimed that a successful cotton industry could bring over one thousand settlers to Cooktown.³¹⁸ A subsequent public meeting asked both Federal and State Governments to investigate the prospects for growing cotton, citrus, peanuts and other tropical products, and provide the necessary assistance.³¹⁹ The plea fell on deaf ears, and for many years nothing more was done.

In 1938 there was renewed interest in cotton, possibly as a result of the worsening world political situation. The Council finally convinced the Cotton Board to help with a trial crop, and 1,040 pounds (lbs) of seed was distributed to various farmers for planting.³²⁰ This time the project had the advantage that freight costs from Cooktown to the ginnery were carried by the Queensland Cotton Board.³²¹ This exercise had more success than previous attempts, with three tons of cotton being exported on the ship *Bidelia*.³²² Despite the relative success of the venture, the farmers who grew cotton could not overcome the disadvantages of poor roads, the absence of scientific advice, and a lack of infrastructure. Eventually cotton suffered a similar fate to other agricultural products in the district.

³¹⁸ Charles Patching, Solicitor, Cooktown, to The Mayor and Aldermen of The Council of the Town of Cooktown, Cooktown, 17 August 1922. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

³¹⁹ Resolutions of Public meeting, Cooktown, 24 August 1922. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

³²⁰ Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, to His Excellency, Sir Leslie Wilson, Governor of Queensland, 14 December 1938. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

³²¹ Cooktown Independent & Northern Sun, 26 September 1938.

³²² The cotton was produced by six farmers: A.J. Campbell, N. Starkey, G.A. Seagren, S. Till, B. Phillips and the Cape Bedford Mission. Cooktown Independent & Northern Sun, 7 August 1939.

Although the proponents of cotton continued to believe that it could have been successfully grown in the Cooktown area, their faith was not justified. Davidson found that cotton, like linseed and rice, could be grown more economically below the Tropic of Capricorn.³²³ Given the higher costs associated with growing cotton in the tropics, and the higher costs of freighting the product to market, it is unlikely that cotton farming will become viable in the area.

Peanuts.

Despite the failure of successive crops to achieve an economic return, the district's farmers were willing to persevere. From the arrival of the first European settlers, local newspapers carried reports of peanuts being grown throughout the district. Small quantities were exported, although farmers were faced with the problem of high transport costs. For instance in 1911 one Chinese merchant unsuccessfully appealed to the Council to lower the wharfage rates on exported peanuts.³²⁴ However, the first significant attempt to establish a peanut growing industry near Cooktown was made in 1921. When the Northern Instructor of Agriculture visited the area he reported that the Cooktown Planting Proprietary Company had 540 of their 6,000 acres at Boiling Springs planted to peanuts. The Company imported a peanut harvester from the United States, and planned to erect a factory to produce oil if the project proved successful.³²⁵ Although the crop grew well, the Company's failure to continue with the project suggests that it was not viable.

³²³ Davidson, *The Northern Myth*, pp. 37-38.

³²⁴ Cooktown Town Council to Tommy Ah Kum, 2 November 1911, Cooktown Town Letterbook, Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

³²⁵ *North Queensland Register*, 25 July 1921.

However, the concept of a local peanut factory persisted. In the 1940s an increased market for peanut products led to renewed interest in farming. Following representations by the local Progress Association and the Shire Council, a delegation consisting of the manager of the Queensland Peanut Marketing Board and North Queensland Board Member visited Cooktown in 1947 to meet prospective growers.³²⁶ After a thorough inspection of the area, the delegates said that the Mclvor Lands would produce large quantities of good peanuts. However, they identified two factors hindering progress in the area. Most of the land required clearing, and access to prospective farming land was poor.³²⁷ This was not new to the locals, who had been asking for Government assistance for better access for many years.

Following the favourable report by the Peanut Board, the Shire Council asked the Minister for Agriculture and Stock for support to have the Mclvor Lands cut into 160 to 240 acre blocks. Closer settlement would lend economies of scale to the farming of peanuts and other crops, as the consequent increase in population would make the provision of services such as roads more viable. While the Minister supported the expansion of primary production in the area, he reminded the Shire Council that much freehold land, suitable for peanut production, was already lying idle in the Mclvor area.³²⁸ It is understandable that the Government was reluctant to incur further expense in opening up more

³²⁶ J. Nesbitt, Manager, The Queensland Peanut Marketing Board, Kingaroy, to Secretary, Cooktown Progress Association, Cooktown, 23 April 1947. Secretary, Cooktown Progress Association, Cooktown, to The Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, 5 May 1947. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

³²⁷ Manager, The Peanut Marketing Board to Secretary, Local Progress Association, Cooktown, 28 June 1947. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

land unless some use was made of land already available.

Relations between the Council and the Government became acrimonious. The Council continued to blame the Government for the lack of progress. It claimed that although the Cooktown area had proved in the past that it could produce good peanuts, lack of Government support had stifled growth.³²⁹ The Minister rejected the accusation, and pointed out that Cooktown growers had equal access to the marketing pool. Freight costs were no longer an issue, as they were paid for their produce free on board at any rail siding on the Cooktown line, making cartage costs competitive with southern growers. The Government had made other concessions to Cooktown growers to help them establish the industry. It had excluded them from the more restrictive regulations of the Peanut Board for four years, and had made finance available for Cooktown growers to purchase picking machines. He reminded the Council that these machines were still available in the district. However, he said the Government was in favour of progress, and urged the Council to submit any further evidence of disadvantage suffered by Cooktown growers.³³⁰

