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MORE THAN RATES, ROADS AND RUBBISH:  
A HISTORY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN ACTION  
IN THURINGOWA SHIRE 1879-1985.

Part I

Thesis submitted by

Lyn Henderson, B.Ed.B.A. (hons)

April 1992

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Department of History  
James Cook University of North Queensland

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is a case study of a rural-urban local authority to 1985. Thuringowa Shire, with no reason for existence in its own right, was a political and administrative creation that tied disparate areas and groups together for the purpose of local government. Hence, the thesis is a history of local government in action; not a history of a local authority area. To this purpose, it is located within a selective socio-economic history of the Shire to provide the necessary background to the study of local government. People struggled to establish the Shire's two staples, beef cattle and sugar cane, and clung tenaciously to the false dream of agrarianism until the 1970s. Two recurring themes are the effects of class on decision-making and the symbiotic relationship between Thuringowa and Townsville.

This analysis of local government in action is situated within a theoretical framework. The tripartite Thuringowa model of local government has been formulated and features the areal division of government powers; the especial values that justify the existence of local government, and an examination of the agents who affect the local authority's philosophies, policies and their implementation. The study of one local authority over time offers much to the debate on local government. Constituents continually demonstrated the need to balance the current emphasis on economic rationalism with liberty and participatory democracy. As the case study demonstrates, local government in action affects more than rates, roads and rubbish.



# Map 1

Location of Thuringowa and Selected Shires in Queensland

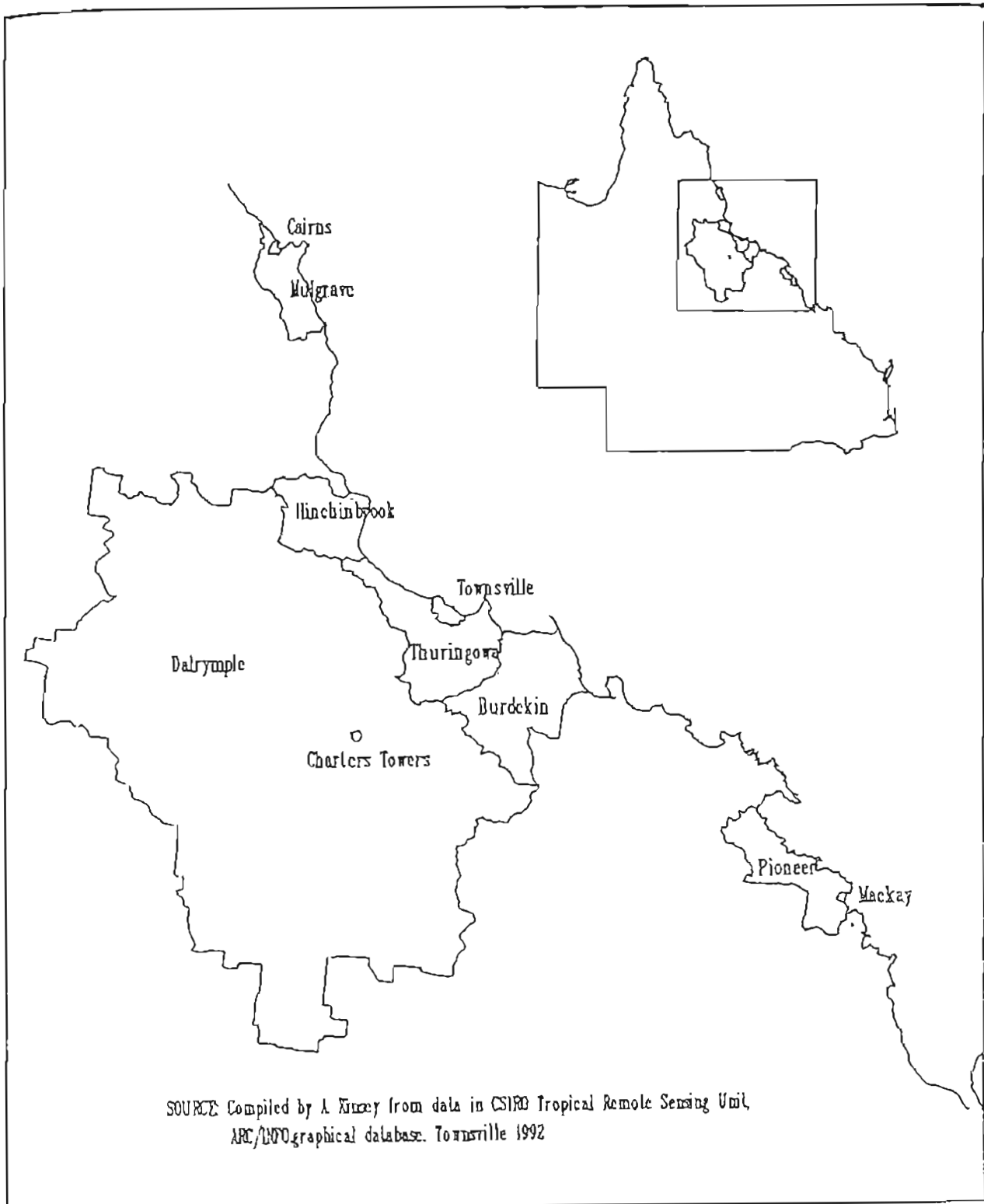


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### Measurements

Historically appropriate measurements have been used. Because of inflation, conversion of the old pound, shilling and pence currency to dollars and cents makes little sense as they are not directly equitable. The following is the conversion used in 1966 at the time of the currency change.

1km	=	one mile	
6d.	six pence	=	5 cents
2½d.	two and one half pence	=	2 cents
1/-	one shilling	=	10 cents
£1	one pound	=	\$2

ABBREVIATIONS

AMIEU	Australian Meatworkers Industry Employees Union
AWU	Australian Workers Union
C&C	Cummins and Campbell's Monthly Magazine
CSR	Consolidated Sugar Refineries
GG	Queensland Government Gazette
HRE	Herbert River Express
IWW	Industrial Workers of World
JCU	James Cook University of North Queensland
km	Kilometres
LAA	Local Authorities Association of Queensland
LGAQ	Local Government Association of Queensland
NQH	North Queensland Herald
NQLAA	North Queensland Local Authorities Association
NQR	North Queensland Register
PDT	Port Denison Times
QME	Queensland Meat Export Company
QMRC	Queensland Main Roads Commission
MRD	Queensland Main Roads Department
QPD	Queensland Parliamentary Debates
QPP	Queensland Parliamentary Papers
QSA	Queensland State Archives
TB	Townsville Bulletin
TDB	Townsville Daily Bulletin
TH	Townsville Herald
QV&P	Queensland Votes and Proceedings
V&P	Votes and Proceedings
TCC	Townsville City Council
TMC	Townsville Municipal Council
TSC	Thuringowa Shire Council

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I declare that the thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institution of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references given.

I am particularly grateful to my current and past supervisors, Dr. Dawn May and Associate Professor Ian Moles, respectively, for their guidance, patience and interest in my work. Associate Professor Noel Loos and Professor Brian Dalton gave critical advice for which I am sincerely indebted.

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I would also like to record my gratitude for the technical support given by James Cook University photography department. I am especially indebted to Mrs. Janetta Halvorsen for her unflagging interest and assistance with interviewing, collating resources and typing; Ms. Sharon Hayston for her constant support and insightful comments; John Collins for his technical expertise and help with interviewing; and, not least, my family.

LYN HENDERSON

April 1992



## INTRODUCTION

In recent years there has been a proliferation of histories of local government areas. Two catalysts for this were the upsurge of interest in urban history and the centenary of the creation of local authorities. Many are celebratory histories which assiduously polish parish pumphandles.<sup>1</sup> Others have been praised for the interplay of macro economic and political developments and micro experiences of the local authority's citizens.<sup>2</sup> However, what is missing from these studies is a serious examination of the complexity of local government itself.

Local government is not totally ignored; it is mentioned by historians, but there seems to be a stock recipe for its treatment in many accounts. The advent of

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1 This description is a paraphrase of B. Dalton, "What makes North Queensland History Different"? *Australia* 1888, Bulletin No.6, November, 1980, p.63.p.63. Examples include both amateur and professional historians: Ross, W. Johnston, *A New Province? The Closer Settlement of Monto* (Brisbane, 1982); Robert Murray, and Kate White, *The Golden Years of Stawell* (Melbourne, 1984); Susan Priestly, *Echuca* (Brisbane, 1965); Dorothy Jones, *Cardwell Shire Story* (Brisbane, 1963); Dorothy Jones, *Trinity Phoenix: A History of Cairns* (Cairns, 1976); Dorothy Jones, *Hurricane Lamps and Blue Umbrellas: A History of the Shire of Johnstone to 1973* (Cairns, 1973); Some are just scissors and paste chronicles: S. Tutt, (Compiler) *From Spear and Musket 1879-1979: Caboolture Centenary* (Nambour, 1979); Fred Bagnall, *Golden Heritage: A Brief History of Charters Towers and Some of its People* (Charters Towers, 1983).

2 Two such authors, a decade apart, that deal not with a region but with a local authority area are Weston Bate and Bill Gammage. Bate's *Lucky City: The First Generation at Ballarat 1851-1901* (Melbourne, 1978) coherently welded economic, social and urban history. Probably, a better example of the combination of parish pump and cosmos is Bill Gammage's *Narrandera Shire* (Narrandera, 1986). It is arguably "one of the most richly detailed and provocative local rural histories yet seen in Australia"; J. Lack, "Review" of B. Gammage, *Narrandera Shire* in S. Janson and S. MacIntyre (eds.) *Making the Bicentenary*, a special issue of *Australian Historical Studies*, 23, 91, October (1988), p.222.

local government is announced with a fanfare;<sup>3</sup> the construction (or non-construction) of roads and bridges and the implementation of water reticulation and sanitary services are briefly examined; examples of corruption or councillor disunity are added for spice; all stirred with mundanity.<sup>4</sup> Occasional examples and sometimes a chapter are included to support the typically triumphant story of the area's economic and social survival and progress. Nolan's study of Bundaberg is an example of the former<sup>5</sup> whilst Johnston's on Monto is an example of the latter,<sup>6</sup> and Jones' *Redcliffe: First Settlement and Seaside City*

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3 According to Doug Tucker, "Queensland Municipal and Shire Histories: In the Context of Crucial Developments in the State's Local Government System" in B.J. Dalton (Ed.) *Peripheral Visions: Essays on Australian Regional and Local History* (Townsville, 1991), p.71; hereafter "Queensland Municipal and Shire Histories", Mervyn Royle's account "provides one of the best scene-setting introductions to this era at the local level of any of the rural histories"; *Perry's Past: A Centenary History of Perry Shire* (Mount Perry, 1980), see p.101.

4 Apt examples include: Dorothy Jones' stories of the Cardwell Shire, Innisfail and Cairns (see fn 1 for bibliographical details); G.O. Armstrong, *The Changing Years: A History of the Shire of Warroo Incorporating Bendemere Shire History* (Brisbane, 1970); John K. Ewers, *The Western Gateway: A History of Fremantle*. 2nd edn. (Nedlands, 1971).

5 Janette Nolan, *Bundaberg: History and People* (St. Lucia, 1978). Wegner also adopts this approach as she devotes three to four succinct paragraphs to the Ethridge Shire's duties in most chapters in *The Ethridge, Studies in North Queensland History No.13* (Townsville, 1990).

6 Johnston, *A New Province? The Closer Settlement of Monto*. Another is Perry Hardy, *The Cloncurry Story: A Short History of the Cloncurry District* (Cloncurry, 1984).

combines both.<sup>7</sup> Readers are left to respond to those moments when the local authority appears as bogeyman, scapegoat, provider or bungler.

The reasons for the neglect are obvious. There has never been a golden age of local government. It has

always been primarily an administrative arrangement, devised by colonial and then by State governments...first to persuade and then to require local groups to accept financial and administrative responsibility for certain bread and butter tasks.<sup>8</sup>

Roads, water reticulation, garbage and sanitary disposal do not have the importance or magnetism of state and federal politics. Its lower status is confirmed when the same discourse used in gender relations is borrowed to describe local government's functions as "housekeeping". Yet local government is a paradox. On the one hand, many equate it with unintellectual petty parochialism; on the other, it is judged, if not in terms of de Tocqueville's conviction that local government is the cradle of democracy, then justifiably as promoting the values of liberty, participation and efficiency more so than the other levels of government. The thesis explores the validity of both suppositions.

The superficial treatment, sporadic illumination or conspicuous neglect of local government in histories of cities, shires and suburbs, especially in those whose

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7 Michael Jones, *Redcliffe: First Settlement and Seaside City* (Sydney, 1988). His other two local histories give more attention to local government but none reflect his expertise in local government legislation, philosophy and theory because the three are content with describing the implementation of local government functions in terms of the area's progress. *Prolific in God's Gifts: A Social History of Knox and the Dandenongs* (Sydney, 1983); *County of Five Rivers: Albert Shire 1788-1988* (Sydney, 1988). Weston Bate's study of Brighton includes sections on water, councillors, etc., within certain chapters; *A History of Brighton*, 2nd edn. (Melbourne, 1983).

8 D. Purdie, *Local Government in Australia: Reformation or Regression* (Sydney, 1976), p.89.

locations are defined by local authority boundaries, has rarely been called to task by historians. Stannage is one of the few who sees the neglect as serious.<sup>9</sup> For instance, he criticises the omission of a discussion of elected councillors, the subculture of electoral politics and the provision of water reticulation in municipal government, "that great arena of suburban and city life", in Davison's otherwise ground-breaking *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne*.<sup>10</sup> Tucker, a local government academic, also berates the "conspicuous errors of omission" in Queensland local histories, such as the impact of the implementation of the adult franchise in 1920, the connections between local government and separation movements, the consequences of increased measures of participative democracy such as polls on loans and parks, the cause and effect of internal territorial financial arrangements, the emergence and impact of women in local government, and the quality and performance of mayors and chairmen before and after the direct election of the mayor and shire chairperson by electors for a three-year term.<sup>11</sup> This study addresses Stannage's and Tucker's concerns.

To accomplish this, the thesis is in two parts.

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9 Tom Stannage, "Review Article: Australian Urban History". *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 26, 1, 1980, p.133.

10 Stannage, "Review Article: Australian Urban History", p.133. Graeme Davison, *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne* (Melbourne, 1978).

11 Tucker also rebukes authors for inexactitudes which may never be rectified because the chore would be onerous. He further argues that historians should be conversant with features of the local government system in order to explain those that are systemic or peculiar to a particular authority. He adds that the most compelling reason for researching the history of local government in each locality is to assist legislators, public servants and royal commissions to understand the territorial effects of legislation. Tucker, "Queensland Municipal and Shire Histories", pp.63, 67, 81, 84, 85, 91, 101.

part I is a more traditional socio-economic history; Part II is a history of local government in action through a case study of a rural-urban local authority located within a theory of local government. It covers a time span from 1861 to 1985. Gammage argues that narrowing the period, stopping well short of the present and "retreating from the sheer load of attempting the whole lot at an acceptable standard...does not further the search for a dynamic of local history".<sup>12</sup> Initially intended as a history to mark the centenary of local government in Thuringowa (1880-1980), it became obvious that 1980 was an arbitrary year; it meant little beyond the celebration of 100 years' existence.<sup>13</sup> 1985 has more meaning as a closing date because Thuringowa ceased to exist as a shire; it gained city status on 1 January 1986 in a climate of increasing political interference by State Government in local government affairs.

There are two reasons why Parts I and II are not interleaved. Firstly, if the examination of the socio-economic bases were incorporated within Part II, it would detract from the centre stage of local government thereby perpetuating the stereotype of local government as a topic unworthy of the historian. Secondly, that spotlight is important because local authorities are political constructs. That is their *raison d'être*. This

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12 Bill Gammage, "A Dynamic of Local History [dynamic, n: energising force]" in Dalton (Ed.) *Peripheral Visions: Essays on Australian Regional and Local History*, p.7.

13 Thuringowa Shire was created as a political local government entity in 1879 by the *Divisional Board's Act* of 1879, see Chapter 8. Until 1902 its official name was Thuringowa Divisional Board; after the 1902 legislative changes, Divisional Boards were renamed Shires. It gained city status in 1986. Whenever I am referring to Thuringowa Shire before 1902 I will use its official title, Thuringowa Divisional Board; between 1902 and 1985, Thuringowa Shire, and after 1985, Thuringowa City Council. Whenever discussion or analysis spans all periods, Thuringowa Divisional Board, Thuringowa Shire, Thuringowa City Council or Thuringowa will be used depending on the context.

is particularly so of Thuringowa Shire. Its southern sugar area is really a northern extension of the Burdekin; its northern sugar area a southern outlier of the Herbert River District; its cattle industry is in no clear ways separable from those of Dalrymple Shire (its south-western neighbour) and indeed of a much larger area beyond; its most densely populated areas have always been dormitory suburbs of Townsville; Thuringowa Shire never contained a town to provide a focus. In a very real sense Thuringowa has never had a separate existence, except as a unit of local government. To ignore the centrality of local government would be to write a history that lacks insight.

Part I is a selective history of those aspects of life in Thuringowa that have major relevance for a study of local government. Mainly a socio-economic history of the principal revenue earners for the Shire.—beef cattle, sugar cane and suburbs — Part I is a condensed and reorganised version of the first section in *More than Rates, Roads and Rubbish: A History of Thuringowa and its Shire Council to 1985*, which the Council intends to publish. The rationale for the condensation was to provide the reader with an understanding of, and feel for, Thuringowa's economic and social bases only in the context of their relevance to Part II.<sup>14</sup>

Part I contains six chapters. The first outlines pertinent facets of Thuringowa Shire's geography and demography to provide background information for subsequent chapters. Thuringowa had little to recommend it to European settlers; its geography and topography ensured that providing infrastructure services (roads,

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<sup>14</sup> Hence, in the thesis, unlike the intended publication, Aborigines are not accorded their own relevance; they are included to emphasise certain sub-themes such as the economic unviability of properties because of Aboriginal attack.

bridges and water reticulation) and establishing an economic livelihood would always be difficult. The latter is the theme of Chapters 2, 3 and 4. Beef cattle (Chapter 2) and sugar cane (Chapter 4) have proven viable but erratic staples alternating between boom and bust. Their influence, particularly that of the grazing industry, on Thuringowa's local politics, has been significant in such areas as the rate struck and works priorities. Chapter 3 argues that Thuringowa's agriculturalists, Chamber of Commerce and other businessmen did not abandon agrarianism until the mid-1970s even in the face of substantial and continuing evidence to the contrary. These chapters emphasise the dependence of locality on regional, national and international factors for survival. Chapter 5 explores social aspects of one of the major themes in the thesis: the symbiotic relationship between Thuringowa and Townsville, Thuringowa's social, economic and administrative centre. That alliance could be harmonious or factious or both at the same time, no more so than in the arena of local government politics. Class, status and poverty were concomitant with European settlement and are the focus of Chapter 6. The Chapter explores the mobility myth, notions of the environment each class was entitled to enjoy and establishes the comparative extent of wealth and poverty in the Shire in relation to neighbouring local authorities. The interrelation of class, mobility, poverty and gender is also examined. These factors are significant in most areas of local government activity: the unequal distribution of economic and social resources makes an inevitable impact on the execution of political rights.

Overall, the socio-economic history of Thuringowa Shire has little to add to any reinterpretation of state or national themes. Only two areas stand out. Firstly, agrarianism is held to have died in the 1890s and been revived by the political parties in the 1920s only to

fade away with the failure of soldier settlements. This was not so in Thuringowa. Attention to this area in other local histories might show that Thuringowa was not unique. Secondly, it is often stated as fact without proper local analysis that rural communities did not suffer as seriously as those living in towns or cities during the Great Depression. In comparison with Townsville (and its neighbours, the sugar shires of Ayr and Hinchinbrook and the cattle shire of Dalrymple), there were more men, women and families in abject poverty in Thuringowa. Local histories are valuable for the substantiation they give to macro themes but also for significant variations at the micro level.

Given the plethora of shire and city histories, the methodology of local history<sup>15</sup> for Part I was easily manageable, though more attention was given to class in comparison with many other local histories because of its importance for Part II. The situation proved more problematic for Part II. There are a few histories of local authorities rather than local government areas: the most lauded are Greenwood and Laverty's study of Brisbane as a local authority and Spearritt's history of city government and town planning in Sydney.<sup>16</sup> At the other end of the spectrum is the concise history of local

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15 See Gammage, "A Dynamic of Local History", p.7.

16 G. Greenwood and J.R. Laverty, *Brisbane 1859-1959: A History of Local Government* (Brisbane, 1959). Laverty's unpublished doctorate thesis built on this; J.R. Laverty, *A History of Municipal Government in Brisbane 1859-1925: A Study of the Development of Metropolitan Government in a Context of Urban Expansion*, PhD. Thesis, University of Queensland (St. Lucia, 1968). Peter Spearritt, *Sydney Since the Twenties* (Sydney, 1978). J.W. McCarty criticises Spearritt for avoiding a full analysis of the process of government; "Melbourne, Ballarat, Sydney, Perth: The New City Histories". *Historical Studies*, 19, April 9 (1980), p.9.



government in Boonah Shire.<sup>17</sup> In between are examinations of local government in Hinchinbrook by Wegner and in Bauhinia Shire by Johnston and Campbell.<sup>18</sup> However, they concentrate on the provision of functions within the story of the city or shire and lack a time-spatial analysis of theories, philosophies and policies. General histories of local government in Queensland and the other states proved helpful in understanding what was systemic and unique in Thuringowa, but they focused on legislative changes.<sup>19</sup> Political geography, sociology

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17 Boonah Shire Council, *Serving the Shire: History of Local Government in Boonah shire from 1879* (Boonah, 1980).

18 Jan Wegner, *Hinchinbrook: the Hinchinbrook Shire Council, 1879-1979*, M.A. Thesis, James Cook University (Townsville, 1984); W. Ross Johnston and Betty Campbell, *Bauhinia: One Hundred Years of Local Government*, (n.p., 1979). There is also the minor work by Denise Shiels, *Local Government in Townsville, 1878-1888*. B.A. (Hons.) Thesis, University of Queensland (St. Lucia, 1964).

19 Bernard Barrett, *The Civic Frontier: The Origin of Local Communities and Local Government in Victoria* (Melbourne, 1979); F.A. Larcombe, *The Origins of Local Government in New South Wales 1831-58: A History of Local Government in New South Wales*. Vol.1 (Sydney, 1973); F.A. Larcombe, *The Development of Local Government in New South Wales* (Melbourne, 1961); A.A. Morrison, *Local Government in Queensland* (Brisbane, 1950); J.R. Robbins, *Local Government and Community in South Australia*. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Adelaide (Adelaide, 1975); R.H. Robinson, *For My Country* (Brisbane, 1957); J.R. Lavery, "An Historical Survey of Local Government in Queensland" in J.D. Tucker in collaboration with A.S. Fogg, R.C. Gates, J.H. Holmes, R.C. R.C. Jensen and J.R. Lavery, *Local Government in Queensland: A Report for the Queensland Division*, Vol.1, Australian Institute of Urban Studies, Canberra, 1981, pp.73-104. There are historical overviews of local government in each of the states in J. Power, R.C. Wettenhall and J. Halligan (Eds.) *Local Government Systems of Australia* Information Paper No.7 (Canberra, 1981). On an international scale there is K.B. Lucas and P.G. Richards, *A History of Local Government in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1978).

and local government literature<sup>20</sup> offered theories, concepts and appropriate areas for analysis but their disciplines were not history. In order to make sense of the complexity of local government in action, the study has been placed within a thematic theoretical framework.

A tripartite paradigm, the "Thuringowa theoretical model", was developed in Chapter 7 (the first in Part II) to examine the territorial division of government powers, the justification for the existence of local government and the power relationships within local government. A history of local government as it pertains to one local authority centred within a relevant theory has value for the current debate on efficiency in local government planning, financial management, provision of services and size to avoid duplication of services. The following chapters demonstrate the validity of the model by showing how certain aspects of the theory are put into practice.

Except for Chapter 8, which examines the process and functions of local government in Queensland and therefore provides a chronological overview of legislation as background information, each chapter explores various facets of one local authority's priorities, philosophy and implementation, with particular emphasis on the immediate and cumulative impact of the legislation in Thuringowa Shire. Chapter 9 returns to the town and country relationship to establish that, except for some notable exceptions, Thuringowa's Boards and Councils were unable to promote in its citizens a sustainable focus of pride in identifying as Thuringowans.

Chapters 10, 11 and 12 form a trilogy. They examine values held to be fundamental to local government. Chapter 10 argues that representativeness was not an especial value of local government; class and, to a

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<sup>20</sup> There are too many to list here; see Chapter 7 particularly and the Bibliography for details.

lesser extent, gender were the deciding factors in who governed. Chapter 11 continues investigating the participatory value of local government and concludes that apathy was fairly widespread in Thuringowa. However, it cautions that apathy does not only connote disinterest but also satisfaction and rational behaviour. Chapter 12 on secession explores some convulsive struggles over the redistribution of rate burdens and infrastructure benefits and the eventual repercussions in terms of territorial changes to Thuringowa Shire. It confirms that participation was strong and politically astute in this area of Thuringowa politics. Violation of the individual's and Councils' liberty is also analysed in Chapters 11 and 12.

Chapter 13 investigates the major revenue bases and analyses the various philosophies and manipulative practices of the Boards and Councils. The first and last two decades reveal robust councils virorously exploring avenues for obtaining revenue; from the 1900s to 1960, the Councils were timid and content to maintain the *status quo*. Poverty was, of course, a contingent factor from the 1921 cattle slump to World War II.

The next three chapters research the implementation of social consumption services (roads, water reticulation, health, etc.) and analyse aspects of the decision-making process. It was not just local decisions that stultified the authority's effectiveness: State Government legislation and interference and the withdrawal of Federal Government's "courtship" subsidies had detrimental results for which the Shire was then blamed. The parish pump of local government is tied to the cosmos of state and federal government.

The last chapter, Chapter 17, is a detailed examination of the effects chairmen, councillors and clerks have on people's lives. For instance, council

policies in a host of areas (employment, roads, water reticulation, sanitation systems, anti-pollution measures, the size of home allotments, ceiling heights, parks, libraries and child-minding centres) can enhance or dramatically hinder the physical, aesthetic and economic aspects of daily life. Those with economic and social resources cannot be ignored in the exploration of power in the political sphere. Councils manage more than rates, roads and bridges.

This thesis is not intended to be a history of a local authority area. Rather it is a history of local government in action. It is set within a narrow socio-economic history and a theoretical framework as a means of giving local government the centrality it deserves in such a study.

PART I

A Selective Socio-Economic History  
of Thuringowa Shire to 1985



## CHAPTER 1

### Geography and Demography

Thuringowa City Council lies in tropical North Queensland in a horseshoe shape around Townsville. One boundary is the "extra-ordinary ocean and bay shoreline"<sup>1</sup> which varies from mud and mangrove estuaries and extensive sand beaches to the almost continuous low-lying, tidal wetlands stretching from Townsville to Giru. Bounded in the north by Crystal Creek, the Shire begins as a narrow coastal plain of some five kilometres wide. This flattish plain, the major physical characteristic of the Shire, progressively widens as it stretches down to Giru and the Haughton River, the Shire's southern extremity. Until 1888 the southern boundary was the Burdekin River (see Map 2). The plain is cut by numerous minor streams and rivers, the most significant being Ollera, Rollingstone, Bluewater, Black, Bohle, Ross and Alligator. The western side of the plain is rugged range country up to 1 000 metres above sea level. The western boundary follows the top of the Paluma and Hervey Ranges to connect with the upper reaches of the Haughton River near Mingela. Originally the south-western boundary curved in from Mingela behind Ravenswood to meet the Burdekin River near Bowen River (see Map 2). At present the Shire encompasses an area of 4 115 km<sup>2</sup> (1 588.8 miles<sup>2</sup>); in 1879 its area was 7 613.9 km<sup>2</sup> (2 935.75 miles<sup>2</sup>).<sup>2</sup>

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1 Geoffrey Burchill and Partners, *Thuringowa Shire Strategic Plan* (Townsville, 1978), p.7. The following sections on topography, soils, vegetation and climate are based on these sections within the above report as well as on Department of Industrial Development, *Natural Resources Survey for Thuringowa Shire Council and Townsville City Council*, Queensland Regional Development Series (Brisbane, 1976); hereafter *Natural Resources Survey*.

2 For the remainder of the thesis, imperial or metric measurements will be given depending on each one's historical appropriateness.

Rising sharply from the plain are the isolated features of Mt. Black, Mt. Stuart, Round Mountain, Mt. Elliott and Cape Cleveland which are very dominant in their height, steepness and grandeur, as well as associated lesser outcrops such as Mt. Margaret, Mt. Jack, Mt. Muntalunga, Major Creek Mountain, Mt. Kukindra and Webb's Hill. Round Mountain, Mt. Stuart, Mt. Elliott, Major Creek Mountain and Iron Bark Mountain split Thuringowa's principal landform into a narrow coastal plain and a huge inland plain.

The Shire experiences two main seasons: a summer wet season of variable but short duration from December to March, followed by a dry period from May to October when the weather is cool and invigorating with crisp blue skies. Summer, with its uncomfortable hot humidity is often stressful though, according to the Manager of Burns, Philp and Company in 1903, only its "detractors harp upon its heat".<sup>3</sup> Most of the Shire lies in an extensive area of low average rainfall ranging from 660 mm to 1 250 mm with areas of much higher rainfall: Paluma (Mt. Spec) in the north and Mt. Elliott to the south-east (see map) receive approximately 2 540 mm and 1 620 mm respectively. However these statistics do not reveal the rainfall's extreme variability. In most years, the majority of the Shire experiences long periods without rain. When it does come it is commonly very heavy; hence the liability to flooding and to severe soil loss when the natural vegetation is removed. Annual figures vary dramatically in the one place; from one place to another, average annual figures differ greatly. Consequently most parts suffer a period of "drought" every year: real

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3 Daniel Patience, *All About Burns, Philp and Company Limited: Their Shipping Agencies, Branches and Steamers*, January (Townsville, 1903), p.43 (Townsville Municipal Library). In contrast, and with more truth, the editor of the local paper described the weather as "miserably hot"; *Townsville Daily Bulletin (TDB)*, 11 January 1902, p.6.



drought eras extend over several years in which annual totals are low. Both natural vegetation and possible land use are directly related to these facts. They are, of course, not peculiar to Thuringowa. Because of this variability in rainfall the Shire relies heavily on underground water resources for residential, agricultural, pastoral and industrial uses. Thuringowa lies within the cyclone "belt" and, since written records were first commenced in 1867, has been damaged by nine cyclones. Sigma, Leonta, Agnes and Althea in particular are now part of the area's folk history.

The duplex soils of Thuringowa's plains "have poor physical qualities and low fertility status".<sup>4</sup> Today, intensive agriculture occurs in just three areas of the Shire: sugar cane in the southern part of the Shire, sugar to the mid-1970s and market farming in the extreme north and market farming in the Majors Creek area. The country provides poor to fair grazing land; until Thuringowa and Townsville were connected by a pipeline to the Burdekin River Dam in the late 1980s, it was also difficult to establish successful home gardens and park beautification programs in the suburbs.

Although Thuringowa retains some of its natural vegetation, mainly in the Hervey Range-Mt. Stuart-Mt. Elliott area and in the tidal and fresh water swamps lands, considerable alteration has occurred through the effects of cattle grazing, farming, timber milling and the introduction of exotic plants, especially lantana and china-apple. For Australia's first settlers, whose ancestors arrived between 30 000 to 50 000 years ago,

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<sup>4</sup> Burchill, *Thuringowa Shire Strategic Plan*, pp.8,9.

Thuringowa was a land of "milk and honey".<sup>5</sup> Various descriptions and the rare photograph of Aborigines in Thuringowa (see Photographs) support Brayshaw's conclusion that Thuringowa offered a rich variety of animals, vegetables, seafood, fruit and material resources.<sup>6</sup> The women were the main "bread-winners", gathering small game, eggs, shellfish and plant food which supplied the bulk of the diet, while the men engaged in hunting and fishing, more "exciting but less reliable pursuits" which allowed them to devote more time to "religious ritual, art and feuding".<sup>7</sup> The creative differences that existed in Aboriginal material culture were exemplified by the different uses made of Thuringowa's physical resources by the Bindal, Njawaygi

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5 Noel Loos, *Invasion and Resistance: Aboriginal-European Relations on the North Queensland Frontier 1861-1897* (Canberra, 1982), p.3. D.S. Davidson, "An Ethnic Map of Australia", *American Philosophical Society Proceedings*, 79 (1935), pp.654-655, points out that North Queensland was one of the most favourable regions "to the Aboriginal system of economy" and it was "the single most densely populated large region in the continent". For a comprehensive account of Aboriginal society in Thuringowa-Townsville before European colonisation see Henderson, *More than Rates, Roads and Rubbish: A History of Thuringowa Shire and its Council to 1985*, Chapter 1: The First Settlers.

6 Helen Brayshaw, *Well Beaten Paths: Aborigines of the Herbert Burdekin District, North Queensland; An Ethnographic and Archaeological Study* (Townsville, 1990), p.51; hereafter *Well Beaten Paths*. See pp.51-62 for detailed descriptions of the types of food eaten.

7 Loos, *Invasion and Resistance*, pp.3-5.



Though dismayed by their "savage expression" and "repulsive cast of features", Dalrymple also admitted they were intelligent, "well-made athletic men...sleek and fat"; Dalrymple, *Report*, p.24. (Courtesy Oxley Library).

and Wulguru.<sup>8</sup> It has been estimated that, in the period immediately preceding European contact Halifax Bay supported 500 people in an area of about 1 900 km<sup>2</sup> which included 80 km of coastline.<sup>9</sup> The Aboriginal population of what was to be designated the Townsville-Thuringowa region consisted of three, broad linguistic groups, each comprising smaller social units. The Wulguru's core territory extended from around Townsville and Magnetic Island, inland to Hervey's Range and perhaps as far north as the headwaters of the Star River. The area around Crystal Creek was occupied by the Njawaygi whose territory stretched to the Herbert River. These two tribes were settlers of the top half of Thuringowa. From Cape Cleveland to the Burdekin and inland, probably to

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8 For instance, grass and reeds were woven in to macrame necklaces, armlets and belts by the Cape Cleveland Aborigines and into nets by the Mt. Elliott group who were members of the same tribe. The Njawaygi used pearlshell fishhooks whilst the Wulguru, the neighbouring tribe, made them from tortoise and turtle shell and used gum for the sinker. Feathers were made into a headdress by the Wulguru but were worked into necklaces by the Bindal Aborigines at the Burdekin River. The latter also used opossum fur in their necklaces while the Cape Cleveland group made the fur into armlets. J. Beete Jukes, *Narrative of the Surveying Voyage of H.M.S. Fly, 1842-1846* (London, 1847), p.62; Brayshaw, *Well Beaten Paths*, Appendix 6A; J. Morrill, *The Story of James Morrill*, compiled by *The Bowen Independent* on behalf of the Bowen Historical Society (n.d.), Chapter 111 (n.p.).

9 For the whole Herbert-Burdekin region, a figure of 12 000 has been postulated. Helen Brayshaw, *Aboriginal Material Culture in the Herbert/Burdekin District*, 1, Ph.D. Thesis, James Cook University of North Queensland (Townsville, 1976), pp.65,67.



James Morrill, 17 years a castaway with the Mt. Elliott Aboriginal group, was later to become an unsuccessful emissary for peace between the Aborigines and Europeans in Thuringowa and the wider North Queensland region.  
 (Courtesy E.P. Meston, *Cummins & Campbell's Monthly Magazine*, November 1931, p.44)



During the Fly's visit in 1843, Jukes had numerous, prolonged friendly encounters when hospitality and gifts were offered amidst a general atmosphere of trust (Jukes, *Narrative*, pp.32-60).

Charters Towers, were the Bindal.<sup>10</sup> Within these three broad groups were substantial social units such as the Cape Cleveland and the Mt. Elliott Aborigines, the latter numbering 50-60 people.<sup>11</sup>

To some, the muted colours of Thuringowa's flora have a seductive beauty; to others, there is a drabness about the ever-present, brown-green tonings of the "stunted and inferior timber". One of the earliest female Europeans in the region recorded her first impressions of Thuringowa with heavy disappointment:

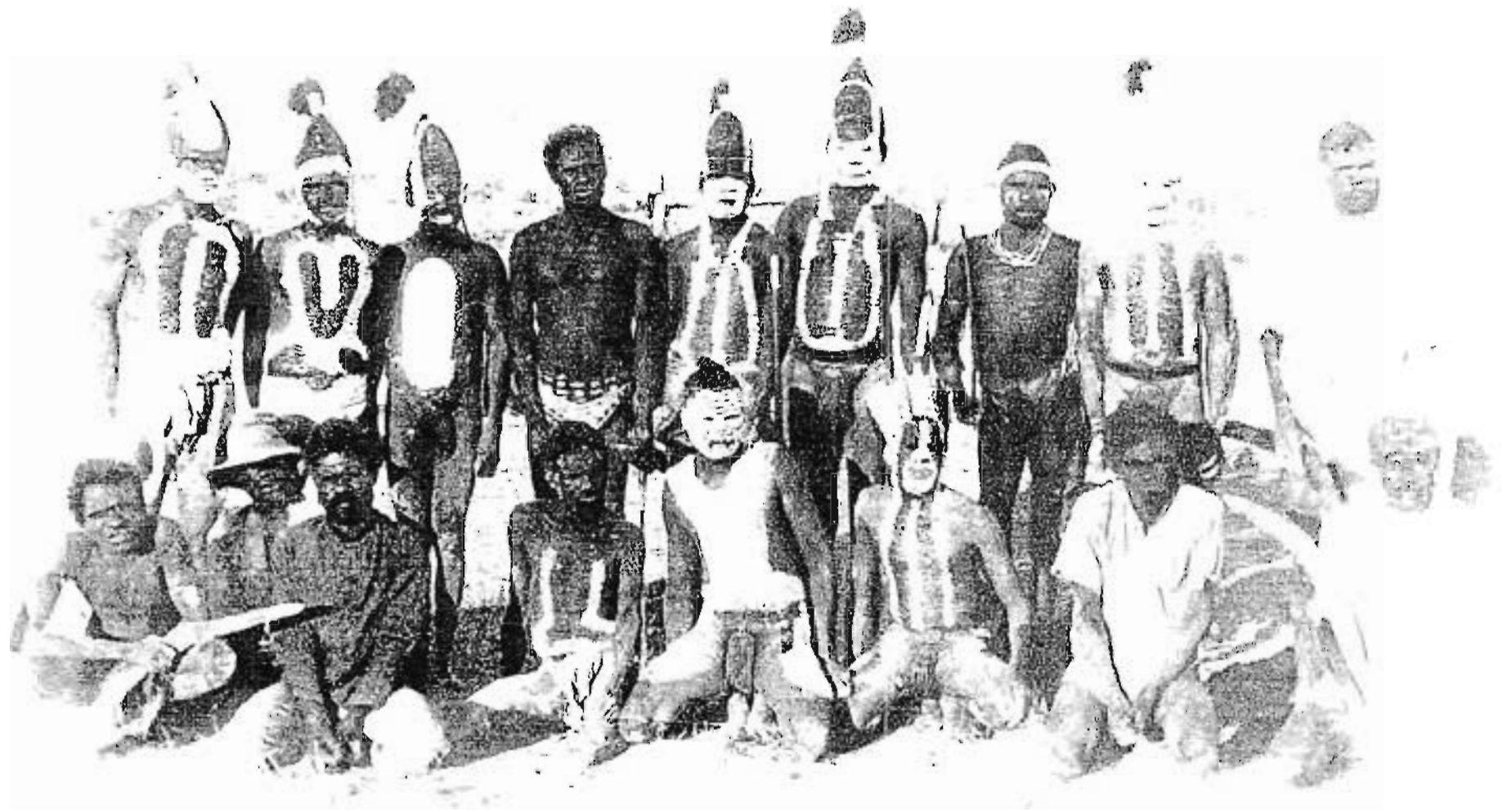
But you in England could not imagine any kind of wooded country so utterly ugly. The trees were the ugliest kind of gum trees, tall and bare, with just a few leaves on top.<sup>12</sup>

Because of the variable rainfall, the appearance of the terrain, except for the limited period of the "wet", is more like the average Australian's idea of the outback than his/her mental picture of the "bush tropics". Nevertheless the natural environment is highlighted by

10 This territorial demarcation is based on Helen Brayshaw's analysis of contemporary accounts and current linguistic studies of P.J. Sutton, *Gugu-Badhun and its Neighbours*, M.A. Thesis, Macquarie University (1973) and R.M.W. Dixon, *The Dyirbal Language of North Queensland* (Cambridge, 1972). Brayshaw has not accepted the linguistic areas delineated by N. Tinsdale, *Map of Aboriginal Tribes of Australia* (Adelaide, 1940), nor his followers G. O'Grady, G. Wurm and K. Hale, *Aboriginal Languages of Australia* (Sydney, 1966) and B. Craig, *Cape York* (Canberra, 1967). These place the division between the Wulguru and Bindal just north of Giru; Tinsdale refers to the Wulguru as the Wulgurukaba, which means the people of the Wulguru.

11 J. Morrill, *The Story of James Morrill*, Chapter 111. Echoing European ethnocentric depictions of Australian history, Austin Donnelly in *The Port of Townsville: The Townsville Harbour Board* (Sydney, 1959) ignores the first Australians: "Those first footprints - barefoot at that - on the shores of Cleveland Bay were those of James Morrill, the sole survivor of a party which made shore after the wreck of the barque Peruvian in 1846", p.1.

12 Lucy Gray, *Diary of Journeys and Life in North Queensland, 1868-1872*, MSS, Cleveland Bay, October 1868 (Oxley Library).



Participants in a corroboree at Rowes Bay, ca.1881,  
reflected the themes of continuity and change for the  
Aborigine. (Cummins & Campbell's Monthly Magazine, November  
1931. p.48).

the imposing panoramic views from Mt. Stuart and Hervey's Range, a bush solitude along the Woodstock to Giru Road, shimmering beaches, lush green coolness at Mt. Spec, teeming birdlife in the tidal marshes at the back of Cromarty and Giru, and entwined mangroves prolific with fish and crab.

There is an abundance of rock art in Thuringowa. It evokes the mystery and grandeur of the Aborigines' economic, social and religious links with their universe, the interdependence of man and nature both sanctified by the Dreamtime. It also reflects the relatively small amount of time required by Aborigines to gather and make the necessities of life. Willmot has estimated that the Aborigines of Eastern Australia spent 20% of their day working and 80% in religious, artistic and recreational pursuits, including sleeping.<sup>13</sup> In Thuringowa they were not tyrannised by distances or environment; rather they were nature's "gentle custodians".<sup>14</sup> As the subsequent chapters reveal, the contrast between the Aborigines' lifestyle and the enormous energy, time and economic resources committed by Europeans for survival let alone success in Thuringowa was enormous. Before 1861 when European settlement in Thuringowa began, Aboriginal society was conservative but always creative and complex - as was its response to European settlement.

By 1879, the date on which the Thuringowa Divisional Board was proclaimed, the world of Thuringowa's first settlers was irrevocably changed. Inevitably, the contact between the first settlers and the new pioneers was bitter and violent. For both groups, it was a political fight for the possession of land and the right to use that land for differing economic purposes. For

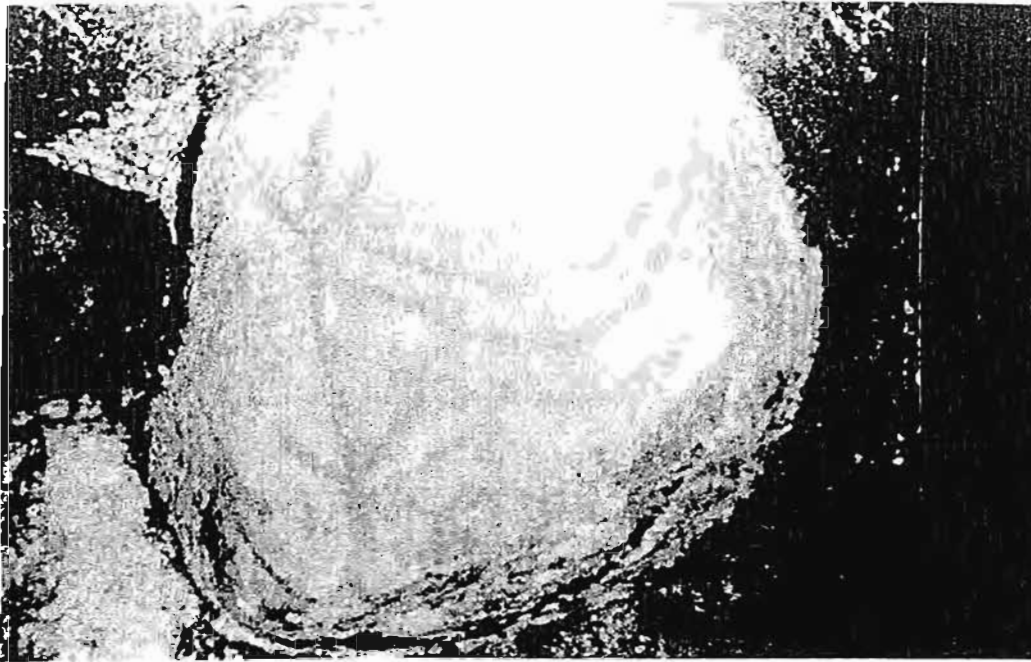
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13 E. Willmot, "What Went Wrong?" Video: Race and Culture Series (Townsville, 1982)

14 Brayshaw, Aboriginal Material Culture, 1, p.35.



Rock Art in Thuringowa.



To-day, cave and rock artistry of ancient Australia bears mute testimony to the area's first inhabitants.



(Top: author's personal collection; bottom: Aboriginal Rock Art Collection, History Department, James Cook University).

the Aborigines, it was also a religious fight as the land was inseparable from the spiritual interpretations and values of Aboriginal life and philosophy.

While we will never know precisely how many Aboriginal people lived in the region at the time of contact, there is also uncertainty about the European population clearly demonstrated in Table 1.<sup>15</sup> For instance, the population could not have grown by 1 800 between 1900 and 1901, even with the influx of workers for the Townsville to Ayr railway in the same period. Thuringowa Shire obviously submitted the same statistical statements year after year (for example, 1904 to 1909 and 1940 to 1946) or made rough calculations based on the previous year's figures and rate books. There also could have been errors in transcription; the population figures for 1886, 1910 and 1915 make little sense otherwise. Reliable population figures exist for the census years, and probably in the years immediately after the boundary changes because new statistical and land evaluation information was necessary for rating and works provision purposes.

