

The Townsville Chamber of Commerce Jubilee Brochure, 1882–1932¹

By Lyndon Megarrity

James Cook University Library's Special Collections holds many valuable historical sources which help to shine a light on North Queensland's past. One of the great treasures of the collection is a document called "Advance Australia." It holds a mirror up to North Queensland society during the eventful years of the 1930s, and offers the reader a deeper understanding of the development of Townsville and the north.

In 1933, the Townsville Chamber of Commerce commemorated its first fifty years (1882–1932) by publishing a 112-page brochure boldly titled "*Advance Australia*": *Townsville Chamber of Commerce Jubilee Brochure, 1882–1932*. It stressed the economic and civic potential of North Queensland as a whole, although Townsville's role as a major shipping and railway hub was acknowledged. Dedicated to Sir Leslie Orme Wilson, Governor of Queensland, the brochure reflected the priorities and interests of its principal author, Herbert Beaumont Marks.

The Author

H.B. Marks (1864–1953) was secretary of the Townsville Chamber of Commerce from 1906 to



1943. He migrated from London aged seventeen, initially finding employment as a farm worker and timber getter near Coomera River. After a few years working as a cane farmer in Bundaberg, Marks moved to Townsville in 1895 where he was employed by A.E. McCreehy, sawmiller and

¹ H.B. Marks (Compiler), "*Advance Australia*": *Townsville Chamber of Commerce Jubilee Brochure, 1882-1932*, D.W. Hastings & Sons Pty Ltd, Townsville, 1933 (hereafter Brochure).

timber merchant.² The next year he married Dora Somerset and they would ultimately have six children.

During the 1900s, Marks began to develop a high profile within Townsville's civic and commercial community. Working alongside local identities such as Queensland state parliamentarian Patrick Hanran, he served as secretary for the Relief Fund Committee after Cyclone Leonta in 1903, helping to organise emergency food and clothing for victims of the natural disaster across Townsville's suburbs.³ Marks was also actively involved with anti-Labor politics, throwing his support behind local member Robert Philp during his 1908 re-election campaign.⁴

For many years, Marks was the superintendent of the Sunday School at St Peter's Anglican Church and was secretary of the Anglican Diocese of North Queensland during Bishop George Frodsham's term in office (1902–1913).⁵ He became an insurance agent, and in the 1920s was the secretary for North Queensland

Securities, a money lending firm.⁶ As well as his work for the Townsville Chamber of Commerce, he was appointed secretary of the Townsville Fire Brigade Board in 1913.

An ardent British patriot and imperialist, he joined the Kennedy Regiment as a volunteer in the 1900s and quickly rose through the ranks as an officer. At the outbreak of World War One, Captain Marks “was appointed Staff Officer and Officer Commanding the Northern Military District, a position he retained until demobilised in July, 1919.”⁷ Sadly, his eldest son, Private Herbert Henry Somerset Marks, was killed in action during the Great War in France.⁸

The Brochure

The themes that ran through H.B. Marks' life and career—a commitment to North Queensland, its people and its industries, a natural tendency to take the employer's perspective, a belief in the British Empire—all feature heavily in the Jubilee brochure. Marks was largely focused on the “here and now”: the brochure is very “light” on historical detail concerning the Townsville

² “H.B. Marks Farewelled,” *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 22 December 1943, p. 2. Unless otherwise cited, biographical information on Marks is found in this article.

³ “Relief Work at Townsville,” *Brisbane Courier*, 24 March 1903, p. 5.

⁴ On election day in Townsville, 1908, “blue’ cabs” were “constantly despatched by Mr O.J. Fenwick and Mr H.B. Marks to bring in electors from near and far.” *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 6 February 1908, p. 6. Marks was also secretary in 1909 for the National Liberal Union, Townsville branch, which provided extra-parliamentary support for anti-Labor politics. See *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 6 February 1909, p. 1.

⁵ I have not been able to identify exactly when Marks became secretary to the Anglican Diocese. The first mention of Marks' secretaryship is in the *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 4 December 1907, p. 6. Marks was still the secretary at the time of Frodsham's departure from Townsville in December 1912: *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 14 December 1912, p. 3.

⁶ For his insurance activities see advertisements in *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 2 October 1937, p. 12; *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 11 January 1907, p. 4; *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 4 July 1942, p. 6. For his money lending activities, see advertisements for “NQ security” in *Townsville Daily Bulletin* on 6 September 1928 and 6 December 1926.