On the surface, the Government's claim that it had been generous to Cooktown district farmers had merit. However, in reality they were very disadvantaged in comparison with farmers in areas such as the Atherton Tableland. For instance, the concession on freight which

³²⁸ H.H. Collins, Minister for Agriculture and Stock, Department of Agriculture and Stock, Brisbane, to J.H. Landy, Shire Clerk, Cooktown, 14 July 1947. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

³²⁹ Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, to Hon. H.H. Collins M.L.A., Parliament House, Brisbane, 8 July 1947. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

³³⁰ H.H. Collins, Minister for Agriculture and Stock, Brisbane, to J.H. Landy, Shire Clerk, Cooktown, 14 July 1947. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown. Cooktown residents claim that one of the Government financed peanut picking machines is still in the area.

allowed peanuts to be carried by rail free of cost had limited application to local farmers. To take advantage of the concession farmers must deliver their produce to the nearest rail siding, and very few of the peanut farms were close to the railway line. The area lacked roads, and the few that existed were in such poor condition that cartage to the rail line was difficult, if not impossible. Of the eighty miles of gazetted main roads in the area, most were merely marks on the map. Some "main roads" had never even been surveyed, and only six miles of roads had been properly constructed. Even the best of roads was so rough that it was common to take three hours to travel thirty miles. This situation applied especially to the Mclvor River area, which supplied most of the peanuts grown in the district. Produce from this area had to be carted almost thirty miles to a railway siding over virtually unmade tracks.

The Mclvor Lands were serviced by one of these non-existent roads, which, as gazetted main roads, were supposed to be provided and maintained by the Government. In addition to these disadvantages, Cooktown had no road connection with other coastal towns, and as already discussed, the shipping service was unsatisfactory.³³¹ Despite this evidence of Government neglect, the Council failed in its bid for more support for the area. In contrast to the almost complete lack of roads in the Cooktown farming district, the Government was at that time constructing a series of weirs and service roads to stimulate farming throughout the state, and particularly in the Mareeba-Dimbulah area.

The lack of Government resolve in developing the agricultural potential of the area was a result of political expediency, and not due to a lack of

³³¹ Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, to Hon. H.H. Collins M.L.A., Minister for Agriculture and Stock, Brisbane, 27 August 1947. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

informed advice. A Report by the North Queensland Land Inquiry Committee in 1952 advised that the establishment of a Peanut Marketing Board Depot would stabilise the peanut industry in the area. The Committee said that the development of the Cooktown area was essential from a defence as well as an economic viewpoint. It recommended that £50,000 be made available by the State and Federal Governments to establish new industries in the district. The most promising enterprises appeared to be a peanut depot, a fruit cannery and an extension of the sawmill, as each would provide employment for workers in both production and processing. The Committee stressed that the point of processing for any industry must be in Cooktown itself to form a nucleus for growth. Although it recognised that any new industry would not be immediately viable, the Committee believed that the settlement of the district warranted Government investment.³³² The Committee's findings confirmed the view of locals that the district could reverse its economic decline only with Government help, but the advice fell on deaf ears. As with previous recommendations on the development of the area, Governments chose not to take the advice of the Committee.

Despite the failure to introduce "organised" farming and processing facilities to the area, individual farmers took up land and produced crops without fanfare. Peanuts were produced in various locations, including the Mclvor River area, in the 1950s.³³³ Results were good, although the Cooktown area failed to produce yields comparable with

³³² North Queensland Land Inquiry Committee. Report to Honourable The Minister For Lands And Irrigation, December 1952, pp. 20-21.

³³³ Sylvia Hood, interviewed by Ellen McIntyre on ABC Radio at Cairns, 29 September 1998.