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15 Although the interpretation of demographic data and an emphasis on quantitative analysis often seem to obscure descriptions of the more human characteristics of people being studied, it is not impossible to combine both approaches. For instances see Michael Durey, "The Death Registers of the Registrar General as Sources for Social and Demographic History", *Australia* 1888, 6, November, 1980, pp.88-93; Graeme Davison, "The Dimensions of Mobility in Nineteenth Century Australia", *Australia* 1888, 2, August, 1979, pp.7-33; James Henretta, "The Study of Social Mobility: Ideological assumptions and Conceptual Bias", *Labour History* (United States), Spring 1977, pp.165-178; Margo Conk, "Social Mobility in Historical Perspective", *Marxist Perspectives*, Fall, 1978, pp.52-69. However more attention will be given to an investigation of certain demographic characteristics - population, gender and ethnicity - with less emphasis on individuals in order to give quantitative tangibility to those who lived in Thuringowa over the 120 years under study. For a complete analysis of gender demography see Henderson, *More than Rates, Roads and Rubbish: A History of Thuringowa and its Shire Council to 1985*, Chapter 10.

TABLE 1  
Thuringowa Population 1880-1985<sup>16</sup>

1880	na	1907	4500	1934	3424	1961	2572
1881	2100*	1908	4500	1935	3424	1962	2600
1882	1500	1909	4500	1936	3400*	1963	2640
1883	1500	1910	2300	1937	2300	1964	2650*
1884	1700	1911	5090	1938	2300	1965	2825
1885	1800	1912	5300	1939	2300	1966	2863
1886	3626	1913	6000	1940	2320	1967	2950*
1887	2500	1914	6250	1941	2320	1968	3050
1888	2000*	1915	8500	1942	2320	1969	3100
1889	2120	1916	7000*	1943	2320	1970	3150
1890	3200	1917	7000	1944	2320	1971	3432
1891	2925	1918	2500*	1945	2320	1972	4378
1892	3000	1919	2500	1946	2320	1973	5600
1893	2724*	1920	2500	1947	2327	1974	6700
1894	2684	1921	2337	1948	2327	1975	9100
1895	2712	1922	2500	1949	2327	1976	10914
1896	2712	1923	2600	1950	2480	1977	12900
1897	2400	1924	2750	1951	2450	1978	13900
1898	2400	1925	3000	1952	2450	1979	14600
1899	2400	1926	3000	1953	2620	1980	15800
1900	2400	1927	3000	1954	2627	1981	17728
1901	4214	1928	3500	1955	2600	1982	21470
1902	4600	1929	3500	1956	2600	1983	22760
1903	4600	1930	3700	1957	2670	1984	23460
1904	4500	1931	3700	1958	2670*	1985	25490
1905	4500	1932	na	1959	2586		
1906	4500	1933	3423	1960	na		

\* signifies boundary changes; except for 1916, Thuringowa lost territory in the changes (see Chapter 12 and Appendix 2).

The boundary changes resulted in noticeable population fluctuations: Thuringowa lost 600 to Townsville in 1881; 500 and 300 to Ayr in 1888 and 1893

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<sup>16</sup> Statistics of Queensland; Censuses; Department of Local Government Queensland, *Statistical Survey* (hereafter *Statistical Survey*); Graph of population figures from Bureau of Statistics, Brisbane reprinted in *Supplement to Townsville Bulletin*, 26 July 1989, p.3 (hereafter *TB*); Thuringowa Record Books, 1889-1891 (James Cook University); *Queensland Votes and Proceedings*, 1894, Vol.1, Table XIX, p.933; hereafter *QV&P*.

respectively; an enormous 4 500 from the loss of the eastern suburbs to Townsville in 1918 and another 1 100 with the excision of the remaining suburbs in December 1936.<sup>17</sup> Thuringowa probably gained 500 when the rural Haughton-Mt. Elliott-Woodstock area was returned from Ayr Shire in 1916.<sup>18</sup> After losing its suburbs to Townsville, Thuringowa stagnated: in 1937 the population was 2 300; in 1947 it was 2 327. Even with the national baby boom after World War II, the Shire's population only grew by 200 during the 1950s and much of this increase was due to the import of Italian, Maltese and Spanish canecutters.<sup>19</sup>

Most of the population increase in the early decades to 1918 and since the mid-1960s was urban. There was an average yearly growth rate of urban dwellings of 40% between 1880 and 1902.<sup>20</sup> The editor of the local paper believed that nearly the whole of the population increase of 1 551 in the Townsville-Thuringowa area between 1889 and 1891 was to be found in Hermit Park and other suburbs in Thuringowa.<sup>21</sup> (Contrast the following two photographs). Nearly a century later, an increase in Thuringowa's urban population accounted for 103% of the intercensal growth between 1971 and 1976; its rural population had a loss of minus three percent.<sup>22</sup>

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17 See Chapter 12 for details.

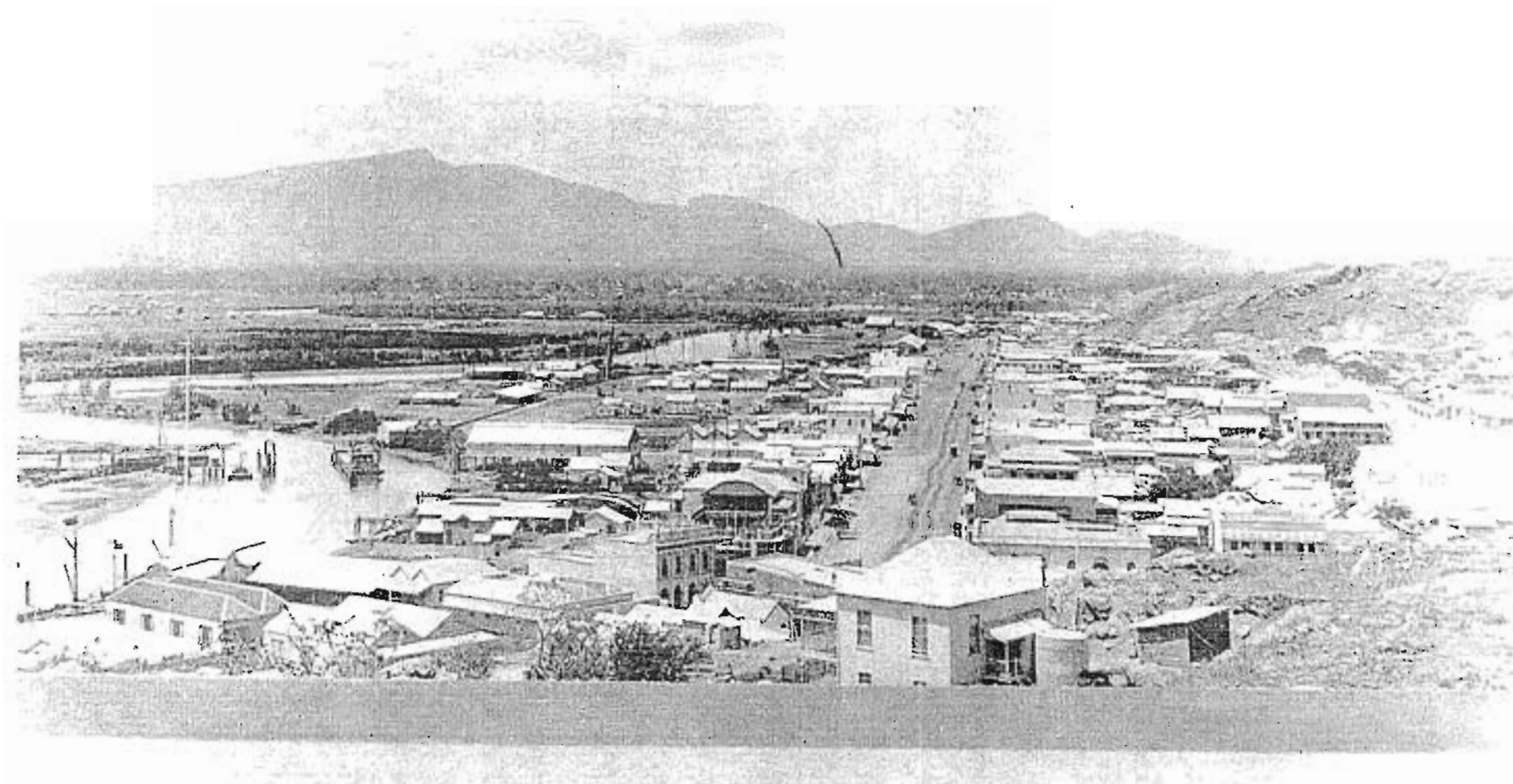
18 Assuming that the population figure for 1915 should have been 6 500.

19 At least 70 Italians took up residence in the Shire in the 1950s; 1947 and 1954 Censuses.

20 See Chapter 13.

21 *TH*, 27 May 1891, p.10.

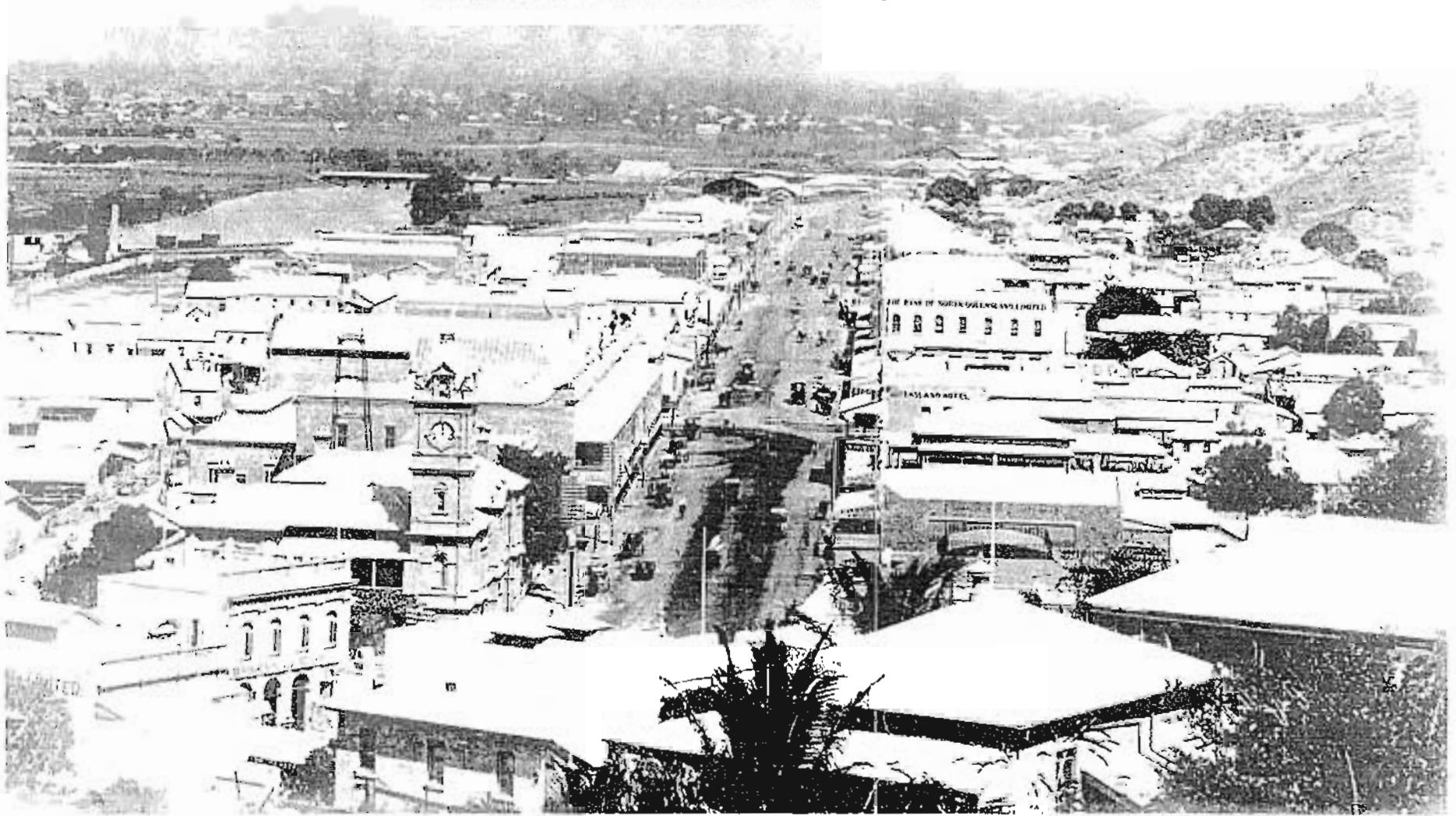
22 The percentages are calculated as a fraction of the total population increase. However, as percentages of just the urban and rural population growth rates, there was a 96% and -9% urban and rural intercensal growth rate, respectively. Calculated from the 1971 and 1976 Censuses.



## TOWNSVILLE 1888

Thuringowa has always taken the suburban spillover from Townsville. Notice the embryonic suburbs on the perimeter of Townsville. (Courtesy Oxley Library).

Townsville and Suburban Thuringowa, ca.1910.



Thuringowa's sphere of influence increased as suburban Townsville grew. (Courtesy Oxley Library).

Although the urban (79%) and rural (21%) growth rates were less disparate for the intercensal period, 1976 to 1981, much of the non-urban population settled in satellite rural and seaside suburbs such as Oak Valley and Saunders Beach.<sup>23</sup>

In comparison with its neighbouring local authority areas, Thuringowa's growth rate from 1971 was extremely high. It had an intercensal population increase of 62% between 1976 and 1981 whilst the sugar Shires of Ayr and Hinchinbrook had a 0.34% and minus 2% growth rate respectively. Although the sugar Shires were not economically depressed, mechanisation of the cane industry and its lack of expansion had decided effects on population growth. In contrast, the poorer cattle Shire of Dalrymple had a substantial population increase of 29%. However, although Dalrymple's growth rate was significant, the actual number of people who settled in the Shire was not. Most of them elected to live on hobby farms or large blocks of land in Dalrymple Shire but on the outskirts of Charters Towers. Townsville grew by one percent, which is understandable as Thuringowa's increase was largely due to the overspill of Townsville's suburbs into Thuringowa.<sup>24</sup>

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23 Calculated from the 1976 and 1981 Censuses.

24 Calculated from 1976 and 1981 Censuses.



TABLE 2  
Male to Female Ratios for Selected Years<sup>25</sup>

year	percentage male : female	year	percentage male : female
1881	62 : 38	1961	60 : 40
1891	57 : 43	1966	56 : 44
1901	58 : 42	1971	54 : 46
1921	61 : 39	1976	51 : 49
1933	62 : 38	1981	51 : 49
1947	62 : 38	1986	51 : 49
1954	64 : 36		

Table 2 shows very clearly the gender demography of Thuringowa. The discrepancy between the number of males to females fluctuated according to the rural or suburban character of the Shire. It is obvious that during the years when Thuringowa had a substantial suburban base, there were nearly as many women as men in the Shire, though the gap widened the further one lived from the suburbs.<sup>26</sup> From the 1880s to 1918 approximately 57% of the population was male as it was when the suburban population began to increase in the 1960s. Given the rural character of the Shire during its middle years, 1918 to 1961, caused by excisions of its suburban areas, it is not surprising that nearly two-thirds of the population was male. Following the suburban boom after 1971 only just over half (51%) the population were men. With numerical support and changing attitudes of society towards the appropriate role of women, women began standing for local government office.<sup>27</sup> Almost 4 000,

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25 Calculated from Statistics of Queensland and Censuses.

26 Rural workers still came to town for prospective brides; Interview Colin Pace, Rollingstone, 6 March 1989.

27 See Chapter 10.



that is four-sevenths, of the dramatic population increase between 1971 and the 1976 censuses were young and married.<sup>28</sup> Another 1 500 couples settled in the Shire between 1976 and 1981.<sup>29</sup> One of the political effects of this youthful electorate whose concerns centred on improving urban facilities was the success, for the first time, of Labor candidates in the 1979 local government election.<sup>30</sup>

Immigration was always predominantly male. The percentage of male to female immigrants fluctuated over time for any particular ethnic group as well as varying across ethnic groups. For instance, in 1921 and 1933 100% of Thuringowa's Chinese population was male but in the 1981 census, the majority of migrants from Asia were women. Some were probably looking for marriage partners; Townsville had a large surplus of men due to the Army and RAAF bases located in the city. The only other migrant group to have a higher percentage of women were the New Zealanders, and this occurred in both the 1976 (58%) and 1981 (53%) census years. Many were probably on a working holiday. In comparison, between 1921 and 1981 male migration oscillated between 75% and 50% of the total number from the British Isles. The higher percentages coincided with the post-World War II sugar and cattle booms when single or, at least, unaccompanied men were prized. From the 1970s approximately half were male thereby indicating that young married couples were by

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28 Calculated from Census 1971, 1976. For an examination of the reasons for the fluctuations of married and single men and women in Thuringowa and its effects on the values and norms of society; see Henderson, *More than Rates, Roads and Rubbish: A History of Thuringowa Shire and its Council to 1985*, Chapter 10.

29 Calculated from Census 1976, 1981.

30 See Chapter 10.

then predominant among immigration from Britain.<sup>31</sup> Italian migration remained a male enterprise though the imbalance steadily decreased with the gradual increase in family reunion from a 100% Italian male population in 1921 to 75% in 1954 to 63% in 1966 to 57% in 1981.

From the beginning of European settlement, Thuringowa's population was always predominantly British.<sup>32</sup> As can be seen from Table 3, 73% were

TABLE 3  
Birthplace 1921 - 1981<sup>33</sup>

Place	1921 %	1933 %	1947 %	1954 %	1961 %	1966 %	1971 %	1976 %	1981 %
Aust.	73	79	86	87	87	87	89	88	87
Brit.	21	14	6	3	3	3.5	4	6	5
Italy	0.1	3	5	5	5	4.5	.3	1	0.7
Rest	2	1.5	2	2	2	3	2	2	2
Eur.									
Asia	3	1	0.2	0.5	0.5	0.4	0.3	0.5	0.7
N.Z.								1	1.4
Other	0.9	1.5	0.8	2.5	2.5	1.6	1.7	1.5	3.2

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31 As most of the intercensal increase between 1971 and 1981 were young couples, then the majority of the migrants from Britain would have been young married couples, with or without one or two children.

32 British here means those who immigrated from Britain or were Australian born. It was not until 1947 that Australian born citizens were referred to as Australians and not British.

33 Census, 1921-1981 inclusive. The Census first gave separate statistics for Thuringowa in 1921 instead of subsuming it within the Townsville district which, until 1911, went as far as Hughenden and therefore made any assumptions about the exact number of Thuringowa's ethnic population tenuous. See Henderson, *More than Rates, Roads and Bridges: A History of Thuringowa Shire and its Council to 1985*, Chapter 10 for discussion of ethnic relations, particularly Chinese-Australian interaction, and for factors affecting the fluctuations in immigration.

Australian-born and 21% of British origin in 1921. The major non-British groups from the 1860s to the 1900s were Aboriginal, German, Northern European and Chinese. The Aboriginal population had been decimated by 25% between 1860 and 1880.<sup>34</sup> After the 1897 *Aboriginal Protection and Prevention of the Sale of Opium Act*, which aimed to segregate on reserves Aborigines unwanted by the European communities, at least 112 Aborigines were "removed" from the Townsville area. The majority (84%) of removals occurred between 1916 and 1926, when Aborigines were sent to reserves from Yarrabah in the north to Fraser Island in the south; at least half were sent to Palm Island.<sup>35</sup>

Although the period between 1921 and 1933 was characterised first by a downturn in the cattle industry and then by the Great Depression, there was a substantial population increase of approximately 1 100 people. Most of the increase was Australian-born whilst the percentage of those born in Britain, though only 22 fewer in number (453 as against 475 in 1921), dropped to 14%. Excluding Italians, 44 Europeans arrived in Thuringowa during these 12 years and Italian migration escalated from three to 91. Some of the increases were due to the belief, particularly on the part of Italians, that the sugar and tobacco industries would provide quick returns, but most of the Australian influx were workers on the Unemployment Relief Work Schemes and those seeking work either under the scheme or at Thuringowa's two meatworks. The increase in population thus did not result in purchase of

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34 See Henderson, *More than Rates, Roads and Rubbish: A History of Thuringowa and its Shire Council to 1985*, Chapter 2.

35 Removal of Aborigines from Townsville, Townsville Prison, South Townsville and Rose (Rowes) Bay between 1903 and 1936, Department of Community Services Archives cited in John Taylor, "Anthropological Report on Contemporary Aboriginal Associations with Magnetic Island with Special Reference to Florence Bay" (Townsville, 1988), pp.27-29.

property and hence revenue for the Shire whose finances were moribund during these years. Nor did it result in a change of ethnic composition of Shire Councillors who were of British-Australian origin; it was not until the 1970s that non-Anglo ethnic groups were represented on Council.<sup>36</sup>

The changes in the ethnic composition of Thuringowa's population between 1933 and 1947 (see Table 3) had more to do with the change of boundaries with Townsville than the disruptions caused by World War II. Half those from Northern, Western and Eastern Europe and at least 200 males and 93 females from Britain lived in the working class suburbs transferred to Townsville in the border realignment of 1937 or had died, returned home or resettled elsewhere due to the War.

Due to the relative stagnation of Thuringowa, whose population only increased by 1 100 between 1947 and 1971, Thuringowa's ethnic composition during this period was fairly consistent. The fluctuations, as shown in Table 3, indicate the quickened interest in the sugar and beef industries during the boom period in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>37</sup> Interestingly, although Thuringowa gained 70 Italians between 1947 and 1954, it lost 29 naturalised Italians during the same period. The most likely reason for this exodus was that those Italian men who had been interned in South Australia and other States and allowed to work in the vineyards and market gardens thought their economic chances and lifestyle would be improved more rapidly by moving their families from Thuringowa to these areas. The possibility of better economic returns was also probably why the 24 Spaniards, 19 Maltese and at least 30 of the Italians who were brought over in the late 1950s and early 1960s as indentured labour for

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36 See Chapter 13.

37 See Chapters 2 and 4.

rollingstone's and Giru's sugar fields left the district before 1971.<sup>38</sup> Their departure was a realistic assessment of Thuringowa's economic potential.<sup>39</sup>

At the close of Thuringowa's first century, the population was distinctly multicultural with people from many different countries and their Australian-born offspring. Besides Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders who made up two percent of Thuringowa's population, residents came from Britain, New Zealand, Southern and Western Europe (there were only 4 less Germans than Italians), Africa, Northern America, India, Korea, Malaysia, and Vietnam. Although Blainey and later John Howard, the Leader of the Opposition, injected racist rhetoric into the Australian community over claims of the "Asianisation of Australia" and Thuringowans, like the wider Australian community, were divided on the issue, they accepted their fellow Asian (and other non-Anglo) residents with little fuss. Probably this was because Thuringowa's Anglo-Australian identity was never seriously threatened. The successes and failures since 1861 of Thuringowa's migrants in their attempts to earn a living from the land is the theme of the next three chapters.

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38 See Chapter 4. Five naturalised Italians also left Giru; census, 1966 and 1971.

39 See Chapters 2, 3 and 4.

## CHAPTER 2

Search for a Staple: The Beef Cattle Industry 1861-1985<sup>1</sup>

Dawn May's comprehensive study of the beef cattle industry in North Queensland distinguished three phases within the industry since 1861: the first drew to a close

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1 In recent years historians have used the staple theory to explain economic growth in newly settled areas. Proponents of this approach argue that the timing and pace of an economy's development is determined by the demand for, and characteristics of, the region's staple export. Sinclair explains that this is a result of the higher return to factors of production in land-intensive industry in the new region than in regions in which land is scarce. Staple export industries are able to attract factors of production from overseas, break free of the constraints imposed by the small size of the local market and make profits which can be used partly to finance imports of manufactured goods and partly to help increase the size of the local market. McCarty, one of the first to apply the theory to Australia, believed it only had relevance in the years between 1788 and the middle of the nineteenth century. After 1850 the increase in wool production was matched by a similar increase in building construction. This conclusion was no doubt influenced by Butlin's work on economic growth in the second half of the nineteenth century. Loughheed was the first to suggest that the theory was applicable to Australian history after 1850. Subsequently Sinclair used a variant of the staple theory to explain the process of economic development in Australia. Pomfret has also reasserted the validity of the theory to Australia arguing that in the second half of the nineteenth century, gold replaced wool as Australia's leading export staple. The relevance of this theory to Thuringowa seems particularly appropriate. With its limited local demand, the North Queensland beef cattle industry was particularly dependent on export markets. W.A. Sinclair, *The Process of Economic Development in Australia* (Melbourne, 1976), p.16; J.W. McCarty, "The Staple Approach in Australian Economic History", *Business Archives and History*, 4, 1, February (1964), pp.1-22; N.G. Butlin, "Growth in a Trading World; The Australian Economy Heavily Disguised", *Business Archives and History*, 4, 1, February (1964); A.L. Loughheed, "International Trade Theory and Economic Growth", *Australian Economic History Review*, 8 (1968); R. Pomfret, "The Staple Theory as an Approach to Canadian and Australian Economic Development", *Australian Economic History Review*, 21, 2, September (1960), pp.133-146. See also G.C. Abbott, "Staple Theory and Australian Economic Growth 1788-1820", *Business Archives and History*, 5, 2, August (1965), pp.142-154.

in the early 1890s; the second lasted some 60 years to the 1950s; and the third to the present time.<sup>2</sup> In the first period, the development of the northern beef cattle industry was in a state of disequilibrium caused by overproduction. Nevertheless, after misadventures with sheep Thuringowa settlers eventually established a viable cattle industry, meeting the many challenges with stubborn determination, despair, hope and hard work. Success, though, proved nebulous: besides Aboriginal hostility, the pastoralists had to cope periodically with problems of labour, animal disease, climate, distance, lack of markets and the effects of their own mismanagement. To help overcome such setbacks, Thuringowa's pastoralists, led by John Melton Black, founded the area's port and also helped diversify the Shire's economy by establishing a boiling down works. A major characteristic of this period was the dispossession of the Njawagi, Wulguru and Bindal: the tragic story of "invasion and resistance"<sup>3</sup> on Thuringowa's frontier "provides a singularly ugly facet of pioneering

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2 Dawn May, "The North Queensland Beef Cattle Industry: An Historical Overview" in B.J. Dalton, *Lectures on North Queensland History*, 4 (1984), pp.121-159. This chapter relies on this article by May as well as her monograph, *From Bush to Station: Aboriginal Labour in the North Queensland Pastoral Industry, 1861-1897*, Studies in North Queensland History, No.5 (Townsville, 1983).

3 *Invasion and Resistance: Aboriginal-European Relations on the North Queensland Frontier 1861-1897* is the title of N.A. Loos' widely acclaimed examination of the dispossession of the Aborigines on North Queensland's four frontiers of colonisation - the pastoral, rainforest, mining and sea frontiers (Canberra, 1982).

endeavour".<sup>4</sup> During the second phase, the structural changes to the north's beef industry in the 1890s were to have a lasting impact upon Thuringowa whilst the erratic economic fluctuations characteristic of these years eventually resulted in the industry's stagnation. Indeed, from 1890 to 1950 the history of Thuringowa's cattle industry was a melodramatic saga of boom and bust caused by drought, tick, inconsistent availability of markets and, as in the first 30 years (1861-1890) of the beef cattle industry, the graziers' own mismanagement. During this period, no other meatworks in the North experienced the same degree of industrial unrest as did the two meatworks in Thuringowa: the Queensland Meat Export Company (QME) and the North Queensland Meat Export Company (Alligator Creek Meatworks). However, beginning in the 1950s, the third period did see massive injections of public and private capital that were to eventually bring the North Queensland beef cattle industry to "the brink of maturity".<sup>5</sup> Thuringowa pastoralists were part of this growth, and improvements in the industry ensured greater stability for the Shire.

In 1860 the new colony of Queensland was financially impoverished, undeveloped and under-populated; the government was therefore most concerned with acquiring revenue and population. Sales of its major resource, land, together with liberal land legislation, were seen

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<sup>4</sup> This description was applied to a much wider region of which Thuringowa was a part; A. Allingham, *Taming the Wilderness* (Townsville, 1978), p.139. The history of conflict between Aborigines and Europeans in Thuringowa is a virtual replica of that which characterised European colonisation of the pastoral areas of Australia in general, and North Queensland in particular. See Chapter 2, "The First Settlers: 'Invasion and Resistance'" in Henderson, *More than Rates, Roads and Rubbish: A History of Thuringowa Shire and its Council to 1985*, for a study of Aboriginal-European contact in Thuringowa-Townsville.

<sup>5</sup> May, "The North Queensland Beef Cattle Industry", p.121.



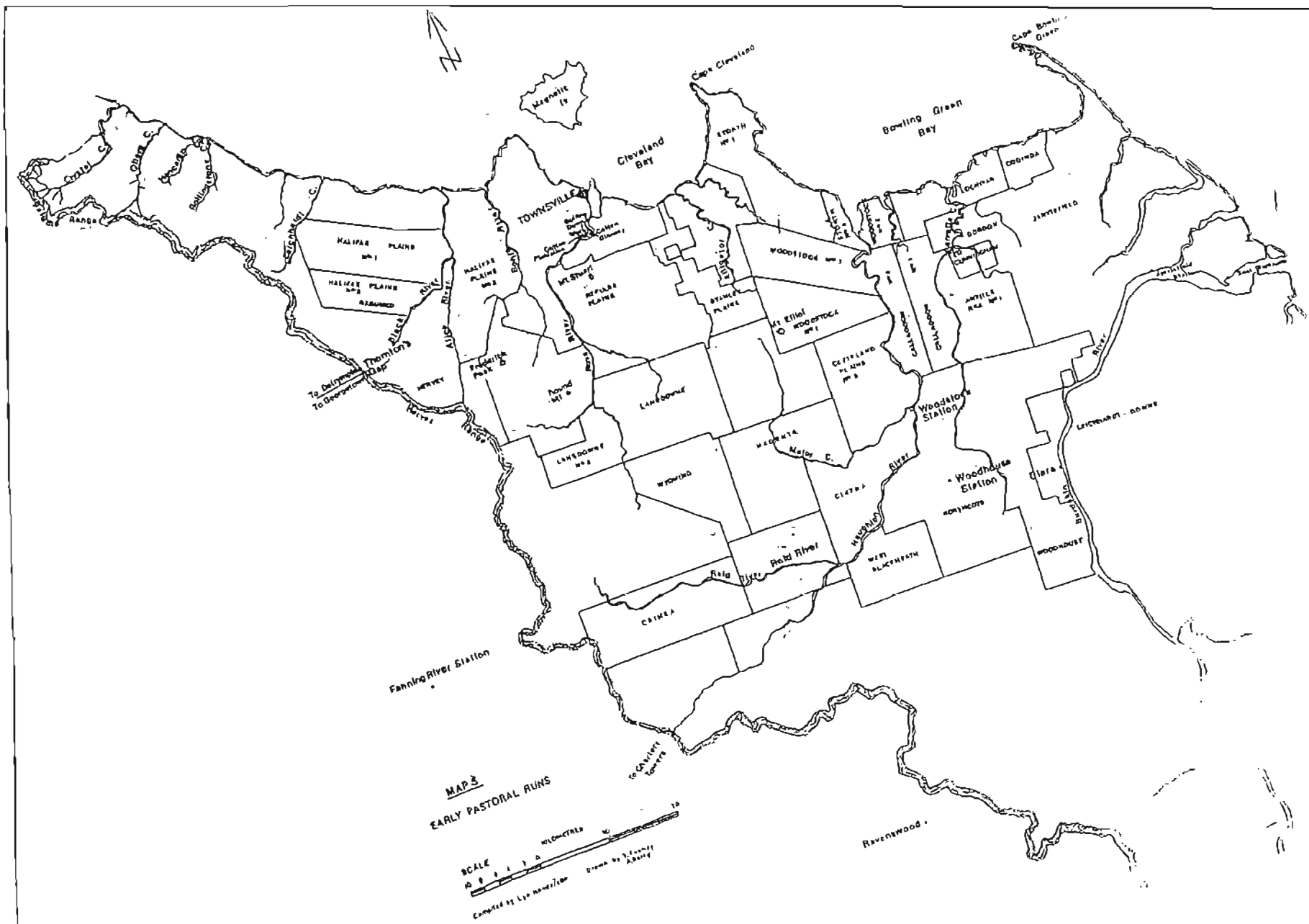
as the principal means to these ends;<sup>6</sup> the Queensland Government declared the Kennedy, and, hence, Thuringowa district opened for pastoral settlement.<sup>7</sup> Applications for pastoral runs within what was to become Thuringowa were received from 1 January 1861.

In the period 1861-1890 European settlers established Thuringowa's economic and urban foundations. The first attempt to create a viable pastoral industry in Thuringowa was a failure. In their eagerness to build sheep empires, the squatters ignored the lessons learnt from other countries concerning the incompatibility of

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6 D. Farnfield, George Elphinstone Dalrymple - His Life and Times in Queensland, 1859-1874, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Queensland (1968), p.51. See Allingham, *Taming the Wilderness*, pp.12,13 for elaboration and details of the government's long-term plan based on the experience of settlement in older colonies: pioneer pastoralists would act as explorers, surveyors and developers; gold would be discovered, causing a population influx and market stimulation; agricultural activity would follow.

7 This was actually the second proclamation of settlement in the Kennedy District. The New South Wales' government had declared it and the Mitchell District open to settlement in November 1859, just three weeks before the Colony of Queensland was granted independent status. However, in the antagonistic atmosphere surrounding separation, Queensland's new cabinet cancelled all tenders, believing that Dalrymple's Sydney backers had precipitated the move with the intention of securing the best leases for speculation. See Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, pp.17,20. The Kennedy Land Agent's District extended from Cape Palmerston in the south to Halifax Bay in the north and inland to encompass the Burdekin watershed.



Map 3

sheep with a tropical climate.<sup>8</sup> Eager for big profits, Kennedy squatters exploited the 14 year leasehold tenure which encouraged overstocking for fast returns and simultaneously discouraged expenditure on run improvements. Disabilities of poor management of the natural habitat and environmental factors beyond the control of the squatters were further compounded by the wider 1865 depression. Britain's commercial crisis of 1866 exacerbated the situation forcing Queensland's colonial government to suspend rebates on unpaid pastoral rents. No new pastoral properties were taken up in Thuringowa or the remainder of the Kennedy district between 1866 and 1872.<sup>9</sup> By 1868 only nine pastoralists registered as graziers in Thuringowa but 20 as managers or overseers.<sup>10</sup>

These conditions naturally influenced the settlers' second attempt at establishing a viable pastoral industry in the region. Cattle were gradually seen as the better prospect and eventually settlers were to experience success with this alternative. Today, Thuringowa's largest land resource industry is cattle breeding and fattening. However, between 1861 and 1890 the establishment and consolidation of the cattle industry

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8 They did not take into account: speargrass, footrot, woolrot, lung and fluke worm and blowflies; scheduling lambing to take advantage of the wet with its ensuing green grass and water; the inappropriateness of the southern practice of burning off which led to erosion and the growth of coarser, less nourishing grasses in Thuringowa; see Henderson, *More than Rates, Roads and Rubbish: A History of Thuringowa Shire and its Council to 1985*, Chapter 2. For a general discussion see Allingham, *Taming the Wilderness*, pp.49-55, 84-129 and Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, pp.34-42.

9 In the North Kennedy and Cook areas, leases totalling 4 836 sq.miles were abandoned between 1868 and 1870; QV&P, "Pastoral Country Abandoned in Unsettled Districts", 1st Session, 1871, p.549.

10 See Henderson, *More than Rates, Roads and Rubbish: A History of Thuringowa Shire and its Council to 1985*, Chapter 3.

were slow and insecure, often teetering on the brink of financial disaster.

Aboriginal hostility and harassment was a major factor. When Thuringowa's squatters signed leases for their runs in the early 1860s, one of the conditions was that no squatter could deny Aborigines free access to the runs.<sup>11</sup> However, both the Government and the squatters flouted this condition. The Colonial Government had condoned the violent actions of settlers and Native Police in the dispossession of Aborigines in Southern Queensland; it would do so again in North Queensland. Europeans believed with dogmatic certainty that Aborigines were primitive savages, cunning, treacherous and "utterly intractable".<sup>12</sup> As Aborigines did not till the soil and therefore did not appear to own land, they had not been accorded in practice moral or legal rights by either settlers or the Colonial Government which was dominated by pastoralists.

Settlers in Thuringowa and the rest of the Burdekin River-Herbert River basin followed uniform procedures against the Aborigines which had been developed in the south and brought north with them. They "kept the blacks out".<sup>13</sup> Legally, Aborigines were British citizens but in the fight for economic survival colonists saw

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11 Loos, *Invasion and Resistance*, p.53.

12 N.A. Loos, "The Pragmatic Racism of the Frontier" in H. Reynolds, (Ed.) *Race Relations in North Queensland* (Townsville, 1978), p.285.

13 This meant that if Aborigines were seen near a camp, out-station, head-station, or township they were "hunted by anyone seen in open country, driven away or shot down when caught out of the scrub...for a time every man's hand was against the blacks"; *Port Denison Times*, 20 November 1869; hereafter *PDT*.



Punitive missions against Aborigines were not directed at finding the offender or offenders as was the legal norm; rather, they aimed at the punishment or "dispersal" - a euphemism for shooting - of any Aborigines in the locality of the committed crime in the hope that this would intimidate all Aborigines. (Vogan, *The Black Police*, frontispiece).

themselves engaged in a "war of extermination".<sup>14</sup> The protection of European lives and property was paramount. Two enquires into the Native Police Force in 1860 and 1861 confirmed the government's policy of using the Native Police as the main, formal instrument of colonisation on the frontiers of Thuringowa and the Kennedy.<sup>15</sup>

Word had filtered through to Thuringowa's Aborigines about the malice and ruthlessness that accompanied the European's policy of "keeping them out" as the settlers moved out from Bowen. James Morrill, a castaway taken in by the Mt. Elliott group with whom he lived for 17 years, records how 15 of his Mt. Elliott group were "shot down dead" by Antill's shepherds while on a fishing

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14 PDT, 8 August 1868. The "stern reality" of bush life meant the settler must either "wipe the nigger out or go insolvent"; *Towers Herald*, 11 September 1884.

15 Loos delineates the three duties of the Native Police. They were to prevent Aboriginal "depredations" by dispersing groups of Aborigines and by intimidating them into quiescence with constant patrolling; they were to act as a punitive force to protect the settlers; and they were to take Aboriginal criminals into custody. "Dispersal" became a euphemism for shooting. Punitive missions against Aborigines were not directed at finding the offender or offenders as was the legal norm; rather, they aimed at the punishment or "dispersal" of any Aborigines in the locality of the committed crime in the hope that this would intimidate all Aborigines. Prisoners were rarely taken. "The Final Report from the Select Committee of Police Together With Proceedings of the Committee and Minutes of Evidence", V&P (1860) examined the management, efficiency and general working of the Police and Native Police Force throughout the colony. A more exhaustive inquiry in 1861 reviewed the "Native Police Force and the Condition of Aborigines Generally" in "Report from the Select Committee on the Native Police Force and the Condition of Aborigines Generally Together with Proceedings of the Committee and Minutes of Evidence", V&P (1861). Loos, *Invasion and Resistance*, pp.25,26.

expedition.<sup>16</sup> This marked the beginning of violent resistance by Thuringowa's Aborigines.

The Njawaygi, Wulguru and Bindal did not suffer the dispossession of their land with timidity.<sup>17</sup> They were efficient guerrilla fighters, intelligently hitting at the European's Achilles' heel: lone shepherds and isolated settlers were speared or terrorised; property was stolen, burnt or destroyed; and sheep, cattle and horses were killed or driven off.<sup>18</sup> Police Commissioner D.T. Seymour, who, as Loos concludes, was not one to exaggerate Aboriginal hostility, reported:

The coast country all along from Townsville to Mackay is inhabited by blacks of the most hostile character. On some of the stations north of Bowen, such as Woodstock...it is almost impossible to keep any cattle on the

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16 Morrill was told that the tribe with whom he had lived for two years at Port Denison had been massacred by a party of squatters and Native Police; Morrill, *The Story of James Morrill*, Chapter II.

17 The traditional historiographical view until recently was that because the Aborigines did not fight with large united forces as did the Maoris, Bantus and American Indians (that is, in the tradition of European-type warfare), theirs was not only a token resistance but also one characterised by treacherous cunning. Tatz and McConnochie argue that Aborigines would have been more respected and honoured if they had put up a better fight; C. Tatz, *Four Kinds of Dominion* (Armidale, 1972), p.19 and K. McConnochie, *Realities of Race* (Sydney, 1973), p.52. However the evidence from Thuringowa supports Reynolds' thesis: settlers brought racist baggage with them so that any Aboriginal group who fought effectively was thought of as more not less savage and treacherous. "Frontier settlers were quite incapable of appreciating the intelligence of the resistance, the high morale and courage of their adversaries"; H. Reynolds, "The Unrecorded Battlefields of Queensland" in Reynolds, *Race Relations*, p.43.

18 Henry Reynolds shows that settlers referred to the frontier conflict as a "kind of war", a "sort of warfare" and from the early 1830s when regular use was made of the term "guerilla warfare", which had first entered the English language during the Peninsula War of 1808-1914, a "guerilla mode of warfare"; *Frontier* (Sydney, 1987), pp.7,8,197.

run.<sup>19</sup>

In 1865 settlers in Thuringowa and surrounding areas demanded and got the protection of the para-military Native Police.<sup>20</sup> However, this was not enough to prevent the abandonment of Hinchinbrook Station and the sale of Jarvisfield and other lower-Burdekin properties in Thuringowa.<sup>21</sup> Yet the Bindal had tried to avoid the fighting and killing; they proposed a peaceful plan of co-existence. Morrill was to be their emissary:

They told me to ask the white man to let them have all the ground to the North of the Burdekin, and to let them fish in the rivers; also the low grounds, they live on to get the roots - ground which is no good to white people, near the sea-coast and swampy.<sup>22</sup>

It was ignored by Queensland's government.<sup>23</sup> Five bloody years followed and "a unique opportunity in Aboriginal-European relations in Queensland was lost".<sup>24</sup>

Contrary to what the settlers and the Government would have the European population believe, it would

19 "Report of Commissioner of Police Upon Tour of Inspection", *V&P* (1868), pp.51-52; Loos, *Invasion and Resistance*, p.40.

20 "The reports of murders and deprivation committed by the blacks are so frequent...that the settlers urge the appointment of an additional attachment of Native Police at Mount Elliott"; Mr. Scott, Police Officer, Bowen to the Colonial-Secretary, 12 January 1865, In-Letters, Colonial Secretary's Office, COL/A63 (QSA). "Police Commissioner's Report", *V&P*, 1968, pp.51,52.

21 Over a period of two months in 1870, 100 cattle were speared on Hinchinbrook Station; *PDT*, 5 December 1870. Antill sold Jarvisfield to Black and his other properties to Towns.

22 Morrill, *The Story of James Morrill*, Chapter II.

23 It was disregarded not because Morrill was held in low esteem; rather the settlers and the government felt Morrill would rejoin the Aborigines and "cause mischief"; *PDT*, 1 November 1865.

24 It was probably very naive of Morrill to think that land rights would be acceded to by a squatter-dominated government; Loos *Invasion and Resistance*, p.42.



appear that only eight Europeans and one Chinese were killed by Thuringowa Aborigines between 1861 and 1897 (see Appendix 1).<sup>25</sup> These figures invite two conclusions. Firstly, Aborigines in Thuringowa and most other parts of Australia rarely killed more than one or two Europeans at any one time.<sup>26</sup> Using Reynolds and Loos's formula that the ratio of Aboriginal deaths would have approximated 10:1, and noting again that eight European settlers had been killed by Aborigines, it would seem that approximately 80 Aborigines were killed between 1861 and 1880.<sup>27</sup> This estimate can be validated, if available evidence is studied.<sup>28</sup> Despite Reynolds and Loos's contention that in North Queensland frontier conflict their estimate is but a conservative one, it

25 For the whole of North Queensland (1861-1897), 470 recorded deaths have been tabulated by Loos. In comparison, "to suggest that at least 4 000 Aborigines died as a result of frontier resistance in North Queensland between 1861-1896 is probably so conservative to be misleading", *Invasion and Resistance*, pp.189-247. Reynolds postulates that 3 000 European settlers died and another 3 000 were wounded in Australia as a whole; *Frontier*, p.30.

26 The two "massacres" in Central Queensland at Horner Bank in 1857 and Cullen-la-Ringo in 1861 were isolated incidents. Compare the list of crimes committed by Aborigines in Tasmania between March 1830 and October 1831 cited in Reynolds, *Frontier*, pp.23-26; robbery of food and implements were understandably common and often accompanied by the beating or spearing of the few men and occasionally any women and children who were in the huts or houses.

27 H. Reynolds and N.A. Loos, "Aboriginal Resistance in North Queensland", *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 22, 2 (1976), pp.214-226; H. Reynolds, "Racial Violence in North Queensland" in B. Dalton (ed.) *Lectures in North Queensland History*, Series II (Townsville, 1975), pp.22-23; Loos, *Invasion and Resistance*, p.190. Diseases, intertribal fighting and the kidnapping of women and children also decimated the three Aboriginal groups; see Henderson, *More than Rates, Roads and Bridges: A History of Thuringowa Shire and its Council to 1985*, Chapter 2.

28 See Henderson, *More than Rates, Roads and Bridges: A History of Thuringowa Shire and its Council to 1985*, Chapter 2.

would seem that it is a realistic approximation for Thuringowa.

The second conclusion to be drawn is that the number of Europeans killed was small.<sup>29</sup> The low numbers could not in themselves account for the settlers' cries for increased Native Police protection nor for the wanton killing of Aborigines by gun or poisoned flour; nor could they account for the siege mentality of settlers and the abandonment of stations.<sup>30</sup> It was the threat posed by Aborigines to their livelihood rather than the lives of the squatters that accounts for their alarm. Aborigines deliberately raided stations and killed, stampeded or drove off cattle and sheep in an attempt to exclude the invaders from their land. The accounts of stock mutilation by Aborigines in Thuringowa are numerous; in 1866 Townsville newspapers refused to print any more accounts of the frequent attacks on cattle in the Townsville-Thuringowa district as the editors had grown tired of the subject.<sup>31</sup>

With a property costing at least £8 000 to establish,<sup>32</sup> loss of stock was a bitter financial blow. Aborigines also increased the squatters' expenses by causing them to employ more labour to provide increased

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29 It is quite possible that more Europeans may have been killed and their deaths were not known or went unrecorded in the early years.

30 See Reynolds, "The Unrecorded Battlefields of Queensland", pp.28-34 who discusses the settlers' communal insecurity and fear of violent attack and death, adding that "these sharp and gnawing anxieties" deeply influenced European attitudes and behaviour during and long after the period of confrontation.

31 Some horses had as many as seven spears in them; carcasses of bullocks were left beside the road, "no attempt was made to remove or conceal them"; *PDT*, 5 December 1868, 12 January 1867 reprinted from *Cleveland Bay Express*.