⁷ “H.B. Marks Farewelled,” p. 2.

⁸ “The Great War,” *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 16 September 1918, p. 4.

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Chamber of Commerce, and his account of Townsville's civic and commercial history is short and superficial. Much of the text is devoted to describing the development of major North Queensland towns and districts, with an emphasis on showcasing local industries as they existed in the early 1930s. Accessing and quoting information from a number of industry representatives, Marks also highlights the economic potential for various northern agricultural and pastoral products, including sugar, tobacco, pineapples, cattle and wool.

The author defended his broad regional agenda by pointing to the objectives of the Townsville Chamber of Commerce, which among other things, aimed to “promote the trade and commerce of the Northern portion of the State.” However, Marks also had personal convictions that drove his selection of content:

The main reason prompting the treating upon the various industries of the North and the great possibilities offering to enterprise, to energy and investment of capital, is to bring under the notice of our kinsmen overseas, as well as the sons of

Australia, who are looking to settle down and establish themselves in a happy, comfortable and prosperous homestead, the great opportunities . . . for large numbers to be absorbed, and to produce the requirements of the nation, of the Empire, and to meet the needs of the East . . . to attract people to the healthy and useful life of the country, and to influence them to leave the congested city areas.⁹

The author made it clear that he believed that North Queensland was being held back by a Brisbane-centred government which was not doing enough to give northern citizens their fair share of resources and government assistance. Marks argued that the State government should “protect the young settler from excessive railway charges,” lower taxation and develop markets for North Queensland produce. He was especially frustrated that a local pineapple canning industry had not yet developed despite the great potential for export within the British Empire. Marks urged the Queensland Departments of Agriculture and Land to provide incentives for fledgling pineapple growers and obtain

⁹ Introduction to Brochure, n.p.



Mt Spec Water Supply Committee ca 1935. H.B. Marks is seated in the front row, second from the right. Image courtesy of the State Library of Queensland.

Commonwealth subsidies to establish a North Queensland canning factory. The urgency for such action no doubt seemed obvious to the author; much to his dismay, Americans were growing pineapples for the Empire market: “No Company, unless the shareholders were at least 75 per cent British, should be permitted to exploit this trade or any other trade within the Empire.”¹⁰

Elsewhere, the author advocated greater North Queensland trade with China, a view which was probably formed through his

attendance at a 1930 function at the Queen’s Hotel in honour of the then Chinese Consul-General to the Commonwealth (F.T. Sung).¹¹ At that function, Sung expressed the view that trade opportunities with China should be explored more deeply, and Marks in the brochure agreed: “Japan has in the past bought raw materials from Australia, which, after manufacture, were re-exported to China. At the present time, the Chinese refuse to trade with their war-like aggressors, and surely the present is the

¹⁰ Brochure, p. 18.

¹¹ “Chinese Republic,” *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 2 June 1930, p. 4.

opportunity to deal with China direct.”¹²

Aside from discussing northern industries and their potential, the brochure was also concerned with making North Queensland appear an attractive location for European Australians from “down south” to live and work. Despite over seventy years of white settlement, there was still some scepticism among southerners regarding the suitability of the tropical climate for Europeans. Traditionally, the tropics had a reputation for being physically and mentally debilitating, especially for women. Citing favourable scientific research on the health of white men and women in the tropics by Anton Breinl, Raphael Cilento and others, Marks argued that the key to living and thriving in North Queensland was the willingness of the resident to adapt to their new environment. In a statement which inadvertently may have discouraged some potential residents, the author observed that people often arrived in the tropics “with a fixed intention to leave the North . . . they are not prepared to settle down . . . which predisposes the acceptance of make-shifts, which means discomfort, disappointment, discontent, and, perhaps, leads to the habit of taking alcohol—the worst possible practice in a tropical climate.”¹³

Parents relocating to the North may have been more encouraged by the educational

opportunities on offer for their children, as set out in brochure. There were many paid advertisements in the text for private schools, including a full-page advertisement for Townsville’s St Patrick’s College, a Catholic girls school which stressed preparation for “University, Public Service, Musical and Commercial Examinations” and an idyllic learning environment: “The pupils constantly enjoy the delightful sea breeze, a daily walk on the beach, and the advantages of sea bathing.” Marks himself emphasised the importance of Charters Towers as an educational hub; his prediction that it would become the north’s centre of tertiary education was an inspired, if incorrect, guess:

No other town in the State can boast of greater facilities for Secondary Education than Charters Towers. It is the Scholastic Centre of North Queensland . . . in addition to State Schools . . . it has six Colleges—three for boys and three for girls. With the establishment of a University in North Queensland, which must result in the near future, it will attain the highest distinction in this respect. Charters Towers is an ideal site for the purpose.¹⁴

¹² Brochure, p. 31.