Year	District	English		Sweet		Cane		Sugar		Tobacco	Bananas	Pineapples	Oranges	Coffee
		Maize	Rice	Potatoes	Potatoes	Cotton	Crushed	Produced	Tons					
		Bushels	Bushels	Tons	Tons	Lbs	Acres	Tons						
1874	Cook													
	Cairns													
1875	Cook													
	Cairns													
1876	Cook													
	Cairns													
1877	Cook													
	Cairns													
1878	Cook	6 950		79							15 312	541		
	Cairns													
1879	Cook	6 065		93							6 255	3 193		
	Cairns													
1880	Cook	8 990		193							2 120	20		
	Cairns													
1881	Cook	6 225		260		2 240	27	52			26 118	1 331	424	
	Cairns													
1882	Cook	24 810		1 112			316	340	8		88 484	15 845	456	
	Cairns													
1883	Cook	1 834		166							46 686	1 851	945	
	Cairns	17 670		529			1 212	2 156			44 700	2 810	120	
1884	Cook	1 037		13	168						31 243	1 937	4 670	
	Cairns	22 846		89	703	2 201	3 843		433		58 690	4 102	1 250	
1885	Cook	2 608		8	225						689 132	1 829	9 380	
	Cairns	20 890		28	438		1 220	2 514	616		207 024	5 150	1 200	
1886	Cook	6 231	2 635				234	285			438 149	2 456	15 300	
	Cairns	26 307	1 705	42	603		1 524	2 340	186		753 927	36 427	440	
1887	Cook	6 385	2 240	22	312		372	738	7		718 483	4 208	10 900	
	Cairns	28 093	4 790	18	526		1 150	2 050	16		1 000 200	3 452	2 800	
1888	Cook	7 249	47 960	12	308		317	520	4		722 180	4 346	50 051	
	Cairns	41 079	458 144	38	485		1 189	1 938	9		1 020 890	6 474	2 059	
1889	Cook	13 523	28 400	29	409		300	333	127		88 365	4 241	2 820	
	Cairns	73 787	143 380	26	610		1 400	1 700	11		1 495 768	5 195	29 930	
1890	Cook	8 711	62 445	14	315	3				359	114 642	15 401	12 835	
	Cairns	78 284	367 520	87	578		1 491	1 755	5		15 654 788	20 644	60 730	
1891	Cook	3 519	1 040	31	290					133	1 029 070	10 181	4 803	
	Cairns	71 731	12 579	124	589		955	1 180			5 200 630	215 097	17 067	
1892	Cook	6 568	1 252	13	253						48 831	21 834	16 992	
	Cairns	55 995	25 516	18	578		1 150	1 465	10		8 130 766	145 684	423 897	
1893	Cook	6 974	1 389	9	299						41 035	4 169	33 580	
	Cairns	88 767	25 010	84	1 319		1 400	1 750	81		6 893 830	36 500	969 412	
1894	Cook	7 933	1 424	5	286					4	36 086	4 546	20 006	
	Cairns	56 017	18 762	19	522		1 200	2 100	18		4 385 930	81 270	122 760	
1895	Cook	5 700	2 676	12	271					2	133 179	5 323	66 921	4 952
	Cairns	44 026	7 000	33	535		1 437	2 722			7 350 700	10 810	163 364	6 030
1896	Cook	6 417	2 744	36	349					5	75 370	4 210	35 085	512
	Cairns	56 058	14 385	48	699	30	1 857	2 932			8 172 900	13 670	107 430	7 795
1897	Cook	4 802	1 428	4	239	20					74 900	3 680	30 324	57 065
	Cairns	45 963	7 162	24	1 266						7 928 662	17 596	225 960	16 962
1898	Cook	6 182	1 456	4	440	50					126 790	3 128	61 420	3 040
	Cairns	72 008	33 540	62	882						37 771 462	72 878	196 756	40 670
1899	Cook	5 491	1 846	14	411						26 900	3 946	34 502	690
	Cairns	59 053	6 304	111	566						26 979 616	82 374	91 730	67 143
1900	Cook	3 964	415	6	262						29 195	2 464	36 384	5 244
	Cairns	120 005	3 756	44	662				15		752 031	28 831	46 200	56 914

Agriculture: production for Cook and Cairns 1874-1900. (Statistics of Queensland).

Year	District	Cultivation		Grain		Potatoes		Potatoes	Sugar		Other				
		Area	Maize	Rice	English	Sweet	Cane	Tobacco	Bananas	Pineapple	Oranges	Crops	Coffee		
1874	Cook		22												
	Cairns														
1875	Cook		89			27			1		16	1		34	
	Cairns														
1876	Cook		197	10		71			4		26	2			
	Cairns														
1877	Cook														
	Cairns														
1878	Cook		369	189		49					37	6	1	48	
	Cairns														
1879	Cook		322	184		38			7		36	16	5	18	
	Cairns														
1880	Cook		629	274		50			16.5		1	0.5	16	16	
	Cairns														
1881	Cook		1 174	286					534						
	Cairns														
1882	Cook		2 697	718		158			1 523		1	48	17	21	67
	Cairns														
1883	Cook		438	99		41			143.5		44	14	10	52	
	Cairns		3 024	609		104			2 172		23	18	5	14	
1884	Cook		1 083	56		7		46	741		67	16	20	61	
	Cairns		5 372	993		43		101	3 924	15	36	17	14	61	
1885	Cook		1 244	96		5		65	817		79	18	21	55	
	Cairns		2 895	508		11		50	2 109	52	61	16	24	10	
1886	Cook		1 520	174	71	6		65	934		87	22	19	34	
	Cairns		3 185	677	77	18		104	1 937	28	159	24	27	41	
1887	Cook		1 008	195	60	12		67	440	1	117	36	33	23	
	Cairns		3 089	837	95	9		84	1 410	8	309	31	107	39	
1888	Cook		1 147	289	35	8		90	438	1	95	29	40	56	
	Cairns		3 310	999	216	15		88	1 554	1	524	42	124	33	
1889	Cook		1 480	547	10	12		90	567	10	84	31	37	13	
	Cairns		4 503	1 469	146	18		98	1 500	2	828	44	170	45	
1890	Cook		1 330	315	37	6		95	550	67	79	34	66	64	
	Cairns		5 684	1 953	164				1 497		1 157	108	149		
1891	Cook		611	217	27	15		89		18	48	26	46	53	
	Cairns		4 801	1 698	248	62		91	955		1 240	219	153	24	
1892	Cook		610	273	37	10		94			41	37	73	20	
	Cairns		5 604	1 715	850	25		103	1 235	7	893	215	204	77	
1893	Cook		716	238	51	5		165			42	35	70	51	
	Cairns		5 096	1 979	542	38		189	1 426	5	443	67	130	67	
1894	Cook		690	297	46	2		82		1	32	26	56	117	
	Cairns		6 186	2 719	418	9		114	1 707	5	830	93	81	44	
1895	Cook		650	200	81	4		90		2	55	34	70	58	10
	Cairns		5 265	1 098	350	15		77	2 356		1 122	45	82	21	18
1896	Cook		622	228	79	4		99		2	55	34	49	26	16
	Cairns		6 915	1 142	364	18		101	3 124		1 778	67	81	39	96
1897	Cook		639	239	59	2		79			64	18	55	59	46
	Cairns		8 662	1 295	232	8		150	4 701		1 709	68	127	78	140
1898	Cook		609	198	47	1		119			83	18	52	34	29
	Cairns		11 164	1 496	709	49		150	5 370		2 340	284	229	24	209
1899	Cook		702	244	61	7		123			55	17	62	31	29
	Cairns		11 154	1 382	207	36		87	6 821		1 860	107	82	52	199
1900	Cook		472	168	23	1		71			36	11	53	32	26
	Cairns		14 181	2 973	144	18		95	7 930	8	2 512	90	52	28	223