32 Allingham, *Taming the Wilderness*, p.50.

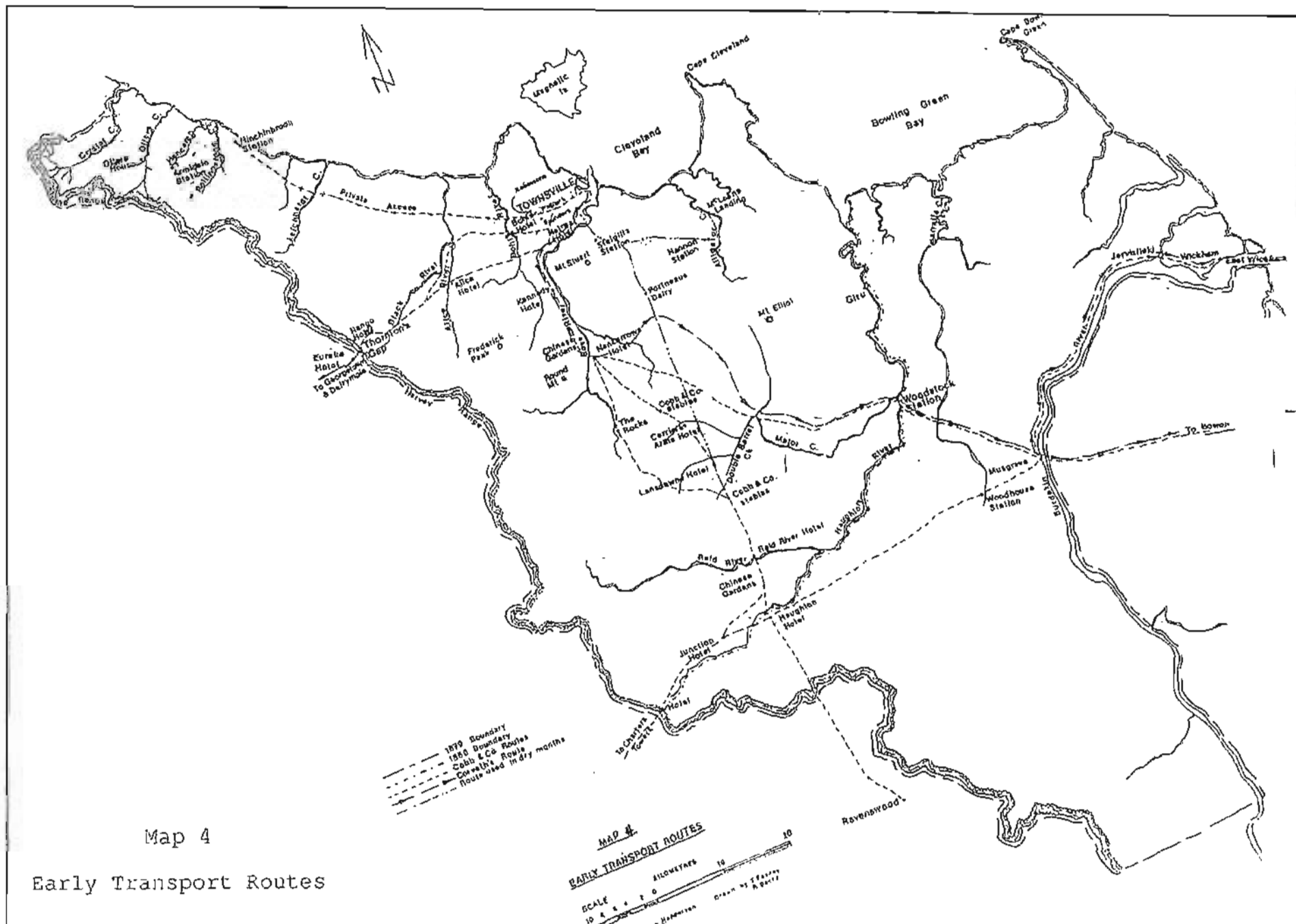
protection. High wages and shortages of labour were constant problems for the settlers for which Aboriginal resistance was in no small part responsible.<sup>33</sup> Costs were also doubled when goods were destroyed or stolen from 'teamsters' wagons.<sup>34</sup>

Considering the various inequalities, not the least being weapon technology, between the two protagonists, it was remarkable that Aboriginal resistance lasted five to six years. It is also quite apparent that Aboriginal society was not so conservative that it could not adapt to certain changes occurring to its lifestyle.

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33 They were difficult to obtain in the Thuringowa district during the height of the conflict: old chums left the bush and new immigrants refused outback work. In 1864 Black was in "a great way about his men"; they had just yarded 5 000 sheep and told Black to shepherd them himself. These men commanded high wages of 30/- per week. *Diary of William Hann*, 8 August 1864 cited in Allingham, *Taming the Wilderness*, p.155; Allingham, *op.cit.*, pp.86,87. Loos, *Invasion and Resistance*, p.53.

34 They were particularly vulnerable on Hervey's Range where terrain and vegetation were suited to guerrilla attacks. The Wulguru struck when the teamsters had unyoked the hind wagons and left them unattended while they went ahead to double-bank the forward teams over the difficult gradients. Foodstuffs and metal objects were taken and much equipment was destroyed; sometimes, with seemingly gleeful daring, the Wulguru mixed together the provisions of flour, tea, tobacco, sugar and salt, compounding the frustrations of pioneering life for the "toiling ironmen of the frontier" and the settlers awaiting their supplies. *Queenslander*, 19 January 1867.



Continuity and change were interwoven for survival.<sup>35</sup>

Coinciding with the beginning of the settlers' policy of "letting the Aborigines in" to stations and fringes of towns in 1869 was a more-or-less peaceful, wary compromise. A few pastoralists and townspeople showed humanitarian concern for the many Aboriginal groups who were in a pitiable condition. However, the motive was largely economic: with the crippling pastoral slump and the shortage of labour (due to the exodus to the goldfields) and its associated costs, pastoralists could no longer easily support the frontier conflict. Aborigines, too, wanted an end to the bloodshed and violence. After seven years of constant guerilla resistance, it was time to "come in". Such action seemed to hold the promise of physical and cultural survival. However, it proved a lull before the storm of "civilisation", Victorian morality, Western drugs and diseases and a sedentary life.<sup>36</sup>

Besides the havoc wrought by Aboriginal attack, drought, overextension, the wider financial depression, cattle diseases and poor management techniques were to blame for the slow conversion from sheep to cattle in the

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35 For instance, in 1865 the Wulguru erected a yard on Ross Island (a future suburb of Thuringowa) for slaughtering horses; "Viator", "James Gordon", *C&C*, June 1933, p.9. Thuringowa's Aborigines also modified cooking methods. The *PDT* recorded the numerous large earth ovens, capable of cooking bullocks whole, that were found from Townsville to Bowen; 9 June, 21 July 1866. In his historically significant book, Henry Reynolds mentions other Australia-wide innovations; *The Other Side of the Frontier: The Aboriginal Resistance to the European Invasion of Australia* (Townsville, 1981), pp.41-43. Access to large amounts of beef and mutton allowed groups to meet more frequently and for longer periods. Not only could ideas about how to fight the intruders be pooled, but important traditions could be continued.

36 For an analysis of these points see Henderson, *More than Rates, Roads and Rubbish: A History of Thuringowa Shire and its Council to 1985*, Chapter 2.

Mark Watt Reid and Aboriginal Worker, 1864.



In a move that may have been fairly common in frontier history but rarely enunciated for later generations to read about, Mark Watt Reid concluded a formal agreement in 1869 with the Bindal which allowed the group the right to hunt and hold corroborees in certain areas of south-eastern Thuringcwa. The pose in the photograph suggests a familiarity between the two men; a situation which was often warned against in frontier society. (*Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 12 May 1984, p.15).

Aboriginal Fringe Dwellers' Camp, ca.1890s.



In Thuringowa the "blacks' camps" or "refugee camps" on the fringe of Townsville were "ragged clusters of wind-breaks made from bark, bags, kerosene tins and other cast off scraps of wood and metal"; Allingham, *Taming the Wilderness*, pp.167,169. (Courtesy, Henry Reynolds and Townsville Municipal Library, No.2 - People)

1860s.<sup>37</sup> Cattle prices were greatly depressed in the 1860s because supply exceeded demand. Consequently, there was an insufficient margin of profit for viability.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, coexisting beside despondency and cynicism was an indefatigable belief in the potential of the region, the inevitability of progress and the necessity of utilising the land.<sup>39</sup>

The person who particularly epitomised this pioneering spirit and endeavour was John Melton Black. In fact, the story of Thuringowa in the 1860s is the story of Black whose vitality, drive, greed, vision, ambition, pragmatism, entrepreneurial skills and business acumen established Thuringowa's first primary bases, both pastoral and agricultural (cotton, sugar and cocoa); helped consolidate the region's cattle industry; established Thuringowa's first light secondary industries (a sawmill, cotton ginney and meatworks); and founded Thuringowa's coastal outlet, Townsville.<sup>40</sup> Robert Towns might have been the region's financial benefactor; indeed without his monetary backing in their business partnership, Black would not have been able to solve the problems of Thuringowa's unfamiliar environment, distance from markets and Aboriginal hostility. But it was Black, not Towns, who deserved any accolades; the title, "Father of Thuringowa" and, for that matter, "Father of

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37 See Henderson, *More than Rates, Roads and Bridges: A History of Thuringowa Shire and its Council to 1985*, Chapter 3.

38 Local butcher sales were inconsequential and more southern Queensland ports maintained their tight monopoly on the profitable trade in live cattle with the Pacific Islands.

39 Arthur Scott's letter to Walter Scott, 21 March 1866, Scott MSS. Letters dated 21 March, 27 March, 23 September-November 1865, Henry MSS; Daintree to Hann, 26 November 1865, Maryvale MSS; and the Scott MSS, A12.

40 For a complete discussion see Henderson, *More than Rates, Roads and Rubbish: A History of Thuringowa Shire and its Council to 1985*, Chapter 3.



John Melton Black.



The entrepreneurial John Melton Black was the major founding figure of Thuringowa and Townsville. (*Cummins & Campbell's Monthly Magazine*, June 1937, p.11).

Townsville" is rightfully his.<sup>41</sup> In 1863, he was already referred to as "The Great Mogul".<sup>42</sup>

A port needed to be established closer to the region's properties than Bowen, on the "wrong" side of the Burdekin River, to serve as a centre from which to market the graziers' sheep and cattle to local and interstate consumers. Black was instrumental in founding this urban centre thereby easing two major problems confronting the region's graziers - markets and distance.

To accomplish this, Black utilised all the assets at his disposal: staff and partners, South Sea Islander labour, a contingent of the Native Police to protect the "urban builders" as Aboriginal hostility was at its height, entrepreneurial thoroughness as well as bribery and rather dubious business methods.<sup>43</sup> In a little over a year Black had founded a port to help solve the graziers' problems of markets and distance.

However, the creation of an urban centre only partially solved these problems because the incipient urban community did not need very much fresh meat. An attempt to consolidate the fledgling industry was a failure: Black and Towns' boiling down works closed after the 1870 season due mainly to the slump in tallow prices.<sup>44</sup> It was the discovery of gold in Thuringowa's

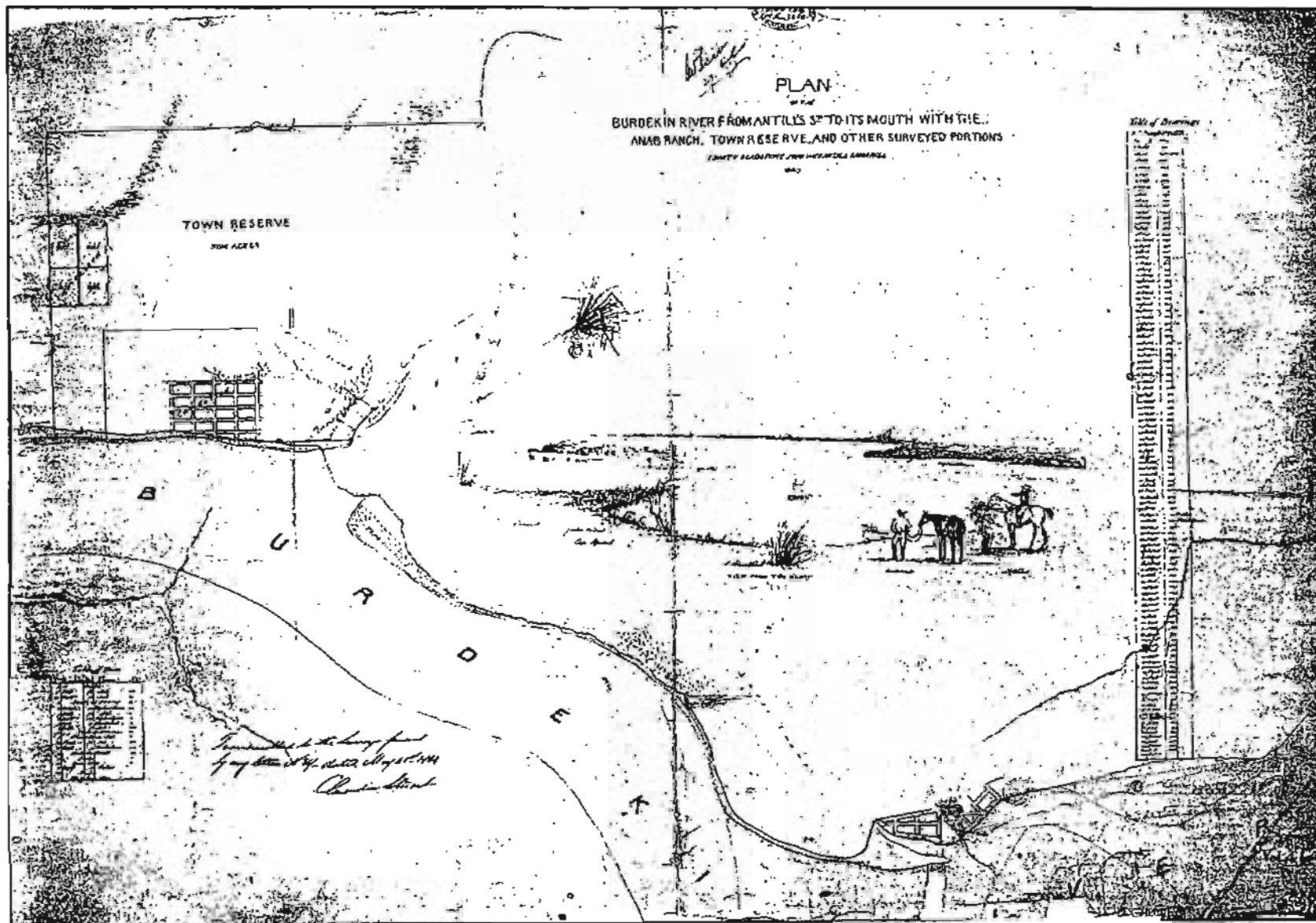
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41 Many North Queenslanders believe that because Townsville was named after Towns, Towns was Townsville's most influential pioneer.

42 PDT, 16 May 1868.

43 For details see Henderson, *More than Rates, Roads and Bridges: A History of Thuringowa Shire and its Council to 1985*, Chapter 3, which also argues that the founding of Townsville was atypical.

44 Griffin, *Frontier Town: The Early History of Townsville and its Hinterland 1864-1884*. B.A. (Hons.) Thesis, James Cook University of North Queensland (Townsville, 1983), Table 7.



This is an interesting map and town plan for Wickham, situated near Ayr, the first site selected as the port for Thuringowa and the Kennedy pastoral properties by Black. It was destroyed twice by floods. Townsville became the hinterland's port. (Courtesy Sunmap).

hinterland that brought dividends as the stations in Thuringowa and Kennedy were major beef suppliers.

The cycle of over-extension and collapse occurred once more. In the 1880s, the easy availability of Victorian and British capital for the expansion of the northern beef industry encouraged graziers to be over-optimistic.<sup>45</sup> With North Queensland runs overstocked and southern graziers having a stranglehold on southern markets, local graziers turned once again to the widely despised boiling down.<sup>46</sup> Unfortunately, like its short-lived predecessor, the North Queensland Boiling Down and Meat Processing Company lasted only five seasons, closing its doors after the devastating 1884 drought.<sup>47</sup> By the end of the 1880s the market was again over-supplied.

During its first 30 years of European settlement, Thuringowa's settlers came to the sensible realisation that Thuringowa's geographical nature favoured beef rather than wool as its staple industry, and in response to this enterprise's varied needs Black established Townsville as its market outlet. During the next phase,

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45 With the collapse of British foreign lending to the United States and few investment outlets within Britain, British capital turned to North Queensland where Anglo-Australian mortgage companies were making large profits; May, "The North Queensland Beef Cattle Industry", p.127.

46 Local graziers and businessmen were the major instigators in establishing the North Queensland Boiling Down and Meat Processing Company which commenced operations at Alligator Creek in 1880. Because of their limited capital (£4 500 in November 1879), the directors decided it would be folly to go ahead with the meat processing part of their business; *Northern Standard*, 21 November 1879, p.2.

47 During this time it processed 20 162 head of cattle from a radius of 500 miles and proved a more profitable market for the graziers than walking the cattle south for sale; *Northern Standard*, 5 October 1879; 7 November 1879, p.2. In 1880, 2431 cattle were boiled down; 1881, 5 573; 1882, 1 838; 1883, 5 327; 1884, 4 993; Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, p.109, fn.21. The drought lasted until 1887.

1890-1950, although beset with difficulties, the beef industry was to be consolidated as the main economic basis of Thuringowa.

Three major, long-term structural changes occurred in the cattle industry in North Queensland in the 1890s. The first, which altered the pattern of ownership, affected Thuringowa minimally; the other two, involving the type of land ownership and advances in meat processing, had more substantial effects.

The first structural change was a direct result of the 1893 Depression which, together with restricted markets and low cattle prices, forced many stations in North Queensland into bankruptcy and the hands of pastoral finance companies and banks. However, this structural change in the pattern of ownership did not occur to any great extent in Thuringowa. The Australian Pastoral Company had bought out Towns' properties in 1877<sup>48</sup> but other large stations - like Cardington - survived corporate take-over bids.<sup>49</sup> Despite an escalation of debilitating factors - drought, tick, lack of viable markets, overstocking and the cruel slump from 1921 to 1939 - which resulted in some take-overs, by 1975 there were only 16 out of 110 properties held by

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48 *Queenslander*, 1 December 1877, p.29.

49 See correspondence concerning Cardington Holding, Department of Public Lands: Run File, North Kennedy District, Cardington, Run No.497, Part 1, February 1884-May 1932, LAN/AF829 (QSA).

companies or corporations.<sup>50</sup> Cattle properties in Thuringowa largely remained in the hands of owner-managers. This was a significant factor in the decision-making of the various Councils: local owner-graziers had more influence on the rate struck than absent corporations.<sup>51</sup>

The 1884 Land Act ushered in a second but more influential change to Thuringowa's cattle industry in the 1890s. Support for closer settlement and yeoman independence had gained momentum enabling the government to frame land legislation to that end.<sup>52</sup> One-fifth to one-third of the acreage of many Kennedy pastoral runs, especially those along the railway line, were resumed and made available for men with little capital. Grazing selectors - "the new breed of owners" - were given 30 year leases on grazing farms.<sup>53</sup> In Thuringowa, such

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50 Department of Industrial Development, *Natural Resources Survey*, Section 7.5, n.p. In the Lower Burnett, cattle stations were taken over by banks and companies in the 1890s but were bought back by individuals with a return to prosperity in the twentieth century. Dignan adds that nothing suggests centralisation of capital and control of land ownership in the Lower Burnett today; D. K. Dignan, *Economic and Social Development in the Lower Burnett 1840-1960: A Regional Study with Special Reference to Kolan Shire and the Gin Gin District*, M.A. Thesis, University of Queensland (St. Lucia, 1962), p.ix.

51 See Chapter 13.

52 G.P. Taylor, "Political Attitudes and Land Policy in Queensland, 1868-1894", *Pacific Historical Review*, 37, 3 (1968), pp.247-264. See next chapter for a detailed examination of yeoman independence.

53 May, "The North Queensland beef Cattle Industry", p.131; "Crown Lands", *The Queensland Official Year Book*, Part VIII (1901), pp.126-138.

properties ranged from 400 to 20 000 acres.<sup>54</sup> Of course, smaller properties meant closer utilisation of land resources and a more intensive style of pastoral industry - as well as increased rates for the Thuringowa's Divisional Boards.

The third structural change which ensured the permanence of the cattle industry was the establishment of freezing plants. This improvement in the industry allowed pastoralists to participate in overseas markets, bringing long term benefits to Thuringowa. QME (at Ross River) was the first northern freezing works.<sup>55</sup> Although the arrival in London of the first consignment of frozen beef from Thuringowa was attended by publicity banquets and press releases worthy of the advertising industry's "hard sell" a century later, it was to little avail.<sup>56</sup> Londoners preferred chilled meat from Argentina which began arriving in the United Kingdom from

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54 For instance, F. Spotswood's grazing farm at Bowling Green Bay comprised 412 acres; from 1885 Martin Hind ran approximately 150 head of cattle on 2 249 acres between Saltwater and Healy Creeks; Hodel's three grazing farms at Cape Cleveland totalled 4 000 acres while his neighbours, the Steiglitz family and John Hearne, each had over 3 000 acres; by 1915 the Kelsos owned 14 937 acres of good grazing land in the Upper Ross-Landsdowne Creek area. Map attached to Memo to Ranger's remarks on Selections re Residence and Improvements thereon, 5 March 1898, no.666LC, LAN/DF4820: Dead Farm Files, No.1-3038; Margaret Hinds to Public Lands Office, 17 August 1905, No.777, LAN/DF4819: Dead Farm Files, No.1-3038; Basis of Valuation Form, 21 July 1921, No. 28552, LAN/DF4825: Dead Farm Files, No.1-3038.

55 The Alligator Creek Meatworks was reopened by local and inland graziers and businessmen two years earlier in 1890 as a meat extract company on the site of the 1880s boiling down works, but did not incorporate a freezing plant until the overseas market for Australian frozen meat improved. This occurred in 1914 after Swifts (America) bought the company and World War I created a large market for frozen meat; *North Queensland Register*, 1 June 1915, p.15; hereafter NQR.

56 *North Queensland Herald*, 30 November 1892, p.5; hereafter NQH.

1901 over the frozen consignments from Australia. Australian producers suffered because the technology to keep meat chilled for the longer journey from Australia was not perfected until 1934.<sup>57</sup>

Even though a number of northern meatworks were shortlived - a meat extract works at Mackay, boiling down plants at Mareeba and Bowen, the works at Selheim and the Cardwell Meat Preserving Co. Ltd. - Thuringowa's two meatworks proved viable. Firstly, Thuringowa's meatworks were soundly situated not only on the outskirts of a rapidly growing port but also at the terminus of the western railway line to Northern Queensland's inland sheep and cattle country. Secondly, the services offered by the meatworks were varied and, except for the minimal demand for frozen meat, highly marketable.<sup>58</sup> By 1899 the two meatworks were processing 80 000 cattle and sheep. The choicest cuts were frozen for southern and overseas markets; some were salted and cured; smoked ox tongues were even packed with cooking directions; mostly old and scrawny cattle and sheep ended up as meat extract, tallow, bonedust and blood fertilizer for Australian and British markets; hides went south and increasingly to a local firm, Stocker and Meyer's Rosevale Tannery (which indirectly owed its existence to the meatworks) for manufacture into boots, harnesses,

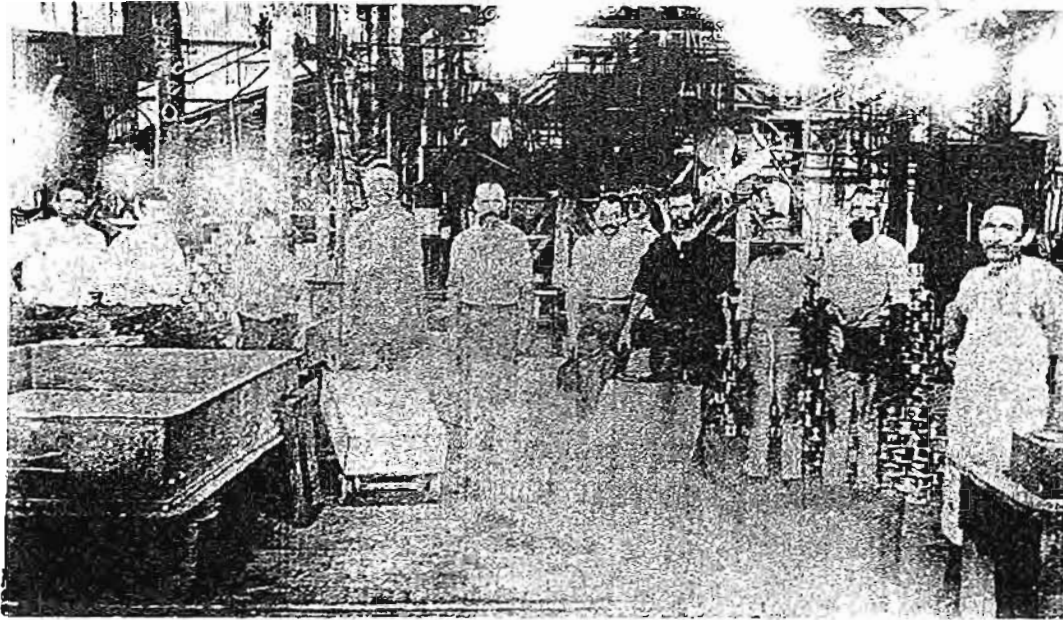
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57 The third shipment from Thuringowa arrived in poor condition, being badly affected by bone taint; *NQH*, 4 January 1893, p.23.

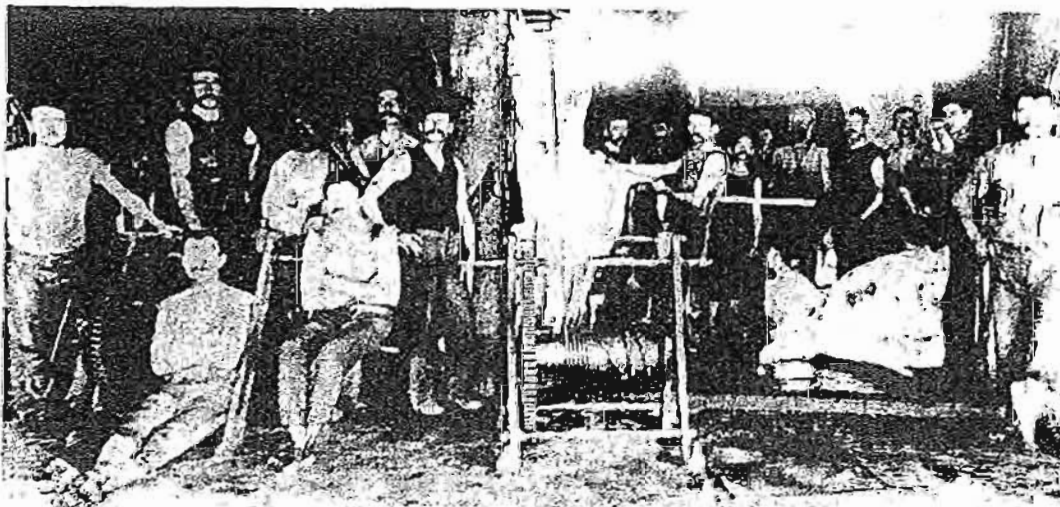
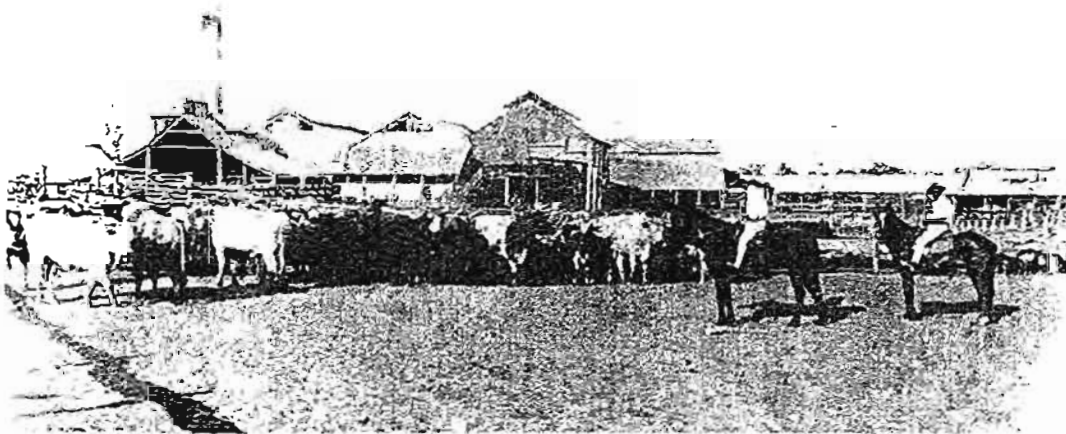
58 Graziers from as far away as Tennant Creek "quickly and gratefully" took advantage of the various market opportunities provided by QME and Alligator Creek Meatworks. A Maltese capitalist opened refrigerating stores at Malta for frozen Australian meat intended for use by the military; *NQH*, 9 August 1893, p.17.



Scenes from Alligator Creek Meatworks.



From its inception, the Alligator Creek Meatworks was a major economic venture within Thuringowa. These photographs depict the aspects of the meatworks: workers, droving, the killing and cutting floor, some of the technology and tins of beef extract for export. (Courtesy Mr. Cordingley).



belts, etc.<sup>59</sup>

The two meatworks provided the Council with a sizeable rateable income (until the Shire lost the QME and Alligator Creek Meatworks in the Townsville-Thuringowa boundary re-alignments of 1937 and 1964 respectively), assured seasonal employment for Thuringowa's working class - for instance, in 1892 Idalia's population of 300 was dependent for a living on QME<sup>60</sup> - and, for Thuringowa's smallholders, a market they shared with graziers whose annual turnover ran into four figures.<sup>61</sup>

With the meatworks firmly established, the 1893 Depression behind them and closer, more intensive land utilisation instigated, North Queensland's graziers were anticipating a more prosperous future. Then disaster struck. Cattle tick and the accompanying redwater fever

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59 *NQH*, 3 August 1892, p.27. Stocker was Townsville's first bootmaker and the firm was the first to tan hides from cattle, sheep and horses; carpet snake skins were treated too. The tannery was situated on the south bank of Ross River about five miles from town. *NQH*, 16 December 1891, p.16; 16 March 1892, p.11.

60 *NQH*, 10 August 1892, p.5.

61 For instance, in 1893 QME froze 72 637 lb of beef from Cluden Station (Thuringowa) compared with 223 239 lb from Havilah Station (west of Thuringowa); *NQH*, 15 February 1893, p.25; Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*,

severely depleted stock numbers.<sup>62</sup> By October 1895 the epidemic had spread with "plague swiftness" along the stock routes to Townsville.<sup>63</sup> As a consequence, the losses in Thuringowa were high.<sup>64</sup> One of the few graziers to commence immediate dipping to help eradicate the tick, Joseph Hodel, nevertheless lost 90% of the herd pastured on his Cape Cleveland properties.<sup>65</sup> Others did not fare as well. Many families who combined beef and dairy cattle or dairying with bullock driving lost both sources of income.<sup>66</sup>

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62 The tick had spread from the Northern Territory where it had been introduced by a cargo of infected cattle from Indonesia in 1872. The Queensland Government's attempts to contain the parasite to the Gulf country and Cape York Peninsula were futile. Many stockholders kept quiet about their infected cattle whilst others, usually those on unfenced holdings, refused to dip their herds - preferring to believe "that a scare had been got up". Stations in the Cairns district lost 40% of their cattle. In 1899 a government report confirmed that cattle numbers had been halved on a number of western properties; May, "The North Queensland Beef Cattle Industry", p.134 and Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, p.220.

63 Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, p.218, 220.

64 Thuringowa Divisional Board Chairman's Annual Report for 1895; the Chairman was Joseph Hodel, a grazier and businessman. Also see *NQH*, 19 February 1896, p.27.

65 Evidence given to Land Court Hearing, Townsville, 2 August 1898, No.18156, LAN/DF4820: Dead Farm Files 1-3038.

66 Near Woodstock, redwater continued to play havoc, killing all of Edmund Crisp's beef and dairy cattle and forcing him to seek work as a railway lengthsman; Report of Bailiff of Crown Lands on Selection or Farm, 11 September 1896, No.18378, LAN/DF4825: Dead Farm Files 1-3038. In the intermediary zone between the urban allotments in Townsville and the grazing farms in Thuringowa, a number of teamsters had established small dairy and mixed farm holdings. While the bullocky was on the road from March to December, his wife and children eked out a living selling milk and surplus produce to suburban housewives, town businesses and the Cobb and Co. staging depots; Reprinted in *Cummins & Cambell Monthly Magazine*, July 1931, p.32; also see Griffin, *Frontier Town*, p.147; hereafter C&C.

The long drought from 1898 to 1902 took a further toll of cattle in Thuringowa but losses were particularly heavy in the Charters Towers and Hughenden areas. For the smaller selectors, foreclosure was a matter of time, ending their determined struggle to be self-employed. In contrast, big graziers like Hodel were able to withstand their losses from tick and drought more readily as they had diversified their investments into mining, hotels or town property during the years of prosperity.<sup>67</sup>

With the collapse of the southern markets in 1908, the cattle industry suffered another reversal which augured well for the meatworks but not for the graziers. The northern meatworks now monopolised northern markets and, through collusion, forced the prices down and their profits up.<sup>68</sup> Even though Alligator Creek did not work at anywhere near full capacity, it could still be selective: aged cattle were turned away and "young fresh oxen" were demanded.<sup>69</sup>

Frozen and canned meat prices again rose dramatically in 1914 due to food shortages caused by the outbreak of war in Europe.<sup>70</sup> Thuringowa's meatworks also prospered and Townsville was Australia's major meat exporting town in 1916. However, as overseas' shortages also resulted in high prices for meat sold locally, the Queensland Government enacted legislation in 1917 to ease

67 See Chapter 17 for details of Hodel's interests; he was Thuringowa's longest serving Chairman.

68 Royal Commission on Meat Industry, *Queensland Parliamentary Papers*, Vol.2, 1913, p.1083; hereafter QPP.

69 *Pastoral Review*, 15 July 1910 cited in May, "The North Queensland Beef Cattle Industry", p.139.

70 With wry humour, a Kennedy grazier commented: "...some 20 years ago a pastoralist would have been in danger of a heart attack from too much joy, were he offered 50/- a head instead of 50/-per 100 pounds"; *NQR*, 18 January 1915, p.7. This was a 66% rise in a matter of four months; *NQR*, 14 September 1914, p.26.

the situation: the meatworks had to retain a certain percentage of export beef at lower prices for home consumption. Beef appeared once again on the family table.<sup>71</sup> But for northern graziers it meant a loss of over £150 000.<sup>72</sup> Thuringowa's grazing selectors - with the support of the Council - "emphatically protested the unwarranted seizure resulting in a loss of £3 to £4 per head to the selector".<sup>73</sup>

In 1921 the bottom fell out of the overseas market. The British Government was selling Australian frozen meat which it had stockpiled during the war. Tainted from over-storage, the released meat gave the Australian product an even worse name and consumers again turned eagerly to South American chilled beef.

The home market was equally unprofitable for Kennedy graziers who realised 20/- per 100 pounds whilst southern Australian graziers averaged 50/- per 100 pounds, at the Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide cattle sales.<sup>74</sup> Nor was the grazier the only one to suffer; the collapse caused much unemployment throughout the industry.<sup>75</sup> Local graziers were forced to retrench approximately one-third

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71 The Inspector of Slaughter Houses in Townsville and Thuringowa had noticed the "very marked decline in the consumption of meat"; *NQR*, 12 April 1915, p.77.

72 *NQR*, 23 September 1920, p.5.

73 *Local Government*, 25 March 1921, p.277.

74 *NQR*, 7 June 1926, p.62. Thuringowa graziers like Fred Burdell of Bohlevale Holding received £4.16.0 per head for fat cattle in 1926 - half of what he received before the collapse; Calculated from Evidence from Fred Burdell to Queensland Beef Cattle Industry Commission: Completed Questionnaires received from Graziers, January - March 1928, p.776, ROY/89. Burdell was a Councillor on Thuringowa Shire Council.

75 *NQR*, 22 August 1921, p.32

of their employees.<sup>76</sup> Another indication of the precariousness of earning a living from cattle in Thuringowa was the number of vacant selections: in 1921 there were eight grazing selections and 24 perpetual lease selections with a total area of 78 194 acres still open for selection.<sup>77</sup>

From the late 1880s to the 1920s overstocking was a perennial problem.<sup>78</sup> The disequilibrium caused by this constant over-stocking ensured that, except for "boom" periods (including the gold rushes), the returns to graziers were low. Such mismanagement also reflected poor marketing judgement and a lack of understanding of, and responsibility towards, land usage.<sup>79</sup> Land in Thuringowa that once carried one beast to eight acres in the 1880s could only sustain a disappointing capacity of one beast to 26 acres and up to 46.8 acres in northern Thuringowa in 1927 and 1929, respectively.<sup>80</sup> The Land

76 Evidence from Fred Burdell to Queensland Beef Cattle Industry Commission, ROY/89, p.776.

77 G. Wright, Land Ranger, to Land Commissioner, Townsville, 9 September 1921, No. 30314, LAN/AF829.

78 It occurred in 1889-1890 when the "good soaking wet" of 1886-1887 brought the two year drought to an end and, with a number of southern Queensland properties changing over to sheep, northern graziers were at last able to participate in the lucrative southern Australian markets. Overstocking occurred again after the long drought from 1898 to 1902 when stock prices spiralled due to the scarcity of beef. Meat shortages caused by World War I encouraged Thuringowa graziers to overstock once more in order to take full advantage of the high prices. Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, p.102; May, "The North Queensland Beef Cattle Industry", p.128.

79 Indeed, over-stocking damaged the roots of the edible grasses which consequently allowed less nutritious grasses as well as lantana and prickly pear to take over. Erosion was also ubiquitous in the eaten-out areas.

80 Land Commissioner, Townsville to Under Secretary for Public Lands, 13 September 1927, No. 36313, LAN/DF820: Dead Farm File 1-3038; Land Ranger to Land Commissioner, 26 September 1929, LAN/DF4913: Dead Farm File 1-3038.

Ranger recommended extensions on rental payments which were already in arrears because there was very little demand for vacant grazing properties in the area. Other compounding factors were zamia poisoning, poling grasstree poisoning, tick and dingo attack.<sup>81</sup> The effects of overstocking on land that was unsuitable to handle it, heralded difficult times ahead for Thuringowa's pastoral industry.

The productivity of the cattle industry was also directly influenced by industrial unrest, perhaps more so than in any other comparable meat processing area within North Queensland. A few random examples will serve to highlight not only the threats to the industry's stability through industrial action but also the dichotomy of interests between workers and employer - between the inherent conservatism of Thuringowa's rural areas and the more radical politics of its working class suburbs.

Strike action in the 1890s was over wages. For instance, work came to a standstill twice during the construction of the QME Meatworks.<sup>82</sup> Both the carpenters and bricklayers separately went on strike four months apart over the same issue: the contractor from Brisbane refused to pay the current Townsville rate which was 2/- above Brisbane's daily rate.<sup>83</sup> The journeymen asserted that they were entitled to the higher rate as

81 Land Ranger to Land Commissioner, 26 September 1929, 31 March 1937, LAN/DF4913: Dead Farm File 1-3038.

82 See NQH, 21 September, p.26 for details of the strike over wages at Alligator Creek Meatworks.

83 McCallum Park had apparently tendered the winning contract on Brisbane prices and any increase in wages would have lowered his profit. The carpenters and bricklayers argued that the cost of living was significantly higher in Townsville, citing Mr. Park's wife's intention of travelling to Brisbane to buy drapery and, of all things, jams as "things were too dear in the north"; NQH, 9 September 1891, pp.11,18.

their ability to make ends meet was vitiated by Townsville's wet season which halted work for three and sometimes four months of the year.<sup>84</sup> Ironically these same reasons allowed the contractor to win. The men could not afford to stay out on strike despite support from fellow tradesmen and even from the local conservative press and contractors who pledged their assistance in the fight to maintain the rate of wages; despite, too, generous subscriptions from the general public of Townsville and the western suburbs of Thuringowa.<sup>85</sup> Such support from the union's traditional opponents was unusual. However the contractor's stated preference for Brisbane goods and conditions was probably enough to blur class boundaries in Townsville and suburban Thuringowa at a time when agitation for a separate state in North Queensland was at its height.<sup>86</sup>

Thuringowa and other northern graziers, on the other hand, viewed the journeymen's strike with unalloyed impatience. They had fought a hard battle with Brisbane over the siting of the freezing works: some directors of the freezing works company had wanted it built in Brisbane. However local graziers used their political influence to put pressure on local and other parliamentarians such as Aplin, Philp, Cowley and McIlwraith (who had money invested in Thuringowa grazing properties) and were successful in having the meatworks built in Townsville to service the comparatively greater

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84 NQH, 9 September 1891, p.18.

85 NQH, 14 October 1891, p.11. The carpenters strike lasted a little over a month; the bricklayers, only a few days.

86 See Chapter 12 for details of the North Queensland separation movement.



marketing needs of North Queensland.<sup>87</sup> In the end, Brisbane compromised by erecting one freezing works in Brisbane simultaneously with the construction of Thuringowa's. The outcome demonstrated the North's political strength on this issue; not only that, it manifested the Government's desire to assuage the North's complaints that northern development always suffered vis-a-vis Southern Queensland's needs.<sup>88</sup> To Thuringowa's graziers, the strike had held up the much needed diversification of markets and, hence, the growth and consolidation of the industry.<sup>89</sup>

Though both graziers and meatworkers suffered during the Townsville railway strike of 1916-1917, their attitudes were divided along class lines. The strike snowballed, until by August 1917, 10 months after it started, all railway stations from Mackay north had closed down. Unable to rail cattle to their works or processed meat to the wharves, QME and Alligator Creek Meatworks laid off 1 000 employees; the meatworkers represented 10% of the male workforce in Townsville and suburban Thuringowa. Interpreting the Companies' actions as a lockout, the meatworkers supported the railway strikers as fellow unionists. Thuringowa graziers reacted bitterly. The demands for beef created by the war had brought them prosperity for the first time since 1908. It was now being jeopardised by "dirty foul-mouthed blackguards...who sing the Red Flag".<sup>90</sup> Bolton

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87 *Townsville Herald*, 5 July 1890, p.5, 12 July 1890, p.16, 2 August 1890, p.15, 11 March 1891, p.17; hereafter *TH*. *Queenslander*, 14 June 1890, p.1152. Aplin was Thuringowa's first chairman.

88 See Chapter 12 for more details; also see C. Doran, *Separatism in Townsville*. Studies in North Queensland History, No.4 (Townsville, 1981).

89 *NQH*, 14 October 1891, p.13.

90 *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 14 January 1918; hereafter *TDB*.

points out that the old struggle between the wages men and the men of property took on "a new acerbity as...North Queensland ceased to be a land of hopeful chances for those who lacked capital".<sup>91</sup>

The QME and Alligator Creek Meatworks strike from November 1918 to September 1919 caused great disruption to Northern graziers who were forced to send a large number of cattle to southern meatworks. With freezing rooms filled to capacity, the 1920 killing season had to be curtailed. On the other hand, meatworkers lost their rights to be involved in the meatworks' decision-making. Cutler conclusively demonstrates that the strike was "a complex web of conflicting ideologies, scheming, tactical exercises, ambitions and manipulation".<sup>92</sup>

In fact, the strike was the outcome of a long and bitter struggle between the Australian Meat Industry Employees' Union (AMIEU) and the meat companies.<sup>93</sup> By 1912 the AMIEU's aggressive industrial policy had resulted in the introduction of a system of direct negotiation with the employers over wages and conditions, as well as preference of employment to their members. At each meatworks, every section elected a delegate to the Board of Control or Shop Committee which supervised the selection of labour. Before signing on every season each

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91 Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, p.313.

92 T. Cutler, "Sunday, Bloody Sunday: The Townsville Meatworkers' Strike of 1918-19" in J. Iremonger, J. Merritt and G. Osborne (eds.) *Strikes: Studies in Twentieth Century Australian Social History* (Sydney, 1973), p.81; hereafter "Sunday Bloody Sunday".

93 Bolton believes the union's beginnings in Townsville and Thuringowa in 1909 were "heroic", *A Thousand Miles Away*, p.312. The AMIEU organiser, refused admission to the Alligator Creek Meatworks, "splashed across the tidal flats and crawled in through the thick [mangroves]... Conditions inside were indeed bad, but the men and boys followed the union organiser barefooted across the mud to hear the gospel"; V.G. Childe, *How Labour Governs* (London, 1923), p.130.

worker had to validate his AMIEU "permit" which was based on seniority. Delegates also nominated the labour for overtime, ensured that casual labour was rotated amongst the unemployed, decided the pace of work and handled job disputes.<sup>94</sup> QME and the Alligator Creek Meatworks were determined to reduce the union's power as it was a direct threat to the employers' management and influence within the industry.

It was hardly surprising, therefore, that the Companies themselves played a direct role in bringing union unrest to a head in 1918. They tried to create sectional rivalry by not increasing wages uniformly.<sup>95</sup> Next, they applied to the Industrial Court for the abolition of preferential employment.<sup>96</sup> During the war the AMIEU had invariably won the numerous skirmishes called "on the least provocation"<sup>97</sup> because of the prosperity of, and protection accorded to, the industry by the *Meat Supply for Imperial Uses Act* of 1914 as well as to shortages of labour with so many men in the forces. But as the war drew to a close, the Companies' willingness or need to compromise with the Union was no longer necessary because the same level of meat production did not have to be maintained. Moreover, with frozen and canned meat stockpiled, the meat companies had no need of a full labour force.<sup>98</sup> The employment of returned soldiers and other scab labour was used to break the strike and provide the skeleton labour force needed

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94 Cutler, "Sunday, Bloody Sunday", p.84.

95 M. Douman, "Townsville during World War I", in B.J. Dalton (Ed.) *Lectures on North Queensland History*. No.1, (Townsville, 1974), p.189.

96 Cutler, "Sunday, Bloody Sunday", p.87.

97 Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, p.86.