¹³ Brochure, p. 25–26.

¹⁴ Brochure, p. 43. Marks invited Townsville Grammar School Headmaster P.F. Rowland to contribute a short item on education in North Queensland for the brochure. Rowland was mostly interested in discussing Townsville Grammar. He remarked that in general, the grammar school boys did better at Mathematics than English. “The heat of the summer affects them little,” he wrote, “they read less than they did before the age of the ‘talkies,’ the motor

The Jubilee Brochure was largely written from the point of view of a man who had lived a hard life on the land in the late nineteenth century and had then prospered in business during the twentieth. The Great Depression of the early 1930s worried him, but Marks believed that the answer to unemployment was to encourage more and more people to settle on the land. He appeared to be relatively indifferent to the plight of employees during a tight labour market, appealing to a presumed Protestant work ethic: “Labour is a commodity, and all labour must be prepared to accept less and give better results—there is a depreciation in everything—everything includes labour as well as material and land.”¹⁵

Conclusion

In 1943, H.B. Marks decided to move to Bundaberg, where he spent his remaining years.¹⁶ Before he left Townsville, his colleagues gave him a farewell dinner and he gave a “thank you” speech which implied that his efforts to promote North Queensland through the Jubilee brochure and other means had not been as successful as he would have wished:

It was not necessary for him . . . to repeat that which was so well known to them . . . [regarding] the potentialities of North Queensland, yet he asserted that they were

not sufficiently realised nor appreciated even by their friends in Townsville, evidenced by an attitude of “laissez-faire.”¹⁷

What is the historical significance of the Jubilee Brochure? First, it captured the essence of North Queensland and Australia during the interwar period, when lingering doubts about the viability of European settlement in the tropics remained, when the romantic but impractical notion of settling the unemployed on the land *en masse* remained popularly supported, and when the idea of North Queensland as a part of the British Empire remained strong. All of these ideas would gradually become outdated in the decades following the Second World War.

Secondly, the advertisements that accompany the volume tell their own story of the changing nature of living in North Queensland. An advertisement enticing readers to “Come to Bowen the Beautiful” reminds us of the amenities we now take for granted but which were still relatively luxurious for many people in the 1930s. For example, Bowen’s Grand View Hotel was “fitted with Electric Light, running water in all rooms, and Septic system.” Elsewhere, the Townsville branch of Burns, Philp & Co, general merchants, placed an advertisement catering for

car and the radio . . . our failure in cultivating the literary taste of our pupils is reflected in the types of entertainment that succeed in the North,” which tended to be the most sensational talking pictures. Brochure, p. 101.

¹⁵ Brochure, p. 27.

¹⁶ “Obituary,” *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 16 March 1953, p. 1.

¹⁷ “H.B. Marks Farewelled,” 22 December 1943, p. 2.

the rising number of middle-class travellers able to secure an overseas trip: “World-tour and Travel Agents: Passages Booked to all parts of the World—on any line.” Those on more restricted budgets might have been tempted by the tourist trips, fishing and boating parties arranged by the Grand View Hotel’s staff.

Finally, there are northern themes present in the brochure that transcend their 1930s context. The author’s insistence that the north was missing out because of Brisbane-centric government remains a persistent theme in today’s political climate. Marks’ interest in China-Australia trade was in a part a reflection of the links between Asia and North Queensland that have existed since the gold rush era of the 1870s. Lastly, while the text was focused on the region as a whole, its photos and advertisements revealed the port city of Townsville’s increasing position as the unofficial capital of North Queensland. As the brochure’s advertisements indicated, its growing population allowed it to provide more services and products than many other towns in the region.

Marks went to a great deal of trouble selecting “before and after” pictures of Townsville, including one of Sturt Street West in 1900 and the same site in 1933, symbolically captioned: “We are growing.” Much of that growth was based on commercial activities in the central business district including major stores, professional firms, and eateries. By the 1980s, the CBD, centred on Flinders Street, was in decline as Townsville’s

suburban shopping centres grew and there was less need for residents to venture into the “heart” of the city. But that’s another story.