Agriculture: acreage under production, Cook and Cairns 1874-1900.
(Statistics of Queensland)

farms on the Atherton Tableland.³³⁴ The crop continued to attract interest from farmers, and a gradual expansion of the area under crop took place until 1960-61, when 112 tons were produced. However, the obstacles to production and transport continued to plague the industry. By 1972 less than fifty tons of peanuts were sent to market.³³⁵ The best chance of establishing peanut growing as a viable industry came in the 1970s when large-scale cropping was attempted at Lakeland Downs. (The Lakeland Downs project is discussed more fully in a separate section) Produce was transported to the Peanut Board facilities at Tolga by large road trains. Initial results were good, but production was sometimes plagued by bad weather. For instance the 1976-77 crop was badly affected by winter rainfall.³³⁶ However, production improved in 1979 when over 400 acres were planted, with returns of approximately one ton per acre. Production reached a peak of 1,500 tons of peanuts from 2,000 acres in 1980.³³⁷ The area continued to produce significant quantities of peanuts for many years. However, the problems associated with transporting produce over poor roads again took its toll, and farmers gradually changed to farming alternative crops and livestock production. Only one farmer in the Cooktown district now grows peanuts for the market.³³⁸

Lakeland Downs.

Lakeland Downs was the only large-scale farming scheme to succeed in the Cooktown area. Formerly the Butchers Hill cattle station, the property is situated at the junction of the Mulligan Highway and the

³³⁴ Davidson, *The Northern Myth*, p. 115.

³³⁵ Wright, *Cook Shire Handbook*, series 6-7.

³³⁶ Diary of John Kilpatrick, district adviser on agriculture, Tolga. (Information given by Kilpatrick in phone conversation.)

³³⁷ David Hurse, Pers comm, 14 May 1999.

³³⁸ The peanut depot at Tolga stated that Robert Woods is the only farmer producing peanuts at Cooktown at present. Information supplied by Kevin Norman, P.M.B. Australia, Tolga, 27 April 1999.

Peninsula Development Road, about eighty kilometres from Cooktown. Clive Foyster purchased the property from the Wallace family in 1968, and renamed it Lakeland Downs. A small town was built to service the development, with ten houses initially being supplied by the Queensland State Housing Commission.³³⁹ An area of 35,000 acres, most of which was volcanic red soil, was cleared for farming. Two irrigation dams were constructed, one on Bullhead Creek, and the other on the Laura River.³⁴⁰ However, the Laura River dam soon collapsed.

The first crop of 250 acres of sorghum was planted in 1970. By 1971 the area under grain had doubled, thanks to a winter crop of maize and sorghum.³⁴¹ By 1984 Lakeland Downs had shipped over 40,000 tons of grain to the Simitomo Trading Co in Japan. Much of the land was later taken up by share farmers, who diversified their crops. In addition to maize and sorghum, they produced many varieties of beans, melons, and pasture seed.³⁴² Port facilities were constructed at Archer Point, about fifteen kilometres south of Cooktown, to export the grain. A road was also made from the highway to Archer Point so grain could be carted to the wharf. However, the handling facilities have since been removed, and all produce is transported to market by road transport. The area continues to produce crops and cattle.³⁴³

The vision of Lakeland Downs as a "grain bowl" is not dead. In 1998 the Shire Council again floated the idea of a new wharf at Archer Point to export grain and other produce. It revealed that the farming monolith Grainco was interested in exploiting 25,000 hectares of prime land. Of

³³⁹ Press Release by Clive Foyster, 1984. Transcript in Cook Shire Council Library. Foyster was the owner and developer of Lakeland Downs.

³⁴⁰ Wright, Cook Shire Handbook, section 3-2.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁴² Press Release by Clive Foyster, 1984. Transcript in Cook Shire Council Library.

³⁴³ Foyster is no longer associated with Lakeland Downs.

this, 4,000 to 6,000 hectares was suitable for sugar cane. The Council estimated that by 2005, farming could be worth up to \$15 million to the district.³⁴⁴ However the project has created some controversy.

Earthmoving machinery was taken to Archer Point, and excavation commenced before approval was given by the relevant Government departments. Following media revelations of the premature start, work was stopped until all prerequisites were met. The project is to be funded privately, at an estimated cost of \$300,000. Unlike the previous loading facility at Archer Point, which included storage sheds and bulk loading machinery, this system will utilise containers.³⁴⁵

Lakeland Downs has a proven record in crop production, and if enough water is found for large-scale irrigation, agriculture will have a bright future. Within a few years the last section of road will be sealed, adding to the area's advantages.

Suitability of land for cropping.

Small-scale crop production occurred in a number of places in the Cooktown district, but some areas were promoted for farming on a larger scale: Mclvor River, Boiling Springs and Lakeland Downs. As with many circumstances when Cooktown people promoted growth, the reality never quite lived up to the rhetoric. Despite earlier euphoric descriptions of the agricultural land available near the Mclvor River and adjacent areas, a report presented in 1948 by inspectors from the Department of Agriculture was not overly enthusiastic. They said that 5,000 to 6,000 acres of land between the Morgan and Mclvor Rivers was suitable for maize and peanuts. However, prospective settlers

³⁴⁴ Brendan O'Malley, "Visions of a bustling Cooktown sail into view", Courier Mail, 25 June 1998, p. 8.