98 J. Phillips, *The Townsville Meatworkers' Strike: A Perspective on Social Conflict in Queensland 1918-1919* B.A. Thesis, University of Queensland (St. Lucia, 1977), p.67

to fill the few orders contracted. Violence erupted, culminating in indiscriminate shooting by police and some members of the crowd that had marched on the police station on "Sunday, bloody Sunday"; nine people were wounded.<sup>99</sup>

The AMIEU eventually lost - for a variety of complex reasons. Firstly, local unemployment was very high and, to make matters worse, the ranks of Townsville's were swollen by men retrenched through the closure of Cloncurry's mines. The simultaneous Maritime Strike caused food shortages and people had to queue for rations. The pressure to return to work was strong. Secondly, the AMIEU had become alienated from the moderate trade unions which, unlike the militant AMIEU, believed the parliamentary Labor Party had not turned its back on the worker and was still the legitimate political mouthpiece of labour. Thirdly, the Labor Government did not support the AMIEU. In order to maintain popular support, the Government wished to distance itself from AMIEU militancy which was associated with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), a group that was labelled Bolshevik and anathema to Australian democracy. In fact, the Labor Government sent extra police to Townsville and Thuringowa to help control the strikers. Ryan's actions enhanced his standing within the Labor Party and in the eyes of the majority of the Queensland community. Fourthly, Commonwealth Intelligence infiltrated the IWW and AWU ranks in Townsville causing dissension and disunity among the leaders - and helped break strike solidarity. Fifthly, the Meat Companies provided united, unequivocal opposition to any claims by the AMIEU and even negotiations with it. Sixthly, Townsville and suburban Thuringowa had become weary of the continual fighting and tension between returned soldiers and unionists as well as frightened by the shooting and the

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<sup>99</sup> Cutler, "Sunday, Bloody Sunday", p.94; Phillips, The Townsville Meatworkers' Strike, p.93.

subsequent dramatic raids on hardware stores for guns and ammunition.<sup>100</sup> Consequently, the strikers found themselves completely alone and had no choice but to concede defeat.

The graziers' simple interpretation - that the union had deliberately set out to wreck their continued prosperity - thus took little account of the complexity of the situation. In particular, it took no account of market forces and the complicity of the Meat Companies in provoking and continuing the strike.

The beef cattle industry remained depressed until 1939. Even with the improvement in overseas markets in the mid 1920s, the Royal Commission into the beef cattle industry in 1928 found that the increased costs of production, treatment and shipment absorbed profits, ensuring a loss for graziers.<sup>101</sup> Ticks and drought were perennial problems and, though not as serious as the redwater epidemic and the cruel drought of 1898 to 1902, Thuringowa graziers still lost up to 10% of their herd annually.<sup>102</sup> The *Cattle Relief Act* of 1923 gave some assistance as rentals on grazing properties were reduced retrospectively to those of 1921 and not increased again until 1936. In addition, Thuringowa's grazer-dominated Shire Councils kept rates and land valuations to a minimum.<sup>103</sup>

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100 Phillips, *The Townsville Meatworks' Strike*, Chapters 4 and 5; Cutler, "Sunday, Bloody Sunday", pp.86-100.

101 Railway charges were an added cost for graziers outside Thuringowa. Royal Commission on the Queensland Beef Cattle Industry, *QPP*, 1928, Vol.2, pp.581-651.

102 Evidence from Fred Burdell to Queensland Beef Cattle Industry Commission, ROY/89, p.774.

103 See Chapter 13 for a detailed analysis of the Shire Council's rating policy and its appointment of a pro-grazier land valuator.

With the outbreak of World War II prices spiralled, though May shows that the effects were not felt in the Burdekin-Thuringowa area until 1942.<sup>104</sup> The demand for frozen and canned meat meant that quantity not quality was important. This meant the abandonment of chilling and the instigation of frozen meats.<sup>105</sup> Thus much needed improvements in the beef industry were not seen to be warranted. For instance, internal fencing which promoted better herd management was no longer considered vital as a means of ensuring better returns; experiments to enhance quality and tick resistance through cross-breeding the English Devon, Hereford and Shorthorn, which were not well adapted to Thuringowa's tropical climate, with other breeds, such as the Zebu, were postponed. Although Thuringowa's meat producers may have appeared shortsighted, even if they had wanted to implement changes, they would have had great difficulty getting the wire for fencing and the exotic breeds for crossing during World War II. Moreover, after experience of the First World War, they had reason to expect that wartime prices would not survive the coming of peace. Only reasonable assurance of sustained good prices would provide economic justification for substantial new capital investment. When the assurances came in the 1950s, Thuringowa's graziers seem to have responded. Nevertheless, by the end of the war the North Queensland beef cattle industry was "moribund".<sup>106</sup>

From the 1950s, however, cattle raising underwent a transformation. The catalyst was a 15 year trade

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104 May, "The North Queensland Beef Cattle Industry", Graph 1, p.147.

105 The long awaited advances in chilling techniques became redundant as the *National Securities Act* suspended chilling in 1940.

106 May, "The North Queensland Beef Cattle Industry", p.148.

agreement in 1950 with the United Kingdom.<sup>107</sup> Australian protectionist policies and a long-term agreement and high prices on the American market brought security. Thuringowa graziers now focussed their attention on improving the quality of their herd. Interbreeding with Brahman, Droughtmaster and Santa Gertrudis bulls improved weight and gradings. Labour costs were also cut as the cross breeds, more resilient to ticks, needed less mustering and fewer dippings. Pasture rotation and regulated dipping also helped control tick infestation.

A number of properties also improved their pastures by sowing various legumes including the most popular, Townsville Stylo, which spreads naturally and therefore colonised large areas of land. Like clover it has a doubly beneficial effect: it is itself a good-quality fodder, but it also fixes atmospheric nitrogen in the soil where it provides nutrients for grasses. This improved the quality of the herd, particularly in the dry months when cattle usually lost condition as the native grasses, low in phosphorus, potash and nitrogen, deteriorated quickly. In 1956 there were 10 acres with introduced pasture; by 1966 there were 9 371 acres.<sup>108</sup> Feed supplements (such as hay and drum licks) were necessary from September to December to ensure top quality beef for the expanded overseas markets in Japan and the United States. Supplementary feeding stopped after the crash in beef prices in 1974. Again, it was not only the grazier and meatworks that were affected by that collapse: a number of farms at Bluewater which had supplied Townsville Stylo and other pasture seeds were

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107 Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, p.326.

108 Department of Industrial Development, *Natural Resources Survey*, Table HL1, Sections 7.3,7.4.

forced to cease production due to lack of buyers.<sup>109</sup>

In contrast to the beef industry as a whole throughout North Queensland, the most noticeable change in the cattle industry in Thuringowa after the 1950s was its diversification. An erratic history of the industry over the century convinced cattle producers that dependence on beef alone was imprudent. Although 110 properties carried cattle in 1976 only 66 were solely concerned with cattle breeding and fattening. The majority of the other 44 properties combined sugar with cattle.<sup>110</sup> Courtenay points out that cattle and cane integrate well; the labour demands for grazing are at their maximum during the wet season when those for cane

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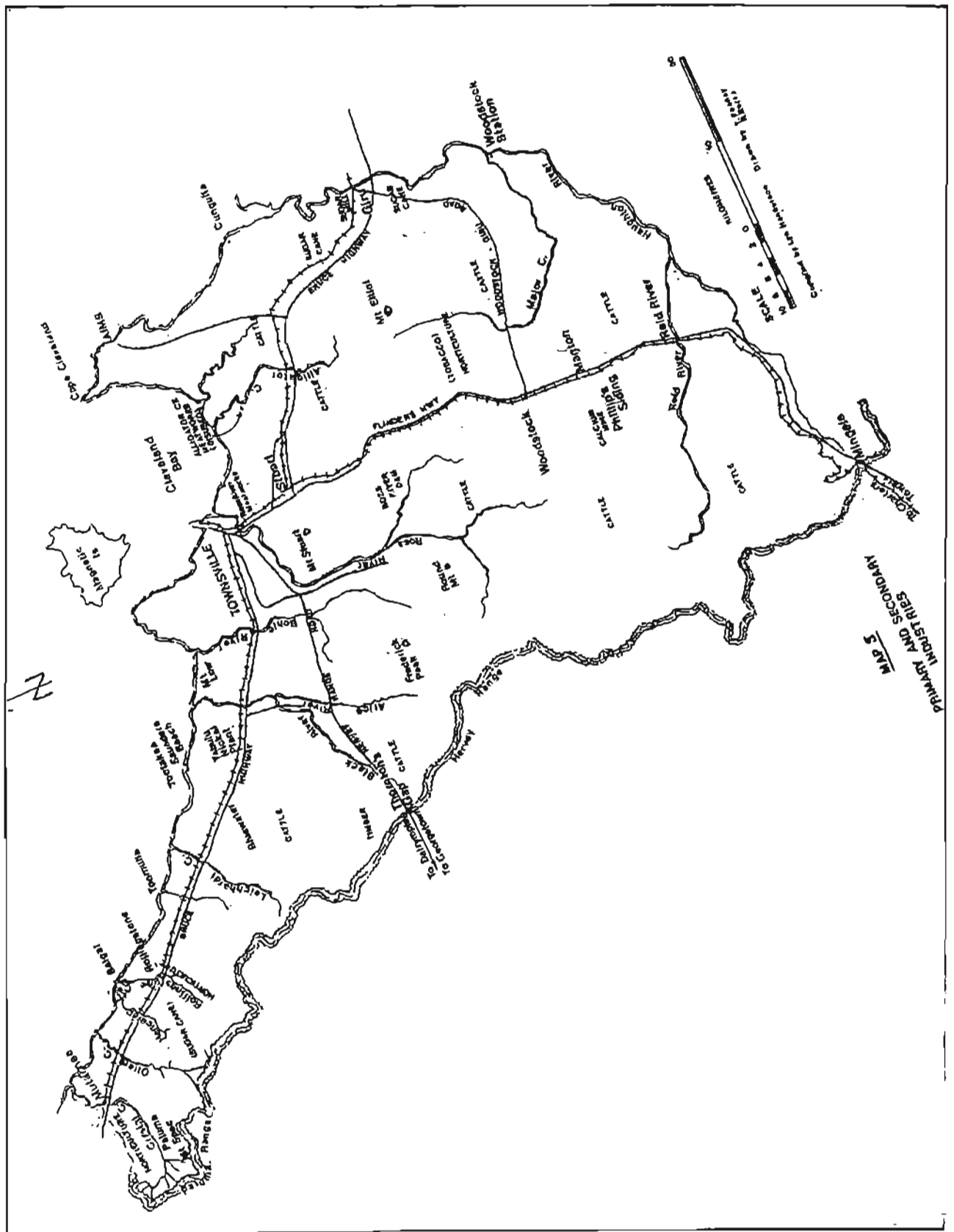
109 Department of Industrial Development, *Natural Resources Survey*, Sections 7.4, 7.5.

110 Department of Industrial Development, *Natural Resources Survey*, Sections 7.3-7.6.



Map 5

1980s Primary and Secondary Industries



farming are at their minimum.<sup>111</sup> After the cattle slump in 1974 a number of graziers began small crop farming to augment their income.<sup>112</sup>

Government regulations, industrial unrest, overstocking, mismanagement, unreliability of markets and the vagaries of the environment all influenced the search for a staple and its consolidation in Thuringowa. With limited local demand, the buoyancy of export markets has been the determining factor in the variable stability of Thuringowa's beef cattle industry. As the next chapter reveals, this was not the case with the failure of agrarianism in Thuringowa.

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111 P.P. Courtenay, "Agricultural Development on the Wet Coast of North Queensland, 1880-1970" in B.J. Dalton (Ed.) *Lectures on North Queensland History* (Townsville, 1974), p.25.

112 Department of Industrial Development, *Natural Resources Survey*, Section 6, pp.4,6.

### CHAPTER 3 The Agrarian Dream

The constant experimentation throughout most of Thuringowa's first 100 years to find primary industries other than cattle emanated from the traditional belief that it was an essential and inevitable element of human civilisation to use land intimately, particularly for agricultural production. "The England legend of the yeoman farmer; the Scots tradition of crofting farms; the German love for the soil; lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the Irish-Catholic enthusiasm for rural virtues" were drawn upon by the agrarian movement.<sup>1</sup> The Bible exhorted the cultivation of land to render it fruitful. The theories of John Locke and Adam Smith blended economic and biblical arguments<sup>2</sup> whilst John Stuart Mill's theory opposed unjustified monopoly by large landholders.<sup>3</sup>

Although the Thuringowa-Townsville community did not believe that Thuringowa "would prove to be one of nature's great agricultural food-bowls"<sup>4</sup>, it was imbued

1 Glen Lewis, "The Alice River Settlement and the Legend of the Nineties", *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 19, 3, December (1973), p.362. Also see R. Gollan, "American Populism and Australian Utopianism", *Labour History*, November (1965).

2 Individuals automatically established their right to land, the property of society, through proper economic use; cultivation of the soil was the source of wealth and happiness "as to cultivate the ground was the original destination of man"; Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (London, 1977 [1776]), p.338; John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (n.p., 1690), II, v, para.27, paras 32-41.

3 John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, new edn. (London, 1923).

4 This was the dream held since earliest European settlement by Springsure's settlers; W. Ross Johnston, "The Locality and the Environment", *Australia 1888*, Bulletin No.6, November (1980), p.65.

with the common belief that most land was arable; so it was just a matter of finding the right crop. Hence it was assumed that Thuringowa would become Townsville's market garden;<sup>5</sup> that agriculture would "make use of idle land" and push cattle from the rivers and railway back into Thuringowa's inland plain;<sup>6</sup> that it would become a mecca for virtuous yeoman farmers who were men of small capital means, farming their own land with the aid of their families and not labouring for others.

Yeoman farming was considered the ideal occupation, automatically being morally superior and physically healthier than other economic pursuits: "Agriculture, as is well known, is the back bone, ribs and sinews of every nation and without it we are mere parasites".<sup>7</sup> The inherent virtues of agrarian life would counteract the moral corruption and radical nationalism of the cities: "...a man with a few acres of land is unlikely to become

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5 For instance, see *NQH*, 28 September 1892, p.12.

6 A Thuringowa settler at Toonpan queried: "Surely this land is destined for a higher purpose than grazing?"; Letter to the Editor by "Flying Fox", *NQH*, 28 November 1894, p.26. The agrarian dream cropped up in rather unlikely places. For instance, in a book on the roads of Queensland which contained all sorts of statistics other than to do with roads, the authors argue that "with the advent of the railway [from Townsville through Thuringowa to Ingham]...more country will come under the plough and grazing will give way to agriculture and dairying; Yates and Jones (Compilers), *The Roads of Queensland* (Brisbane, 1913), n.p. (no authors' initials were given).

7 Contained in speeches by Mr. Gulliver and Mr. Banfield at a Public Meeting on Agriculture called by the Townsville Chamber of Commerce "for the purpose of devising measures to bring the agricultural interest prominently before the Royal Commission on Agriculture"; *TH*, 2 February 1889, pp.18,19. Also see *TH*, 20 April 1889, p.15 and *NQH*, 7 September 1892, p.27. Also see *Queensland Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 55 (1888), p.405; hereafter *QPD*.

a socialist".<sup>8</sup> Nor would there be strikes or "public disturbances with tens of thousands of well-to-do farmers on their own freehold".<sup>9</sup> Farming was also ideologically superior because it provided self-employment and, in a country that prided itself on the belief that "Jack-is-as-good-as-his-master", this was an important consideration in Thuringowa's continual attachment to the land.<sup>10</sup>

There was political urgency, too, in support for the agrarian ideal: the Queensland Liberals, representatives of the towns and adjacent small-farming districts, used agrarianism as a weapon to break the political power of the squattocracy.<sup>11</sup> Dignan points out that while the settlers lived in pitiful conditions wringing a bare subsistence from the soil, the largely-urban Liberal

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8 Statement by Archbishop Dunne cited in D.B. Waterson, *Squatter, Selector and Storekeeper: A History of the Darling Downs 1859-1893* (Sydney, 1968), p.104. Also compare similar sentiments echoed elsewhere in Lewis, "The Alice River Settlement and the Legend of the Nineties", pp.362,363.

9 NQH, 7 October 1891, p.18.

10 H.C. Luck, *Queensland: A Sketch* (Melbourne, 1888), p.40, explained this point: "The farmer on his own freehold is thus his own master, subject to no landlord...Queensland may be described as very little short of an earthly paradise for farmers". Bolton argues: "The plain fact was that the typical North Queenslander at this time still expected that the land would be generous and provide him with at least a modest opportunity for self-improvement"; Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, p.215.

11 This thesis is a simplification of the issues involved but validated by the neglect of the urban middle-class in favour of the selectors after the 1884 Act. See Waterson, *Squatter, Selector and Storekeeper*, p.106; G.P. Taylor, "Political Attitudes and Land Policy in Queensland, 1868-1894". *Pacific Historical Review*, 37, 1968 pp. 249,250; D.W.A. Baker, "The Origins of Robertson's Land Acts", *Historical Studies*, 8, 30, May (1958), p.166; and A.A. Morrison, "The Town Liberal and the Squatter", *Journal of the Royal Queensland Historical Society*, 4, 5, December (1962), p.599.

Party talked of a country of prosperous farmers who would provide more markets for businessmen than fewer large, scattered pastoral properties.<sup>12</sup> Both Labor and non-Labor parties recognised that the agrarian vote was a precondition of electoral success, and the myth was entrenched in their political ideologies.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, Waterson and Taylor both stress the prevalence of a very real belief in agrarian ideals. There was a genuine attempt in Queensland to create a society based on social justice through radical land legislation.<sup>14</sup> Agrarianism, equality of opportunity and

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12 Dignan, *Economic and Social Development in the Lower Burnett 1840-1960: A Regional Study with Special Reference to Kolan Shire and the Gin Gin District*. M.A. Thesis, University of Queensland (St. Lucia, 1962) pp.54,55.

13 Glen Lewis argues that Labor did not reformulate the agrarian illusion into its ideology and political platform until 1913; *A History of the Ports of Queensland: A Study in Economic Nationalism* (St. Lucia, 1973), pp.192,193. Once in power, Labor attempted to realise the agrarian dream: it implemented an elaborate system of farm support which encouraged small-scale settlement, established soldier-settlement schemes, conducted numerous Royal Commissions into various aspects of agriculture, particularly its expansion, organised a web of primary producers' organisations, imposed tariffs and intervened in the market place to stabilise prices and organise marketing generally; Ross Fitzgerald and Harold Thornton, *Labor in Queensland: From the 1880s to 1988* (Brisbane, 1989). The Country Party lost seats to Labor because of its attractive rural policies; Z. Abidin, *A History of the Queensland Country Party*, M.A. Thesis (University of Queensland, 1954), pp.114,155,174, 175. According to McQueen, "Bjelke-Petersen will be judged by history to be the farmer who killed rural idiocy...The votes of a few small farmers help him to realise the interests of certain big corporations ...and in encouraging miners, speculators [and tourism]...Joh is rewarding the very people who are killing off...the small farmers and bush workers", "Queensland: A State of Mind" *Meanjin*, 38, 1, April (1979), pp.41-51.

14 Waterson, *Squatter, Selector and Storekeeper*, p.106 and Taylor, "Political Attitudes and Land Policy in Queensland, 1868-1894", p.262.

political and economic self-interest were fused.<sup>15</sup>

According to Camm the agrarian illusion was destroyed by the late 1880s as the economic realities of farming the colony became apparent.<sup>16</sup> Lewis argues that the disillusionment occurred between the 1884 and 1894 Land Acts because, though the total acreage increased, there were 30 000 acres more put under crop between 1874 and 1884 than between 1884 and 1894. He further argues that after 1900 the agrarian ideal was revived as part of government policy.<sup>17</sup> However, repurchase amendment Acts that resumed land from pastoralists for agriculture were enacted in 1894 and 1897, as well as in 1901, 1906 and 1913. Such legislation manifested the constant strength of the illusion.

An examination of agrarian myth and reality in Thuringowa validates this thesis.<sup>18</sup> The community's stubborn belief in the farming potential of the Shire was not severely damaged until the collapse of the tobacco industry in the late 1930s and the loss of a substantial market provided by the United States and Australian

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15 G. Lewis asks if agrarian lobbying by various interests was "deceptive window dressing" or a "shifting combination" of those interests, *A History of the Ports of Queensland*, p.37.

16 J. Camm, "Agriculture in Queensland in the 1880s-Optimism and Reality", *Australia 1888*, 5, September (1980), p.133.

17 Lewis, *A History of the Ports of Queensland*, pp.131,136

18 Compare Gammage, *Narrendera Shire*, who argues that in the 1910s "the champions of closer settlement saw such suffering as a scar on the face of progress, but their conviction that small farms brought civilisation and prosperity was unshaken", p.103.

forces stationed in Thuringowa during World War II.<sup>19</sup> However, it was not totally shattered until the Government deliberately phased out sugar cane, an industry that received Government protection and seemed inviolate, in northern Thuringowa in the 1970s and transferred the assignments to the Ingham district.<sup>20</sup>

Until the 1970s, each new farming venture was heralded with exaggerated claims. This was particularly so during the years of separatist agitation. Northerners desperately wanted the future northern state to be self-sufficient.<sup>21</sup> Regional separatism was another political reality behind the agrarian ideal.<sup>22</sup>

Initially, such claims that Thuringowa produced, for instance, "monster vegetables"<sup>23</sup>, "remarkably well-

19 Colin Pace believes his parents made more money during the War than in any other period. The United States army would send their own men and trucks to pick and transport three and four loads of watermelons and pineapples at a time. Interview, C. Pace, Rollingsstone, 6 March 1989.

20 McIntyre and Associates, *Townsville Development Strategy Study*, 6.3 (ii). See previous Chapter for details of the abandonment of the Townsville Stylo farms. See the next Chapter for a more thorough discussion of the sugar industry.

21 In a parallel case, the Barcaldine district supported the Alice River co-operative agricultural settlement as its success would bolster the campaign for provincial separation by central-western Queensland; Lewis, "The Alice River Settlement and the Legend of the Nineties" p.362.

22 Compare Lewis, *A History of the Ports of Queensland*, p.38: "[After 1885] the Queensland economy did expand rapidly, but while agrarianism failed, regionalism was an important means of growth".

23 *TH*, 20 September 1890, p.14. In 1922, on Arthur Buck's property near Barringha, "one cabbage filled a Chinaman's basket...radishes grown from seeds bought from the Swedish Seed Depot in Melbourne grew to three feet and needed a crowbar to get them out!"; Interview Mr. and Mrs. Buck, September, Thuringowa Oral Interviews 1978.



flavoured peaches"<sup>24</sup>, "excellent exhibits of ginger and cotton",<sup>25</sup> "splendid examples of lucerne, wheat and oats",<sup>26</sup> and tobacco leaf whose quality in 1931 was regarded as "a triumph",<sup>27</sup> were probably not overstated but Thuringowa's soil, climate and susceptibility to crop pests and diseases soon took their toll.<sup>28</sup>

More significant than the duration of the agrarian ideal *per se* was its persistence for so many years alongside substantial evidence to the contrary. The myth makers saw what they wanted to see:

Here was to be seen the typical old English farmer with his neat cottage and flower plot in front, a few pigs in a well-kept sty, and poultry feeding contentedly around, whilst the wife sat at the door reading lessons to her little ones.<sup>29</sup>

Mrs. Emily Watson's story unmasks the illusion that was the agrarian myth, exposing the earthen floor and white-ant ridden walls, the unpredictability of working the

24 TH, 13 December 1890, p.17.

25 TH, 13 October 1888, p.12.

26 These were grown by Mr. A.L. Smith, Toonpan; NQR, 20 July 1914, p.29.

27 'Solarium', "Tobacco Notes", C&C, June 1932, p.76.

28 For example, after initial success in the 1890s potatoes were not grown commercially for nearly 20 years, but with their re-introduction in 1918 it was not long before the yields from Woodstock were lauded by objective experts as exceptionally good. In 1920, 262 acres were under potatoes. However by 1937 this area had dropped to 80 acres due mainly to problems of soil deficiencies, faulty germination, seed diseases, tuber moth, blight and lack of adequate water. At the close of Thuringowa's first century, 10 growers were planting potatoes. Statistics of Queensland, "Production", Table XVII, p.14K; Department of Primary Industries, *Annual Report, 1936-1937 and 1939-1940*, pp.38,20 respectively; N.A.R. Pollock, "Potatoes in North Queensland: Comparative Trial on Tableland and Coast", *Queensland Agricultural Journal*, 1 October (1925), p.349; Pollock was the Northern Instructor in agriculture.

29 TH, 28 May 1886, p.17.

land and the long back-breaking hours of work which the weather demolished within hours. In 1898 the Land Ranger reported that after losing her dairy cattle to the tick plague, Mrs. Watson grazed horses and goats and had begun cultivation on "rotten clay soil":

Mrs. Watson (a widow) and her son - quite a lad - lived continuously and worked on the farm at very great disadvantage. The soil being very poor, they worked and reworked it with tons of manure which the son carted onto the land and when on the brink of success on a small scale, the Cyclone "Sigma" in January 1896 occurred ...The wind destroyed nearly the whole of the unfortunate woman's buildings, and the flood which followed submerged the whole of her farm which covered the highest spot, viz, where her house stands, to a depth of 3 feet, washing away all her fences, fowls, goats and most of her tools and farming implements and all the soil they had worked so hard to make up. Mrs. Watson and her son also narrowly escaped drowning. None of the neighbours had never [sic] known that particular spot to be submerged. Within 6 weeks after Sigma, the farm was submerged 2 or 3 times. Mrs. Watson being an elderly person took very ill and came to town for medical treatment. Her son, with the aid of 2 men, worked hard for some weeks to clear away the debris and burn the dead beasts...After so much rain the white ants destroyed the remaining portions of her buildings - a two-roomed cottage plus kitchen, dairy shed, fowl house - she pulled down all except the frame of the dwelling and rebuilt it. During the wet season last year, the floodwaters submerged her farm again destroying all her young fruit trees, about 40 in number - after all her trouble in getting the holes sunk 4 ft. deep and filling them up with good soil for the trees. The display of pluck on the part of Mrs. Watson and her son - who is very delicate - to improve the land after so much experimenting and labour in vain, is a credit to any settler...A few weeks ago, the son found the plough they lost in the flood during Sigma in a heap of debris down the Creek.<sup>30</sup>

In the 1890s of 50 farms that were partially or substantially under crop, nearly half (21) were owned by men (19) and women (2) who also worked elsewhere; many

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30 Report of Bailiff of Crown Lands on Selection or Farm, 24 January 1898, Dead Farm File, LAN/DF4826.

selectors took work on the railway and at the meat works or as carpenters, labourers, even oyster farmers "to keep the wolf from the door".<sup>31</sup> It was estimated that in 1891 nine-tenths of the selectors between Townsville and Reid River were also lengthsman.<sup>32</sup> This proportion seems somewhat exaggerated but does highlight the dual work of selectors - both men and their wives who had to take on the outdoor work during their husbands' absences - in order to stay on the land. The attraction of railway work lay in the substantial rebates for freight and personal travel, but such legitimate reductions to railway employees caused friction amongst "bona fide cockies" who had to make their living solely off the land.<sup>33</sup> By 1910, except in the Majors Creek area, the majority who had taken advantage of government land legislation and bought agricultural farms had sold their properties to neighbouring graziers.<sup>34</sup>

The disadvantages of Thuringowa's difficult physical environment were acknowledged, but they were not allowed to sway the belief that such factors were of peripheral

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31 The 19 men's occupations were as follows: 1 confectioner, 1 oyster farmer, 5 labourers, 1 meatworker, 1 fencer, 1 bushman, 2 lengthsman, 3 carpenters, 1 plumber, 2 woodcarters, 1 sawmill owner; 1 woman gave her occupation as farm assistant and 1 "worked elsewhere". Three other women owned working farms but gave their occupation as "widow", "single woman" and "nil"! Dead Farm File, LAN/DF4819-4913. See Henderson, *More than Rates, Roads and Rubbish: A History of Thuringowa Shire and its Council to 1985*, for a discussion of the women's work on the selection.

32 TH, 6 May 1891, p.20.

33 The lengthsman-selector's stores were carried free whilst he and his family paid only one-quarter of the fares; TH, 13 May 1891, p.20.

34 Although there were 27 properties listed as agricultural farms or homesteads in 1910 in the Townsville-Thuringowa district, at least two were in Townsville; some others were only used for dairying or grazing some cattle and horses. Statistics of Queensland, 1910.

importance and that the real problems lay elsewhere. In charge of the new Department of Agriculture which commenced in 1887 "to school primary producers into better methods of land use and stock-rearing",<sup>35</sup> Professor Shelton noted that the land in Thuringowa was "horribly poor but that there must be something else handicapping the farmers".<sup>36</sup>

Ignoring the environment as the basis of their problems, the citizens of Thuringowa and Townsville considered that there were three major reasons for the area's unproductivity.

The first was a belief that the right crop for Thuringowa's conditions had not yet been discovered. Settlers and businessmen thought that the establishment of a model farm in Thuringowa was "the very key to the problem as it would prove what they could grow".<sup>37</sup> A Stock Experimental Station and Farm was established but its research concentrated on cattle and sugar.<sup>38</sup> Thuringowa settlers were left to experiment with a procession of crops (see Table 4): mainly cotton (tried three times), sugar (four times), tobacco (three times), potatoes (twice), tomatoes, pineapples, citrus fruits (mainly oranges), watermelons and grain sorghum; and among minor crops pumpkins, beans, capsicums, cucumbers, egg fruit, zucchinis, bananas, rockmelons, grapes, pawpaws, peaches, maize, wheat, oaten hay, corn,

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35 Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, p.215; NQH, "The Agriculturalist", 7 October 1891, p.18.

36 NQH, "The Agriculturalist", 16 September 1891, p.19. An American, Shelton was appointed on the recommendation of the United States Department of Agriculture; Dignan, *Economic and Social Development in the Lower Burnett*, p.54

37 TH, "Public Meeting on Agriculture", 2 February 1889, p.19.

38 TH, 12 July 1890, p.16; 29 July 1891, p.17.

arrowroot, ginger, peanuts, yams, sissol and Townsville Stylo. The only crops to succeed beyond a few years were sugar (41 farms as at 1976) and watermelons in the Giru region; potatoes and other vegetable crops at Majors Creek-Woodstock; pineapples, watermelons and pumpkins at Rollingsstone-Mutarnee; and a few fruit orchards and small horticultural gardens dotted throughout the Shire.<sup>39</sup> In 1976, besides the cane farms and beef grazing properties involved in small crop farming as a side-line, there were 38 rural holdings on which the principal crops were vegetables and fruit.<sup>40</sup> Table 4 shows Thuringowa's persistent experimentation, even to the extent of planting crops that had previously failed.

A second reason commonly advanced for the lack of agricultural growth was the prevalence of poor farming practices. In some respects this conviction had substance. Farmers in the 1880s, 1930s and 1950s stubbornly maintained traditional practices. In 1889 they "displayed an entire absence of brain power because they still used methods followed in the old country".<sup>41</sup> According to the government-appointed Instructor in Agriculture, results from tobacco in the 1936-1937 season were very disappointing because growers did not take advantage of the early fall of rain in January, "the opinion prevailing among growers that the best results are obtained by planting in March, after the wet season".<sup>42</sup> Marketing was a major problem for potato farmers in the 1950s because of their persistence in planting traditional varieties which were subject to second growth characteristics that did not enhance

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39 See further on in this chapter for more details.

40 McIntyre and Associates, *Townsville Development Strategy Study*, 6.3 (iii), (vi)

41 TH, 2 February 1899, p.19.

42 Department of Primary Industry, *Annual Report, 1936-1937*, p.38

TABLE 4  
Crop Experimentation<sup>42</sup>

Crop	Locality	Period	No. Farms
sugar cane	Ross River	1860	1
	Lower Burdekin	1880+	3
	Toonpan	1894	1
	Giru	1916+	{ 57^
	Rollingstone/Mutarnee	1920s-1976	
cotton	Ross River	1860s	1
	Lansdowne Creek	1895	3
	Woodstock	1938-1950	5
	Giru	1942	**
	Woodstock	1965-1966	2
	Woodstock	1969-1970	1
tobacco	Majors Creek	1890s	1
	Majors Ck - Woodstock	1920s-1940	31#
	Majors Creek	1960-1969	6
potatoes	Cluden, Majors Creek	1880s-1900	few
	Majors Ck - Woodstock	1920s-1939	3
	Woodstock - Majors Ck	1940s+	13*
pineapples	Magnetic Island	1920s-1955	3
	Rollingstone	1920s+	20*
tomatoes	Majors Creek - Cluden	1880s-1900	few
	Majors Ck - Woodstock	1930s+	25*
bananas	Rollingstone & Giru	1920	few
		1940s-1963	11*
		1970	4
maize	Woodstock	1890s	1
	Woodstock	1920	2*
	Woodstock	1959-1977	
sorghum	Scattered	1959+	4*

\* average

^ average for the years 1945-1976

\*\* 100-120 acres

# peak for 1932

42 Statistics of Queensland, "Production", Table No.XVII, 1920, p.14K; McIntyre and Associates, Townsville Development Strategy Study, Tables 10.5,10.7; Statistics, Summary of Queensland Local Authority Areas, 1968-1977-1978;C&C, September 1942, p.19.

marketing prospects, and it was not until the 1960s that they were gradually replaced by varieties better suited to Thuringowa conditions.<sup>44</sup>

The farming expertise of the Chinese was condemned rather than copied.<sup>45</sup> In 1889 European-grown agriculture in Thuringowa was at a standstill; most of the vegetables and fruit were grown by local Chinese farmers who made £3 000 on their bumper potato crops, for example.<sup>46</sup> Meticulous cultivators, the Chinese market-farmers maintained competitive prices with southern imports.

Despite an increase in the number of lapsed leases, the community nevertheless hoped that Australian farmers would not be compelled to adopt the irrigation techniques of "the Celestials".<sup>47</sup> Racism was also the motive behind Professor Shelton warning that "vegetables grown by Chinamen were not fit for the men and women of Queensland to live on...that Chinese grown stuff wouldn't make the best sort of man".<sup>48</sup> Disdain for their

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44 McIntyre and Associates, *Townsville Development Strategy Study*, 6.3 (v).

45 See Henderson, *More than Rates, Roads and Rubbish: A History of Thuringowa Shire and its Council to 1985*, Chapters 5 and 10 for a discussion of the community's general non-acceptance of the Chinese.

46 TH, 2 February 1889, p.18; 20 September 1890, p.14. Bolton points out that small-scale cultivation was the traditional standby of the Chinese who monopolised market gardening in Australia in the 1880s and 1890s; *A Thousand Miles Away*, p.223.

47 TH, 2 February 1889, p.18. After telling the "parable" of the Chinese farmer who sank two wells which saw him through the subsequent drought and the European farmer who did not, Bolton concludes that "the capacity for inexpensive forethought was what distinguished the Chinese cultivator from the European"; *A Thousand Miles Away*, p.223.

48 NQH, 16 September 1891, p.19; 28 September 1891, p.17.

# Farming by Chinese Settlers.



Three scenes (farming scene; aerial view near Alligator Creek Meatworks; hand-made dam) of agricultural activities of Chinese settlers reflect their astuteness in location and ingenuity. (Courtesy Mr. Cordingley).





expertise and jealousy over their success prevented acceptance of Chinese farmers, even the two who were naturalised,<sup>49</sup> as participants in the agrarian ideal.

The irony of agrarianism was that, though it was hailed as morally and physically superior to other economic pursuits, farmers being seen as living "nearer God, nearer heaven",<sup>50</sup> it was never enshrined by Australia's balladists and writers (nor gained acceptance and influence) as were the bush myths of the pastoral proletariat. Henry Lawson's selectors and selections - "only a lifetime of incessant bullocking might have made a farm of the place"<sup>51</sup> - were too painfully real to be immortalised. His sardonic humour did not create national heroes: how could Tom Hopkins, whose one great regret after being admitted to a lunatic asylum following numerous hapless catastrophes was "that he wasn't found to be of unsound mind before he went up-country",<sup>52</sup> become part of the Australian legend? Steele Rudd's "Dad and Dave" gained some recognition for the battles won by the selectors but his "creations soon lost their earthy reality and richness...Caught by the seductive demands of urban success [Rudd] exploited the farcical in his farmers".<sup>53</sup> Local selectors wrote letters to-the-editor pointing out the genuine disadvantages and realities of selection and, to emphasise their points, signed themselves "A Poor Cocky". They used the label given by town and pastoral workers with cynical awareness for

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49 Dead Letter Files, LAN/DF4821,4828.

50 *Brisbane Courier*, 23 March 1872, p.6 cited in Waterson, *Squatter, Selector and Storekeeper*, p.99.

51 H. Lawson, "The Selection and a Sketch of Grandfather" in C. Mann (ed.) *The Stories of Henry Lawson*, 1st Series (Sydney, 1964), p.17

52 Lawson, "Settling on the Land" in Mann, *The Stories of Henry Lawson*, pp.78-81.

53 Waterson, *Squatter, Selector and Storekeeper*, p.107.

cocky or cockatoo farmer was synonymous with stupidity and meanness.<sup>54</sup> Highlighting reality rather than romanticising agrarianism produced figures of gloom and derision; the cocky's contributions and attributes never became part of the image of the "true Australian".

Marketing problems, rather than environmental unsuitability, were given as the third reason for Thuringowa's agricultural backwardness. The marketing of agricultural produce in North Queensland was always unsatisfactory. Bolton believes that it was the "want of markets, and not any innate dislike of farming [which] drove the younger generation off the land".<sup>55</sup> Until World War Two Thuringowa growers were faced with poor roads.<sup>56</sup> Shipping charges from the makeshift landings at the mouths of Thuringowa's major rivers to Townsville, Ingham or southern markets were exorbitant. Farmers lobbied the Government for a railway so that farm produce "of the finest quality" could become marketable.<sup>57</sup> When the railways came (1901 to Ayr and 1925 to Ingham), they made no difference.

Thuringowa farmers were faced not only with southern but local consumer prejudice against the little-known Thuringowa product.<sup>58</sup> The establishment of a public market became a "local burning question" in 1891 because it would benefit both the consumers, who would not have

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54 TH, 13 May 1891, p.20. "I represent that struggling and impecunious class known as settlers, or rather 'cockies'"; NQH, 16 January 1895, p.16.

55 Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, p.222.

56 See Chapter 15.

57 TH, 20 April 1889, pp.12,15; NQR, 22 June 1914, p.92. The northern railway from Townsville to Cairns was completed in 1924.

58 Angus Ferguson's "locally manufactured cigars, though of a really excellent quality, had to fight against prejudice"; NQH, 13 October 1897, p.21.

to buy imported goods at higher prices, and farmers who could sell locally, thereby avoiding high shipping freights and "the influence of importing houses in promoting their own wares".<sup>59</sup> A building was erected by the Townsville Municipal Council - the Thuringowa Divisional Board disdained involvement<sup>60</sup> - but the public market was "not a brilliant success". Saturday trading only soon became the norm, and within four years the market was defunct.<sup>61</sup> To merchants, an assured supply is crucial: they would buy from a great distance in preference to an uncertain local supply. Marketing monopolisation was also a problem.<sup>62</sup>

Technological advances also affected Thuringowa's farmers. For instance, the Magnetic Island pineapple farmers had to cart their crop to a wharf in Horseshoe Bay; thence by launch to Townsville; thence by road to the railway and by rail to Brisbane. (The Townsville market was too small). The pineapples were of superb quality, and ripened a fortnight or so before the first crop from southern growers. Consequently they commanded premium prices, which offset the very high transport and handling charges - until the development of artificial ripening which wiped out the one advantage of Magnetic Island growers.

Farmers also experienced failure because they planted crops which were currently profitable rather than

59 Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, p.231.

60 See Chapter 17.

61 NQH, 9 December 1891, p.10,

62 In 1895 a local farmer abandoned cotton as he could only get what it cost him to grow and harvest the crop from the Ipswich Cotton Company, the only buyers; NQH, 16 January 1895, p.16. Thuringowa potato farmers in the 1930s had great difficulty in disposing of their crop as all orders, including those for the local district, had to be placed in Brisbane; Department of Primary Industries, *Annual Report, 1937-1938*, p.66.

those which were perhaps more environmentally suitable. With the collapse of the particular crop's national or international market, the farmer languished. This often occurred after the farmer over-extended through capital improvements during the first few years of the crop's success and consequent prosperity. For example, the tobacco farmers in the early 1930s, a period briefly prosperous for them, spent from £65 to £120 erecting tobacco drying barns (see photographs).<sup>63</sup> Hit by the 1974 cattle slump, most pasture seed farms at Bluewater Creek ceased production; in their short-lived optimism some farmers had installed drying, grading and cleaning equipment.<sup>64</sup> It was difficult to judge when to upgrade facilities and practices in the interests of greater efficiency and profits. But Thuringowa's record of instability in agriculture should have counselled procrastination.

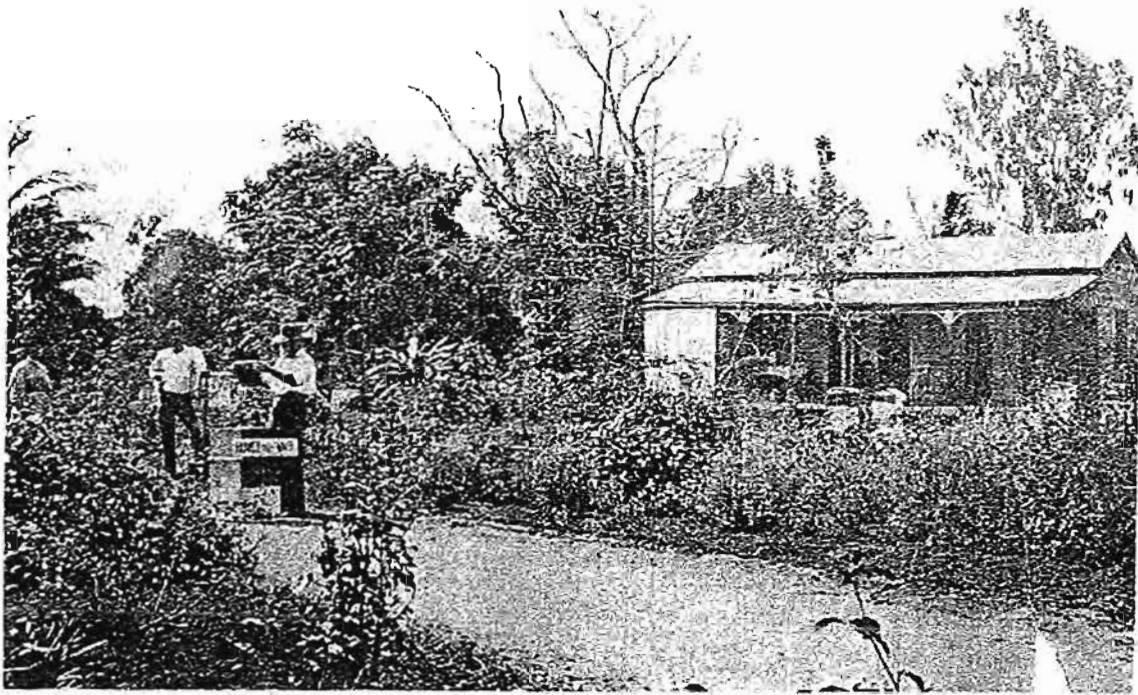
The economic history of Thuringowa epitomises the comparative failure of agricultural endeavour in Queensland. Farmers and businessmen finally admitted Thuringowa's limitations. The greatest inhibiting factor to the production of commercially viable crops was the short growing period brought about by high temperatures, a short wet season (which often caused water-logging of the soil and flooding), insufficient surface and underground water for irrigation and poor soils. With the exception of the younger alluvial land along the water courses, Thuringowa's soils were (and are) generally infertile mainly because phosphorous is grossly

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63 Four Italian farmers spent less: two put their previous brick-laying skills to use by making their bricks from material on their property and erecting the barn themselves; two others, Messrs. Nerotti and Checci, used local bush timber; *C&C*, August (1933), pp.25,27,29.

64 McIntyre and Associates, *Report: Townsville Development Strategy Study*, 7.4.

Agrarian Experiments in Thuringowa.



T.A. Gulliver experimented with a diversity of fruits and vegetables in a search for a viable crop for Thuringowa. (*Townsville Picture and Prose*, p.99).



Pineapples were not to be a successful widespread option either, as this Magnetic Island farmer discovered. (*Townsville Picture and Prose*, p.90).



ROLLINGSTONE STATION, INGHAM LINE, ON THE WAY TO PALUMA. ALTITUDE 130 FEET. 22/1/22.

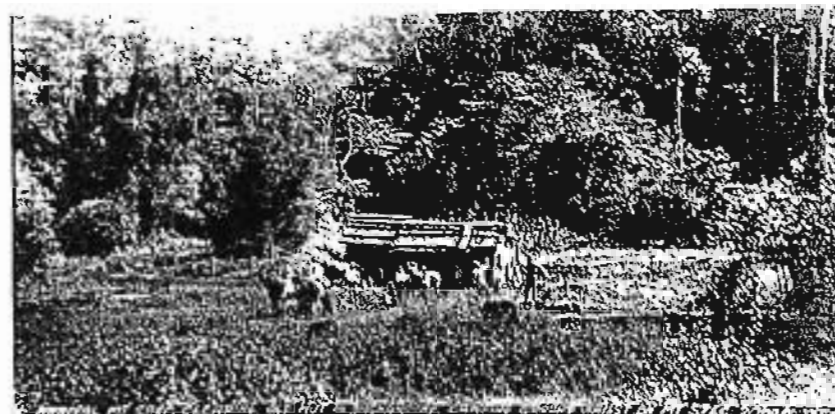


STOCKYARD (WHILE LAMM FOR CLOUDY SALWATER FALLS) 23/1/22.

Government Fact-Finding Tour of the Rollingstone-Paluma Area was initiated by the desire to open land for agriculturalists. Notice the incongruous formality of these officials' attire. (Courtesy, Thuringowa City Library).



