"an institution of help and education":

The development of free public library services in the City of Townsville, 1866-1981.

Thesis submitted by Richard Colin Sayers in December 1996 in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honours in the Department of History and Politics at James Cook University of North Queensland.

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Contents

The three most important documents a free society gives are a birth certificate, a passport, and a library card.

- E. L. Doctorow, quoted in the *Library Journal*, 1 November 1994.

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Introduction

From the earliest days of settlement in 1864, the people of Townsville have derived particular pride from local developments or events that place their community ahead of others in Queensland. It is remarkable, therefore, that an event of enormous social and cultural significance, the founding of Queensland's first free public library in Townsville in 1938, has received scant local attention over the last five decades. The Townsville Municipal Library, as this free public library was known, opened on 1 August 1938, five years before the State's first attempt at free library legislation, and a full seven years prior to the formation of the Library Board of Queensland. Considered a bold experiment in the municipalisation of hitherto subscription-based services, the Library was contrived from the remains of a longstanding but declining private institution, the Townsville School of Arts. Until the middle of the 1940s, the Townsville Municipal Library formed a solitary (and largely unrecognised) vanguard for the Free Library Movement in Queensland. It was also the exemplar of modern practice to which Queensland's other emerging free public libraries looked in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

The absence of adequate local recognition for these achievements cannot be explained by a simple lack of public attention to the Library itself. As this study demonstrates, library services in Townsville have been characterised by unflagging popular attention and support since the late 1860s. This "long felt want in the community"[1] was most evident during the final difficult years of the School of Arts, when public interest in library services turned to rival subscription libraries conducted by stationers and booksellers. Despite flourishing for a time, Townsville's subscription libraries declined

[1]*Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 5 December 1953.

rapidly after 1938 when free services were instigated. Perhaps the lack of formalised recognition has had more to do with the unfortunate corollary of longevity, complacency; in other words, a tendency to take institutions of substance and longstanding for granted. The exceptional success of the Library's initial services to adults encouraged the creation of a dedicated Children's Library in 1953. After a decade operating independently, the two libraries were eventually joined under one City Librarian. Thereafter followed a rapid acceleration of the process of modernisation which removed any remaining vestiges of the School of Arts era. Crucial to this process was an understanding of the need to take library services into the rapidly expanding suburbs. In late 1971 the Aitkenvale (Branch) Library was opened, and a decade later, a dedicated Mobile Library was commenced to service residents in nursing homes and on Magnetic Island. By 1988, after 50 years of anticipating and meeting community needs, the Townsville Municipal Library had seemingly conditioned local people to expect that high quality library services would always be part of the city's infrastructure. For most library users, the knowledge that their library was the first of its kind in Queensland seemed immaterial so long as it continued to meet their requirements for informational and recreational reading.

Sadly, myopia of this kind is not confined geographically to Townsville, nor is it the exclusive province of library users. Unlike many other institutions, most notably schools and local authorities, libraries have not been the focus of detailed historical research. Consequently, there exists little public understanding of the historical development of Australia's libraries. Much of the responsibility for this lack of awareness must surely lie with the profession of librarianship itself. As the present Director-General of the

National Library of Australia, Warren Horton, has commented, "the Australian library profession pays too little attention to its history".[2] Despite enduring public perceptions of librarians as dowdy, somewhat conservative types - members of a gray profession - they are in fact more typically inclined to look forward to new possibilities than to ruminate on the past. Aside from occasional seminars conducted at Australia's larger library schools, professional training generally contains little about the history and development of libraries, library practices, and the profession itself. There is, therefore, an apparent (if unconscious) tendency towards reinventing the wheel, and a failure to appreciate that many so-called contemporary issues like diminishing budgets are actually recurring manifestations of age-old challenges. In this respect, many librarians fail to see history as "a powerful diagnostic tool"[3] which could enable them to better understand their present circumstances, and address the future positively and constructively.

This study evolved from a personal desire to recognise and document the development of library services in Townsville - from the first static collection through to the advent of mobile services - and place them in historical perspective. The unusually long period covered by the study, 1866 to 1981, has the advantage of allowing critical events to be placed in broad context, although this necessarily occurs at the cost of certain aspects of detail. With little already written about the evolution of libraries in Townsville, it seemed that a choice had to be made between outlining broad themes or selecting and

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[2]Warren Horton, "Foreword", *Australian Academic and Research Libraries*, 24(3), September 1993, p.151.