³⁴⁵ Cooktown Local News, 27 May 1999.

were warned that they would face many problems in farming the area. Heavy machinery would be necessary to clear the land for cultivation, and the soil was not as good as it appeared. While the surface soil looked fertile, the topsoil was very shallow, and fertiliser would soon be necessary. The soil was also acid in nature and would need lime for most crops. The inspectors found that moisture retention of the soil was poor, making dry farming a risky proposition. The only area found to have first-class agricultural land available was in the vicinity of Boiling Springs.³⁴⁶ This area had been identified in 1930 as suitable for the settlement of at least fifty families to farm peanuts and maize.³⁴⁷

Cooktown's ability to attract interest as an alternative area for prospective farmers and settlers was demonstrated in 1950. Following an article about Cooktown in the Courier Mail, at least thirty-five letters were received by the Cook Shire Council inquiring about the availability of land in the district.³⁴⁸ Those who did settle had mixed results. One landowner, who had 3,000 acres on the McIvor River, brought English migrants to settle the area. However, the scheme was not successful.³⁴⁹ The costs of farming in an isolated area made the project uneconomic.

Dairying.

³⁴⁶ Report: Cooktown lands, areas suitable for cultivation, 6 September 1948. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown. Further investigation led to a similar conclusion. P.J. Skerman, 1954. "The Agricultural Potentialities", in Northern Australia: task for a nation, Australian Institute of Political Science, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, p. 73.

³⁴⁷ N.D. Allom to The Secretary, Provisional Forestry Board. Report on land traversed and served by Cooktown-Laura line, 21 April 1930. Submission From Cook, 541, Royal Commission On Development Of North Queensland, A/6420, Q.S.A.

³⁴⁸ Copies of these letters are available in the Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown. Courier Mail, 6 October 1950.

³⁴⁹ Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, to Dr. F. Ditmer, Parliament House, Brisbane. Reported in Cook Shire Council Minutes, 18 December 1950.

Europeans brought animal husbandry when they settled in the Cooktown area, and although dairying occurred on a small scale, it had little chance of becoming a staple industry. As usual in North Queensland, soon after the establishment of the town, several dairy farms supplied fresh milk. Two were *Majorea*, owned by Mr Keating, and another owned by Henry Gardner.³⁵⁰ Milk was delivered daily, and locally made butter was sold in Cooktown shops.³⁵¹ While little evidence remains to indicate the extent of the dairy industry in Cooktown during the gold rush era, eight dairies were registered with the Council in 1893.³⁵² By 1896 the number had been reduced to three, with only one remaining by 1906.³⁵³ Although information on these dairies is scarce, a sale notice from a local newspaper in 1890 is revealing. The property was a freehold selection of 160 acres on the Annan Road, with stock and milking yards for 1,000 head of cattle. Stock included 125 milch cows, seven foals and twenty-nine horses.³⁵⁴

One initiative that transformed Queensland's dairy industry was the travelling dairy. This facility was established by the State Government in 1889 to instruct dairy operators on hygiene and technical skills associated with milk production, and how to make butter and cheese. The dairy, which first operated at Tallebudgera, eventually visited 166 country towns. It was so successful that Queensland changed from an importer to an exporter of butter by 1897.³⁵⁵

³⁵⁰ *Cooktown Courier*, 3 May 1874, 10 February 1874.

³⁵¹ Li Lij, a general merchant, advertised that he had butter from the Bustard Park Dairy for sale. *Ibid.*, 2 August 1889. Two butter factories were recorded in the Cooktown district in 1898. *Queensland Agricultural Journal*, Vol 2, January-June, 1898, p. 243.

³⁵² Dairy Registrations, Municipality of Cooktown, 1893. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 1896, 1906.

³⁵⁴ *Cooktown Courier*, 17 January 1890.

³⁵⁵ *Harvest And Heartaches: Images and Stories of Queensland's Agricultural Past*, Compiled by Tony Barker and Ian Byford, Department of Primary Industries, Queensland Government, 1988, pp. 22-23.

After McLean, the Under-Secretary for Agriculture inspected the northern area he recommended that the travelling dairy should not proceed north of Cairns.³⁵⁶ This decision led to a scathing attack in the Cooktown press by James Dick, on "those in power whose duty it is to interview such visitors and to make them acquainted with our resources". Dick claimed that local Councillors had done little to encourage the Minister to send the travelling dairy to the area. In an attempt to reverse the decision he interviewed McLean, who agreed to send the travelling dairy to Cooktown if enough farmers took an interest in the project.³⁵⁷

The Under-Secretary set conditions for the travelling dairy's visit, although the cost to local farmers would be minimal. The machinery would be landed at the wharf free of expense, and the Government would pay the two men who would accompany the dairy. He promised that all local farmers would be catered for, as the dairy was capable of treating from ten to 200 gallons of milk each day.³⁵⁸ The participating farmers were responsible for supplying a shed and a man to wash the utensils, and a horse would also be needed to drive the cream separator. Dick urged all interested parties to join forces to take advantage of the offer before the dairy was sent elsewhere.³⁵⁹ He was well supported, with the Jockey Club offering the use of the saddling paddock and grandstand for the demonstrations, and the Chamber of

³⁵⁶ Cooktown Courier, 3 January 1890.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 7 February 1890.