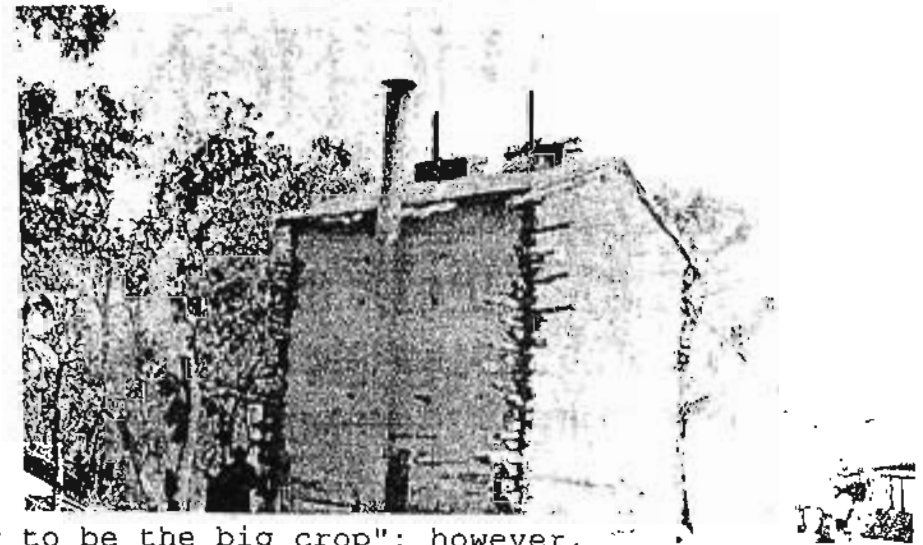
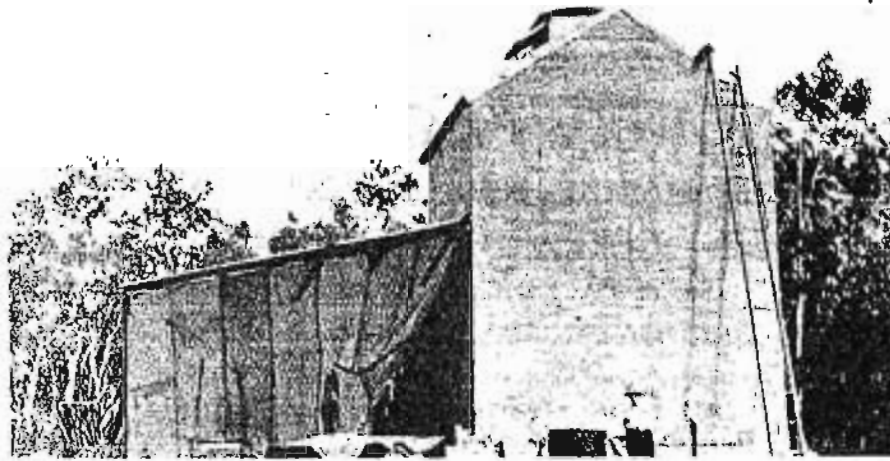
THE PARTY ENJOYING A WELL EARNED REST 24/1/22.



WAGON LOADED WITH HAY 25/1/22.



Four Varieties of Tobacco Kilns at Major Creek.



In 1930's, tobacco was "going to be the big crop": however, these tobacco kilns stand testimony to yet another agrarian failure in Thuringowa. (Interview with Richard Moyses; *Townsville Advertiser*, 9 June 1983, p.14). (Cummins & Campbell's *Monthly Magazine*, August 1933, pp.25,27,29).

deficient and nitrogen levels are very low.<sup>65</sup> In addition, the realities of market forces were conclusive. Firstly, the precariousness of agriculture's dependence on other industries was inescapable. Secondly, and more importantly, there was the phasing out of sugar cane, a crop which, because of it had been grown successfully for 50 years and because the industry had received government protection since the 1870s, seemed sacrosanct. It took a century for the agrarian dream to die: agricultural failure had not resulted in the abandonment of the myth.

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65 McIntyre and Associates, *Townsville Development Strategy Study*, 3.11.



#### CHAPTER 4

##### The Sugar Industry - 1866-1985

The only one of the many agricultural crops grown successfully in Thuringowa for any length of time was sugar cane. However it was only in restricted areas of Thuringowa that sugar cane did succeed, and even there its success was precarious as both its sugar cane areas were on the fringe of the viable Burdekin and Hinchinbrook sugar districts; in the 1970s, the Government transferred the latter's peaks to Hinchinbrook. For such success, sugar cane had to overcome most of the difficulties that sank other agricultural attempts. The basis on which it was grown at first was the antithesis of the "agrarian dream" and it was a deep-seated belief that it could be grown by no other means than plantations worked with imported black labour. The reasons why it alone succeeded help to explain the failure of all other crops.

Among others, there were three major factors distinguishing sugar cane from other crops. Firstly, the end-product, raw sugar, is a uniform substance which will withstand long storage and transport. Secondly, there was/is a large market for it in Australia and abroad. Thirdly, Queensland governments were determined to see it succeed, as the only basis for closer settlement of tropical areas, and gave it a range of special measures of assistance. These included experimental stations working continually on peak problems and producing new strains of cane.

The history of the sugar industry in Thuringowa differs only marginally from that of other sugar-growing districts in North Queensland. On the whole, and in contrast to the beef cattle industry, there was less industrial agitation. Thuringowa's farmers, millers and labourers generally eschewed the ultimate expression of

dissatisfaction - strikes or lock-outs. One reason for the difference was size: the number of cane farms and the general acreage of the farms in Thuringowa were smaller than in either the adjacent Burdekin and Hinchinbrook areas or the far northern districts. The farms were located on the northern and southern borders of Thuringowa and most farms usually employed up to five cutters.<sup>1</sup> Isolated in small gangs, Thuringowa's cutters lacked the industrial strength of the bigger and more numerous cane gangs of other northern areas. Another more important reason was that Thuringowa's Invicta Mill was seen as "our" mill. In contrast to sugar areas that were dominated by monolithic mill owners like Consolidated Sugar Refineries (CSR) or the Drysdale-Australian Estates consortium whose ownership and head management were based in southern Australia or overseas, Invicta Mill was owned by local farmers and business people and operated by a Board of Directors drawn from the district.<sup>2</sup>

There are three phases in the history of the sugar industry in Thuringowa. The first period, which began in

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1 The number of family members who worked cutting cane was also a factor in the number of cane cutters employed. Interviews with Colin Pace, canefarmer, Rollingstone, 6 March 1989 and Mr. and Mrs. A. Jeffrey, Mr. Brian Jeffrey, canefarmers and Mr. Ron Carty, ex-canecutter, Giru, 7 March 1989.

2 This was so until recently. For a complete discussion of the sugar cane industry in Thuringowa see Henderson, *More than Rates, Roads and Rubbish: A History of Thuringowa Shire and its Council to 1985*, Chapters 6 and 7.

1863, was one of a plantation economy<sup>3</sup> based on the segmentation of large independent plantations, each operating as a self-sufficient unit<sup>4</sup> and relying on the exploitation of imported non-European indentured servants for most of its labour requirements. As a result, a complex and highly structured class/caste system existed in Thuringowa and other Queensland sugar areas. This phase co-existed with the next phase which saw a technical shift to central mills, each serving a district of small cane farms, which began before 1888 when Thuringowa lost its sugar lands to the Ayr Divisional Board. The second period saw a realisation of the obstinate vision of settling the land with yeoman farmers. It began when the Shire won back the sugar area just north of the Haughton River as a consequence of the Thuringowa-Ayr boundary re-alignment of 1916.<sup>5</sup> By 1916 cane was being grown on family farms: the gang labour employed seasonally for cutting, was white and unionised; crushing was being done in fewer, very large mills. This transformation was not brought about simply by market forces, but by conscious government policy backed by

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3 Thuringowa and other Queensland sugar plantations were not examples of a "classical plantation economy" because such an economy is dominated by an overseas "metropolis where finance is generated, decisions made and managerial and technical skill recruited. The colonial segment merely provides the locus of production". It was also different to the classical plantation economies of Jamaica, Fiji, Mauritius and British Guiana because Queensland's sugar industry was only one component within a diversified economy. K. Saunders, *Workers in Bondage: The Origins and Bases of Unfree Labour in Queensland 1824-1916* (St. Lucia, Brisbane, 1982), p.xviii. Also see George Beckford, *Persistent Poverty. Underdevelopment in Plantation Economies in the Third World* (New York, 1972).

4 Plantation and estate have precise and different meanings in Queensland. Plantation was a large sugar growing unit which crushed its own crop in its own mill. Estate was similar in all respects except that it depended for crushing on another's mill.

5 The latter area, centred on Giru, was ceded to Ayr Divisional Board in 1893. See Map 2.

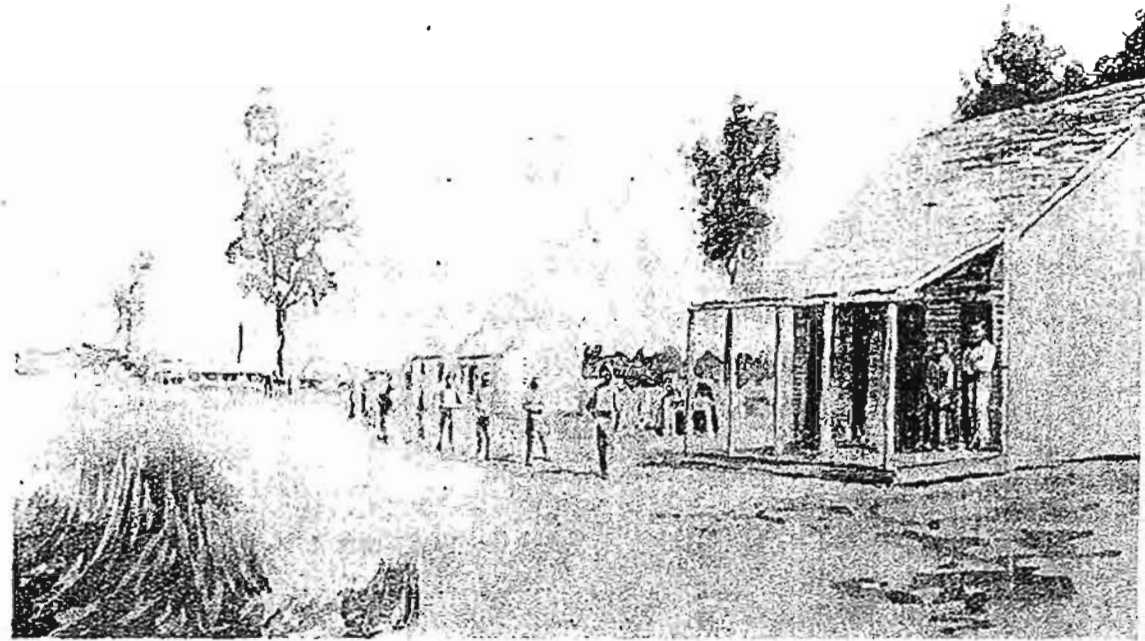
legislative sanctions and large economic incentives.<sup>6</sup> The second phase of the sugar industry in Thuringowa ended and the third began in the late 1960s with the mechanisation of planting, cutting and loading cane. Not only did this produce changes within the industry but the social fabric of the farm and the sugar town of Giru altered with the end of the era of canecutters. There was one major factor common to all three periods: the escalation of government protection in an industry that was increasingly vital to Queensland's economic stability.

The first attempt at sugar cane cultivation in Thuringowa failed because of environmental and marketing factors. Black and Towns planted Thuringowa's first crop of sugar cane on the banks of Ross River in 1866 in order to fulfil the terms of a grant of crown land under the Coffee and Sugar Cultivation Act. In 1867 they erected a sugar mill. Towns & Co. could have withstood the hurricane which flattened the 1870 crop but not the declining prices caused by the expansion of the beet sugar industry in Europe.<sup>7</sup> The second try at cane growing proved successful. Jarvisfield and Towns's pastoral properties in south-eastern Thuringowa were auctioned after his death in 1873. Costs made the Lower

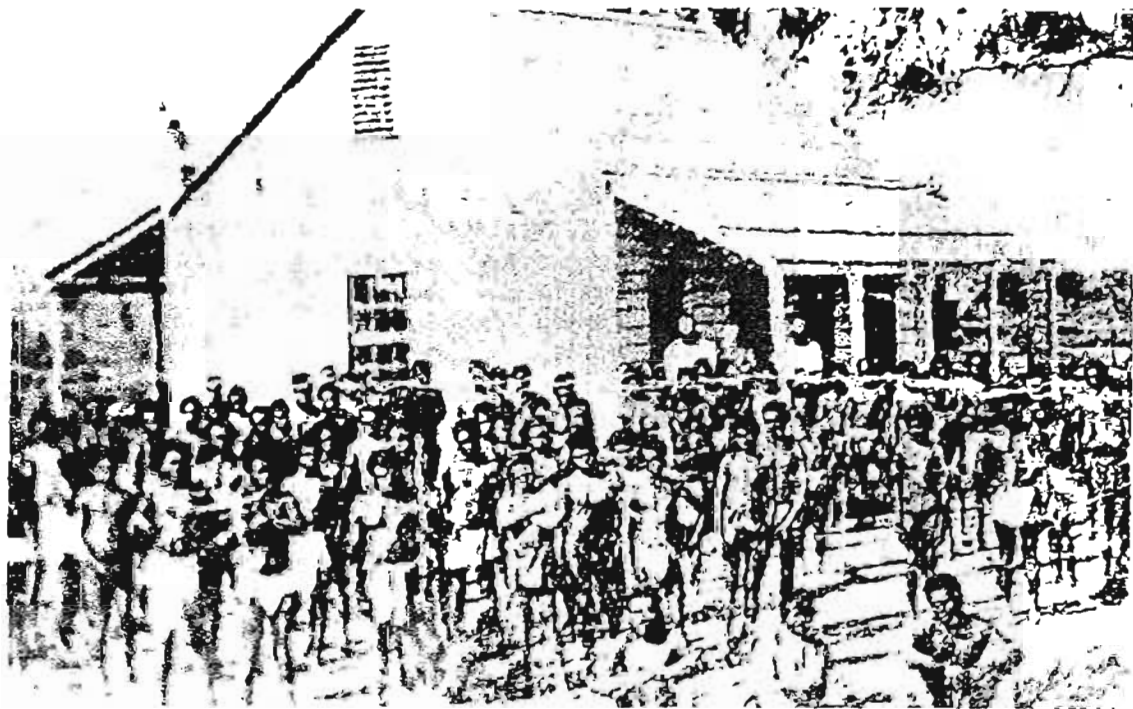
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6 The trend towards large central mills was worldwide, the result of economies of scale at that stage of the production cycle, but central mills co-exist with large plantations and gang labour in many sugar-producing countries to this day.

7 PDT, 12 March 1870. Lewis, *A History of the Ports of Queensland*, p.27. Black had returned to England in May 1867; Black & Co. was replaced by Towns & Co. with Spencer Frederick Walker, previously head clerk, as manager; Gibson-Wilde, *Gateway to a Golden Land: Townsville to 1884*. Studies in North Queensland History, No.7 (Townsville, 1984), pp.76,77. Walker was a Member of the first Thuringowa Divisional Board.



Black and Towns were the first to use South Sea Islander labour in Thuringowa at both their Boiling Down Works (top) and cotton plantation (bottom).



Unlike other towns which commenced with convict labour, Townsville was established with the use of Islanders in hard outside labouring jobs. (Top: *Townsville Bulletin Jubilee Souvenir*, 27 August 1913, Oxley Library No.22077; Bottom: *Cummins and Campbell's Monthly Magazine*, May 1931, p.17).

Burdekin a field for large scale investment initially.<sup>8</sup> Thuringowa lost these sugar plantations in 1888 to Ayr.

Both these ventures into sugar assumed that cheap Pacific Islander labour would outweigh Thuringowa's problems of a difficult climate, the need for irrigation to augment the low rainfall and fluctuating markets. There was another major justification for black labour. It was axiomatic that Europeans were physically incapable of sustained good health if they worked outdoors in the tropical sun: "...they were not intended by nature to work in a moist, sweltering heat" at hard labouring tasks

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8 A.C. MacMillan was the first to commence growing and milling at Airdmillan in 1879; British shareholders invested £200 000 to pay for technological improvements in sugar milling and to meet the cost of steam-ploughs which were needed to break up the Burdekin delta's virgin loams for planting. Through over-capitalisation and extravagance, Airdmillan ceased crushing after less than three years' operation; R. Connolly, *John Drysdale and the Burdekin* (Sydney, 1964), pp.83,84. Other sugar estates and mills quickly followed: James MacKenzie at Seaforth in 1880, Colin Munro at Drynie in 1881, the Young brothers at Kalamia in 1882 and, in the same year, John Spiller and Henry Brandon at Pioneer. John Drysdale became managing director of Pioneer after its purchase by his four brothers in 1884. Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, pp.136,237; J. Peake, *A History of the Burdekin* (Ayr, 1952), p.5. By 1886 and 1888 respectively, the Drynie and over-capitalised Airdmillan mills had ceased production and in 1898 Australian Estates Company took over Airdmillan, Seaforth and Kalamia and appointed John Drysdale as manager of the reconstituted Kalamia Estate; the eldest Drysdale, William, was an influential member of the Board of the Australian Estates Company; I. Robertson, *Pioneer Sugar Mill - 100 Years* (Paddington, Queensland, 1983), pp.4,5. In 1887, Drynie was converted to a condensed milk factory and operated for several years; thus Thuringowa had the first condensed milk manufacturing plant in Australia; C.H. O'Brien, "History of the Australian Sugar Industry: The Lower Burdekin District", *Australian Sugar Journal*, June 16 (1952), p.240.

such as cutting and trashing cane.<sup>9</sup>

Black and Towns were the first to use Pacific Islander labour in North Queensland. Eventually, over 100 worked their sugar and cotton plantations (see Photograph).<sup>10</sup> Between 1863, the beginning of the labour trade, and 1904, the end of recruitment, 62 475 Pacific Islanders were indentured to work three-year terms in Queensland, mainly on sugar plantations.<sup>11</sup> Thuringowa's planters employed a multi-racial work force which was common to all sugar areas and maintained a ratio of approximately five Pacific Islanders employed for every non-Pacific Islander.<sup>12</sup> The planters prophesised bankruptcy if permanently deprived of

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9 *The Sugar Question in Queensland*, p.18. Also see, A. Birch, "The Organisation and Economy of Pacific Island Labour in the Australian Sugar Industry 1863-1906", *Business Archives and History*, VI, 1, February (1966), p.201 and L. Roberts, "The Plantation Era in North Queensland: Centenary Year Flashback", *North Australian Monthly*, September (1959), p.9: "Europeans could not engage in hard physical labour in a tropical or sub-tropical region without complete collapse in health".

10 In January 1866, 24 Pacific Islanders were imported from Sandwich and Tanna Islands specifically to work the Thuringowa's sugar and cotton plantations. Hodel, "First Impressions of Townsville", *C&C*, April 1931, p.51. Others were engaged to work in the *beche-de-mer* industry and on the larger European mixed agricultural farms such as Spencer Walker's "Farleigh" which, by 1879, had 15 acres under pineapples, bananas, coffee, tapioca and citrus fruit trees; "Viator", "S.F. Walker, A Townsville Pioneer", *C&C*, October 1931, p.37.

11 64% were from the New Hebrides and the remainder mostly from the Solomon Islands; there were a few Polynesians and approximately 2 800 Papuans most of whom were returned when it was discovered that they had been kidnapped or did not understand their contract; Charles H. Price and Elizabeth Baker, "Origins of Pacific Island Labourers in Queensland 1863-1904: A Research Note", *Journal of Pacific History*, 11, 1-2 (1976), p.111.

12 Calculated from figures in Connolly, *John Drysdale and the Burdekin*, pp.65,79 and H. Easterby, *The Queensland sugar Industry: An Historical Review* (Brisbane, n.d.), p.99.

coloured labour as legislated by Griffith's 1885  
*Exclusion Act*.<sup>13</sup>

The Act allowed the sugar industry five years in which to make alternative labour arrangements as licences to recruit Pacific Islanders would not be issued after 1890. Griffith aimed to abolish indentured coloured labour and to prevent the emergence of a permanent caste society; in its place, he hoped to establish an independent European yeomanry on small sugar farms. Griffith's vision was given further legislative assistance through the 1884 land resumption Act and the creation of a central sugar mill system.<sup>14</sup> Although most planters opposed the immediate implementation of the central mill proposal,<sup>15</sup> the separation of cane growing and sugar manufacture was already occurring in the industry because costs of new milling technology made specialisation increasingly necessary for economic viability.<sup>16</sup>

Griffith's agrarianism floundered for economic reasons. The 1880s were difficult for Thuringowa's

13 TDB, 3 November 1887, p.2.

14 The problems of the 1885 Act were sorted out in the 1893 *Sugar Works Guarantee Act*. The government guaranteed debentures taken out on a mortgage of the central mill and the lands of selectors supplying it with cane; management was vested in a committee of directors elected by the farmers but the Government could take over the running of the mill if substantial losses were incurred. Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, pp.153, 233; Clive Moore, "Queensland Sugar Industry from 1860 to 1900" in B.J. Dalton (Ed.) *Lectures on North Queensland History* (Townsville, 1974), p.40.

15 Central Mills were established at Racecourse and North Eton in Mackay.

16 In the Herbert River district, for instance, the separation of manufacture and farming was already being promoted by Colonial Sugar which offered small growers seven year contracts in 1884; Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, p.154.



planters and Queensland's sugar industry generally. There was a disastrous slump in the world sugar market, the price falling from £21 per ton in 1882 to £13 per ton in 1884.<sup>17</sup> Thuringowa cane growers found it difficult to compete on the Australian market with the government-protected beet sugar industry of Western Europe and the cheaper West Indies and Javanese grown sugar.<sup>18</sup> As well, they suffered greatly from the general outbreak of cane-grub between 1886 and 1888 and the drought of 1888. White labour was difficult to obtain because of the lure of the mining fields and the racist objection to "blackman's work". Any European who did cane cutting and labouring work was castigated as a "mean white" performing "niggers' work".<sup>19</sup> When white labour was obtained, it was expensive and unreliable.<sup>20</sup>

It was not just the big planters whom Griffith had to convert to the ideal of a European yeoman economy in the sugar industry. By 1888, when Thuringowa lost its sugar areas, three-quarters of the North's sugar growers employing Pacific Islanders were small cane farmers.<sup>21</sup> Their reasons were economic. In 1888 Thuringowa plantation owners and farmers paid the following wages:

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17 Robertson, *Pioneer Mill - 100 Years*, p.4.

18 Lewis, *A History of the Ports of Queensland*, p.81.

19 No white man was a gain to North Queensland if he could find no better work than tending cane; A.W. Stirling, *The Never Never Land, A Ride in North Queensland* (London, 1884), p.111. See Kay Saunders, "Masters and Servants: the Queensland Sugar Workers' Strike 1911" in A. Curthoys and A. Markus (Eds) *Who are our Enemies? Racism and the Working Class in Australia* (Sydney, 1978).

20 During a five-month period in 1887 MacKenzie employed 67 Europeans at Seaforth: seven stayed one week each; another seven did not even last one week; the record was 22 weeks; the average length of employment was six weeks and three days; TDB, 3 November 1887, p.2.

21 They usually employed only two or three Islanders. Royal Commission, 1889, Appendices 7, 12, 14 and 19.

Malays received about £30, Cingalese £40, the Chinese £55, Europeans £75 and Pacific Islanders a mere £6 per year. Overall, Pacific Islanders cost £26 per annum each which included the Islander's recruitment, keep, wages and repatriation.<sup>22</sup>

Planters and farmers alike blamed Griffith's anti-coloured labour legislation for their economic troubles and clamoured for retention of the labour trade. In order to revive confidence in the North's sugar industry among farmers, millers and their financial backers, the Griffith and McIlwraith coalition government enacted the *Extension Act* of 1892 which allowed the reintroduction of cheap indentured Pacific Islander labour.<sup>23</sup> It was left to the Commonwealth Government to enforce the abolition of the trade by 1904 and the repatriation of most Pacific Islanders by 1907 in keeping with its ideal of a white Australia. 1 654 Islanders were granted exemption from deportation.<sup>24</sup> Connolly calculates that approximately

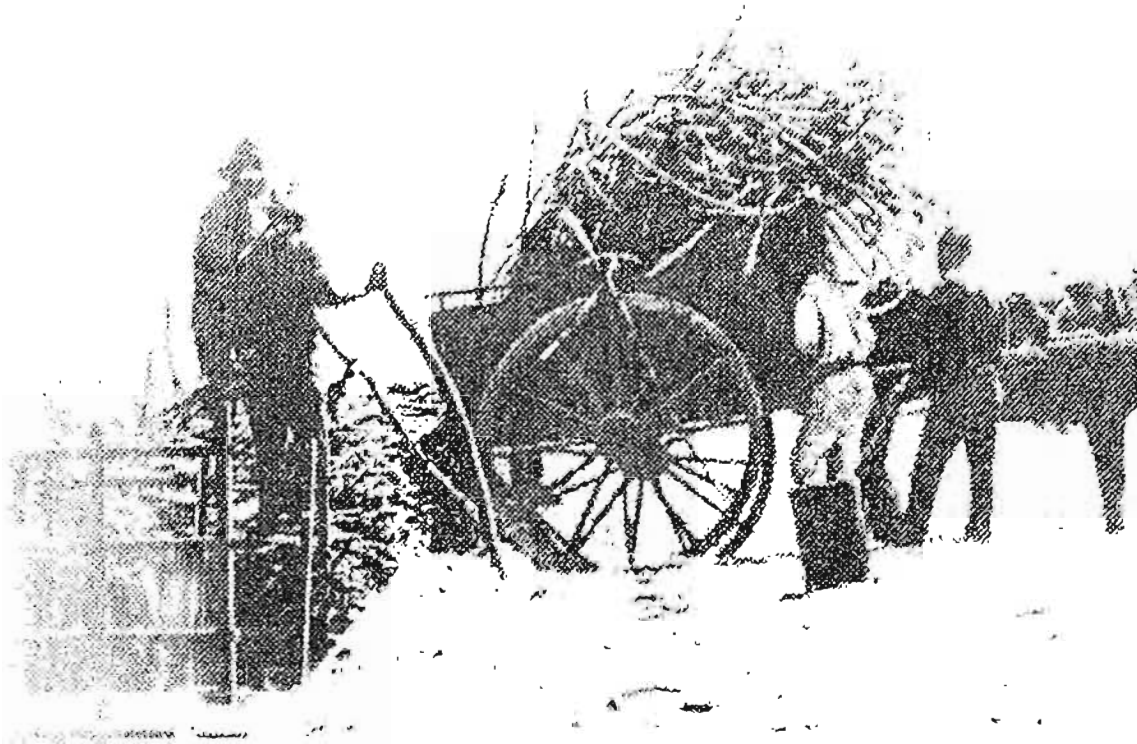
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22 Connolly, *John Drysdale and the Burdekin*, p.79. For a thorough discussion of South Sea Islanders in the sugar industry in Thuringowa, including working conditions, lifestyle and high mortality figures, see Henderson, *More than Rates, Roads and Rubbish: A History of Thuringowa Shire and its Council to 1985*, Chapter 6.

23 A steady expansion of the industry occurred after 1892 and by 1902 the acreage in North Queensland had doubled. However, although Burdekin sugar cultivation rose from 2 555 acres in 1892 to 5 208 acres in 1898, it quickly dwindled to 3 156 in 1902 due to consecutive years of below-average rainfall. Bolton, *a Thousand Miles Away*, pp.233,239.

24 At least 900 of these were in the Mackay region. 146 of the 1 654 left Queensland between 1910 and 1914. Islanders were exempt from deportation if they had arrived before October 1879, had lived in Queensland continuously for 20 years, would be at risk because of their marriage to spouses from different islands, were married to non-Islanders, were old, or held freehold land. Corris, "'White Australia' in Action: The Repatriation of Pacific Islanders from Queensland". *Historical Studies. Australia and New Zealand*, XV, lviii, (1972), p.243.

South Sea Islander Labourers in the Canefields in Thuringowa region, 1880.



South Sea Islanders were engaged in the heaviest aspects of the industry: they axed, crashed, wooped, cut and loaded the cane - Pioneer Mill 1880. (*Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 27 December 1983, p.9).



30 Islanders continued to live in the Burdekin.<sup>25</sup> They quickly became fringe dwellers living at a bare subsistence level in a society that enacted legislation to keep the work force white.<sup>26</sup>

Small-scale farming during the second phase (1916-late 1960s) of the history of the sugar industry in Thuringowa was established by 1916. The 1910 *Land Act* provided the impetus after slow land sales: between 1912 and 1914, 40 farms were taken up in the Haughton River district.<sup>27</sup> However, agrarianism in Thuringowa demanded enormous faith.<sup>28</sup> It also needed substantial finance.

In 1918 farmers formed the Haughton Sugar Company Limited and acquired the Invicta Mill with an authorised capital of £105 000 in £1 shares. After paying a nominal deposit, the farmers guaranteed a yearly repayment of £5 000. Thuringowa and Burdekin farmers bought shares and agreed to levies on their cane, for which they

25 One was married to an Aboriginal woman, several were married to women from other islands and the rest had been in the Burdekin since the farms had belonged within the boundaries of the Thuringowa Divisional Board; Connolly, *John Drysdale and the Burdekin*, p.118.

26 Many were harassed by government and union officials who attempted to force them out of the sugar industry; Section B, *Black Oral History*. For an examination of this "squeezing-out" process see Saunders, *Workers in Bondage*, pp.172-183.

27 Some of these farms were in Ayr Shire. *NQR*, 23 February 1914, p.31; 28 September 1914, p.20. Although the railway from Townsville to Ayr (the Ayr Tramway) was built in 1901, land sales were disappointingly slow and it was not until 1905 that the first consignment of cane was sent to Pioneer Mill to be crushed. See Chapters 5 and 9 for details of the Ayr Tramway.

28 "Generally speaking, the Haughton River area is too dry for cane growing, and there needs to be some proper system of irrigation...Some farms cannot find water to irrigate. But courage is not wanting amongst the farmers, and that seems to act as a fertiliser"; "Viator", "Invicta; Sugar Mill: Interesting Record", *C&C*, February 1934, p.33.

received debentures; in 1920, with a bank overdraft of £23 670, the farmers agreed to a further two-year levy on their cane.<sup>29</sup> Local businessmen also bought shares, though the commitment by business interests in Townsville to the economic development of Thuringowa was not as high as was hoped.<sup>30</sup> Preferential shares did not receive dividends until 1932 and dividends on the first ordinary shares were paid after the 1937 season.<sup>31</sup> The Thuringowa Shire Council praised the settlers for "showing such confidence in the possibilities of their district by finding the money necessary to purchase and erect the Invicta Mill".<sup>32</sup>

Government protection of the sugar industry increased through price fixing, the creation of a Sugar Board, and the commencement of the Commonwealth's embargo on "black-grown sugar".<sup>33</sup> These measures and some good seasons gave an impetus to Thuringowa's sugar industry

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29 Farmers whose cane would go to Invicta Mill paid a 3/6 per ton levy and the other Burdekin farmers paid 1/- per ton. Besides the Mill, the Company had to erect accommodation for over 100 men (including those who worked in the Mill's blacksmith and carpenter shops and sawmill), as well as the usual conveniences which included a reading room and social hall; "Viator", "The Invicta Sugar Mill: A Successful Enterprise", C&C, December 1932, p.68.

30 John Drysdale gave solid support to the farmers' enterprise by advancing £9 100 against their levies, standing guarantor for the overdraft and directing 11 917 tons of Inkerman's bountiful crop to Invicta Mill for its first crush in 1921. 212 tons came from the Ingham district and the Haughton provided 24 906 tons from its farms; Connolly, *John Drysdale and the Burdekin*, pp.173,174.

31 C.H. O'Brien, "The History of the Australian Sugar Industry", *The Australian Sugar Journal*, 15 September 1952, p.453.

32 Minutes, 10 December 1919, 11 THU/D5.

33 These were legislated in 1920 and 1922, and continually renewed; Easterby, *The Queensland Sugar Industry*, pp.61-63,143-147.

which steadily expanded. In 1928 just under half the Invicta Mill's supply came from the Giru-Shirbourne-Cromarty area and the adjacent Ayr Shire district; the remainder was supplied by 115 growers on the Townsville-Ingham Railway Line at Rollingsstone and Mutarnee, the majority in Hinchinbrook Shire.<sup>34</sup>

The problems associated with the industry's over-production resulted in the "peak-year" scheme. Invicta Mill's future output was limited to its highest output of sugar since 1921 (1915 for other mills). This ensured stability for farmers, in terms of a guaranteed tonnage of cane, and for workers in terms of employment for a permanent minimum number of cane cutters and mill workers. However, because the peak-year system slowed expansion, the ability of wage workers to become yeoman farmers was reduced further.

During the first 25 years of the second phase (1916-1960) of the sugar industry in Thuringowa, the question of non-British labour and ownership in North Queensland's sugar industry continued to be a matter for debate by all Australians. It was argued that not only agrarianism but also the right to work in the sugar industry, more specifically as cane cutters, were the Anglo-Australian's prerogative.

By the time Thuringowa regained the sugar lands north of the Haughton in 1916, State and Commonwealth legislation had done much to facilitate the creation of a

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34 *Australian Sugar Journal*, XX, 1, April (1928).

Invicta Mill, established in 1921, led to the birth of Giru. It experienced less industrial action than other Northern mills mainly because it was considered to be "our" mill by local shareholders and had fewer large cane cutting gangs. (*Cummins and Campbell's Monthly Magazine*, May 1938, p.45).





"white" sugar industry.<sup>35</sup> With the increasing influx of Italians into North Queensland sugar areas, both the 1925 Queensland Ferry Report and the Commonwealth 1930 Sugar Inquiry investigated Italian involvement in the sugar industry. Ferry's conclusions were built on bias and superficial investigations.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, the findings of the 1930 Sugar Inquiry evinced a Commonwealth interest in quietly desensitising the whole issue. Hence the brief, generalised and not unfavourable comments by the Inquiry regarding Italian land ownership and standards of living.<sup>37</sup> Three non-government efforts to secure monopolistic ownership and labour by Anglo-Australians were union agitation and regulations, and the "Gentlemen's Agreement" and the British Preference League both of which began in 1930.

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35 That which was "alien" and "foreign", that is, a non-British migrant was, for the purpose of rhetoric at least, also "non-white". The Commonwealth's *Sugar Bounty Act* of 1905 provided bounties for sugar grown solely by white labour; Queensland's *Sugar Cultivation Act* of 1913, reinforced by the Queensland Industrial Court Awards of 1915 and 1919, legislated to restrict "coloured aliens" from owning cane farms or labouring as cane cutters. Clauses in the 1913 *Sugar Cultivation Act* pertained to the administration of a dictation test to non-English speaking persons who wished to become farmers. Clause Six of the constitution of the Australian Workers' Union (AWU) debarred Kanakas, Chinese, Japanese and Afghans or coloured aliens (Italians were put into this category) from becoming members. L. Henderson, "Economic or Racist - Australia's Reactions to Italians in North Queensland, 1921-1939" in Reynolds, *Race Relations*, p.328. For the period 1900-1910 see Doug Hunt, "Exclusivism and Unionism: Europeans in the Queensland Sugar Industry 1900-1910" in Curthoys and Markus, *Who Are Our Enemies? Racism and the Australian Working Class*, pp.80-95.

36 Royal Commission on the Social and Economic Effects of Southern European Emigrants in North Queensland, QPP, III (1925), pp.36,38,41,42. hereafter Ferry Report. For an examination of the Ferry Report see L. Henderson, *Italians in the Hinchinbrook Shire, 1921-1939*, B.Ed.B.A. (Hons.) Thesis, James Cook University of North Queensland (Townsville, 1978).

37 1930 Sugar Inquiry Committee Report, QPP, III, Session (1929-1930-1931), pp.12,12. Also see Henderson, "Economic or Racist?", pp.346,347.



Unionists' racial prejudices took precedence over wider issues of class consciousness and economic exploitation. As unskilled work became harder to get due to the Great Depression, white wage labourers moved into the sugar industry with proprietorial aggressiveness. The former champions of the view that cane cutting was "niggers' work" and, as such, degrading to their racial pride, now maintained that

the contention that the "lower races" were physiologically suited to menial and arduous tropical agricultural labour had always only been a ruse on the part of the planters to maintain a particular social structure.<sup>38</sup>

Workers also argued against the assertion that Southern Europeans were better suited to tropical work than Anglo-Australians. This was only another version of the capitalist plot to swamp North Queensland with cheap labour. It is also relevant that, although cane cutting was always very hard work, the piecework system coupled with industrial awards and vigilant unions meant that rates of pay were relatively high.

The "Gentlemen's Agreement" in 1930 was effective as a means of halting further movement towards a perceived monopoly in the sugar industry by Southern European farmers and cutters. It was based on the theory that each mill area should have a share of ethnic-Australian cutters proportionate to the number of ethnic-Australian farmers; that the percentage of British cutters was to be maintained at the 1929 sign-on level; that mill areas where the percentage of British cutters was below 75% should increase the percentage to at least 75% for the

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38 Saunders, *Workers in Bondage*, p.157.

1931 and subsequent seasons.<sup>39</sup> Thuringowa's farmers, through their representatives on the state and federal canegrowers organisations were co-signatories of the Gentlemen's Agreement with the Australian Workers Union for two major reasons. Firstly, in order to obtain renewal of the embargo, they had to placate southern manufacturing interests and the general public by assuring the Government that they would make "every effort to encourage a higher percentage of British-born to come into the sugar industry".<sup>40</sup> Secondly, they wished to avoid further industrial action by the rank and file.<sup>41</sup> Giru and Rollingstone cane farmers, 22 of whom were naturalised Italians,<sup>42</sup> could afford neither the cessation of the embargo nor strikes because there was still sizeable debts on their farms and the purchase, erection and operation of the Invicta Mill. Moreover, the farmers and Mill had been adversely affected by

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39 The "Gentlemen's Agreement" appeared equitable, offering no racial slight to the Italians - at least on the surface. However it excluded from the 75% all naturalised Italians, that is Australian citizens; naturalised Italians were expected to fulfil the obligations of an Australian citizen but were denied the rights of such citizenship. On the other hand, naturalised and, more significantly, unnaturalised Northern Europeans were not excluded from the 75% British quota. "Sugar Industry Employment of Foreigners 1931-1933", item J325/7/1 of CRS A461 (Australian Archives); *Herbert River Express*, 19 November 1935, p.4. The AWU and the Queensland Cane Growers Association repeatedly refused to change this ruling although the Australian Sugar Producers Association opposed it; *Daily Standard*, 15 May 1933; *Herbert River Express*, 18 March, 18 April 1933.

40 Annual Conference Queensland Cane Growers' Association, March 1934, p.89.

41 Annual Conference Queensland Cane Growers' Association, March 1934, p.89.

42 Calculated from Census statistics for Birthplace and Nationality, 1933 and Council Rate Books, 1933.

variable seasons due to rainfall fluctuations.<sup>43</sup> Naturalised Italian canefarmers could not afford to allow ethnic loyalty to subvert their principal reason for emigrating: economic wellbeing.<sup>44</sup> The class division between workers' interests and employer interests operated with as much vehemence between Italian worker and Italian cane farmer as it did between their non-Italian counterparts. For non-Italians, another factor was the racist belief in the superiority of the Nordic races and the inability of Italians to assimilate to Australian society even when naturalised - "once an Italian always an Italian".<sup>45</sup>

The British Preference League commenced with four men at Ayr in February 1930, a few months before the Gentlemen's Agreement was inaugurated. Within a year, a branch was formed at Giru and in nine other sugar areas.<sup>46</sup> Its ideal was "a British Australia with all

43 Dividends on preferential shares were not paid until 1932 and on ordinary shares until after the 1937 season; C.H. O'Brien, "The History of the Australian Sugar Industry: The Haughton District". *The Australian Sugar Journal*, 15 September 1952, p.453. The 1923, 1926 and 1929 crops were poor; Easterby, *The Queensland Sugar Industry*, pp.62,64,66.

44 To improve the status and income of their families were high priorities not easily relinquished; L. Henderson, "Italians in the Hinchinbrook Shire, 1921-1939: Motives for Migration" in B.J. Dalton, *Lectures on North Queensland History*, 3rd Series (Townsville, 1979), pp.197-214.

45 "The descendants of the newcomers will make good Australians, says Mr. Smooth-it-away. Don't you believe it"; *TDB*, 4 June 1924, p.10; Italian newspapers quoted comments from Australians: "If he [the Italian] would only 'Australianize' himself all would be well"; *Il Giornale Italiano*, 16 April 1932.

46 The nine were Innisfail, Cairns, Babinda, Gordonvale, Feluga, Fairfield, Home Hill, Proserpine and Ingham which was the last sugar area to spawn a branch of the League; *HRE*, 13 and 24 January 1931; *Smith's Weekly*, 7 March 1931, p.2.

that that implies."<sup>47</sup> Thus its platform stipulated 90% employment of Britishers in all labouring and skilled facets of the sugar industry, increasing to 100% within three years. In addition, cane assignments were to be given only to British-born men, the residential qualification for naturalisation was to be extended from five to 10 years, and a test in oral and written English was to be passed before naturalisation.<sup>48</sup> Within a few years the League died a quiet death, but not before influencing the establishment and continuation of the Gentlemen's Agreement.

The formation of a branch of the League in Giru exemplifies the strength of the fears and prejudices that ebbed and flowed through Australian society.<sup>49</sup> In 1933 there were only 91 Italians in the whole of Thuringowa

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47 Letter from W. Pulham, President, British Preference League to Hon. A.E. Moore, M.L.A. 19 June 1930, No.303 of 1930, A/12206 (QSA).

48 Letter from Mr. W. Pulham, President, British Preference League to Hon. A.E. Moore, M.L.A. 19 June 1930, No.303 of 1930, A/12206. To the *Worker* the formation of the British Preference League was "an unwarranted intrusion into AWU affairs"; *Worker*, 11 June 1930, p.6. To *Il Giornale Italiano*, the British Preference League was "a venomous reptile, an odious adversary...spreading fanatical hatred of Italians"; *Il Giornale Italiano*, 21 May 1932. It was a popular Italian magazine read by Italians in Thuringowa. Regularly from April to August 1932 it retaliated strongly against the League and the Gentlemen's Agreement.

49 For instance, in 1926 the female Head Teacher at one of the small one-teacher schools in the Giru-Cromarty area told the Education Department that a "lady teacher could not stay in the teacher's accommodation [a room built onto the school] as she would be too nervous...the district is full of foreigners, it being a sugar cane district"; Letter from Constance Shonhan to Education Department, 3 March 1926, Schools Primary - correspondence c.1861-c.1959, EDU/Z1693 (QSA). In 1933 a male Head Teacher "didn't think any teacher would board with...Italians"; Letter from Dennis Sheehan to Education Department, 17 July 1933, Statistical returns by headmasters of provisional and state schools 1875-1969, EDU/AB1093 (QSA).

Shire which had a total population of 3 424. In the Giru district itself, there were only five Italian-owned, compared with 68 non-Italian owned, farms. By 1939 with the award of additional cane assignments to the Giru sugar area, the number of farm ownerships had increased disproportionately to 16 and 69.<sup>50</sup> Thus during these six years, the total number of farms increased by 12 and, of these, Italians owned 11. However some of the 16 Italian farms were owned by several Italians in partnership, and a few of the European farms also had Italian partners. It is not difficult to see why this might seem to some an alarming trend. Nevertheless, Giru was never in danger of losing its Anglo-Australian identity.

Class issues were again to the fore during the Depression. In 1930 sugar farmers were successful before arbitration in having award cane cutting wages reduced and hours extended. This was fortunate for Thuringowa's farmers and millers since 1930 proved a disastrous crushing season.<sup>51</sup> Harvesting and crushing then returned to normal, but further reductions in wages for all categories of sugar workers were granted in 1931 and 1932.<sup>52</sup> In fact, wages and salaries generally were subjected to cuts as part of the response to the Great Depression but prices fell more rapidly than earnings. Consequently, the real wages of the cane cutter (as for all those in employment) actually rose.

More industrial trouble occurred in 1934 and 1935 over the issue of burning cane in order to combat Weil's

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50 Invicta Mill Cane Farm Ownership Records (Invicta Mill).

51 Invicta Mill crushed 20 000 tons of cane less than it did in the 1928 and 1929 seasons; "Viator", "The Haughton Sugar Mill: Successful Enterprise", C&C, September 1935, p.49.

52 *Australian Sugar Journal*, 3 June 1934, p.206.

Disease.<sup>53</sup> The disease was not prevalent in Thuringowa, and both cane cutters and Invicta Mill workers were industrially quiet. However conflict arose over union, as well as ethnic, solidarity when predominantly only Italians contracted the disease.<sup>54</sup> By 1935 the agitation broadened into a battle between the Australian Workers Union and the Communist Party for the workers' allegiance as new industrial awards affected the livelihood not only of Thuringowa's sugar workers but

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53 The carriers were rats which, through their urine, infected the leafy cane tops and the trashy undergrowth. The germ entered through lacerations on the hands, arms or legs of the cutters. Drainage systems and rat eradication programs were not as effective as burning off in killing the germ. The symptoms were frightening: high temperatures, brown furred tongue, loss of appetite, intense headache, generalised body pains and extreme mental depression; in the more severe cases jaundice supervened, accompanied by black vomit containing blood, blood and bile in the urine, bleeding and epistaxis in the gums. Those who subsequently died also became delirious or suffered acute mania. Convalescence took from two to several weeks. Dr. G. Morrissey, "The Occurrence of Leptospirosis (Weil's Disease) in Australia", *The Medical Journal of Australia*, 2, 1 (1934), pp.496-497. T. Cotter and W. Sawers, "A Laboratory and Epidemiological Investigation of an Outbreak of Weil's Disease in Northern Queensland", *The Medical Journal of Australia*, 2, 19 (1934), pp.597-605. *Workers Weekly*, 5 June 1936 and 7 July 1936. Also see Annual Conference of Queensland Cane Growers Association, 1936, p.12.

54 Between October 1933 and December 1935, 181 Italian cane cutters and two Italian farmers fell prey to Weil's Disease or Leptospirosis. Seven of these cases proved fatal; Morrissey, "The Occurrence of Leptospirosis (Weil's Disease) in Australia", pp.496-497. G. Clayton and Dr. E. Derrick, "The Presence of Leptospirosis of a Mild Type (Seven-day fever) in Queensland", *The Medical Journal of Australia*, 1, 18 (1937), pp.617-654, gives 138 cases with seven deaths.

farmers and millers as well.<sup>55</sup>

It is no wonder the strikers lost the initial battles to have cane burnt before cutting. They were fighting on several fronts. There was opposition from growers and their powerful lobby groups. Forgan-Smith's Government wished to disassociate Labor from Communism in the voter's eyes and sent police reinforcements to the strike area. The Australian Workers Union fought to maintain its supremacy, declaring that the "Weil's Disease health cause was a communist diversion"; the real issues were the 20% drop in burnt cane cutting rates and the retrenchment of men because fewer would be needed to cut a given quota of burnt cane.<sup>56</sup> Within each mill district and between different sugar areas, cutters and millers were divided over the issues.<sup>57</sup> However the industrial and political scene quietened after 10 cutters became afflicted with Weil's Disease in one month, allowing moral considerations to triumph: a general order for burning cane was handed down in July 1936.

With Italy's entry into World War II, the status of Italians in Thuringowa Shire changed overnight. Whether or not Thuringowa's Italian cane farmers and labourers

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55 Because growers' groups, other conservative bodies and the Australian Workers Union blamed Communists for the spread of industrial trouble, the "burning" issue was not merely one of economics versus social and moral concerns. Growers claimed that the leaders of the 1934 Ingham strike were Communists; Henderson, *Italians in the Herbert River District, 1921-1939*, p.200. In the subsequent strikes by various northern mill workers and cane cutting gangs in 1935, Jean Devanny and fellow Communists in the Innisfail and Tully region were influential; communists in Giru donated £20 to the Strike Defence Fund in 1935; see Diane Menghetti, *The Red North: The Popular Front in North Queensland*. Studies in North Queensland History, No.3 (Townsville, 1981), Chapters 2 and 3; hereafter *The Red North*.