[3]Peter Biskup, *Libraries in Australia*, Wagga Wagga, NSW, 1994, p.vii.

describing specific events. It is of little comfort to realise that this type of dilemma is not unusual in the study of Australian library history, given that so little of it has been documented and published to date. In a conference paper entitled "Making history", Jean Whyte described the conundrum thus:

> How should we try to find and write the history of libraries and librarianship in this country? By producing many small studies, or studies of particular institutions, people, processes? Chronological accounts do not sound very exciting but we have to get the facts straight before we can start to explain and interpret.[4]

To achieve this end, a compromise was reached whereby the broad themes of local library development were investigated and illustrated, using detailed examinations of watershed events, such as the Council's takeover of the School of Arts in 1938. This study establishes the timeframe of library development in Townsville. More than that, it describes and analyses seminal events, placing them in their appropriate historical and social contexts.

Chapter One examines the establishment, progress and eventual decline of the Townsville School of Arts Library and Reading Room from 1866 to 1938. For most of its life, the School of Arts was a major social institution which epitomised the ambiguities of transplanted British urban middle class values. Whilst acknowledging utilitarian ideals, in practice it was focussed on meeting a more pressing need for recreational reading. This period alternately hinted at, and established, many of the social habits and aspirations which eventually guided the early development of the

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[4]Jean Whyte, "Making history", in E. Morrison & M. Talbot (eds), *Books, libraries and readers in colonial Australia*, Clayton, Vic., 1985, p.136.

Townsville Municipal Library. Chapter Two traces the next stage of development from Alderman A. V. "Vic" Hamilton's first suggestion of the need for a free public library in October 1937, through to legislative recognition in Queensland's *Libraries Act of 1943*. This period was one of dynamic interplay between influential individuals like Hamilton, the Townsville community, and external catalysts such as the Munn-Pitt report of 1935. Chapter Three describes the establishment of the Children's Library in 1953 and examines its first decade, characterised by the incredible growth of both collections and membership. During this time, the Children's Library became simultaneously a focus and catalyst for the extra-curricular development of Townsville's younger residents. The study concludes with Chapter Four, an examination of the development of library services to Townsville's rapidly expanding suburbs, including Magnetic Island, between 1963 and 1981.

It is common for libraries to be defined by their physical circumstances, much like museums, art galleries or even churches. This is unfortunate as libraries are actually the products of their collections and those whom they exist to serve. The net worth of an individual library cannot be gauged simply from its building. Wherever possible, this study offers description and analysis of Townsville's evolving library collections and membership patterns up to 1981. The task of gathering information for this purpose proved inordinately challenging as many of the primary research materials - notably card catalogues, accession registers, and membership records - have not been retained in archives, or have simply failed to survive the rigours of time. Wherever gaps are apparent, the study extrapolates from the experiences of other libraries, as described in secondary sources.

As had been suspected when this study was proposed, few secondary sources were found to relate directly to the development of library services in Townsville. Dorothy Gibson-Wilde's *Gateway to a Golden Land* provided a useful starting summary of the early life of the Townsville School of Arts and its library. This account was expanded using newspapers of the period and copies of official government correspondence obtained from the Queensland State Archives. A recent work edited by Philip Candy and John Laurent, *Pioneering Culture: Mechanics' Institutes and Schools of Arts in Australia*, was also found to provide a detailed background summary of the development of Queensland's schools of arts, although no mention was made of Townsville. Events from 1938 onwards were investigated using the Minutes of the Townsville City Council, contemporary newspapers (especially the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* and *Townsville Evening Star*), archives found in the Local Collection of the Townsville Municipal Library, and interviews with former library members and employees. Excellent contextual accounts of Australian library history were provided by Peter Biskup's *Libraries in Australia* and an extensive survey of the *Australian Library Journal* from its inception in 1951 through to 1996.

Ultimately, this study is offered in recognition of the many achievements of the Townsville Municipal Library since 1938. It is also a formal acknowledgment of the Library's integral place in the community of Townsville.

Chapter One

The Townsville School of Arts Library, 1866-1938

In early November 1866, barely two years after John Melton Black and his party from Woodstock Station had founded the settlement of Townsville, plans for a library and reading room were begun. James Gordon, the first government official in Townsville, convened an evening meeting of "gentlemen desirous of establishing a Library and Reading Room" in the settlement. The meeting was held in the first Customs House on Melton Hill, a building which also served as Townsville's earliest Court House, and the office of the Police Magistrate.[1] A provisional committee was appointed at this meeting and charged with the task of developing a plan for the institution, including the framing of rules. The committee clearly moved expeditiously as it was able to report back to another meeting the following evening. As recounted by the *Port Denison Times*, the proposed rules were accepted just as quickly and a full management committee was elected to oversee the first year of operation. This committee comprised the leading citizens and associates of the settlement at that time: the Honourable R. Towns, MLC, Patron; J. Gordon, President; J. M. Black, Vice-President; J. T. Walker, Treasurer; and, E. U. Roberts, Secretary. Other committee members included Messrs Grimaldi, Blitz, Boston, Bordziak, Josephson, and Childs.[2]