³⁵⁸ The travelling dairy carried a variety of butter and cheese making machinery of different capacities to demonstrate how all farmers could benefit from technology. It therefore catered for farmers with a few cows to those with large herds.

³⁵⁹ Cooktown Courier, 7 February 1890.

Commerce promising to promote the scheme.³⁶⁰

The travelling dairy arrived in Cooktown in May 1891 for a ten-day visit. Farmers who wished to process their milk were promised that the advanced type of machinery used in the process would increase the yield of butter by about seventy percent as opposed to that obtained under existing farm conditions.³⁶¹

The project proved popular, with fourteen people attending classes. The tutor claimed that the milk provided by local dairies was equal to any produced north of Rockhampton, and in one session he made eleven pounds (lbs) of cheese from twenty-eight gallons of milk. All excess butter and cheese was sold immediately through Dick's shop, with orders for more. However, the project was not without problems. Even though the worst summer heat had passed, the dairy operator was forced to process the milk at night, as it curdled during the day.³⁶² The travelling dairy demonstrated that butter and cheese could be produced in Cooktown, but no further attempts were made to produce these products on an organised commercial basis. Although the local farmers and the press said the trial was a success, dairying around Cooktown faced obvious obstacles. These included distance from market, an expensive and unreliable transport system, and a climate that was unsuitable for pasture growth and milk processing, especially during summer.

The possibility of establishing a dairy industry in the Cooktown district was again canvassed in 1932. Douglas Tilghman claimed in an article in a Queensland Government handbook that the Mclvor River area

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 9 May 1890.

³⁶¹ Endeavour Times, 27 May 1891.

³⁶² Endeavour Times, 30 May 1891.

could support 200 dairy farms carrying 30,000 cattle. He advocated the establishment of a modern cheese and butter factory in Cooktown at a cost of £80,000. Tilghman estimated that the manufacture of butter alone could add up to £300,000 to the local economy. He was adamant that it would be necessary for the Government to construct an all-weather road from Cooktown to the McIvor River via Boiling Springs.³⁶³ Like other plans to stimulate the area, it was ignored by the Government.

Despite Cooktown's declining population, it could still boast one dairy during the Second World War. This dairy, operated by A. Ure, received a boost in trade from the influx of armed forces personnel. However, many civilians who evacuated during the war never returned, and the market never recovered. The dairy ceased operations about 1946.³⁶⁴ The town was served by another small dairy in the early 1950s, but production was limited, and stopped within a few years.³⁶⁵ Another short-lived dairy began about 1972, when the family of retired Senator Ken Morris established a dairy on the Endeavour River. Eventually the delivery of fresh milk by refrigerated road transport replaced the local milk supply, and the population of Cooktown received an abundant supply of pasteurised and homogenised milk from Cairns.

Beef cattle.

In contrast to the failure of the dairy industry, the beef cattle industry flourished. However, it is ironic that the most successful primary industry in the district regarded as Cooktown's hinterland brought little

³⁶³ Douglas C. Tilghman, 1959. "Cooktown: can vision be made into reality", North Australian Monthly, 21 August.

³⁶⁴ Bill Baker, interviewed by Peter Ryle at Cooktown, 28 October 1998.

³⁶⁵ Sylvia Geraghty, Pers comm, 30 October 1998.

economic benefit to the town. The absence of a reliable market, such as a meat works, within a reasonable distance meant that cattle had to be transported to other centres for processing. Cooktown's only transport facilities, the Laura railway and the town wharves, offered little incentive to producers to transport cattle through the town. As noted in chapter six, the train service was limited, and shipping services were too expensive.

Even without the disadvantages of distance and lack of transport facilities, it is doubtful that the beef cattle industry could have benefited Cooktown more than it did. The soil and climate conditions in the Cape York Peninsula district are not conducive to good pasture production. Consequently, the average free-range cattle from this area are inferior to cattle from many other areas. For instance, Davidson found that cattle from the wet tropics were older and weighed less at slaughter than those from the dry tropical regions or the sub-tropics.³⁶⁶

In the 1870s and early 1880s, squatters used open land to provide meat for the population drawn to the gold mines. The Government soon attempted to regulate the use of land by offering formal land tenure to graziers. In an effort to stimulate closer pastoral production in the area, the Department of Public Lands made land available at the Morgan and McIvor Rivers north of Cooktown. Six blocks were offered, totalling 226 square miles, with annual rents ranging from £1/5/0 to £2/10/0 per square mile.³⁶⁷ Interest in the land was intense, with twenty-two applicants for four of the blocks.³⁶⁸ The Government continued to make more grazing land available and demand continued strong. In one

³⁶⁶ Davidson, *The Northern Myth*, pp. 89-93.

³⁶⁷ Queensland Government Gazette, 11 February 1888.

report on the alienation of Crown land in 1890, twenty applications for occupational leases covering 198 square miles were recorded.³⁶⁹

The cattle industry in the Cooktown hinterland grew quickly from herds brought to the district to supply the influx of miners to the Palmer River gold field. Despite the decrease in population following the decline of the mining industry, the number of livestock continued to increase as more land in Cape York Peninsula was taken for pastoral purposes. The 1888 stock returns reported that the Cook District had 3,215 horses, 42, 535 head of cattle, 96 sheep and 1,302 pigs.³⁷⁰ By 1944 the Cook Shire had approximately 79,000 head of cattle.³⁷¹ The expansion of markets in the United Kingdom, and later in the United States, encouraged further increases in stock numbers after the Second World War. By 1971 the stock returns for the Shire showed that the number of cattle had risen to 105,000.³⁷²

The cattle industry was different from other primary industries in that it was able to overcome the lack of facilities in the area, especially of road access, because cattle could be walked to market. However, while Cooktown acted as a supply point to many cattle properties, the town received little else in the way of tangible benefits from the pastoral industry. Until the construction of an all-weather road in the early 1960s, most cattle from Cape York Peninsula were taken to Mareeba

³⁶⁸ Telegram from W.J. Hartley, Land Commissioner, Cooktown to Under Secretary of Lands, Brisbane, 26 March 1888. Lands Department In Letters LAN/A149, 10,018-11,955 (08540), Q.S.A.