56 Geoff Burrows and Clive Morton, *The Canecutters* (Melbourne, 1986), p.132.

57 See Menghetti, *The Red North*, Chapter 2.

were naturalised they were then regarded as enemy aliens under the National Security (Aliens Control) Regulations of 13 September 1939. Their movements were restricted, an evening curfew was imposed, pressure increased to ensure that cane cutting gangs were non-Italian and the lease and purchase of farm land by Italians was now forbidden.<sup>58</sup>

Civilian tensions - the usual Friday night visit to town and the pictures now erupted into fights<sup>59</sup> - compounded the indignity and horror of internment. Although only a small proportion of the 320 Italians interned from the Townsville district were from Thuringowa Shire,<sup>60</sup> the fear of their own internment or that of their relatives and friends from other sugar areas - "no one knew whose door would be knocked on next"<sup>61</sup> - was strong. Those interned were not told why

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58 Diane Menghetti, "'Their Country, Not Mine': The Internments" in B.J. Dalton, *Studies in North Queensland History*, No.4 (Townsville, 1984), pp.196,197. The RSSILA still maintained this stance in 1946 when, after government vetting, two naturalised Italians were allowed to buy farms; one had been farming at Giru before the war and both had been in Australia for more than 20 years; Letter to T. Aikens, item W4525 P+2, Acquisition of Land by Aliens - Protests, Attorney-General's Department Correspondence Files War Series, 1939-1945, CRS A472 (Australian Archives). For a detailed exploration of Italians during the War, see Henderson, *More than Rates, Roads and Rubbish: A History of Thuringowa Shire and its Council to 1985*, Chapter 7.

59 Interview with M.P., Italian cane cutter, Giru; Italian Oral History Collection, James Cook University. The initials of interviewees have been changed to protect their anonymity. Mrs. Parisi was told by Australian neighbours that she and other Italian women should be interned along with the men; Interview, Mrs. Parisi (this is a pseudonym), 10 March 1989. In neighbouring Hinchinbrook Shire, hospital workers went on strike over the employment of an internee's wife there; *Herbert River Express*, 21 April 1942.

60 Noel W. Lamidey, *Aliens Control in Australia 1939-1946* (Sydney, 1974), p.56.

61 Interview with G.P., Italian Oral History Collection.



they were taken or where they were going. Local police were sometimes over-zealous in their duties;<sup>62</sup> on the other hand, they were sometimes highly embarrassed at arresting old friends and well-respected community members.<sup>63</sup> The scars are still felt in Thuringowa.

Because of enlistments and internments, the sugar industry suffered acute labour shortages during World War II. In 1942 the Mansfield Commission allocated labour to ensure that crushing rates were maintained at 75% of the average weekly crushing rate. Even so, the peak number of cutters available for Thuringowa's 1943 season was only 50% of the normal work force.<sup>64</sup> The effects were instantaneous: production dropped resulting in a crushing rate that was half the 1939 figure.<sup>65</sup> Another causal factor in the drop in the average yield per acre from 22 tons to 15 was the chronic shortage of fertilizer and

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62 For instance, Mario, a Giru field hand who had served as a volunteer in Abyssinia, was arrested during a midnight police raid on his barracks; he was not allowed to pack anything - clothes, family photographs, money or letters from loved ones; Interview with M.P., Italian Oral History Collection. This is despite the Minister for Defence's stipulation that arrests were to be carried out "without harshness" and preferably during daylight - before "the proposed internee had retired to rest"; CRS A472, 1929-; W601.

63 Such a person was Giuseppe, a naturalised farmer who had become involved in the life of the local community; Mentioned in interview with M.P., Italian Oral History Collection. He was one of the petitioners requesting the transfer of the Giru district from Thuringowa Shire to Ayr Shire in 1935 on the grounds that Thuringowa Shire Council was neglecting the district's needs. Of course, Giuseppe and the other 201 petitioners thought that they would also benefit by Ayr's slightly lower rating charge; List of Petitioners attached to letter to Thuringowa Shire Council from Ayr Shire Council, 13 August 1935, 11 THU/140.

64 C. Wood, *Sugar Country: A Short History of the Raw Sugar Industry of Australia 1864-1964* (Brisbane, 1965), p.25.

65 "Invicta Mill", *Australian Sugar Year Book* (1947-1948), p.221.

cane grub fumigants.<sup>66</sup> Tractor impressments, shortages of fuel due to war-time embargoes and the disruption to railway transport, particularly with trucks either in short supply or unsuitable for carrying cane, severely effected Giru Mill's Ingham-line farmers.<sup>67</sup> Sugar rationing - one pound per week per person - introduced in August 1942<sup>68</sup> also caused a decrease in Invicta's output.

The 1950s and particularly the 1960s - "the great expansion" decade - was a boom period for the sugar industry generally. Australia's sugar sales agreement with Britain after the War provided stability and, on the home market, the price of refined sugar steadily increased. Japan became a very important importer in the 1950s and sales were increased further in the 1960s. The collapse of the International Sugar Agreement in 1961 was "the genesis of the greatest expansion in the history of Australia's sugar industry".<sup>69</sup> North Queensland was also quick to take advantage of the rupture of diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba; the United States market was closed to Cuban sugar which had previously enjoyed a specially favoured entry. An arctic winter decimated Europe's sugar beet and a cyclone in Cuba destroyed the sugar cane crop of one of the world's largest exporters - allowing Australia access to

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66 Only the less effective meatworks byproducts such as blood and bone were available in any quantity after 1940; J. Wegner, "Hinchinbrook Shire during World War Two" in Dalton, *Lectures on North Queensland History*, p.217.

67 Wegner, "Hinchinbrook Shire during World War Two", p.218.

68 This was double the ration in the United Kingdom, Canada and United States of America and 60% more than that for New Zealand; letter to Thuringowa Shire Council from R. Keane, Minister for Trade and Customs, 30 November 1942, Correspondence re Mill White Sugar, 11 THU/152 (QSA).

69 Wood, *Sugar Country*, p.32.

previously uninterested overseas markets. There was so much optimism in the industry that the mill peaks were increased in 1947, 1954, 1964 and 1966 to make the most of the boom.<sup>70</sup>

Although Invicta Mill was granted extra peaks, the number of cane holdings fluctuated with a more realistic understanding of local conditions. There was a steady increase from 58 farms in 1945 to 68 in 1955 to 70 in 1960, but the number dropped back to 63 in 1965, increased to 68 in 1968, then dropped again to 59 in 1970.<sup>71</sup> Although a weir was build on the Haughton River to store water for irrigation, environmental conditions - drought or flooding - were the chief constant hazards facing growers in Thuringowa.

Since its inception in 1903, the sugar industry in the Haughton River area has had to rely on irrigation for viability. The spear method developed by John Drysdale in the 1880s was still being used a century later. Unfortunately some farms could not locate a suitable surface or underground water source and a few of them suffered bankruptcy and forfeiture during extended dry periods - only to be resold during boom years. During the drought of 1970, for example, Giru's surface and underground water resources were severely depleted through farm, mill and town residential usage. As occurred during dry periods, many irrigated farms were contaminated by salt seepage from the Haughton River.<sup>72</sup> Eight cane farms had to be sold and their peaks transferred out of the district.<sup>73</sup> Cane production

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70 Extra peaks had been granted in 1939. The above relied heavily on Wood, *Sugar Country*, pp.30-32.

71 Department of Industrial Development, *Natural Resources Survey*, Table 10.7.

72 TDB, 16 August 1969.

73 TDB, 19 August 1970, p.3.

dropped dramatically by 27 000 tonnes from the previous season and by 1972 there were 300 fewer hectares under the plough.<sup>74</sup>

Torrential rain was nearly as devastating as inadequate rainfall. Washouts of canefarms on the banks of the Haughton River due to flooding in 1960 led to a public meeting at Giru in March 1961 to discuss an idea that had been desultorily debated since 1950 - the formation of a joint Haughton River Improvement Trust between Thuringowa and Ayr Shire Councils. Although Thuringowa Shire was prepared to proceed, some farmers and Ayr Shire Council were not because the benefits of the proposed erosion protection strategies would not be commensurate with the high costs involved.<sup>75</sup> However the continuation of severe flooding and loss of adjacent cane land resulted in the formation of the Trust in 1972.<sup>76</sup>

The mechanisation of loading and harvesting cane was the dominant characteristic of the third phase of the sugar industry in Thuringowa. However technological change was accompanied by tensions between the three sectors of the industry: farmers, millers and cutters.

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74 Department of Industrial Development, *Natural Resources Survey*, Table 10.5.

75 Not only would the two Councils have to take out loans but the farmers would be taxed a special levy above their normal rates to help cover the loan; see Chapters 9 and 13.

76 M.D. Medley, "A Brief History of the Burdekin and Haughton River Improvement Trusts", in *Report of Proceedings on Trust Conference at Ayr on August 25th and 26th, 1975* (n.p.; n.d.), pp.37,38. Also see *TDB*, ? April, ? May and ? August 1960 Press Cuttings Book, July 1955 to June 1964. In 1978-1979 the Trust had a loan indebtedness of \$114 548; J.D. Tucker in collaboration with A.S. Fogg, R.C. Gates, J.H. Holmes, R.C. Jensen and J.R. Laverty, *Local Government in Queensland: A Report for the Queensland Division*, Part V, Vol.2 (Canberra, 1982), p.38.

The labour problems of the 1950s provided the impetus for the mechanisation of cane cutting. Labour was in short supply. In an effort to ease the shortage of canecutters, Refugees or Displaced Persons from war-torn Europe were drafted in to work on the canefields on two-year contracts. However, relatively few continued longer than the contract period and few came to Thuringowa, anyway.<sup>77</sup> A booming labour-starved economy provided perfect bargaining conditions for the scarce seasonal labour that was available. Cutters increasingly refused to cut flattened or tangled cane and threatened to leave burnt cane to sour if a higher rate were not paid. Farmers outbid their neighbours for labour.<sup>78</sup>

To ensure that the sugar industry and hence Queensland and Australia's economy did not suffer, the Commonwealth Government agreed to the Queensland Cane Growers Council's scheme to the effect that three practical canegrowers of Italian origin (one of whom was Pietro Lalli, a cane farmer on Invicta Mill's Ingham line) should be sent to Italy to select labourers on a two-year indenture contract.<sup>79</sup> Under the scheme 2 250 men and 150 dependants were brought to Queensland's sugar

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77 See Bianka Hedwig Vidonja Balanzategui, *The Gentlemen of the Flashing Blade: The Displaced Person as Canecutter in Post-World War II North Queensland*, B.A. Hons Thesis, James Cook University (Townsville, 1985).

78 Thuringowa cutters who received 20/-per ton at the beginning of the 1954 cutting season were paid 35/- per ton by the end; Burrows and Morton, *The Canecutters*, pp.137,138.

79 According to Wood, it was "the best planned immigration scheme in Queensland's history", *Sugar Country*, p.31.

fields.<sup>80</sup> Seventy Italians (52 men and 18 women), 19 Maltese (all men) and about 24 of the 159 Spaniards, predominantly Basques and Catalans (who were brought out in 1958), settled in Thuringowa.<sup>81</sup> Although fears of docile labour still permeated union rhetoric, the racist backlash of the 1920s and 1930s was decidedly absent. With full employment apparently firmly entrenched, there was not the competition for canecutting jobs that there had been during the Great Depression. The migrants were accepted and absorbed into Thuringowa society.

Another practical initiative of the Queensland Cane Growers Council to help the industry overcome its labour problems was the commissioning of a lorry-mounted front-end loader. The loading and transport of cane into a single unit thus foreshadowed the cut/load principle which became the ultimate answer. Local growers invented

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80 Four hundred men and 150 dependants arrived in Cairns in May 1955 to be dispersed on canefields north of Townsville; 400 disembarked at Townsville for work in the surrounding cane districts; a further 700 single men arrived in July 1955, half were allotted to farms in southern Queensland and the other 350 to the Northern Rivers District; another 800 arrived in May 1956. *Australian Sugar Journal*, June 17 (1955), pp.237-239; August 15 (1955), p.405. The further south the Italians were placed, the fewer the number who broke their contract. One-fifth of the first contingent of Italians who arrived in Cairns absconded within three months; Burrows and Morton, *The Canecutters*, pp.141-143. 120 Maltese were brought out in June 1964 and by August "a large number had deserted"; *Australian Sugar Yearbook*, 56, 3, June (1964), p.201; 56, 5, August (1964), p.338.

81 The sources do not say how many went to each area. See *Australian Sugar Journal*, January 15 (1957), p.210; September 15 (1958), p.385. The figures given for Italian, Maltese and Spanish migration to Thuringowa were calculated from the intercensal increase between 1947 and 1954.

and improvised.<sup>82</sup> There were numerous problems with the first loaders.<sup>83</sup> The relatively few in use in the 1950s were undoubtedly by-products of the desperate labour shortage.

The main obstacle to mechanisation was that the economic returns to the grower from mechanical loading were at first no better than those from manual loading. One answer was to reduce the cutters' award rates. At the beginning of the 1955 season, growers initially paid cutters only 2/5 a ton less if cane was loaded mechanically, a saving not sufficient to justify the expense of buying and maintaining a loader. Because labour disruptions in the sugar industry were seriously damaging Queensland's economy, the growers won the arbitration battle to re-adjust the award if mechanical loaders were used: cutters lost a further 1/7 per ton if mechanical loaders were used, receiving 10/- per ton for cutting cane in lieu of 14/- per ton for cutting and manually loading cane. This saving of 4/- per ton together with spreading the capital costs of loaders through syndicate ownership and thereby delivering larger tonnages to the mill, canegrowers eventually benefited - as did Invicta Mill which was assured of a more regular supply of cane.<sup>84</sup>

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82 For example, George Quaid of Mossman and Don Leighton of Mulgrave; later northern inventors were Robert Rossi and Savino Beneditti of Mulgrave, Lauri Mizzi of Ingham and Arthur Cannavan of Home Hill. The following section on mechanisation draws heavily on Burrows and Morton, *The Canecutters*, pp.144-187, 213-224.

83 For instance, they bogged easily; soil compacted into "concrete-like tracks where the loader had travelled"; and portable tramlines were easily dislodged when loaders crossed them; Burrows and Morton, *The Canecutters*, p.145.

84 See Henderson, *More than Rates, Roads and Rubbish: A History of Thuringowa Shire and its Council to 1985*, Chapter 7, for details of the figures in this and the next paragraph.

Some cutters initially tried sabotaging the introduction of loaders by scattering cane in order to hinder the loader driver. By 1964 however, Thuringowa's canecutters realised that, although the rate had been reduced from 14/- to 10/-per ton, mechanical loaders relieved them of loading cane manually, a job that took up one-third of their time. In lieu, they were able to raise their cutting rate enough to increase income by as much as 40%, despite the lower rate per ton. By removing the most strenuous part of their job, mechanical loading also allowed aging "Roos" and "Barneys" to prolongue their careers as canecutters - as "a coupla kings...not the sort we see go rolling home to their wives every night, but men".<sup>85</sup>

The introduction of chopper harvesters was hampered by resistance from Invicta Mill. In 1965, 10.95% of the cane was harvested mechanically; in 1966, 34.31% was cut by two chopper harvesters and a number of wholestalk machines; but in 1967 the ratio fell to 27% in face of miller opposition.<sup>86</sup> It was a substantial expense for the Mill to convert open tram wagons to enclosed bins suitable for holding chopped cane. The Central Cane Prices Board allowed Mills to charge growers bin rentals.<sup>87</sup> However when this decision was reversed, Invicta Mill refused to increase its supply of bins. Chopped cane deteriorated more rapidly than wholestalk or manual-cut cane and the juice from the smaller chopped lengths soured badly and was difficult to crystallise if

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85 Ray Lawler, *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, 4th edn. (1965), p.20.

86 "Favoured children in paddocks, chopper harvesters were seen [initially] as delinquents by sugar millers"; Burrows and Morton, *The Canecutters*, pp.173,219.

87 Most Mills charged 1/- to 3/- per ton but the Burdekin Mills charged 6/- because it was believed that the heavier cane variety sown on irrigated lands would defeat the chopper harvesters; Burrows and Morton, *The Canecutters*, p.215.



left standing.<sup>88</sup> Hambledon Mill growers went on strike over the Mill's refusal to increase bin allocations and its demands that growers harvest at night.<sup>89</sup> The Mill lost and the right of canegrowers to use harvesters became a permanent reality in the sugar industry.

Loaders had allowed all parties to profit from the technological advances in the industry. However wholestalk and chopper harvesters<sup>90</sup> only benefited the grower and miller; between 1962 and 1975, 9 000 cutters were replaced by machines.<sup>91</sup> Within seven years of the introduction of choppers into Thuringowa's sugar industry in 1964, the sun-bronzed muscle-bound canecutter was non-existent:<sup>92</sup> "instead of ten-deep at the local [hotel], you'd be flat out finding two drinking".<sup>93</sup> Surprisingly, the cutters put up only token resistance. They were an aging workforce and, unlike John Missing who got "itchy feet" every slack season, new cutters rarely

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88 Polysaccoride chemists at James Cook University developed an enzyme that overcame the problem of difficult crystallisation of sugar harvested by choppers.

89 See Burrows and Morton, *The Canecutters*, pp.220-222 for details of the strike.

90 Chopper harvesters cut the cane into short lengths, that is, foot-long billets.

91 See Henderson, *More than Rates, Roads and Rubbish: A History of Thuringowa Shire and its Council to 1985*, Chapter 7, for a discussion of the changes to the workforce in the sugar industry.

92 A canefarmer's wife wrote: "It has been said that if a canecutter has plenty of brawn and muscle he doesn't need much more"; M. Graham, "Our Canecutters", *North Australian Monthly*, February (1960), p.36. Also see G. Bolton, "Memories before the 18th Doll", *Cairns Post*, 12 October 1973, p.2. Calculated from Burrows and Morton, *The Canecutters*, pp.213,219.

93 Interview, Mr. and Mrs. A. Jeffrey, Mr. Brian Jeffrey, canefarmers and Mr. Ron Carty, ex-canecutter, Giru, 7 March 1989.

saw it as a permanent way of life.<sup>94</sup> A number were re-employed as harvester drivers or farm labourers. Besides, work for unskilled labour was not too difficult to find in the 1960s and early 1970s.

As the 1970s progressed, improvements in harvester machines increased efficiency and decreased the numbers of men required.<sup>95</sup> As well, mechanical harvesting was taken over more and more by contractors, many of whom had had no prior contact with the sugar industry. Farmers also amalgamated into consortiums in order to reduce capital costs and better utilise the expensive harvesting equipment. Finally, in the 1980s due mainly to the "slump-price tactics of the European Economic Community and the clinically detached strategies of the millers", farmers themselves increasingly took over the cutting of their own cane, particularly when local machinery dealers bankrupted by the 1985 crash began selling used machines very cheaply.<sup>96</sup> Thus, although at the end of Thuringowa's first century cane cutting was now mechanical, the struggling yeoman farmer of 1916 who often had to become one of the cutters to make ends meet was again dominant in Thuringowa's sugar fields.

The phasing out of cane by 1976 in northern Thuringowa was a harsh reminder of the vulnerability of agriculture to factors other than the environment. The writing was on-the-wall from 1964 for Rollingstone cane farmers: eight cane farmers' applications for increased cane assignments were refused but 11 new assignments were granted to Hinchinbrook cane farmers just north of

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94 Burrows and Morton, *The Canecutters*, p.212.

95 For instance, in 1985 a study of harvesting in the Burdekin district showed that "35 000 tonnes of cane was the effective capacity of one harvester driver and two tractor-bin haulers working a single shift for one season"; Burrows and Morton, *The Canecutters*, p.253.

96 Burrows and Morton, *The Canecutters*, p.258.

Thuringowa's border. Yet the average yield of Thuringowa's northern farms was 30 tons per acre and Rollingstone cane won championships at Ingham's show. Locals believed the reason was "political economy": Ingham had the better promoters and political lobbyists.<sup>97</sup> Advances in mill technology and better cane varieties resulted in higher sugar yields; each farm now produced more sugar per ton of cane. As well, many of the 41 cane farms in the Giru district put more of their land under cane in order to gain maximum advantage from the boom. To maintain peaks and thereby prevent serious over-production,<sup>98</sup> 19 cane farms in the northern Rollingstone and Mutarnee areas were phased out by 1976.<sup>99</sup> By the mid-1970s some Giru cane farmers were combining cane with watermelon farming or cattle grazing in order to help cushion the effects of an erratic environment, world price fluctuations, over-production and technological advances.

As the boom and bust of its major economic resources testify, Thuringowa's links with its urban base - and national and international markets - were crucial for survival. The symbiotic relationship between Thuringowa and Townsville is one of the major themes in Thuringowa's political and social life, too.

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97 TDB, 22 August 1964, Press Cuttings and Advertisements, July 1964 - .

98 In the 1957-1958 season, nearly one million tons of cane were left standing in North Queensland's fields or ploughed in because of overproduction; like other growers eager to participate in the export trade, Thuringowa farmers had seriously miscalculated and sown 5% above their Mill's allotted peak; Wood, *Sugar Country*, p.30.

99 Department of Industrial Development, *Natural Resources Survey*, Table 10.5.

## CHAPTER 5

### Town and Country

Were the dominant influences upon the formation of the Australian ethos urban or rural? According to Stannage, "Sydney or the bush" has been "the greatest non-debate in the writing of Australian history".<sup>1</sup> He contends that it is more important to analyse the relationship between town and hinterland, one of the least studied aspects of Australian history.

Some historians have looked at the issue. For Manning Clark, the "great conflict in our history" has been "town against country".<sup>2</sup> In their respective studies of the Riverina and New England, Buxton and Walker show that bitter conflict soon arose between squatters and townsmen for political and social control in their regions.<sup>3</sup> Waterson, too, in his history of the Darling Downs underlines the political divisiveness that existed between town and country.<sup>4</sup> Gammage's *Narrandera Shire* highlights the fact that the squatters were not a single nor unified entity through his analysis of the battle between rival squatting interests and their eclipse by town commercial interests during the boom of the 1870s and 1880s. Allingham contends that Kennedy (and Thuringowa) pastoral society was "a manifestation of the universal clash inherent in the disparate life-

1 See T. Stannage, "Review Article: Australian Urban History", *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 26, 1, 1980, p.132. cf. Ronald Lawson, *Brisbane in the 1890s: A Study of an Australian Urban Society* (St. Lucia, Brisbane, 1973), Chapter 1.

2 Manning Clark, *A Discovery of Australia*, Boyer Lectures (Sydney, 1976), pp.10,11.

3 G.L. Buxton, *The Riverina, 1861-1891* (Melbourne, 1967) and R.B. Walker, *Old New England* (Sydney, 1966).

4 Waterson, *Squatter, Selector, and Storekeeper*.

styles, demands and values of rural and urban sectors".<sup>5</sup> Allingham writes about the dissention between town and country as if it were inevitable.

However, this was certainly not the case between Thuringowa and Townsville. In fact, their stories support a view that other histories have propounded: that the relationship between town and country was a positive one. In her study of Townsville to the 1880s, Gibson-Wilde concludes that Townsville and the surrounding districts realised their interdependence and combined with "a remarkable unity" to further the development of the town. But she incorrectly surmises that the relationship was unusual and peculiar to Townsville.<sup>6</sup> Bate's *Lucky City: the first generation at Ballarat 1851-1901* clearly shows the regional interactions of Ballarat. Priestley's studies of Echuca and Warracknabeal, and Palmer's history of St. Arnaud, demonstrate the significant role of townsmen in rural development.<sup>7</sup> The complementary character of urban and rural life, particularly with respect to politics, is stressed in Hirst's *Adelaide and the Country, 1870-1917*.<sup>8</sup>

A study of Thuringowa and Townsville reveals the nature of this complex inter-relationship. Town and country presented a united face on issues; on some others, dissension caused polarisation. It was common for agreement and conflict to occur concurrently over different issues and concerns. As well, each was

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5 Allingham, *Taming the Wilderness*, p.220.

6 Dorothy Gibson-Wilde, *Gateway to a Golden Land: Townsville to 1884*. *Studies in North Queensland History*, No.7 (Townsville, 1984), p.135.

7 Susan Priestley, *Echuca* (Brisbane, 1965); *Warracknabeal* (Brisbane, 1967); Yvonne Palmer, *Track of the Years* (Melbourne, 1955).

8 P. Hirst, *Adelaide and the Country, 1870-1917* (Melbourne, 1973).

involved in the other's development. Thuringowa's squatters established Townsville and continued to play an influential role in its growth. Subsequent graziers, cane farmers, meatworks' managers and union organisers were linked firmly to the town. Over the years, townsmen fostered important rural initiatives. On many occasions, they combined to promote development that would benefit both. The affiliation between Thuringowa and Townsville was primarily one of symbiosis. Although Townsville quickly became the dominant partner and virtually obliterated Thuringowa's distinct identity,<sup>9</sup> they enjoyed a healthy alliance, no more so than in their early years.

Many sound reasons existed for the close relationship between Thuringowa and Townsville from 1864 to 1900. There were multifarious and overlapping interests. The squatters, large selectors and plantation owners were no more than two or three days' ride from Townsville; they therefore could, and did, participate meaningfully and regularly in Townsville's religious, social and commercial life. Townsville's banks and stores provided credit to selectors. There was dual membership of town and rural local government bodies, as well as ownership of both town and rural business concerns. Most of the leaders of the urban and rural business community were involved in the formation of Townsville's Chamber of Commerce; both were represented on the Townsville and District Pastoralists' Association. This integral relationship - political, social and economical - between Thuringowa and Townsville was developed by men such as Black, Rowe and Ross who instigated or bought into town businesses whilst maintaining grazing properties; and Townsville merchants such as Joseph Hodel, William Aplin, William Kirk, Spencer Frederick Walker, Frederick Johnston, John Deane and Robert Philp who similarly bought grazing and farming

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9 This will be examined in depth in Chapter 9.

land in Thuringowa.<sup>10</sup> Of course, the individual pecuniary interests and political ambitions of many were not inconsequential in their endeavours to ensure that town and country pulled together for the sake of economic viability and political stability. The common experience of rapid social mobility in Black's entrepreneurial town ensured strong comradeship, similar economic and social philosophies and an "old boys' network" that was used with consummate skill, particularly to the advantage of the Thuringowa Divisional Board.<sup>11</sup>

Naturally, the erratic turbulence of the Burdekin River and the easier inland route from Townsville were also vital factors in Townsville's winning the terminus to the Ravenswood-Charter Towers railway in 1879 - even though it had been planned to link it to Bowen. Nevertheless, the political astuteness of Thuringowa's and Townsville's elite was manifest. Besides parliamentarians (Philp, Aplin and Deane), various Premiers and Cabinet Ministers had an economic stake in the area. Two of these were Sir Samuel Griffith, a partner with Sachs, the manager of a local bank, in Thuringowa's suburban development boom, and Sir Thomas McIlwraith, a partner in the North Queensland Pastoral Company which had bought out Towns and Co.'s properties in south-eastern Thuringowa properties. Having such friends in high places was significant in the agitated lobbying that always preceded Government decision-making. It was no coincidence that Townsville and Thuringowa gained one of the two freezer meatworks built in

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10 Most of these men served on either Townsville or Thuringowa's local government council or on both (for example, Hodel, Kirk, Walker and Aplin) or in colonial government (Philp, who became Premier, Aplin, Hodel and Deane). See Chapter 17 for a detailed discussion on Hodel who was Thuringowa's longest serving Chairman. The social interrelationships are discussed more fully in Henderson, *More than Rates, Roads and Rubbish: A History of Thuringowa and its Shire to 1985*.

11 See Chapter 17.

Queensland in 1891 even though they already had the Alligator Creek Meatworks: people such as Philp, Aplin, Deane and Hodel were shareholders.<sup>12</sup> A Stock Experimental Station and Farm was built on the outskirts of Townsville in suburban Thuringowa to service the immediate hinterland.<sup>13</sup> Since sheep grazing, agriculture and dairying on a large scale were not suited to the area, the anomaly of siting the facility in such a place did not escape the notice of others: since the early 1870s Townsville had been considered "the pet of the Ministry".<sup>14</sup>

Another process which linked the country and town was the incorporation of both urban and rural areas within Thuringowa's local government jurisdiction. In late 1879 the *Act to Provide for Local Government outside the Boundaries of Municipalities* [short title: *Divisional Boards Act of 1879*] created the local government division of Thuringowa; it became a Shire in 1902.<sup>15</sup> Except for the thirty years (1936-1964) when a re-alignment of the Thuringowa-Townsville boundary changed Thuringowa to a rural shire containing a few small villages, Thuringowa has incorporated both a large rural area and numerous suburbs containing Townsville's urban overflow. Over the years, boundary changes altered the character of the Shire in terms of the numerical importance of people and dwellings in the suburban spill-over compared with those in its rural sector.

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12 See Henderson, *More than Rates, Roads and Rubbish: A History of Thuringowa Shire and its Council to 1985*, Chapter 4.

13 The research was directed at improving the pastoral industry rather than the agricultural problems of Thuringowa's selectors. *TH*, 12 July 1890, p.16; 29 July 1891, p.17.

14 *Queenslander*, 11 December 1875.

15 See Chapter 8 for complete details and reasons for the implementation of local government in the rural areas of Queensland.



Thuringowa was predominantly rural with one suburb in 1880. Out of 279 dwellings, there were 75 suburban rateable dwellings - 57 in the Townsville suburb of Ross Island which was annexed to Townsville in 1881. However Thuringowa quickly became a rural-suburban shire; only three years later, half of the 400 dwellings were in suburbs. In 1890 a majority of the 683 dwellings were located in 32 different suburban sub-divisions. A boundary change in 1893 excised the rural area from Cromarty to the Haughton River to Woodstock, reinforcing the numerical (and, for the Council, the administrative and financial) importance of the suburban section of the Shire. In 1918 with the creation of Greater Townsville, Thuringowa lost its eastern suburbs containing 790 dwellings to Townsville. Until 1936, when Townsville absorbed the suburbs of Oonoomba, Fairfield, Idalia, Stewart Town and Stuart Dale, Thuringowa remained a rural-suburban Shire containing 140 suburban dwellings. Between 1937 and 1964 it was a rural Shire with one small village (Giru) and several hamlets (Woodstock, Paluma, Mutarnee, Rollingstone and Bluewater). From 1964, events repeated themselves: Townsville's economy boomed and its growing population spilled over once more into Thuringowa, creating new suburbs and increasing their population density. In 1971 there were probably only 120 suburban dwellings; by 1979 there were 3 182.<sup>16</sup> Thus except for 30 years, Thuringowa's Councils served both urban and rural needs.<sup>17</sup>

Businessmen, plantation owners, farmers, graziers, the churches, newspapers, local government councils, women, the working class and suburban white-collar workers all combined to support causes seen to benefit

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16 For information and discussion of the above statistics, boundary changes and effects see Chapters 12, 13 and 14.

17 See Chapters 14, 15 and 16 for examples of urban and rural provisions by the Councils.

their communities. Two such instances were the separation and federation movements.

The demands for the creation of a new northern colony quite independent of the rest of Queensland were particularly vocal in Townsville and Thuringowa.<sup>18</sup> They believed they were being robbed by Brisbane: the north contributed a disproportionately large amount to the wealth of the Colony, yet the south enacted policies that disadvantaged northern industries and businesses; the north could never obtain adequate political representation under a system based on population rather than economic contribution; the north suffered inequities in the provision of rail transport; the north was defenceless since the headquarters of the voluntary Defence Force were in Brisbane!<sup>19</sup>

Townsville and Thuringowa were regarded as the "stronghold of Separation";<sup>20</sup> their unity and persistence were contrasted with the vacillation of other centres.<sup>21</sup> Local papers proclaimed the superior qualities of "separation" bricks, "Separation Saddlers", the "Separation Cafe", "separation" hotels, "separation" beer, "separation" whiskey, and "separation" soap. "There were also separation carnivals, balls, processions, marine excursions, picnics and holidays".<sup>22</sup> The Separation Carnival of 1890 drew an estimated crowd of 8 000 to its procession through Flinders Street and

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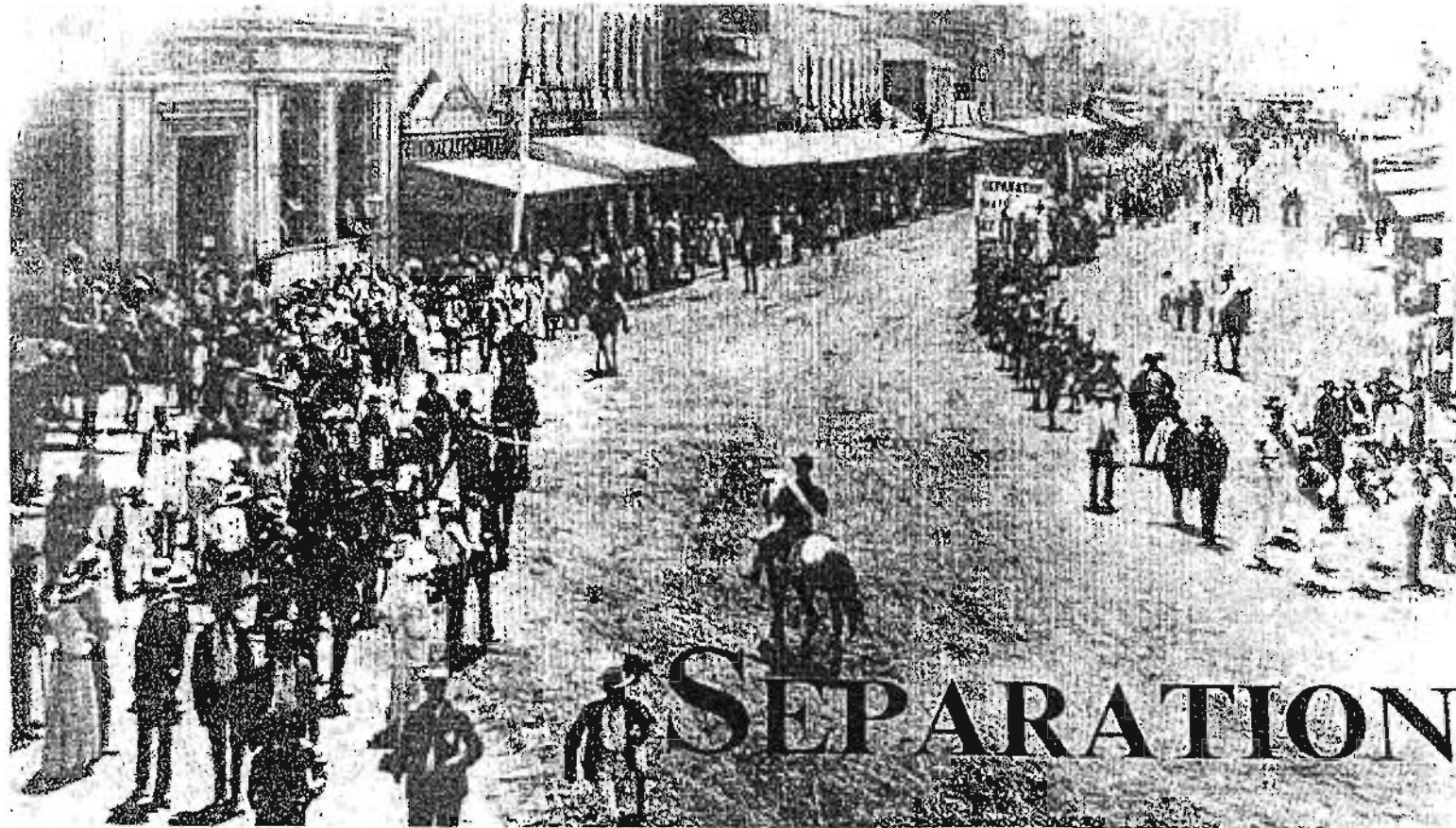
18 See C. Doran, *Separatism in Townsville*, *Studies in North Queensland History*, 4 (Townsville, 1981). Also see Chapter 12 for a discussion of separatism, local government and the secession moves for a separate North Queensland colony.

19 Doran, *Separatism in Townsville*, pp.22-25.

20 TH, 13 December 1890.

21 *Townsville Evening Star*, 5 November 1890, 25 February 1891, 10 February 1893.

22 Doran, *Separatism in Townsville*, p.17.



Townsville and Thuringowa were strident in their opposition to the "Brisbane Monopoly" and agitated for a separate state for North Queensland. (*The Weekender*, 12 March 1988, p.1).

Separation Rally in Townsville, ca.1890.

approximately 6 000 to the Carnival and Show Grounds.<sup>23</sup> As Townsville's population was 7 821, numerous Thuringowa residents obviously journeyed in to enjoy the festivities and demonstrate commitment to separatism.<sup>24</sup> Thuringowa and Townsville constituents elected pro-separationist parliamentarians. Important groups within Townsville society - the Chamber of Commerce, the local government authorities,<sup>25</sup> the Roman Catholic and Church of England churches and the Harbour Board - were also prominently involved in the cry for separation.<sup>26</sup> Although there was conflict in the ranks of the separationists on the question of coloured labour, the working class were adherents of secession; they formed alliances with the Chamber of Commerce to oppose the "Brisbane Monopoly" and push for greater public works expenditure which, they believed, would increase employment opportunities.<sup>27</sup> Demands for separation expressed the desire of local citizens for greater participation and control.

Thuringowa and Townsville voted overwhelmingly "yes"

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23 TH, 18 October 1890.

24 Census 1890.

25 See Chapter 12 for details of Thuringowa Divisional Board's commitment.

26 Doran, *Separatism in Townsville*, p.20. The Catholic Church went further, demonstrating its faith in the separatist belief that Townsville would be capital of the future Northern colony by buying land in Thuringowa at Hermit Park and Aitkenvale for an Industrial Home for destitute children and for a day school, and at Stewart's Creek for a future orphanage; Letter from W. Walsh, Parish Priest, St. Josephs Church to Thuringowa Divisional Board, 6 December 1898, Thuringowa Divisional Board Correspondence Book.

27 TH, 9 March 1889; Doran, *Separatism in Townsville*, p.83.

in the federation referendum,<sup>28</sup> though polling day was characterised by "the same want of excitement and demonstration" that distinguished the campaign:

The usual accessories of a Parliamentary election - industrious committees, eager touts, rival cabmen -all were absent.<sup>29</sup>

Only 51.5% of the population of Thuringowa and Townsville voted. However the turn-out was not so different from other voting centres in Australia; the national average was 60.7%. The main reasons for the apathy were the beliefs that federation was a foregone conclusion - it was "the inevitable destiny of the Australian colonies"<sup>30</sup> - and that federation would not significantly change the individual's life. There was also a preoccupation with local matters.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, ardent campaigning occurred only where a "no" vote was expected.<sup>32</sup>

28 NQH, 2 October 1899, p.8. 80.6% and 90.5% of those who voted in the Townsville and Herbert electorates (Thuringowa constituents lived in both electorates) in the referendum of 2 September 1899 voted "yes". The Herbert electorate went up to Innisfail and down to Ayr. Alan Jenkins, M.A. Qualifying, University of Queensland (St. Lucia, 1969), Appendix 1.

29 NQH, 4 September 1899, p.2.

30 Speech by Robert Philp, Member for Townsville and suburban Thuringowa, in *Northern Miner*, 29 August 1899.

31 As the following references show, the local papers usually put federation articles from pages 9 to 39.

32 Jenkins, *Attitudes towards Federation in North Queensland*, pp.vii,3 and Appendix 1. The TDB editorial of 20 August 1899 discussed the extra incentives present at elections:

There are variety [sic] of stimulating influences at work at elections of Parliamentary representatives which will not send electors to the polling booth for the federal referendum. Conspicuous among these are personal liking for one candidate, and, often, dislike of his opponent, anticipation of some private benefit from political influence, and, strongest of all, indisposition to face the local discredit attaching to the defeat of the favoured candidate.

In the campaigning that it did undertake in the few months prior to the referendum, the Townsville Federation League was welcomed enthusiastically by all sections of the two communities.<sup>33</sup> The League received support from prominent businessmen, businessmen-graziers and local government councillors.<sup>34</sup> There was advocacy from the pulpit.<sup>35</sup> Thuringowa's graziers and struggling farmers believed federation would abolish inter-colonial protectionist policies, allowing interstate free trade.<sup>36</sup> Railway and meat workers supported federation, particularly the provision for adult suffrage.<sup>37</sup>

Audiences at League meetings revealed self-interest as well as wider political concerns. The railway workers at Reid River wanted to know if, under federation, the Colony's railways were likely to drift into the hands of

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33 *NQH*, 31 July 1899, p.19, 14 August 1899, p.9, 28 August 1899, p.30.

34 Those from Thuringowa included: Joseph Hodel, Chairman of Thuringowa Divisional Board, Frederick Johnson and W.J. Affleck, Members of Thuringowa Divisional Board, ex-Members of the Divisional Board, William Lennon and Wm. Rollwagen, and other businessmen and businessmen-graziers: R. Craddock, W. Castling, Mr. Fraire and Dr. Ahearne.

35 During his sermon, the Rev. Richard Kerr of the Presbyterian Church told parishioners to vote "yes"; *NQH*, 28 August 1899, p.33.

36 Jenkins, *Attitudes towards Federation in North Queensland*, p.138. William Lennon, an ardent separatist, federalist, businessman and ex-member of Thuringowa Divisional Board, contended Federation would put £1 per head on each of the six million cattle in Queensland and remove the duty on frozen meat allowing a big trade with the southern colonies; *Northern Miner*, 30 August 1899 cited in *ibid*.

37 Both the men and women at the Ross River Meatworks meeting "heartily approved" the likelihood that one-adult-one-vote would be a reality under federation; *NQH*, 22 August 1899, p.30. There was unanimous support from those who attended the overflowing meeting in the school room at Stewart's Creek, a working class suburb; *NQH*, 2 September 1899, p.39.

syndicates. As well, their questions reflected the general community's concern with the possibility of obtaining separation under federation.<sup>38</sup> Northerners believed the anti-federal motto of southern Queensland, "Queensland for Queenslanders" was really "Queensland for Queen-street", whilst both north and south agreed that the northern "yes" majority opposing the "no" vote of central and southern Queensland was "not a vote for the Bill...[but] a vote for separation".<sup>39</sup> A "White Australia" was a particular concern for all, even cane farmers returning a "yes" vote.<sup>40</sup> Doran concluded that by 1899 all sugar farmers, big and small, accepted as irrevocable the coming end of Pacific Island labour, but took it as symptomatic of Brisbane's indifference to Northern needs. Thus in voting for federation they were (in part) expressing resentment at the conclusion of the trade, but with no expectation of reviving it.<sup>41</sup> More importantly, farmers wanted federal tariff restrictions on overseas-grown sugar.<sup>42</sup> The national political and

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38 *NQH*, 28 August 1899, p.30.

39 *NQH*, 11 September 1899, pp.11,19. The local paper's editorial, "After the Battle", proclaimed that "the Commonwealth Bill most assuredly throws open the road for the division of Queensland into three states"; *NQH*, 4 September 1899, p.4. Bolton, however, believes that the North's distinctive political remedy, that is, separatism, was no longer sought after; North Queensland had "advanced from a go-it-alone parochialism to a willing acceptance of the identity of its interests with those of the rest of the Australian community"; *A Thousand Miles Away*, p.211.

40 The *Charters Towers Eagle* warned: "64 Kanaka-white marriages. Federalists at any price, and a piebald Australia"; 2 September 1899 cited in Jenkins, *Attitudes towards Federation in North Queensland*, p.54.

41 Doran, *Separatism in Townsville*, pp.76,81,82,84.

42 Thuringowa had very few farms growing sugar in 1899. Many cane farmers believed that separation would be obtainable under federation, too. For full discussion of all the issues see Jenkins, *Attitudes towards Federation in North Queensland*, pp.117-130. Also see Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, pp.209-211.

constitutional crisis of 1975 was foreshadowed by the apprehension of meatworkers concerning the powers of the Governor-General; they were told that their fears were illogical as "the power of the people through their parliaments was supreme".<sup>43</sup>

The electors of Thuringowa and Townsville "set an example...by lodging an intelligent and patriotic vote"<sup>44</sup> that saved Queensland from "the terrible blunder of the rest of the colony". Town and country pulled together for "a magnificent victory".<sup>45</sup>

It was not just political issues that united Thuringowa and Townsville; they frequently combined to promote joint economic development. This was not always the case of many town-country relationships in New South Wales and Victoria. Bate shows that Victoria's gold towns initiated development in their hinterlands, but towns in New South Wales tended to respond to "hinterland development achieved from outside the region as, for instance, through migration from Victoria and South Australia".<sup>46</sup> In Townsville and Thuringowa, the two meatworks, the bulk sugar terminal at Townsville wharf, the Townsville to Ingham railway, the Copper Refineries, the College of Advanced Education and James Cook University, the Army base at Lavarack Barracks, the Commonwealth Scientific, Industrial and Research Organisation's experimental farm at Woodstock and laboratory in Townsville, the Australian Institute of Marine Science and the Yabulu Nickel Works are all examples of the strong links between town and country.

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43 NQH, 28 August 1899, p.30.

44 NQH, 11 September 1899, p.19.

45 NQH, 4 September 1899, p.3.

46 Bate, "The Urban Sprinkle: Country Towns and Australian Regional History", p.118.



Another good example, historically, is the Townsville to Ayr railway. Three local government authorities - Thuringowa Divisional Board, Townsville Municipal Council and Ayr Divisional Board - formed the Ayr Tramway Joint Board to finance and operate the railway which was completed two months under contract time in April 1901.<sup>47</sup> Thuringowa's commitment, two-fifths of the cost (£78 000) of the railway, compared with two-fifths from Townsville and one-fifth from Ayr - a disproportionately generous contribution as neither terminus, nor the anticipated growth, were in Thuringowa; nor did the line go through any of Thuringowa's small townships. Such "splendid public spirit" was nevertheless a vital stimulus to the region's development.<sup>48</sup>

There were times when the predominantly rural Shire aided town and regional development. During the Great Depression, it was a financially poor Thuringowa that built and operated Townsville's first airport - at a loss - for the benefit of both town and country.<sup>49</sup> The Townsville Municipal Council had refused to consider such a proposal.<sup>50</sup> During the first year of operation in 1930, three planes operated a tri-weekly, return service to Mackay, Rockhampton and Brisbane.<sup>51</sup> However, the

47 See Chapter 9.

48 C&C, December 1932, p.54.

49 See Chapters 9 and 13 respectively for a detailed discussion concerning the aerodrome and Thuringowa's financial affairs.