The committee's enthusiasm for the project was evident in their desire to have the reading room open by the beginning of December. In very short order a subscription of £1 per annum, payable quarterly, was decided and an order for newspapers and magazines despatched to Sydney by the first available steamer. W. B. Grimaldi, a man with numerous mercantile interests in the settlement, offered accommodation in the front

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[1]Dorothy Gibson-Wilde, *Gateway to a golden land*, Townsville, 1984, p.64.

[2]*Port Denison Times*, 14 November 1866.

portion of his offices for three hours each evening.[3] Donations of books were also sought and a modest library of 30 volumes was soon available to subscribers. Optimism even overflowed into a proposal for the formation of a museum. Of greatest moment to the committee was the choice of a name for their new civic institution. It is reported that "considerable discussion took place"[4] before the title *Townsville Library and Reading Room* was accepted by subscribers. At this early stage of the town's development, it appears that terms like Literary Institute and School of Arts were considered too pretentious.[5] This particular aversion to perceived pretension lingered for several years despite the formation of Schools of Arts elsewhere in the colony. Although the commercial and social aspects of Townsville developed rapidly, and its residents clearly desired civic aggrandisement in other forms, it was not until 1870 that a proper School of Arts committee was finally formed.[6]

The issue of suitable accommodation was to be the overriding concern of each successive committee until the construction of a dedicated School of Arts building in 1877. The library and reading room remained in Grimaldi's front room until their removal to the Council Chambers on the Strand in October 1868.[7] The Council's accommodations at this time comprised "little more than a wooden shed with front

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[3]*Ibid.*

[4]*Ibid.*

[5]*Ibid.*

[6]Gibson-Wilde, *Gateway to a golden land*, p.153.

[7]*Cleveland Bay Express*, 10 October 1868.

verandah overlooking the Strand."[8] Although described as adequate for the requirements of the Council, it was less than ideal for the purposes of conducting a library and reading room. A small cottage situated on the site of the old Supreme Court on Melton Hill was eventually rented from Henry Bartels for the sum of 12/6 a week.[9] This was later described by one local correspondent as a "wretched humpy dignified by the appellation of School of Arts."[10] In March 1869, Grimaldi, acting in his capacity as Town Clerk, submitted a memorial from the members of the Municipal Council of Townsville to the Secretary for Public Lands requesting the reservation of a site - allotment no. 2, IIIA - for public buildings on Melton Hill. The memorial was signed by the Mayor, W. Aplin, and the five aldermen, including W. A. Ross. The Secretary for Public Lands replied in May 1869 that although land sales in the area would continue, "steps will be taken beforehand to reserve a sufficient area for public buildings as requested."[11]

The Secretary for Public Lands may not have been surprised to receive, in the same mail bag from Townsville, an application "for a grant of land to the extent of one acre on the Reserve Section IIIA fronting Cleveland Terrace"[12] from the committee of the Townsville Library and Reading Room. It is interesting to note that having decried the

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[8]Gibson-Wilde, *Gateway to a golden land*, p.99.

[9]*Townsville Bulletin Jubilee Souvenir*, 27 August 1913.

[10]*The Queenslander*, 9 August 1873.

[11]Secretary for Public Lands to Townsville City Council, Queensland State Archives (hereafter QSA), LAN/A17, 1869/3331.

[12]Committee of the Townsville Library and Reading Room to Secretary for Public Lands, QSA, 1869/3330.

term Literary Institute as pretentious in 1866, in its letter to the colonial government the committee stated that the land would be used to construct the Townsville Library and Literary Institution. In fairness to the committee, its members may have felt that the inclusion of a more portentous name in their application would lead to a greater chance of success. However, as in his reply to the Townsville Municipal Council, the Secretary for Public Lands was polite but noncomittal. He indicated that any consideration of the committee's application would have to await the results of a survey being undertaken by E. U. Roberts, the town's surveyor. Official records are not clear as to when the colonial government did finally make a grant of land to enable the construction of a permanent School of Arts in Townsville. At least one secondary source has suggested that a site may have been laid out on Melton Hill as early as 1870.[13] Other sources indicate that the grant was made in 1872.[14] Either way, the site chosen was indeed the reserve section IIIA situated on Cleveland Terrace.