³⁶⁹ *Cooktown Courier*, 10 January 1890.

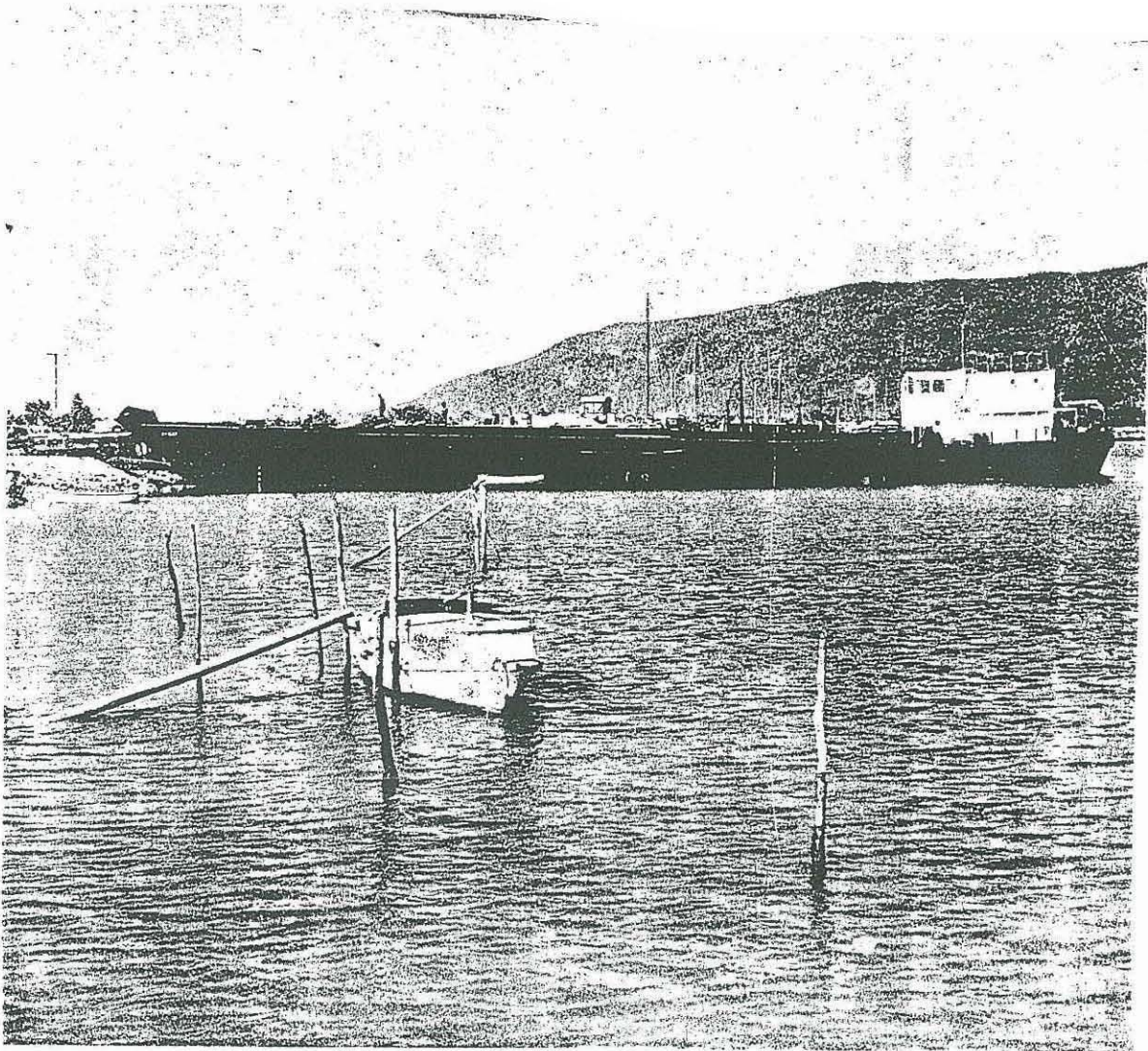
³⁷⁰ *Q.V.P.* 1888, Vol. 3, p. 626.

³⁷¹ Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, to R.D. Rex, Local Authority Representative, State Labour Exchange Board, Cairns, 20 March 1944. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown. The increase in numbers is greater than indicated as the Cook District was much larger in area than the Cook Shire.

³⁷² Wright, *Cook Shire Handbook*, series 6-1.