50 Letter, 25 June 1935, Correspondence re Aerodrome at Ross River, 11 THU/144 (QSA).

51 The three planes, two Avro 10's and one Avro 5 were christened the "Star of Townsville", "Star of Rockhampton" and "Star of Cairns" respectively. The fare to Brisbane was approximately £10 and aircraft departed Townsville at 6.00 a.m., arriving in Brisbane at 3.30 p.m.; "Townsville Airport" (Townsville, n.d.), p.1 (Townsville Municipal Council Library).

pioneering era of air transportation was not smooth.<sup>52</sup> Thuringowa lost the airport to Townsville in the 1936 boundary change. However Thuringowa's commitment to air transportation strengthened Townsville's place as the north's commercial centre as well as the region's links with more distant parts.

Other reciprocal developments had to do with the cattle and sugar industries. Thuringowa erected cattle dips, windmills and dams and improved the Hervey's Range stock-route which were of benefit not only to Thuringowa's graziers but also Townsville's meatworks (Thuringowa lost QME and Alligator Creek Meatworks in the boundary changes of 1918 and 1964 respectively) and, indirectly, the meatworkers living in the suburbs of Thuringowa and Townsville. It was Thuringowa cane farmers who bought and operated Invicta Mill with only minimal investment in shares by town businessmen.

On the other hand, town businessmen gave more support to the district's agricultural and dairying industries than Thuringowa's Councils. The Municipal Council operated a market in the 1890s for Thuringowa's horticultural and dairy farmers. Townsville's business community started the Australian Sugar Producers

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52 The carrier, Queensland Air Navigation Limited, ceased operations as a result of public disenchantment with this new form of transport following the fatal crash of the "Star of Cairns" at Bundaberg in 1931. QANTAS then flew into Townsville for a few weeks only, followed by Tom MacDonald who, with a Gypsy Moth, operated North Queensland Airways between Cairns, Townsville and Thursday Island. Both helped keep the infant airport open until in late 1934 New England Airways began a return, Brisbane to Townsville freight service which quickly grew to a tri-weekly service with feeder services to Cairns and Mt. Isa.

Association in 1907<sup>53</sup>, lobbied the 1947 Royal Commission on Development to open up Townsville's hinterland for agricultural development and supported various Thuringowa lobby groups (such as the Haughton River Farmers Association and the Woodstock Tobacco Growers Association) in their requests for better facilities.<sup>54</sup> The Royal Automobile Club of Queensland (RACQ) and the Townsville and District Progress Association were instrumental in obtaining considerable Unemployment Relief funds in the 1930s to build the Hervey's Range and Mt. Spec roads.<sup>55</sup>

Friction between Thuringowa and Townsville occurred. Social relations were not always pleasant: a feature of early life in Townsville was "the horse-play that was indulged in by visitors from the country. The practical jokes were not appreciated by the shopkeepers...[one of whom] was so irritated that he discharged a revolver at his tormentors".<sup>56</sup> However tension arose mainly in the sphere of local government. Disgruntled with the level of services provided, rural settlers believed that "we outside people need never expect justice while joined to the suburbs".<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, urban dwellers were convinced that a rural-dominated council could not

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53 The formation of the Australian Sugar Producers Association was a result of a conference organised by the Townsville Chamber of Commerce which continued to play an important role in the district's sugar industry; Harry Easterby, *The Queensland Sugar Industry: An Historical Review* (Brisbane, n.d.), p.43.

54 For example, railway-siding sheds to protect their produce and government intervention to protect the tobacco industry.

55 Both these were in Thuringowa Shire; see Chapter 6 and Photographs in chapter 15.

56 Reprinted in C&C, April 1931, p.53.

57 TH, 10 March 1888, p.25.

understand their needs.<sup>58</sup> The major areas of local government conflict within the Shire and between the two local authorities, Thuringowa and Townsville, are dealt with in detail in Part II of the thesis.

Town and country were also linked through recreation. Initially, Townsville was the meeting place and social venue for the rural community.<sup>59</sup> However, as small rural villages became established, they too provided a cricket pitch, tennis court, pub and picture theatre. Townsville then only drew rural dwellers for the grander events such as football finals, balls, major race days, the circus, theatricals and the Ice Follies. Urban dwellers went bush or to the beaches to get away from the faster pace of town and suburban living where the clock governed life more precisely. Any activity associated with country pursuits was instantly popular.<sup>60</sup> "Roughing it" in tin sheds with earthen floors, kerosene lamps and crude bathing and sanitary arrangements was seen as part of the appeal of the fishing and crabbing weekender, at least for the men.<sup>61</sup> It was thought that Mt. Spec would become Townsville and

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58 See Chapter 12.

59 Compare Bate, "The Urban Sprinkle: Country Towns and Australian Regional History", p.112.

60 "Robinson's Rodeo: the Great Bushman's Carnival" attracted thousands "with the thrill and skill of buckjump and bullock riding". The rodeo was held at Mt. St. John to benefit local charities; *C&C*, April 1934, p.33. Wild duck and pig shooting parties were popular diversions for male suburbanites; they were especially arranged for visiting urban dignitaries. For instance, a shooting party was arranged for the Honourable Justice Cooper and Major General Owens to Reid River as "the country was in the pink of condition"; *NQH*, 12 April 1893, p.16. Also see *C&C*, June 1937, p.14.

61 Mr. and Mrs. A.J. Litster used such facilities at Balgal Beach for two years from 1955 until they built "a large-ish two roomed cottage"; Interview, 18 April 1986.

suburban Thuringowa's sanitorium.<sup>62</sup> By 1971 there were 388 holiday homes built on Thuringowa's beaches and at Mt. Spec to be enjoyed by Townsville's and Thuringowa's urban dwellers.<sup>63</sup> Until Thuringowa Councils adopted stringent town-planning bylaws from the 1960s, shanty dwellings and Townsville's rejects were permitted. Evenso, the cost of land, rates and travel still ensured that the holiday "home" was a welcome indulgence for the more wealthy.

Picnicking was the town's most popular form of rural recreation. In the early days, a certain status attached to "the picnic", which would command space in the newspaper - even under "Topics of the Day".<sup>64</sup> Magnetic Island was a popular site for picnickers and the natural history enthusiast; ferry excursions attracted between 100 and 200 persons (see Photographs).<sup>65</sup> The train and later the car made Thuringowa picnic sites more accessible to more people.<sup>66</sup> Special trains were hired, particularly for Townsville and suburban Thuringowa's

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62 Minutes, 12 March 1913, 9 April 1913, Minute Book, 11 December 1912 - 8 March 1916, 11 THU/D4 (QSA); hereafter 11 THU/D4.

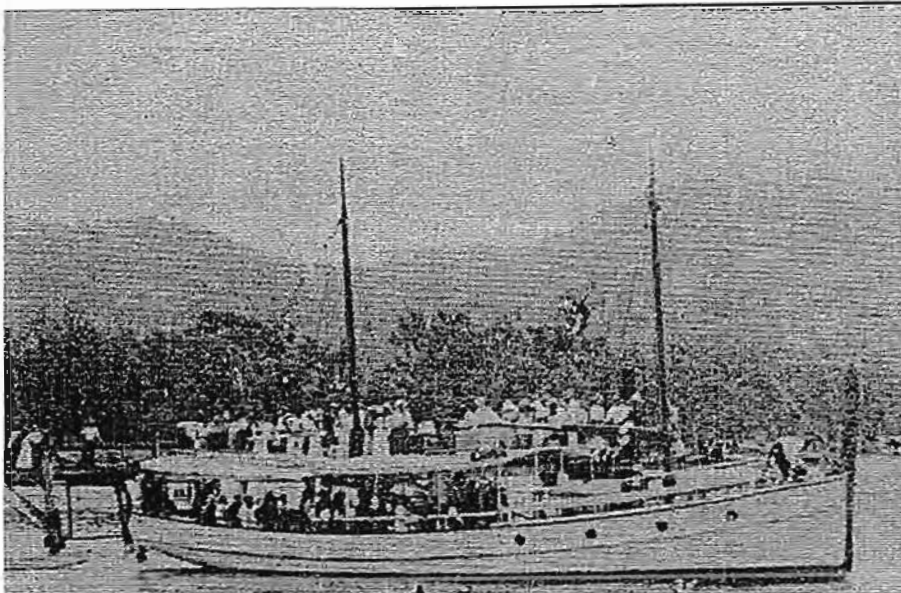
63 Census, 1971.

64 For instance, the "very enjoyable picnic to Ross River on St. Patrick's Day given by Mrs. Savage of Pimlico" (a suburb in Thuringowa) was worthy of detailed comment; *NQH*, 23 March 1892, p.8.

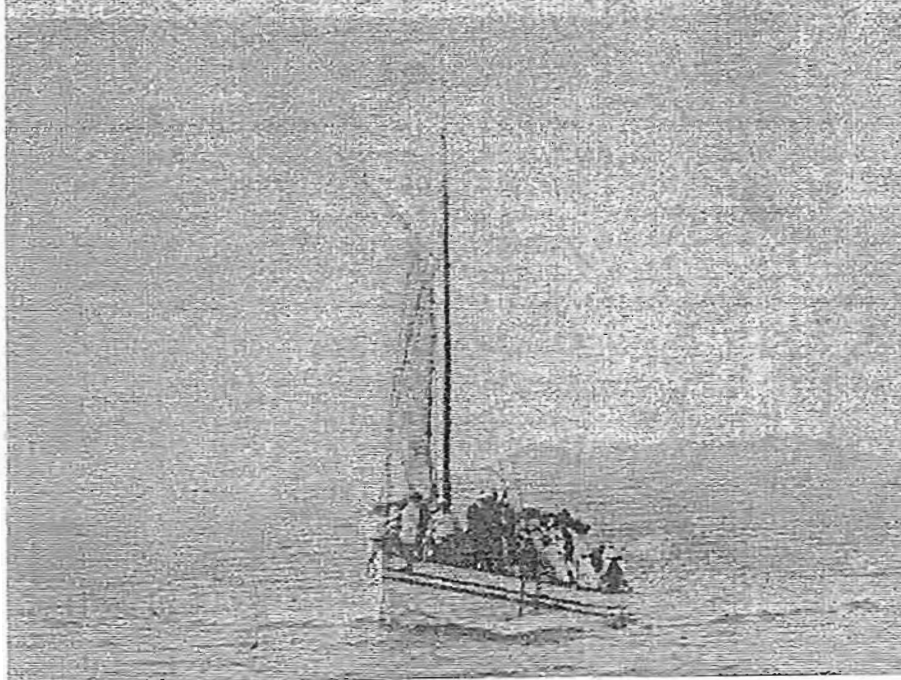
65 See *TDB*, 20 March 1888; *TH*, 28 July 1888, 12 April 1890; *NQH*, 14 November 1894, 17 April 1895. Guided excursions to examine ferns and orchids were offered by the proprietor of picnic facilities at Cockle Bay; *TH*, 3 March 1888.

66 One of the largest picnics was attended by 3 500 workers and their families who celebrated Labour Day in 1924 with a train excursion to Bluewater Creek, 20 miles from town; *Queenslander*, 10 May 1924, p.29.

## Picnickers to Magnetic Island.



Hayles' tourist boat Magneta, pictured above, was popular back in 1914 at the time when World War I was about to erupt and change the lifestyles of millions of people throughout the world. Pictured below is the first ferry to be operated between Townsville and Magnetic Island. Conditions may have been overcrowded but for the early settlers and tourists, there was no doubt that the trip was pleasing.



Picnics were an invaluable means by which "town met country". (Centenary Souvenir Supplement Townsville Daily Bulletin, 5 September 1981, p.47).

*Cummins and Campbells' Annual Staff Picnic.*



The Grand March down Townsville's main street was followed by a motor lorry cavalcade to Bluewater Creek for the annual picnic. It was obviously an important event that help give staff a community spirit. (*Cummins and Campbell's Monthly Magazine*, September 1937, pp.13,11 respectively).



annual Sunday School picnics.<sup>67</sup> Firms like Cummins and Campbell which held its Hamper Picnic at Alligator Creek, one of the most favoured spots for picnics and swimming by motorists, journeyed by truck convoys (see Photograph, previous page).<sup>68</sup> From the 1970s the provision and maintenance of barbeques, tables, bench seats and toilet blocks in aesthetically pleasing picnic areas for the increasing number of caravaners and day-trippers constituted a heavy financial burden for Thuringowa Shire Council.<sup>69</sup>

A large number of urban people took advantage of train excursions. It was common for special trains to carry 300 to 500 people, even on weekends when the charges were 25% above the week-day rate because of

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67 For instance, in 1892 the City and North Ward branches of the Baptist Church took the train to Brookhill; on different Saturdays, St. Peter's Church of England, West End, and 680 Presbyterians picnicked at Stewart's Creek. The Primitive Methodists preferred Vidler's Paddock, Cluden, so that the children could pet the baby farm animals; the City, South Townsville, West End, Aitkenvale and Idalia Wesleyans held their foot races, sack-jumping and tug-of-war games in the park at Idalia Estate; the Mundingburra Church of England returned to their favourite spot nine miles from town on the banks of Ross River; *NQH*, 1 June 1892, p.11. In 1933, 3 000 children and adults boarded day-excursion trains in Townsville for their Sunday School picnics on the banks of various northern or western rivers, Black River being the favourite; *Weekly Notice*, Railway Department Publication, 25 (1933), n.p. For many suburban children in the 1950s the train ride, with "its distinctive puffing and whistling and clickety-clacking", made the Sunday School picnic "extra special" because it was either their first or annual train journey; the day was not quite so exciting for the fathers, who had to dig and, at the end of the day, fill in open-hole latrines behind hessian screens, or for the mothers who still had to attend to babies, solve squabbles and put mercurochrome on grazed knees whilst keeping the lunch free of flies; Interview N. Mulchay, 18 April 1987.

68 *C&C*, May 1930, p.31; "RACQ Notes", *C&C*, May 1932, pp.69,70.

69 See Chapter 14.



higher wages.<sup>70</sup> Indeed the frequency of excursion trains indicated not only the desire but the ability of town dwellers to get away from their town and suburban environment. Farmers and their families could not escape their environment so easily: they usually had to work weekends. Because of complaints by cane farmers that excursion trains early in the crushing season interfered with harvesting,<sup>71</sup> the Ayr Tramway Board rescheduled the monthly excursion trains to Sunday.<sup>72</sup> This example highlights the symbiosis between town and country employers on economic matters.

Show week was an important event in the district's calendar. For a number of years local authorities could declare which day was the public holiday. Special excursion trains brought people from Ayr, Charters Towers and Ingham. Months of preparation culminated in competitions for best bull, pig, wool clip, fruit cake, needlework, pickles, show-jumping and copperplate writing among and between graziers, farmers, rural and suburban housewives and town and country school children. Other entertainments which also came to town during Show Week when the town was full of Westerners, were more expensive. Nevertheless, Saul's Vaudeville which was held in a marquee, as well as the Follies and, for a few years in the 1950s, the Ice Follies were always crowded.<sup>73</sup>

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70 For instance, in 1892 400 travelled to Cluden to watch the naval and military tournament; *NQH*, 5 October 1892, p.12. In 1907 480 enjoyed the five hour rail trip each way to Ayr and back with refreshment stops at Cromarty and Brandon; *TDB*, 19 August 1907, p.4. Also see *Brisbane Courier*, 10 October 1904, p.5; *TDB*, 12 July 1907, p.3; 19 August 1907, p.4; 16 May 1908, p.7; 12 March 1909, p.5.

71 *TDB*, 13 January 1909, p.3.

72 *TDB*, 14 August 1908, p.2.

73 Interview V. Litster, 18 April 1986.

Dances brought people together for various social reasons, not least of which was the quest for marriagable partners.<sup>74</sup> According to a southern visitor, the socials and balls provided Townsville with its "superior tone", and the severe adherence to formal conventions was lauded as it "does as much to keep young men 'straight' as sermons".<sup>75</sup> Small country areas enticed town dwellers out for "good old fashioned dancing and hospitality".<sup>76</sup> Sometimes they abused that hospitality; the Bohlevale School Committee, which, like most school committees, ran dances to raise money for school amenities, were dismayed at the behaviour of the "larrikin type" who, in 1912, regarded the dances as occasions on which they can get away from police restraint and indulge in drink and rowdyism to their heart's content. The last dance ended in a drunken orgy. They arrived in cabs, singing lewd songs and telling passers by what they were going to do to the Bohlevale girls.<sup>77</sup>

Marriage partners were sometimes found at bush dances at Bohlevale or those held in Gleeson's Barn which was a very popular venue, particularly during the Depression; hay rides were organised to take suburbanites to the dances.<sup>78</sup> The Woodstock dances drew people from

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74 For instance, on 26 July 1866 a private dance, "the first time such a thing had been attempted in Townsville", was held at the Gordon's Thuringowa estate at Cluden for the district's elite. James Gordon was the first Magistrate; both he and his sons became Members of Thuringowa Divisional Board; *C&C*, August 1932, p.25.

75 "As Others See Us", *TH*, 14 September 1889, p.14.

76 Interview Mr. and Mrs. Wordsworth, 18 April 1979.

77 Letter from D. Wallace to the Education Department, 12 September 1912, Schools Primary - correspondence c.1861-c.1959, EDU/2238 (QSA).

78 Mr. and Mrs. W.F. Benton who celebrated their golden wedding anniversary in July 1978 met at a bush dance at Bohlevale in 1926; "North Queensland People" Pamphlett File (Townsville Municipal Library); Interview Mrs. V. Litster, 18 April 1985.

Townsville, Giru and Charters Towers from the late 1950s.<sup>79</sup> However, the success of the country dances was eclipsed when the disco arrived in Townsville in 1960. It was nothing for single men to travel 30 to 40 miles each Saturday into Townsville to attend the smoke-filled, dimly-lit and music-blaring discos at the better hotels.<sup>80</sup>

After the bombing of Pearl Harbour in 1942, Thuringowa and Townsville became the vital staging centre and forward command post for the Pacific war theatre.<sup>81</sup> Australian and United States military personnel increased Townsville and Thuringowa's population to about 90 000 by mid-1943; soldiers outnumbered civilians by almost three to one.<sup>82</sup> In Thuringowa the ratio would have been 10:1.<sup>83</sup> Thuringowa and Townsville residents reacted differently to the military occupation, especially to the presence and behaviour of the Americans. Of course, the situations were different.

Townsville's civilian disaffection, irritation and low morale led to government studies which were

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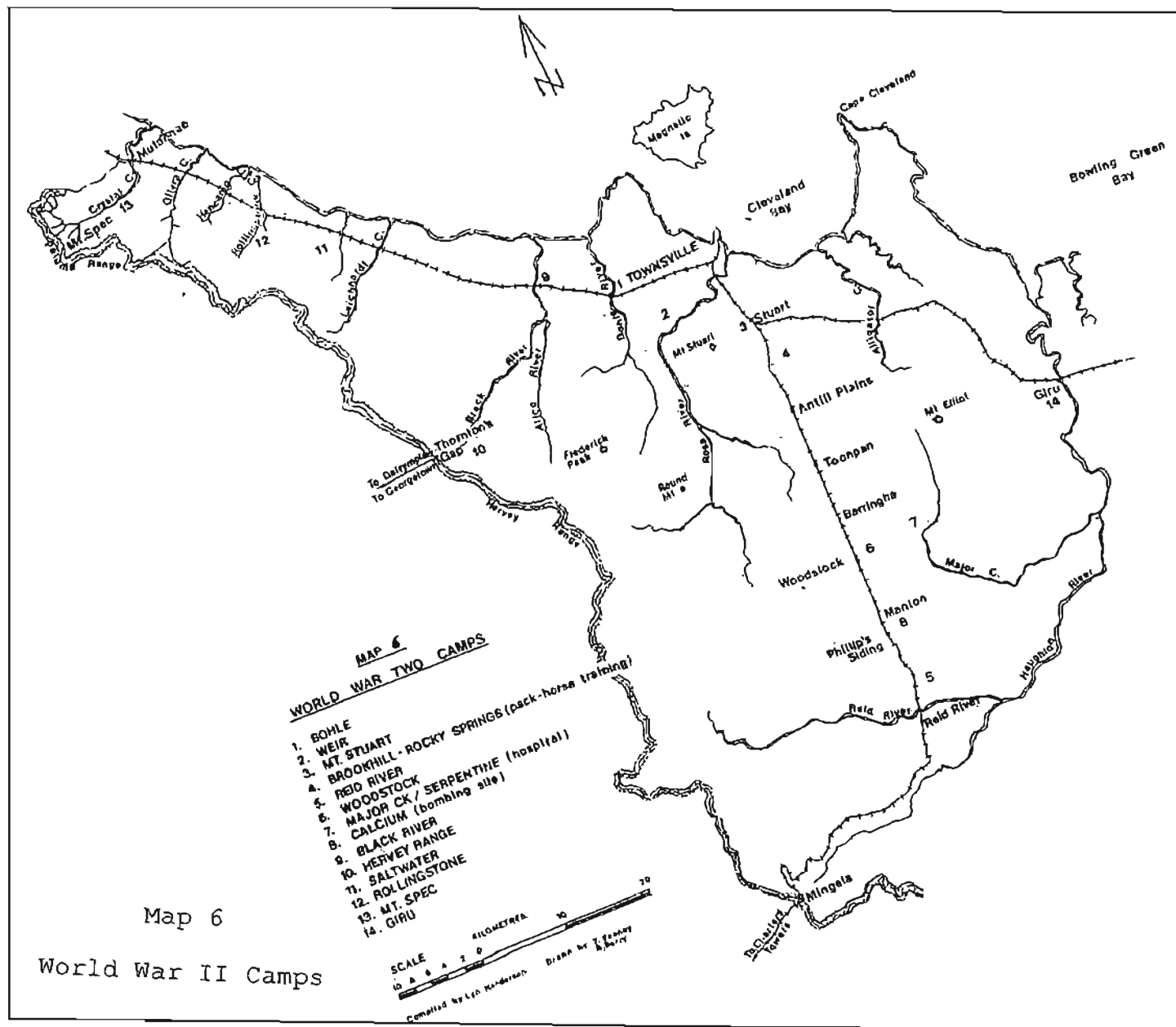
79 The local Country Women's Association's Hallowe'en Ball Committee at Woodstock was "elated" with the 400 people who attended the "night of the year" in 1974; TDB, 9 August 1974.

80 Interview Colin Pace, Rollingsstone, 6 March 1989.

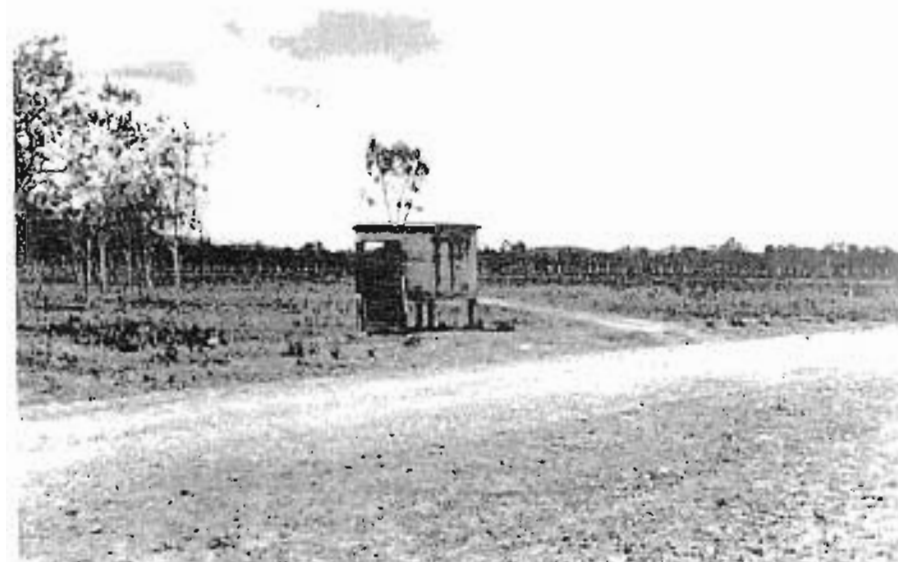
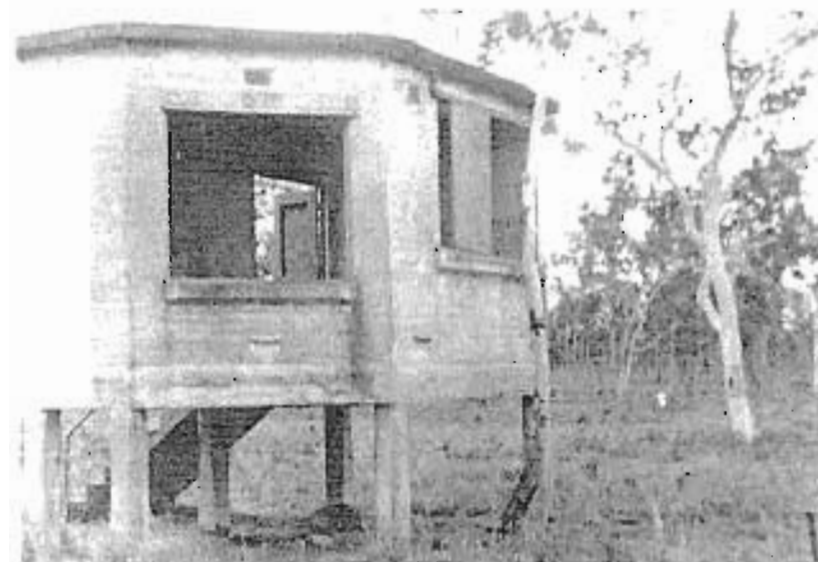
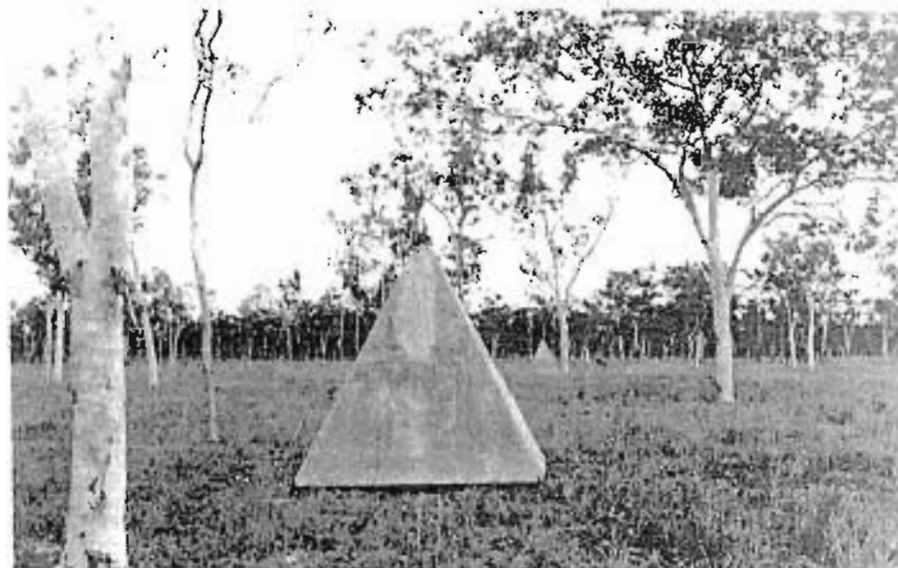
81 Base Section 2, encompassing North Queensland to the Northern Territory border, was established on 5 January 1942 with headquarters in Townsville. It was also assigned responsibility for logistical support for New Guinea. (Base Section 1 was centred at Darwin; Base Section 3 at Brisbane; and Base Section 4 at Melbourne).

82 Secretary, Department of Labour and National Service to secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 22 June 1944, L356/5/2, Prime Minister's Department Correspondence Files, Multi-Number Series (Third System), 1934-1950, CRS A461; hereafter CRS A461.

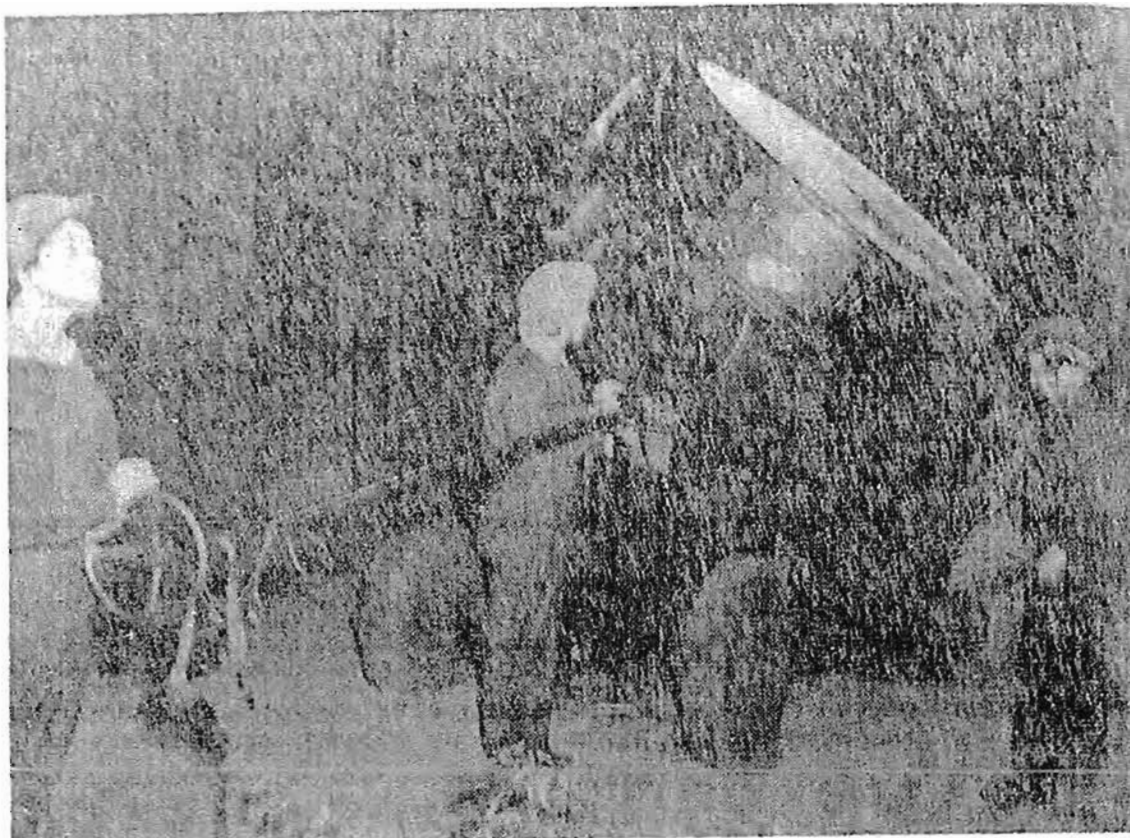
83 Calculated from statistics of Queensland, 1939-1945 and CRS A461.



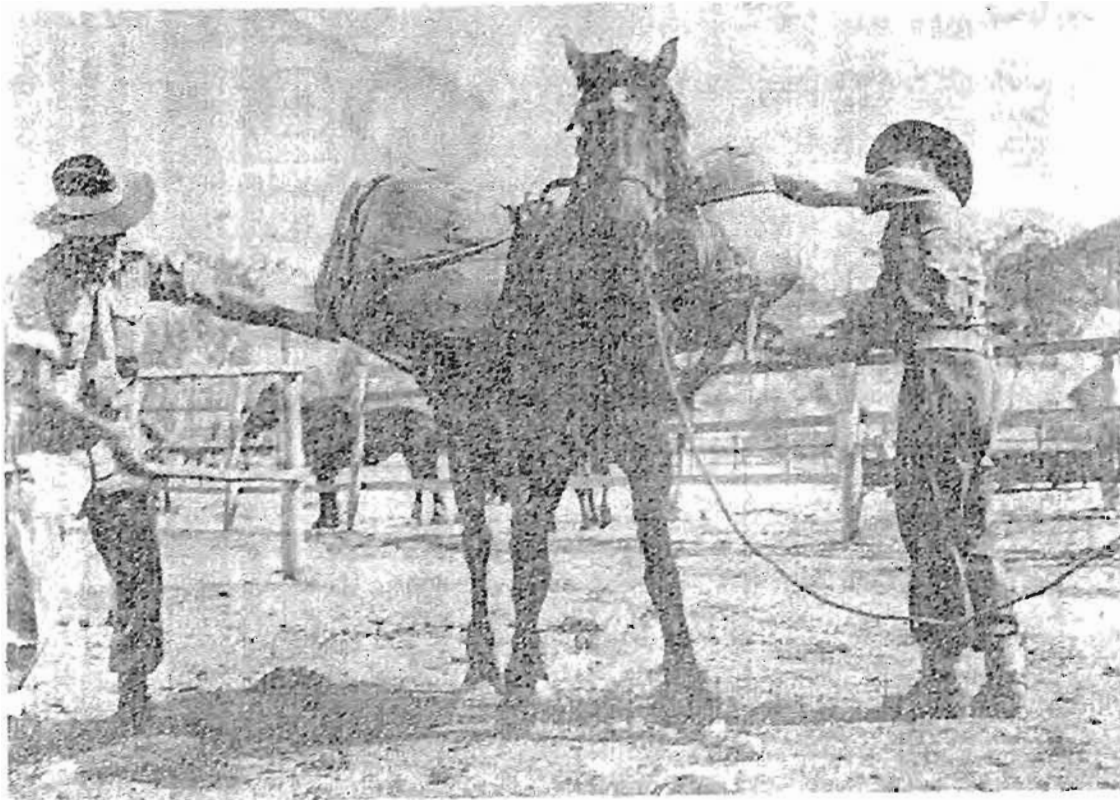
World War II Bomb Training Sites in Thuringowa



These sites near Calcium (see Map 6) provided target practice for the serious business of war. (Author's



Women, frequently forgotten in the traditionally masculine arena of war, showed considerable merit on the domestic front. (*Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 5 May 1976, p.5).



In the Thuringowa area, Aborigines and other soldiers trained packhorses for use at the front. (*Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 5 May 1976, p.5).



apprehensive of insurrection.<sup>84</sup> In comparison with Thuringowans, most Townsvillians suffered deprivations,<sup>85</sup> were irate over the misuse and waste of

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84 "Report on Civilian Morale", p.21; covering letter from W.J. Scully, Department of Commerce and Agriculture to the Prime Minister, 10 January 1943 on Report on Townsville's Food Supply by Controller-General of Food to Department of Commerce and Agriculture, 27 December 1942, CA37 Dept. of Defence Co-Ordinator, 1939-1942, Correspondence Files, Multiple Number Series, 1935-1958, "Townsville - Investigation by Security Service" 1944, CRS A816 item 42/301/410 (AA) (Canberra Archives); hereafter "Report on Townsville's Food Supply"; "Report on food Position in Townsville by Drs. Coombs and Clements" in Report of Civilian Food Position in Northern Queensland, CRS A1608 item BA29/1/2 (Canberra Archives).

85 Many basic commodities - ice, milk, tinned and dried fruits, biscuits, alcohol and fresh fruit and vegetables - were scarce and exorbitantly expensive yet the American forces had well-stocked canteens and, to make matters worse, purchased fruit, confectionery, icecream, softdrinks and milkshakes when on leave in town, with the result that "the ordinary householder and his children" were forced to go without. "Report on Townsville Food Supply", p.3. After allowing for the consumption of 4 500 gallons of locally produced milk by service personnel purchasing through retail cafes and hotels, it was estimated that there was a deficiency in supply of fresh milk for civilian consumption of nearly 4 000 gallons; "Report on Food Position in Townsville by Drs. Coombs and Clements", Appendix 2. There were continuing shortages of bread, ham, bacon, "dainties, condensed milk, full cream milk, pepper, macaroni, wax matches, household utensils, fencing wire and netting, starch, clothes pegs and millet brooms"; President, Townsville Trades and Labour Council to Chairman, Emergency Food Supply Committee, Townsville, 15 October 1944, Department of War Organization of Industry, Civilian Requirements Committee (Qld), Correspondence Files 1943-1945, BP18/2 item CRC30 (Commonwealth Archives Office Brisbane, CAO).



supplies which the military "so greedily" took,<sup>86</sup> resented the official impressment of 177 homes,<sup>87</sup> objected to the profiteering which was rife,<sup>88</sup> disapproved the brawling between the American and

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86 Preference given to the US forces with respect to ice when locals had to queue for hours for one block "had the biggest influence recently in whipping up the population than any other single thing"; "Report on Townsville's Food Supply", p.2; "Civilian Morale in North Queensland", pp.8,9. The condition of perishables left over for civilian purchase after the military's "Army First" policy "can only be described as disgusting. We saw a squad of youths removing cabbages, one by one, from their containers and wiping off the putrescent outer covering before delivering them for sale. Dietetically these were fit only for the ashcan"; "Civilian Morale in North Queensland", pp.9,10. Also see Assistant Secretary, Department of Commerce and Agriculture to Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 4 May 1943, CRS A1608 item BA29/1/2, p.1.

87 Though many contracts were "eagerly entered into and lucratively discharged", civilians were often ordered out of their homes at very short notice in the early days and continued to be particularly irritated by the retention of homes by "women folk who followed service men to Townsville": "Report on Townsville's Food Supply", p.1; CP/80-1, Department of War Organization of Industry, Correspondence Files, s series (secret), 1941-1946. Item S326, Civilian Morale in North Queensland, pp.7,11, 12; hereafter, "Civilian Morale in North Queensland".

88 Watermelons and pineapples cost more than they did in Sydney. All retailers "seemed to be exacting very wide margins of profit between the wholesale and retail prices"; "Report on Townsville's Food Supply", p.2. When beer quotas not only failed to improve - hotel bars were inappropriately open for two hours before lunch which allowed servicemen to consume most of the civilian ration -but actually fell after August 1944, the Townsville Trades and Labour Council held a one-day strike to highlight the "intense irritation" felt by the people of Townsville; "Townsville's One Day Strike", TDB, 6 December 1944; "Civilian Morale in North Queensland", pp.8,10.

Australian forces,<sup>89</sup> worried about the proliferation of prostitution and venereal disease,<sup>90</sup> and felt "under siege".<sup>91</sup>

On the other hand, Thuringowa residents generally accepted the conditions imposed by "an army of occupation" with unruffled composure.<sup>92</sup> There was much less antagonism felt by Thuringowans with respect to their lack of "essentials" in comparison with the discomforts endured by the soldiers, most of whom were Black American GIs stationed at Giru, Woodstock and Reid River, and Civil Construction Corps workers.<sup>93</sup> Although land was taken for airstrips, camps, hospitals and a bombing practice range and tractors were commandeered, for Thuringowa's graziers, dairy farmers, market gardeners and hotel proprietors, it was a time of

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89 Fights were more prevalent in the early days of occupation, usually between men who were stationed permanently out of the battle zone or else on their way to the front line; returned American and Australian soldiers rarely fraternised but had only praise for the other's heroism and fighting ability; "Civilian Morale in North Queensland", pp.14,15.

90 The peak incidence of syphilis and gonorrhoea in women was between 17 and 20 years of age; many teenagers under 17 were pregnant; Dr Cilento's statistics in "Civilian Morale in North Queensland", p.17. Civilian-military relations were not improved by the troops' use of shop doorways as places for copulation (and as latrines); *op.cit.*, p.19.

91 "Civilian Morale in North Queensland", p.6.

92 Assistant Secretary, Department of Commerce and Agriculture to Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 4 May 1943, CRS A1608 item BA29/1/2, p.1.

93 For a discussion of the numbers and placement of troops and the involvement of Black American soldiers in the war effort in Thuringow see Henderson, *More than Rates, Roads and Rubbish: A History of Thuringowa Shire and its Council to 1985*, Chapter 10.

profit.<sup>94</sup> With guaranteed large markets, profiteering, "blackmarketing and back-door selling at exorbitant rates",<sup>95</sup> Thuringowa's primary producers earned long-awaited profits. Country slaughter houses increased their output by 300% but hygienic improvements were unable to be carried out in order to keep pace with the heavy purchasing demands of the Australian and American forces, or were ignored for increased profits: the "conditions in and around the slaughter houses became appalling".<sup>96</sup> Although Thuringowa's milk production fluctuated seasonally and manpower shortages affected output, the number and size of dairy farms increased; there were 17 milk suppliers on the outskirts of Townsville as well as others at Woodstock and Giru.<sup>97</sup> These supplied the Australian forces, cafes, milk bars, hotels and lastly, civilians. Though the Americans preferred the more hygienic conditions associated with pasteurised milk which was trucked from Malanda on the Atherton Tableland, they nevertheless consumed 80-90% of the milk deflected from civilian consumption to the cafes and milk bars.<sup>98</sup> Thuringowa's milk vendors refused to countenance a zoning system which would correct the shortage of milk for Townsville's suburban population because the profits to be made by the vendor relegated to an outlying suburb would be considerably smaller.<sup>99</sup> Sugar farmers "made their money" with watermelons and

94 Assistant Secretary, Department of Commerce and Agriculture to Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 4 May 1943, CRS A1608 item BA29/1/2.

95 President, Townsville Trades and Labour Council to Chairman, Emergency Food Supply Committee, Townsville, 15 October 1944, BP18/2 item CRC30 (CAO).

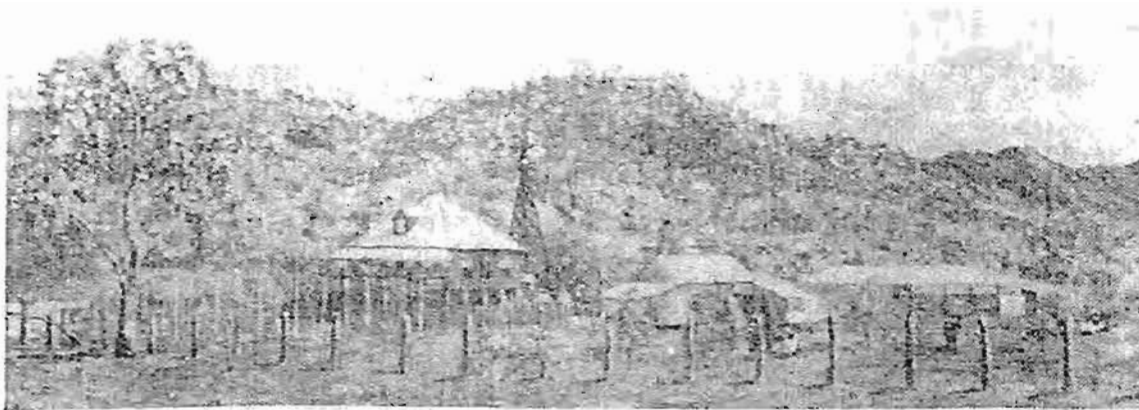
96 "Report on Food Position in Townsville by Drs. Coombs and Clements", p.3.

97 *Ibid.*, Appendix 2.

98 *Ibid.*, pp.4,5.

99 "Civilian Morale in North Queensland", p.8.

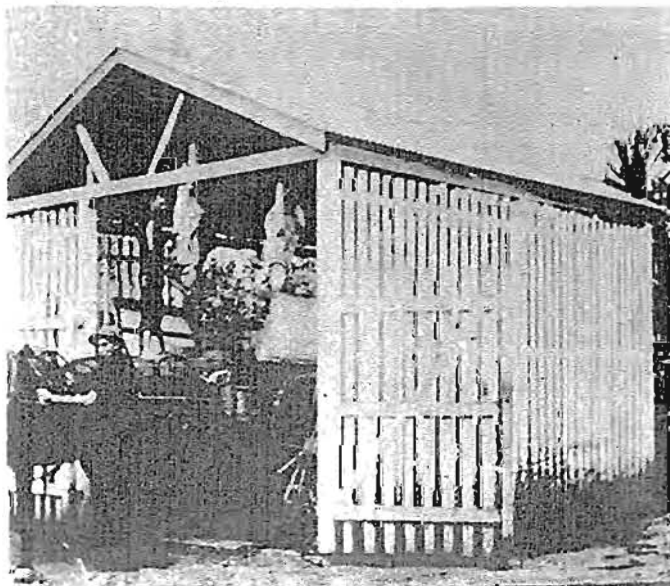
## Dairy Farms and a Slaughterhouse



Dairy farms, like Vidler's, were a part of the Thuringowa picture from early times. (*Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 20 June 1981, p.14).



They were busy family concerns. (Courtesy, Dan Gleeson, ex-Mayor Thuringowa City Council)



Conditions on them were often not the most hygienic (note the exposed carcasses). (Courtesy, Dan Gleeson, the Alderman who took Thuringowa from Shire to City status).

pineapples in the Rollingstone area during these war years.<sup>100</sup>

After Thuringowa "gave birth" to Townsville, town and country formed a symbiotic relationship. Linked by strengthening lines of communication with their rural hinterlands and larger urban centres in Australia and overseas, Thuringowa increasingly became the country cousin to the more affluent Townsville. Wealth, poverty and preferential treatment and expectations were always constants in Thuringowa's internal history, too.

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100 Interview Mr. Pace, canefarmer, Rollingstone.

## CHAPTER 6

### Class, Status and Poverty

Contemporary accounts reveal that class lines were sharply drawn in frontier Thuringowa as well as in Black's entrepreneurial town, Townsville. The evidence requires modification of the interpretations of Margaret Kiddle and Russell Ward who both hold that the "fierce egalitarian energies" of a "mobile rural workforce"<sup>1</sup> ensured that "the old hierarchic gradations - nobility, clergy, farmers, labourers and the rest were left in the old country".<sup>2</sup> True, the old categories were no longer relevant, but social divisions were still important in colonial society. There were distinctions between squatters and station hands, drovers and bullockies; between businessmen and shopkeepers; between publicans and inn-keepers; and between mistress and servant - though each might do the same work. Jack may have felt "as good as his master", may have eaten with him and dressed like him, but each knew exactly his social position.

It was the pastoralists, entrepreneurs and businessmen who monopolised rank and social privilege during the foundation years of Thuringowa and Townsville society. They were squatters like Black, Ball, Reid, Rowe, Ross and Cunningham, and businessmen like Black, Aplin, Ross, Philp, Walker, William Lennon, Hodel and Thankful Willmetts, all of whom achieved status, wealth and influence during the frontier era. As *nouveaux-riches* they became very protective of class boundaries. Black's story has already been told. Aplin, Walker and Philp each quickly progressed from clerk to manager to

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1 R. Ward, *The Australian Legend* (Melbourne, 1958), pp.1-13.

2 M. Kiddle, *Men of Yesterday: A Social History of the Western District of Victoria, 1834-1890* (Melbourne, 1961), p.47.

owner or co-owner of flourishing northern businesses which fostered inland networks as well as direct trade with southern, northern and overseas ports. Hodel, the son of Black's carpenter, became hotel proprietor, newspaper owner and grazier. All were influential in both Townsville and Thuringowa local government, Hodel becoming Thuringowa's longest serving chairman.<sup>3</sup> Aplin and Hodel became effective state politicians; Philp became Premier of Queensland. They possessed many of the characteristics that Ward discerned in the national character but, probably more importantly, they exemplified the "mobility myth":<sup>4</sup> the belief that anyone can make it economically and hence socially in Australia. Many histories have praised the self-made pioneer's diligence, frugality, sobriety, perseverance and moral triumph over the harsh circumstances of a new land; few however have stressed the importance of conniving, the political usefulness of having friends in high places and the importance of the monopolistic advantages of a relatively open field.<sup>5</sup>

The upper strata of frontier society were less rigid than those in the old country. Money, especially if earned in grazing or a flourishing business, conferred social status in Australia. In the 1880s and 1890s this was still so, at least in Thuringowa. Samuel Hind was

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3 See Chapter 17 for details of Hodel's story and his use of power and privilege in the arena of local government.

4 Terry Irving and Bob Connell, "Class in 1888: Theme or Theory?", *Australia 1888*, 6, November (1980), pp.71-81; G. Davison, "The Mobility Theme", *Australia 1888*, 1, April (1979), pp.10,11; G. Davison, "The Dimensions of Mobility in Nineteenth Century Australia", *Australia 1888*, 2, August (1979), pp.7-33; also see R.W. Connell and T.H. Irving, *Class Structure in Australian History: Documents, Narrative and Argument* (Melbourne, 1980).

5 Black, Hodel and other Thuringowans would be apt examples. See Graeme Davison, "The Dimensions of Mobility in Nineteenth Century Australia", pp.7,11, for his perspective on this point.

toll-keeper for Thuringowa Divisional Board in 1880; he then bought grazing land. This gave social clout to his family. For example, in the 1890s his sons were invited as eligible bachelors to elite social gatherings for the marriageable daughters of two of the earliest land-holding families, the Wagners and Saunders.<sup>6</sup> To the extent that social class was open to economic means, Kiddle and Ward are correct in discerning "fierce egalitarian energies".

Like women elsewhere in rural Australia, women in Thuringowa were used as a reserve labour force.<sup>7</sup> There were differences based on class, though. Thuringowa's European, female, grazing pioneers worked as shepherds and ringers when pastoral labour was scarce but returned instantly to domestic tasks when the shortage eased, thereby perpetuating the myth that their energies were restricted to the narrower world of the house.<sup>8</sup> Like Italian women migrants a century later, Thuringowa's early pioneer women preserved traditional values in an attempt to have some control over a relatively hostile environment. They ensured that the social mores and status consciousness of their upwardly mobile society were entrenched. They also "represented the permanency of Aboriginal dispossession"<sup>9</sup> and, as "God's police", the invariable relegation of Aboriginal women to "damned

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6 TH, 8 July 1891, p.10; NQH, 2 December 1891, p.12.

7 A. Curthoys, "Towards a Feminist Labour History" in A. Curthoys, S. Eade and P. Spearritt, *Women at Work* (Canberra, 1975), p.90.

8 See E. Pownall, *Australian Pioneer Women* (Adelaide, 1975; a re-issue of a book originally entitled *Mary of Maranoa: Tales of Australian Pioneer Women*, Sydney, 1959) for a description of the life of many different rural women.

9 Curthoys, "Towards a Feminist Labour History", p.89.



whores".<sup>10</sup> The wives and daughters of poor selectors, however, never escaped non-domestic work. Not only were they engaged in housekeeping, childbearing and childcare but also ran the fowlhouse, goat yard and dairy. Their roles and obligations straddled both inside and outside work. Women frequently had to add what traditionally has been seen as men's work to these chores.<sup>11</sup>

Being self-employed graziers, farmers and businessmen (and the wives of same) did not bestow automatic membership in the upper classes. It was the more wealthy landholders, politicians, professionals and businessmen who gained that privilege, and in the 1890s so, too, did businessmen who were gentlemen farmers. One of the last was Charles Richards, a confectioner and "experimental farmer", who built probably the only

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10 A. Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police: The Colonisation of Women in Australia*. (Ringwood, Vic., 1975).

11 For instance, when the teamsters were on the road, their wives and children had to manage everything. Other women added builder's labourer and general rousabout to their customary roles; a three roomed 24ft. x 16ft. cottage of "fine edge-dressed slabs fitted in like weather boards... with dressed pine floors and partitions", substantial fencing with morticed and trimmed posts and rails, a 12ft. x 12ft. bush timber, thatched roof fowl house and a half acre of cleared and grubbed land were "completed solely by Per Svensson and his wife's own labour...their large family of young children, too little to help; "Report of Bailiff of Crown Lands on Selection of Farm, 11 June 1898, Dead Farm File, LAN/DF4826.

double-storey home in Thuringowa in the 1890s.<sup>12</sup> It was not just the size of the house but its lined walls and ceilings (and the absence of tin or calico for internal partitions) that set Richard's house apart from most selectors' homes which were often smaller than the fowl house and/or dairy.<sup>13</sup> Economic livelihood usually took precedence over splendid accommodations, for it was not easy to establish farms, dairying or cattle grazing in Thuringowa. The smaller graziers and farmers, no matter that they were self-employed or employers, were seen as struggling selectors and cockies, "a rather despised species".<sup>14</sup> Greater status was achieved when money was invested not just in farming and grazing but also family comfort.

This was particularly evident in the class divisions

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12 The house, at the foot of Mt. Bohle and situated in the lower left-hand corner of a 160 acre selection, was approached via an avenue of trees. It measured 30ft x 16ft. with 10ft. high ceilings and generous eight foot wide front and side verandahs on the upper floor. There was a separate 24ft. x 12ft. kitchen with its own front and side verandahs and an adjoining spare bedroom. The house and kitchen were made from pine, hardwood and chamferboard except for the iron roofs and the ant-bed cement floor in the kitchen and dining room on the lower level. Report of Bailiff of Crown Lands on Selection or Farm to Public Lands Office, Townsville, 10 June 1899, No.02125 of Dead Farm File, LAN/DF4826.

13 For instance, Frank Pennell, a farmer, and his wife and three children occupied a two-roomed 18ft. x 10ft. 6inch slab hut with internal bark partitions, a 5ft. wide front verandah and separate iron roofed fireplace, 2ft. 6inches x 3ft. 6inches. The thatched fowl house measured 15ft. x 12ft. and the cart shed, 24ft. x 13ft. Report of Bailiff of Crown Lands on Selection of Farm, 20 May 1897, Dead Farm File, LAN/DF4825. Dairyman James Cruickshank and his family lived in a two-roomed galvanised iron cottage, 11ft. 6inches x 19ft. x 8ft. 6inches high walls with a 7ft. wide front verandah. Their dairy was 30ft. square and a separate calf pen and milking shed was 48ft. x 22ft. Report of Bailiff of Crown Lands on Selection or Farm, 13 October 1896, Dead Farm File, LAN/DF4825. Also see Dead Farm Files, LAN/DF4821, LAN/DF4823 and LAN/DF4826.

14 NQH, 16 January 1895, p.16.

Early Settlers in Thuringowa, ca.1870s.



This thatched dwelling was a little bit of Europe in an alien environment; the use of Aboriginal and/or South Sea Islander labour was not uncommon at that time, considered the just entitlement of not only the rich. (Arch Fraley Photograph, Centenary Souvenir Supplement Townsville Daily Bulletin, 5 September 1981, p.64)

of Thuringowa's urban areas. Since the 1880s and the overflow of Townsville's suburban population into Thuringowa, certain suburbs or sections of suburbs were recognised as either predominantly middle class or working class.

Initially, Townsville's wealthier businessmen and their wives built gracious homes set in acres of land two to six miles from town in what was to become Thuringowa's eastern suburbs. The suburbs grew around these "mansions" (see photographs \* ).<sup>15</sup> As Townsville's population increased, many of the properties were subdivided and sold as half or one acre suburban allotments. By 1883, one such subdivision, Mundingburra, consisted "almost entirely of the wealthier tradesmen who have villa cottages...this population seems to form a group distinct from the poorer population at the West End".<sup>16</sup> Nor was it coincidence that roads, bridges and water reticulation were given priority in Mundingburra and Hermit Park by Thuringowa Divisional Boards.

The working class built or rented working-men's cottages - usually 20ft by 12ft to 20ft with a skillion at the back, usually for the kitchen, and sometimes with a verandah at the front<sup>17</sup> - close to their place of work, bus route or railway line. Some lived in West End near the Maas Soap Factory, the brick works or livery stables; others lived near the ice works, brewery, steam laundry, tannery and two fellmongeries situated in the less-favourable sections of Thuringowa's wealthier eastern suburbs. In Idalia Estate, adjacent to the newly-completed Ross River Meatworks (QME), 50

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15 See Letter-to-the-Editor from T. Marron, *TH*, 10 March 1888, p.25.

16 Jas. Platt to Under-Secretary, Department of Public Instruction, 13 October 1883, Schools Primary - correspondence c.1861-c.1959, EDU/21977.

17 *TDB*, 4 May 1888.

workingmen's cottages were erected for rental to meatworkers and their families by the Idalia Land Company. Its shareholders were local Thuringowa-Townsville businessmen and two "friends in high places", the parliamentarians, Robert Philp and J. Donaldson, who were expected to act as "a board of advice in Brisbane".<sup>18</sup> Stewart Town, Stewart Dale and Fairfield were also considered working class suburbs from the 1880s to 1936 when Thuringowa lost them to Townsville in one of the many boundary changes. These tiny suburbs stagnated for much of this period as they were located along the railway, close to the meatworks, brickworks or gaol; as well, they either bordered salt pans or were cramped into small pockets of flattish land at the bottom of Mt. Stuart.

Pollution was a constant problem for the residents. Those in the neighbourhood of the brewery, "a locality which has not enjoyed a favourable character for salubrity", blamed the brewery's proprietors for polluting the district's underground water supply and, according to the editor of the local paper, "all sorts of evil things...[like] the continual presence of the doctor and the too frequent visit of the undertaker".<sup>19</sup> The editor, who misconstrued the doctor's report, claimed the working-class residents themselves were entirely to blame for contaminating the water supply through seepage from their cess-pits and rubbish holes and, hence, "the serious outbreak of typhoid fever in their area...Their disregard for the healthfulness [sic] of the whole town

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18 TH, 13 October 1888, p.12; NQH, 12 August 1891, p.11.

19 Editorial, NQH, 16 March 1892, p.10. Also see complaint to the Thuringowa Divisional Board, Minutes, Thuringowa Divisional Board, reprinted TH, 15 June 1889, p.15.

was little short of criminal".<sup>20</sup> More sympathy went to residents living near the fellmongeries. The Board directed the companies to "clear-up the nuisance" because the polluted water was not just injurious to the nearby residents' health but, ever mindful of its rural rate base, it was also poisonous to cattle, the district's biggest industry; as well, it contaminated produce from the Chinese market gardeners who rented the fellmongeries' waste water.<sup>21</sup> Notions of class affected the community's perceptions of the sort of environment each class was entitled to enjoy.

Eager to increase their sales, the larger landholders agitated for an extension of the "omnibus service so that the poorer artisans and tradesmen" would be encouraged to buy building allotments in their subdivided estates.<sup>22</sup> By 1891 there were 25 sub-divisions ranging from 4 acres to 1 149 acres in these eastern suburbs of Thuringowa.<sup>23</sup> Glowing advertisements, extravagant oratory, colourful lithograph maps and champagne picnics were used to tempt the buyer.<sup>24</sup> The desirability of certain sub-divisions was seen by

20 NQH, 16 March 1892, pp.10,11. Compare Dr. Hunter Finlay's report, Minutes for March, Thuringowa Divisional Board, reprinted NQH, 16 March 1892, p.17

21 TH, 21 February 1891, p.28.

22 Letter from Jas. Platt, District Inspector, to Under-Secretary, Department of Public Instruction, 13 October 1883, Schools Primary - correspondence c.1861-c.1959 EDU/Z1977. Also see TH, 18 December 1886, p.9.

23 See Henderson, *More than Rates, Roads and Rubbish: A History of Thuringowa Shire and its Council to 1985*, Chapter 10.

24 For instance, this occurred at the auction of 440 one-quarter acre blocks in North Aitkenvale; Aitken, the owner and developer, announced that

Free conveyances will be provided.

A Champagne Luncheon will be provided.

Sports will be provided.

Reprint of advertisement for a land sale in Aitkenvale North, 15 August 1885, C&C, April 1934, p.82.

some to consist in their proximity to Thuringowa's wealthier residents.<sup>25</sup>

Owning one's own home on its own block of land was not just a question of social desirability and the availability of land. Kociumbas contends that from the 1870s the influence of the medical profession ranging far beyond its immediate concerns with the preservation of health, was instrumental in dictating the shape of domestic space and architecture.<sup>26</sup> The profession increasingly pontificated on the health and morals of children.<sup>27</sup> A geographical separation between work and home was also deemed desirable for reasons of health and

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25 Commission agents and auctioneers tempted buyers with land "surrounded by the residences of Messrs. Goldring, Parkes and Philp" in Hyde Park or close to "the Residence of William Lennon, esq." or in "the most select suburb of Townsville [because] most of our wealthy farseeing Citizens having chosen its vicinity as their permanent homes"; TDB, 4 May 1888; Supplement, TDB, 4 August 1888, p.2; Reprint of advertisement for a land sale in Aitkenvale North, 15 August 1885, C&C, April 1934, p.82.

26 Jan Kociumbas, "'The Management of Children': Medical Advice on Child Care in New South Wales and Victoria, 1860-1900", *Australia 1888*, 9, April (1982), pp.14-19; hereafter "Management of Children".

27 They demanded "that houses be detached from their neighbours and have their own outdoor space or garden where the children could play in the open air under the watchful eye of the mother". The last sentence shows that the medical profession was also advocating an appropriate role for mothers which involved "the isolation of the mother in the separate world of the child over a protracted period. Herself a dependant, protected and provided for by a male breadwinner, she was to devote herself to the welfare of her young". Separate bedrooms were also recommended and justified on the grounds of lessening the spread of diseases and the risk of "premature awareness of sexuality in children" which had to be repressed at all costs. Kociumbas, "Management of Children", p.16.

aesthetics and was elevated to a status symbol.<sup>28</sup> The intervening creeks, parks and open spaces provided symbolic separation between the two spheres of home and work.<sup>29</sup>

The desire to have the best environment for home and children and some degree of acknowledged social status by building in the "right" suburb - values which were reinforced through advertising - successfully lured more and more people to Thuringowa rather than Townsville's suburbs: between 1880 and 1902, dwellings in Thuringowa's eastern suburbs increased by a staggering 882%.<sup>30</sup>

Thuringowa lost her populous eastern suburbs to Townsville in the 1918 boundary change and the working class suburbs of Oonoomba, Idalia, Fairfield and Stuart in a subsequent boundary change in 1936.<sup>31</sup> When Townsville's population began increasing after 1964 it

28 Commission Agents used this to advantage: "Why stifle your Wives and Little Ones in a close unhealthy City Climate...? Let us toil in the City all day, but let us enjoy comfortable (and consequently) happy homes, a smiling bounteous nature, and a healthy life-giving atmosphere, when our work is done...We are only anxious that those of us who, up to the present, have not succeeded in securing a Suburban Area may not neglect this chance"; Reprint of advertisement for Aitken's land sale in Aitkenvale North on 15 August 1885; C&C, April 1934, p.82.

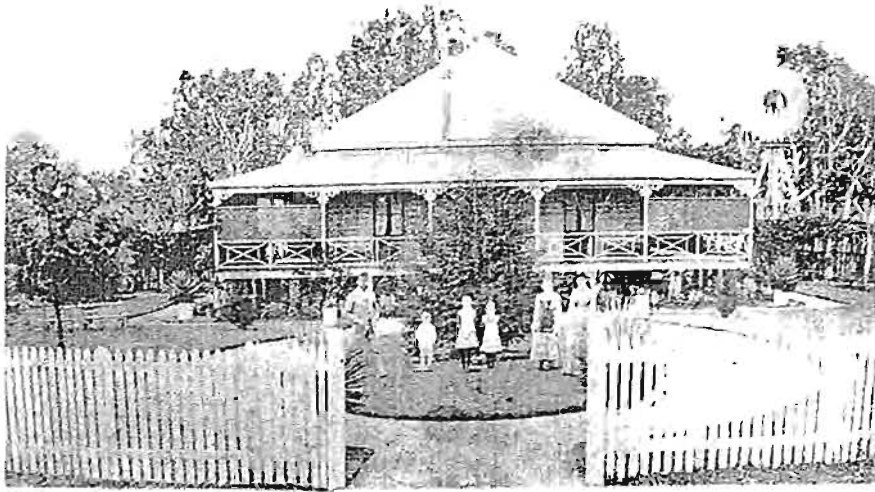
29 See Davison, *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne*, pp.138-140; Shane Carmody, "The Currie Family in 1888", *Australia 1888*, 11, May (1983), pp.32-34.

30 Statistics of Queensland 1880-1900; Department of Public Works, Correspondence and Records respecting formation and work of Divisional Boards, 1880-1891. WOR/N18 (hereafter WOR/N18); Reports Book 1889-1891; Letter Books, March 1880 - February 1888, 11 THU/G1 (hereafter 11 THU/G1); Miscellaneous Reports, Contracts and Balance Sheets December 1924-April 1931, 11 THU/132 (hereafter 11 THU/132); Valuation Registers 1886-1887 to 1900-1901.

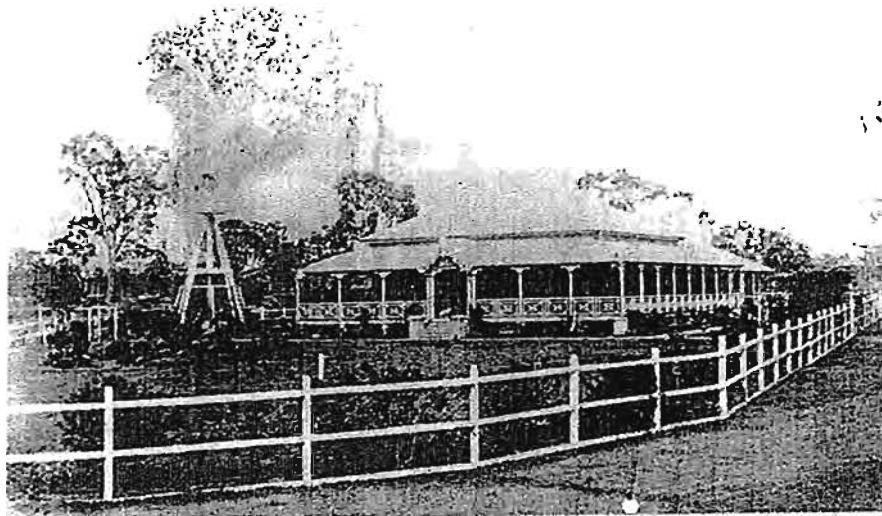
31 Stuart became the common name for the original suburbs of Stewart Town, Stuart Dale and Stewart's Creek.



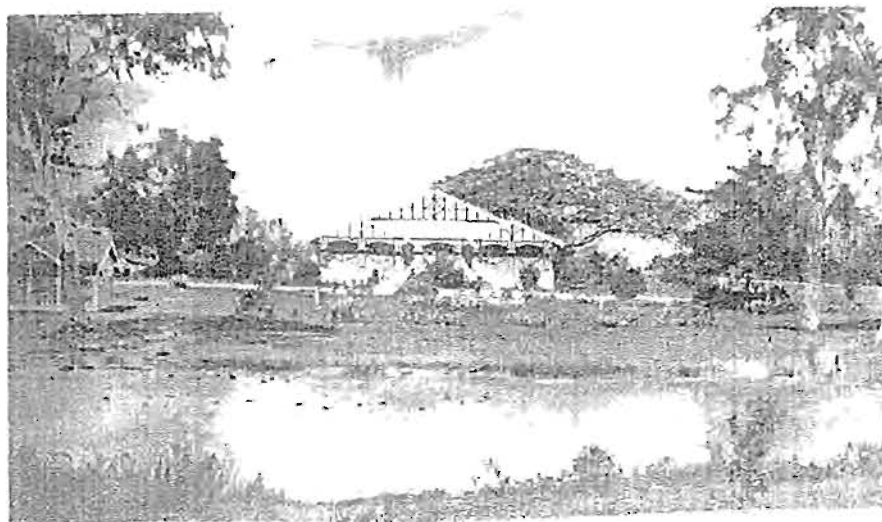
Homes of Affluent Thuringowans.



Ballachmore (1881), the Mundingburra residence of Alexander West, a wine and spirit merchant. (Courtesy Oxley Library No.38773).



Rosebank, ca.1892. The home of one of the first settlers in Thuringowa and Townsville, Andrew Ball. (Courtesy Oxley Library No.46858; by H.B. Allom).



Ellerslie, the residence of W.J. Heatley, Aitkenvale. (*The Christmas Number, North Queensland Register*,

Townsville suburbs in Thuringowa attracted the wealthy; rural spaciousness conveniently close to the town provided appealing settings for their splendid homes.

spilled over into Thuringowa, creating the suburbs of Kirwan, Condon, the Upper Ross, Kelso and the Willows. Blocks of land along Ross River were prized: their cost was prohibitive to buyers who were not relatively wealthy. Part of Kirwan became a Housing Commission Estate for low income families. However a characteristic of all these suburbs was their diversity: it was possible to find residents belonging to the working, middle and upper classes in the same suburb.

The five acre block of land in selected rural suburbs within 20 to 40 minutes travelling time, whether by horse or car, from the outskirts of Townsville's suburbs was always popular.<sup>32</sup> From the mid-1970s, a few graziers sub-divided their properties to create small rural suburbs at Oak Valley, Alligator Creek, Cordelia Estate, Mt. Low and Rupertswood which proved popular with the upwardly mobile.

Seaside retreats in Thuringowa's small beach villages were sought after by the middle and upper classes, particularly after World War Two. Balgal Beach, at the mouth of Rollingstone River and a 45 minute drive from Townsville, was one. Table 5 delineates the occupations of 52 owners;<sup>33</sup> the majority fall into the self-employed, managerial or professional categories. Word-of-mouth enthusiasm probably encouraged those in the building industry. The men may have lauded the benefits of a bracing outdoor climate for their families, but all were impressed, too, by the fishing, boating and

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32 In the North Queensland secessionist era of the late 1880s and early 1890s, 58 five acre "farmsteads" were offered at St. Kilda which would become "the future fashionable suburb of the future capital city of the new colony of Alberta"; C&C, April 1934, p.83.

33 There were another six owners, two of whom were retired, whose occupations are unknown.

TABLE 5

Occupation of Owners of Beach Huts at  
Balgai Beach from 1948 to the early 1960s<sup>34</sup>

Grazier	2+	Minister	2
Retired Manager	1*	Jeweller	1^
Manager	3	Caterer	1
Softdrink Manufacturer	1	Owner Corner Store	1
Building Contractor	7	Grocer	1
Painting Contractor	1	Barber	2
Electrical Contractor	2	Bootmaker	1
Plasterer Contractor	1	Service Station Prop.	1
Motor Repair Contractor	1	White Collar Worker	3
Earthmoving Contractor	2	Projectionist	1
Bridge Contractor	1	Truck Driver	1
Professional Fisherman	3*	Pipe Layer	1
Doctor	3^	Wharf Labourer	1
Dentist	1	Meatworker	1
Teacher	4	Railway Worker	1

+ Their grazing properties were west of Charters Towers

\* Were the only permanent residents at Balgai

^ One doctor and the Jeweller were from Charters Towers

crabbing.<sup>35</sup> Excluded from younger men's sports because of their ages, which ranged from mid-thirties to retirement age,<sup>36</sup> the seaside and adjacent creeks allowed substitute male-dominated recreation.

An investigation of income data for 1933 and 1976, the only census years for which the information is

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34 Rate Valuation Book, 1948-1960; interviews Mr. and Mrs. A.J. Litster, 2 May 1989; Mr. R. Mckergow 27 May 1989.

35 Interviews Mr. Russell Macklin, whose father built a weekender in 1947, 23 May 1989 and Mr. and Mrs. A.J. Litster, 2 May 1989. Mr. Litster, a building contractor, erected a tin shed in 1956. During the weekends and school holiday periods, the family lived in the tin shed for two years before a cottage on two-foot stumps was erected.

36 Interviews Mr. and Mrs. A.J. Litster, 2 May 1989 and Russell Macklin, 23 May 1989.

available, highlights the dimensions of poverty and wealth in Thuringowa. It is important to establish the financial capacity of the Shire's ratepayers for the Depression years and for the 1970s, an era of rapid suburban growth, because the ability of the ratepayers to pay rates had ramifications for the philosophies of the various Councils in terms of setting the rate to be levied and the consequently the amount of revenue which would be available for roads, bridges, water reticulation and sanitation.<sup>37</sup>

Before examining the extent of poverty in the Shire, it needs to be stressed that "classes can never be treated as homogeneous, internally undifferentiated units".<sup>38</sup> A comparison between occupation and income for the same years, 1933 and 1976, reveals the diversity within classes.<sup>39</sup> In 1933, 23% of Thuringowa's work force were employers or self-employed but only nine percent earned over £260 per annum; a further nine percent earned between £208 and £260 a year.<sup>40</sup> At least five percent of the employers and self-employed were struggling on the same income, less than £260 per year, as were wage and salary earners. The situation was different in 1976; 13% of the total number employed were employers or self-employed and a further two percent were employed professionals but 16% of all income earners

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37 The political implications of wealth, status and class will be explored in Part II of the thesis, particularly with respect to representation in local government and the degree of influence of the Shire's elites in setting the rates and works priorities.

38 Terry Irving and Bob Connell, "Class in 1888: Theme or Theory?", *Australia* 1888, 6, November (1980), p.73.

39 These were the only years that the census included both categories.

40 £260 or more was the top income category; calculated from Census, 1933.

cleared \$15 000 or more per annum.<sup>41</sup> Clearly, some workers were earning more than those in classes above them (or the latter had clever accountants!). To Irving and Connell, "contradictory experiences are the essence of classes".<sup>42</sup>

An examination of the 1933 census reveals that during the Depression 36% of the adult population of Thuringowa was in poverty: 11% had no income and 25% earned less than £52 per annum (see Table ). Of the latter, 5% were pensioners, 8% worked part-time and 2% worked but did not receive a wage, which leaves 10% who worked full-time for a meagre wage of £1 per week or less. Another 25% earned between £1 and £2 per week. A further 13% would have managed reasonably well on £2 to £3 per week, particularly if they had their own fowls and vegetables and perhaps a goat or two for milking. At the top end of the income scale, 26% of the population were comfortably off earning more than £3 per week; nine percent of these were quite wealthy. In all, two-thirds of Thuringowa's population struggled to put food on the table, clothe themselves and their children and keep a roof over the family's head.

This would seem a rather high level of poverty for a predominantly rural area which was supposed to have been affected less by the Depression than were urban areas. A comparison between Thuringowa and its rural and urban neighbours will help test this popular assumption. Table 6 reveals the differences between the cattle Shire of Dalrymple, the mixed cattle and cane Shire of Thuringowa, the two cane growing Shires (Ayr and Hinchinbrook) and their sugar and cattle port, Townsville.

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41 Calculated from the 1976 Census.

42 Irving and Connell, "Class in 1888: Theme or Theory?", p.74.

TABLE 6  
Comparison of Income for 1933<sup>43</sup>

	% No In- come	% less £52	% £52- £103	% £104 - £155	% £156 - £259	% £260 plus	% Unem- ploy- ed
Thuringowa	11	25	25	13	17	9	14
Townsville	8	25	17	14	21	15	14
Ayr	5	21	13	15	26	20	16
Hinchinbrook	7	16	15	18	25	19	11
Dalrymple	13	37	19	13	11	7	11

Dalrymple was the poorest Shire with 13% of its population having no income and 37% earning under £52 per year. Contributing to the latter percentage was a higher proportion of pensioners (11%) compared with Thuringowa (5%), Townsville (8%), Ayr (3%) and Hinchinbrook (2%). This probably reflected the number of ex-miners and ex-drovers who lived in the ghost town of Ravenswood or the meatworks township of Selheim: the sugar areas of Ayr and Ingham, on the other hand, were meccas for young canecutters.

Adding the next category of income, £52 to £103 per annum, Dalrymple (69%) and Thuringowa (61%) are similar in the number of people struggling to survive on less than £2 per week. The Shires' reliance on cattle was probably a crucial factor in the prevalence of poverty; so, too, was Thuringowa's 13% unemployment rate in 1921

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43 Calculated from 1933 Census.

and 14% in 1933.<sup>44</sup> As discussed in Chapter 2, the beef cattle industry suffered until 1939 from the dramatic downturn in prices caused by the 1921 market collapse, the inability of local graziers to tap into the more remunerative southern markets and the general inability of people to buy meat during the Depression. Many graziers had to retrench staff.<sup>45</sup>

Ayr and Hinchinbrook had the most wealthy citizens and the fewest in poverty. Indeed only one-quarter of their populations were poor (earning less than £1 per week) compared with 45% who were comfortably-off or rich (earning over £3 per week). The situations in Thuringowa and Dalrymple were quite different. Cane growing and cutting were obviously lucrative occupations that helped soften the effects of Depression. The fact that Thuringowa had two cane growing areas, Giru and Rollingstone-Mutarnee, no doubt accounted for the better economic conditions in the Shire compared with those in Dalrymple.

Townsville had more people who earned above £3 per week (35%) than below £1 per week (33%). As Townsville was the port, rail and service centre for the surrounding districts and north-western Queensland, the level of income for those in employment remained relatively high. Many of Townsville's wealthier citizens were members of long-established families who had arrived before the turn of the century. Although Townsville had an unemployment

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44 This rate is calculated on the number of employed and registered unemployed adults; if it is calculated as a percentage of the total number of people in the Shire, then the rate is 6%. See below for a detailed discussion of the rationale for calculating unemployment on the former criteria.

45 Many of these found their way to the Mt. Spec unemployment relief road construction camps; Linda Venn, Women and Families in an Unemployment Relief Scheme Construction Camp, work-in-progress on B.A. (Hons) thesis, James Cook University, p.2.

rate of 14%, quite a number of these were certainly itinerants looking for work. This was always the case. For instance, in 1918 the ranks of Townsville's unemployed were swelled by men retrenched through the closure of Cloncurry's mines.

Unemployment rates need some explanation. If calculated as a percentage of the total population they are much lower than those stated in Table 6. For instance, as a percentage of the total population, Thuringowa had 6% unemployed; Townsville, 7%; Ayr, 8%; Hinchinbrook, 5%; and Dalrymple 6%. However, these percentages are roughly half the unemployment rate calculated on the number of adults eligible for work in the local government areas - that is, the total population minus the number of dependants. Such a calculation gives a fairer picture of unemployment and poverty, although it still conceals aspects of hidden unemployment such as women and minors working on the family's property or as unpaid family domestic labour.

As shown in Table 6, the rate of unemployment for 1933 was roughly the same for all areas. Ayr's higher figure was due to the strike at the sugar mills over British preference in cane gangs.<sup>46</sup> If these 92 men were excluded - for none of the other centres experienced strikes during 1933 - then Ayr's unemployment rate was 14%. The major reason given for unemployment in the five local government areas was scarcity of work.<sup>47</sup>

In terms of total unemployment figures, Thuringowa fared equally as poorly (or as well, depending on the point of view) as her neighbours. However, if the number of breadwinners with dependants who were out of work is

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46 See Chapter 4 for an explanation of the British Preference League and the Gentlemen's Agreement.

47 1933 Census.



compared across the Shires and Townsville, then Thuringowa had the gravest problem of poverty. 41% of Townsville's and Hinchinbrook's unemployed were single; Ayr's rate was 69%. On the other hand, 83% of Thuringowa's unemployed were men or women with families who received no income for an entire year.<sup>48</sup> Thus, if only unemployment figures are considered as a gauge of hardship during the Depression, without being calculated on the working adult population or without ascertaining who were the unemployed and cross-referencing unemployment with income, then the real extent of poverty (and wealth) is effectively hidden.

Moles trivalises the plight of the unemployed in Thuringowa-Townsville during the Depression. He argues that the Depression meant "inconvenience but rarely hardship" as it scarcely curtailed life's amenities. Indeed, "a day of unemployment was more like a day off work than a day out of work".<sup>49</sup> He ignores the loss of dignity and self-worth and sense of failure to one's family let alone the very real grind to put food on the table and provide decent clothes, particularly underclothes.<sup>50</sup>

The poor in Thuringowa used many strategies to help them survive. They fished, hunted kangaroos, birds and wild pigs, caught straying goats, kept chickens, grew some vegetables, worked for food and clothing, and stole

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48 Unfortunately, the figures quoted in the 1933 Census for Dalrymple do not tally; hence, this category cannot be used.

49 Moles, *A Majority of One: Tom Aitkens and Independent Politics in Townsville* (St. Lucia, 1979), p.47.

50 Though the latter could not be seen - and efforts were made to dry them inside or under the high-blocked house to avoid the neighbour's judgement - the wearer felt hidden shame; Interview Mrs. H.L., 18 April 1988.

from the Chinese market gardeners.<sup>51</sup> The rewards from these activities were unreliable - even Moles points out that attempts by the unemployed to sell fish at threepence per pound were usually unsuccessful as even the employed did not have the ready cash to buy<sup>52</sup> - and the activities themselves erratic, particularly as bullets cost money and food scraps were begrudged for fowls and goats.

If the family were fortunate to own (through inheritance or past good times), or to be buying their own home, rates were one of the first budgetary items left unpaid in the bad times. Thuringowa Shire Council, fully cognisant of the Shire's poverty, seemed loath to sue for rate arrears.<sup>53</sup> Thus in two working-class suburbs in 1933, 270 or 90% of the dwellings in the Cluden area and approximately 100 allotments in Stuart Town were in arrears.<sup>54</sup> Some families who rented were equally fortunate if tolerant and understanding landlords did not press for rent.<sup>55</sup>

As there were 1 495 unemployed men in Thuringowa and Townsville and the majority had dependants, some men had to leave home to look for work. Sometimes the family went too; not to, was to be uncertain of the next day's food and their marriage. Sometimes the husband's search for work did not end. Sometimes, when the men did gain

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51 Interview Mr. A.J., 18 June 1988.

52 Moles, *A Majority of One*, p.47.

53 See Chapter 13.

54 Letter attached to petition by residents of Cluden objecting to the secession of the south western suburbs to Townsville, Correspondence re no.4 Division and Shire Boundaries c.1934-8, 11 THU/140 (QSA); hereafter 11 THU/140.

55 Letter attached to petition by residents of Cluden objecting to the secession of the south western suburbs to Townsville, 11 THU/140.

work, money was not sent back to the family but spent - maybe at poker schools, such as that at Rollingsstone Hotel.<sup>56</sup> Men preferred to travel unencumbered as they could travel more quickly by jumping the rattler. If they gained unemployment relief work on long-term construction sites, such as the Mt. Spec road, then they might send for their families to provide stability and comfort.

The Government's unemployment relief work scheme provided 12 weeks' work on a rotational basis. Preference in terms of hiring and length of contract (usually 24 weeks), was given to married men and, in particular, men with families.<sup>57</sup> Families in the 12 Mt. Spec construction camps were provided with two tents, each 14 ft. by 10 ft, a fly which was strung between the tents to create a dining area, canvas stretchers, a bush shower and, for the adults only, eating utensils.<sup>58</sup> Flattened cardboard cartons and linoleum often lined the tent floors whilst the dining area sometimes had a "duckboard" floor.<sup>59</sup> Living under mouldy canvas in an area with a high number of rain days added to the housekeeping difficulties and substantially reduced one's comfort.<sup>60</sup> The Main Roads Commission believed that the women and families living in construction camps on the Mt. Spec road had a lower standard of living than most of

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56 North Queensland Oral History Project, ID34, 1B1 and 3A3 (History Department, James Cook University).

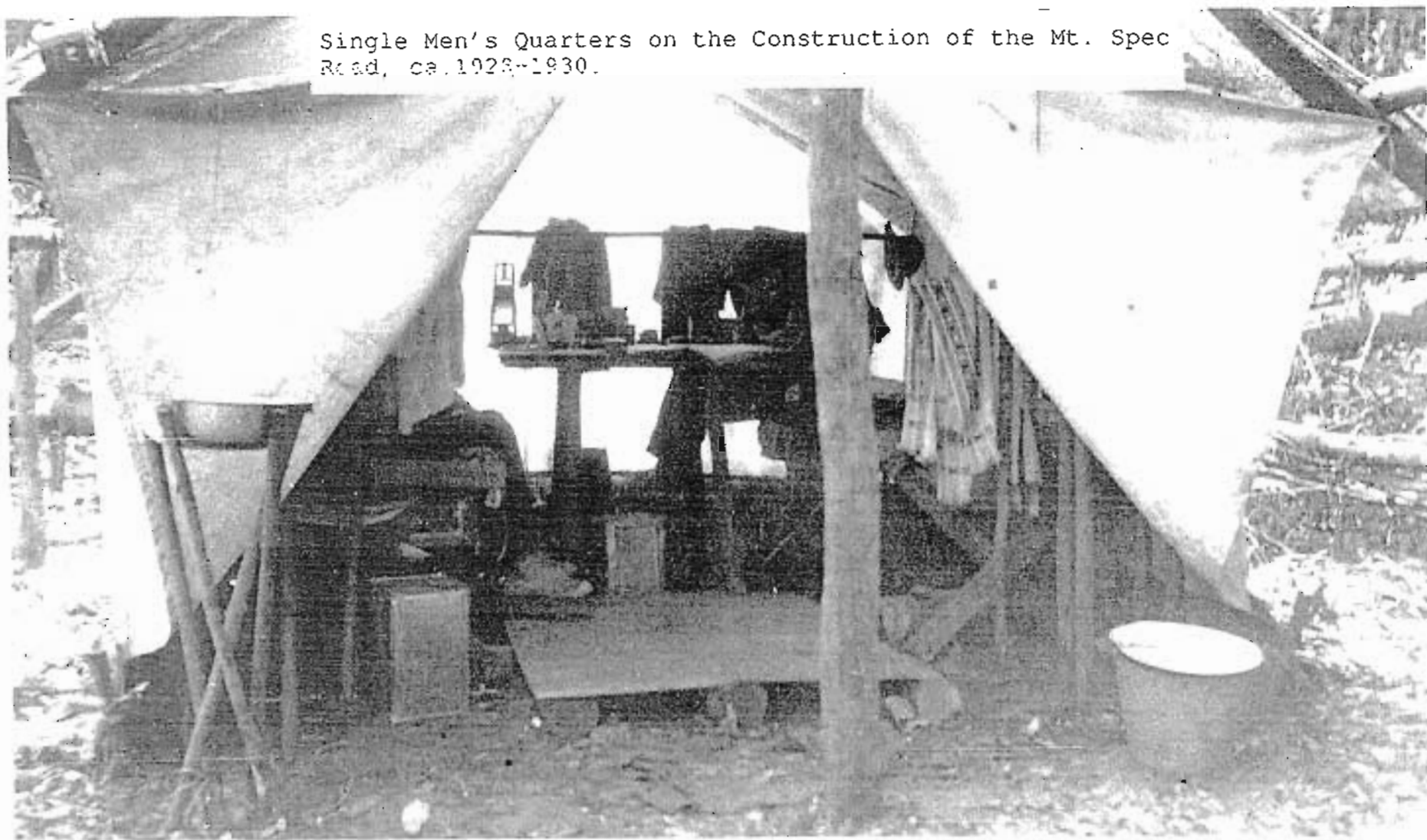
57 *Queensland Parliamentary Papers*, 1931, Vol.2, p.53.

58 *Townsville Bulletin*, 2 February 1985, p.13

59 North Queensland Oral History Project, ID89, 1B1. The photograph on p. 183 shows the single men's quarters; two to a tent.

60 Riddled with spiders, centipedes and snakes, the forested rough terrain presented women with the further worry of straying inquisitive children who consequently needed constant watching. Dysentery was rife in the camps due to contaminated water but medical assistance on Mt. Spec was non-existent; *TB*, 2 February 1985, p.13.

Single Men's Quarters on the Construction of the Mt. Spec  
Road, ca. 1928-1930.



Duckboard floor, calico roof, kerosene tin table - these were some of the "conveniences" of living for the men fortunate to obtain unemployment relief building roads during the Depression. (Peut Collection, Thuringowa City Library).

their urban and rural contemporaries.<sup>61</sup>

In 1933 12% of the adult female population were sole breadwinners with dependants but no income; a further 2% were single and unemployed. They and their families unquestionably suffered more than their male unemployed counterparts in that their poverty was ignored by the Government as unemployment relief schemes were devised for the employment of men, even if they were single. This is probably one of the most illustrative examples of the marginalisation of women whose proper place was seen to be in the home thereby highlighting the myth that only men were the family breadwinners. Single working women could be discounted as they were merely filling in time until marriage. Such stereotyping further entrenched the sex segregation of work and home and the values that made it possible to see men as the rightful heirs to paid employment and unemployment relief.<sup>62</sup>

In some respects, except for the wealthy few who employed domestic servants,<sup>63</sup> all Thuringowa housewives - suburban, rural and Mt. Spec - faced similar housekeeping duties. During the Depression no housewife in Thuringowa had access to reticulated water, although this had been a priority budget commitment of Thuringowa's various Boards and Councils since the late

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61 *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Main Roads for the year ended 30 June 1930*, No. 9, p.14 (in bound collection of *Annual Reports* held by the Main Roads Department, Townsville).

62 See E. Ryan and A. Conlon, *Gentle Invaders: Women at Work in Australia, 1788-1974* (Melbourne, 1975), which is primarily concerned with women's wages. It is a valuable account of why women were paid low wages for so long, and of how sex segregation in the work force ensured that their wages were generally lower than men's.

63 There were only 42 domestic servants in Thuringowa in 1933 and many of these would have been employed in the Shire's hotels.

1880s.<sup>64</sup> When Thuringowa lost the wealthier eastern suburbs to Townsville in the boundary re-alignment of 1918, the Council did not introduce reticulated water schemes for its poorer suburbs until the 1950s. On the other hand, in the years before World War II all the housewife's needs were delivered by tradesmen (see Appendix 1). Vera Litster believes that in this respect they were the "good old days" for all suburban women, except the poorest who could not afford to buy at the store or from the travelling salesmen.<sup>65</sup> "The only thing the housewife had to go out for, was to go to church".<sup>66</sup> Occasionally there was a trip to town to pay bills or to search for that something special. Otherwise, leaving the house during the week was synonymous with visiting. However there was a considerable gulf between women who had to work to support their families and those whose status was judged not only by the number of visits made or visitors received each week but also by the social standing of the visitors.

Committee membership was another index of class status. Although sport cut across class boundaries from Thuringowa's and Townsville's earliest days, men of wealth controlled horse racing; the middle and working class were more likely to be organising football. Membership of 'charitable works' committees such as the orphanage, gaol or the Red Cross was considered to have more status than being on school committees - except for the early years of the Grammar School. The executive, as opposed to the ordinary membership, of the Country Women's Association usually comprised the more influential women in the Giru, Woodstock and Bohle country areas. Women were often the secretaries of the

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64 See Chapter 16.

65 Interview with Mrs. Vera Litster, 2 May 1988.

66 Interview Mrs. Vera Litster, 2 May 1988.

Growers' Associations and, particularly, the Progress Associations. Two of the four women to be elected to Thuringowa Shire Council came out of this tradition of country women's involvement and leadership.<sup>67</sup> Men were on the boards and synods of Thuringowa's churches; in the early days they were drawn from the wealthier business-rural class. Women were involved at the lower committee level of church fund raising. Until the 1970s when Thuringowa gained a substantial urban population, women who were involved in the executive of unions and political organisations such as the Townsville Women's Progress Club came from the working class, but their organisations were accorded only low social status - and some derision.<sup>68</sup>

From the end of World War II to 1981, Thuringowa's unemployment rate stayed at one to two percent of the population.<sup>69</sup> As Thuringowa was a rural Shire until the 1970s, when it increasingly became a suburban-rural Shire, it is not surprising that approximately one-quarter of the people working were employers or self-employed until 1976.<sup>70</sup> The proportion then dropped to one-sixth, reflecting the occupational changes in Thuringowa's demographic structure caused by the high number of wage and salary earners living in Thuringowa

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67 See Chapter 10.

68 For a discussion of this area see Henderson, *More than Rates, Roads and Bridges: A History of Thuringowa Shire and its Council to 1985*, Chapter 10.

69 The Censuses do not give the number of dependants, that is, wives and children. Calculated from the 1947, 1954, 1961, 1966, 1971, 1976 and 1981 Censuses.

70 The percentages are as follows: 26% in 1947; 23% in 1954; 27% in 1961 and 1966; and 21% in 1971. There was an expansion in the sugar industry in the 1950s and especially in the 1960s. Labour was brought in for cane cutting in the 1950s; some cutters would then have bought farms in the early 1960s. There was also an expansion of the cattle industry from the 1950s; see Chapters 2 and 4.

but mostly working in Townsville.<sup>71</sup>

In 1976 Thuringowa was one of the fastest growing local government areas in Queensland. The intercensal population increase between 1971 and 1976 was a record 68%. Most of this expansion was in new, rapidly growing suburbs catering for the young, married, population overspill from Townsville whose economy and, hence, population had escalated. It is not surprising then that, firstly, Thuringowa had the highest percentage of upwardly mobile middle class (48%) compared with Townsville (39%), Ayr (40%), Hinchinbrook (39%) and Dalrymple (29%) and, secondly, the lowest percentage of people in poverty. Thuringowa had the same unemployment rate - 1% - as Ayr and Hinchinbrook whilst Townsville and Dalrymple had 2%. Only 3% of Thuringowa's population earned less than \$2 000 per annum compared with Townsville (6%), Ayr (5%), Hinchinbrook (5%) and Dalrymple (17%). Adding the next category, \$2 000 to \$5 000, Thuringowa only had 12% earning below \$5 000, Townsville 23%, Ayr, 20%, Hinchinbrook, 26%, and Dalrymple the highest with 34%. Although Hinchinbrook and Ayr had the highest number of wealthy people due to investments in sugar and property, it was no longer possible to find lucrative employment in the sugar cane areas after conversion to mechanical planting and harvesting. Total reliance on beef cattle provided a precarious living for many workers in Dalrymple Shire. People with money were moving out of Townsville into the new housing subdivisions in Thuringowa, which accounted for the high percentage of people in Townsville earning below \$5 000. Thuringowa was no longer the poor relation, whether in terms of unemployment, income or socio-economic mobility.

In its history, Thuringowa Shire experienced

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71 Calculated from the 1976 and 1981 Censuses.



difficult times. Firstly, there were the exigencies of life as a frontier society - dispossessing Aborigines; accommodating to an alien environment that demanded new practices; and establishing a necessary port. Secondly was the concurrent search for a staple and, when cattle and then sugar were found as solutions, the harrowing cycles of boom and bust. Interspersed, too, was the reluctance to accept the incompatibility of Thuringowa's geography and topography with agrarianism. Nevertheless people in Thuringowa had a profound belief in progress despite these obstacles.

Such optimism was reflected in the socio-economic life of the Shire. Even though there were obvious class differences within the Thuringowa population, such distinctions were not enough to counter that belief in the future that all could succeed. An effective symbiotic relationship materialized between town and country from the outset in many areas of activity. It was then predictable that optimism, despair, boom and stagnation should have been reflected in the nature and operation of local government in Thuringowa.