Year	District	Horses	Cattle	Sheep	Pigs
1874	Cook	360	332	2 028	67
	Cairns				
1875	Cook	756	1 003	900	501
	Cairns				
1876	Cook	1 425	3 579	267	828
	Cairns				
1877	Cook				
	Cairns				
1878	Cook	1 484	7 496	1 046	801
	Cairns				
1879	Cook	1 039	10 822	2 420	1 032
	Cairns				
1880	Cook	1 578	10 808	262	1 574
	Cairns				
1881	Cook	2 692	16 852	917	2 132
	Cairns				
1882	Cook	3 796	30 065	2 143	2 151
	Cairns				
1883	Cook	1 544	18 238	258	1 438
	Cairns	2 176	8 357	12	924
1884	Cook	1 955	24 565		1 409
	Cairns	2 918	16 280	791	1 637
1885	Cook	2 601	43 800		1 638
	Cairns	592	5 497	748	890
1886	Cook	2 641	36 399	127	1 678
	Cairns	1 109	5 481	404	705
1887	Cook	2 475	36 120	18	1 504
	Cairns	1 269	5 031	700	961
1888	Cook	3 215	43 535	96	1 302
	Cairns	1 690	6 524	85	850
1889	Cook	3 450	54 640	55	1 112
	Cairns	1 294	6 116	54	869
1890	Cook	3 738	70 298	28	1 280
	Cairns	1 912	8 957	34	1 261
1891	Cook	3 144	46 951	3	948
	Cairns	1 834	8 206	20	1 306
1892	Cook	3 294	56 780	14	1 005
	Cairns	2 092	8 918	23	1 235
1893	Cook	2 248	39 586		341
	Cairns	1 107	7 389		344
1894	Cook	2 540	42 442		427
	Cairns	1 023	7 975		432
1895	Cook	4 258	56 395	4	657
	Cairns	1 306	8 381		632
1896	Cook	3 169	18 515		436
	Cairns	1 422	1 729	156	732
1897	Cook	3 764	21 544	3	807
	Cairns	1 943	3 134	76	1 127
1898	Cook	3 734	27 986	2	716
	Cairns	2 273	3 660	201	874
1899	Cook	4 036	26 912		671
	Cairns	2 114	2 924	65	1 021
1900	Cook	3 457	27 550		510
	Cairns	1 892	3 081	60	1 086

Livestock returns, Cook and Cairns districts 1874-1900. (Statistics of Queensland).



Barge *Wewak* in Cairns Inlet. In the 1950s *Wewak* transported many Peninsula cattle to the Queerah Meatworks near Cairns.
Cairns Harbour Board Annual Report, 1952.

sale yards by overland drovers.³⁷³ For a short period some cattle were exported to Cairns through the port of Cooktown, but after 1960 most stock went to Mareeba by road train. Thus Mareeba became the commercial centre for the cattle industry of the Peninsula, with Cooktown reaping little reward from one of the few successful industries in its area.

Given the size of the pastoral industry in Cooktown's hinterland it would be reasonable to assume that the Local Government would benefit substantially. However, the cattle properties were originally situated in Divisional Boards (later Shire Councils) adjacent to Cooktown, and the Town Council received no rates from these properties. After the amalgamation of the Cook Shire Council and the Town Council in 1935 all rates from the cattle properties in the Cooktown hinterland were paid to the Cook Shire Council. Despite the concentration of rates, the total revenue from this source did not significantly improve the financial situation of the Council, which was now responsible for all roads in the amalgamated area. It had even less effect on Cooktown itself.

Conclusion.

Cooktown's isolated position was obviously an important factor in the failure of various agricultural industries to survive. However, decisions by successive Governments to provide only the minimum assistance to primary producers did little to help them. There is no doubt that Government assistance was instrumental in helping agricultural industries in other areas become established. The provision of financial aid to help canegrower cooperatives build sugar mills between

³⁷³ Mareeba had three advantages over Cooktown as a destination for cattle from the Peninsula. It had a major cattle saleyard, it was situated on the railway line connecting Cairns and its hinterland, and it had its own meatworks.

Mossman and Tully undoubtedly kick-started the sugar industry in those areas. Dairy cooperatives on the Atherton Tableland were also assisted with finance for milk processing factories. In some instances, as in the Burdekin area, land was cleared and fenced by the Government before it was made available to farmers. A similar level of assistance was given to tobacco farmers in the Mareeba-Dimbulah area, where considerable funds were provided for irrigation facilities and scientific advice. There is no guarantee that farms in the Cooktown district would have benefited to the same extent if similar assistance had been offered. Conversely, there is nothing to indicate that they would have proved any less successful.

Cooktown farmers, until relatively recent times, were deprived of even a basic road system to deliver produce to market. Despite their failure to take a proactive role in the establishment of an agricultural base for Cooktown, successive politicians and Governments continued to assure the locals that they were in favour of the development of the area. The help that was given to farmers, such as the provision of land at Laura, served only to place them in a position where they could not succeed without further help. It is obvious that without an injection of significant amounts of capital and expertise, the agricultural industry in the Cooktown area would continue to be marginal. Perhaps it would have been more appropriate for the Government to have stated categorically at an early stage that the area would receive no help. This would at least have removed any false hope by farmers in the Cooktown area that their efforts would be recognised and rewarded.

It is obvious that although Cooktown was capable of growing many crops, for various reasons none was capable of reversing the area's decline. The experience of agriculture in other areas like Cairns proved

that it could provide viable staples, even under the conditions prevailing in North Queensland. It is probable that agriculture in the Cooktown area was the victim of Myrdal's cumulative causation. Even though it had a reasonable start, the industry suffered from the loss of market and decline in transport facilities associated with the end of the gold era. Unfortunately for Cooktown, its decline coincided with the growth of Cairns. The coastal strip near Cairns, like its hinterland, was better agricultural land, with higher rainfall and better soil, and closer to markets. It was much more attractive to new settlers.