By early 1875 members of the School of Arts Committee were openly expressing concern about the safety of the books in their care. In reporting the situation in Townsville, *The Queenslander* described the town's library of donated books as "excellent and valuable" but called Bartels' cottage "a disgrace".[15] As an interim measure, the committee decided to seek leave to again locate the collection with the Council. Mindful perhaps of the cyclone in 1867, it was agreed that "another heavy gale

[13]Gibson-Wilde, *Gateway to a golden land*, p.106.

[14]*Townsville Bulletin Jubilee Souvenir*, 27 August 1913.

[15]*The Queenslander*, 27 March 1875.

might send the crazy shanty, yolept [sic] School of Arts, toppling down the hill."[16] Subsequent discussions about the future of the institution even called into question the suitability of the site on Melton Hill:

> ...it is the opinion of many that the present site is most unsuitable. People don't care to climb a steep mountain at night, at the risk of their necks, to read the papers or borrow books, consequently the number of subscribers is about a third of what it might be.[17]

The degree of concern was such that it was suggested that the committee apply to the government for leave to sell the site and acquire land in the centre of town. This concern for a more central location was to become increasingly urgent in subsequent decades as the town expanded southwards onto Ross Island and to the west along Finders Street. As Gibson-Wilde explains, it is not clear whether the library returned to its miserable quarters in Bartels' cottage or was relocated elsewhere. However, regardless of the library's location, in October 1875 the papers reported a leaking roof and a more permanent solution was obviously needed.[18] In the meantime, the library was assigned "more commodious quarters" in a house, also owned by Bartels, at the top of Denham Street.[19]

A positive sign of progress towards a permanent library appeared in the *Townsville Times* in December 1875. The paper advertised a call for "plans, specifications and

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[16]*Ibid.*

[17]*Ibid.*

[18]*Cleveland Bay Express*, 2 October 1875.

[19]*Townsville Bulletin Jubilee Souvenir*, 27 August 1913.

tenders for the erection of a two-storied building in Flinders Street, to be called 'The Townsville School of Arts'".[20] The building was required to "comprise two shops, Library and Reading Room on the ground floor, and on the second floor a large hall, with balcony, stage and dressing rooms."[21] These plans did not proceed and it seems that the library and reading room remained in the Denham Street premises until 1877. In September of that year, plans for a dedicated School of Arts building were finally realised. The School of Arts committee held a competition for suitable designs and from the entries selected Charles A. Ward, a highly respected local builder, as the winner. As stipulated by the committee, Ward's design provided for a library, reading room, museum, and theatre able to seat 700 people.[22] Although Townsville's first permanent School of Arts building was an unpretentious structure, unkindly described by one local as "an abominable old bandbox"[23], its design was sufficient to secure for Ward a prize of £10 and the building contract. The construction of the School of Arts cost £1700, a large portion of which, £500 in cash and promissory notes, was claimed to have been collected by L. F. Sachs, P. F. Hanran, H. Bartels and others in just one day.[24] It seems that their confidence in the value of the project was not misguided, and there is evidence that the bandbox rejoinder may not have been a widely held opinion at the time. In 1882, *The Queenslander* published the following recommendation:

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[20]*Townsville Times*, 29 December 1875.

[21]*Ibid.*

[22]*Townsville Herald*, 18 January 1879.

[23]Gibson-Wilde, *Gateway to a golden land*, p.194.

[24]*Townsville Bulletin Jubilee Souvenir*, 27 August 1913.

> The stranger who has a few hours to spare in Townsville should not omit to visit the School of Arts. The building is a two-story wooden structure, something after the style of the Brisbane School of Arts, the reading-room being on the upper floor, with a wide balcony around it. The institution is on the eastern slope of Melton Hill, overlooking the bay, and is consequently one of the coolest places in the town. Files of nearly all the Queensland newspapers, as well as of many southern journals, are kept, and the reading-room is open to all strangers. On the lower floor is a large public hall with a stage; a library, in which is kept a fair selection of books; and a museum on a small scale.[25]

Townsville's first permanent School of Arts was finally opened on 20 September 1877 with a gala concert. The building is still a feature of the southern slopes of Melton Hill and is listed with the National Trust as the "oldest surviving timber theatre in Australia."[26] Compared to the late twentieth century concrete edifices further along Flinders and Walker Streets, the former School of Arts is a gracious reminder of the city's colonial heritage.

Where libraries are concerned, glorious structures are rarely ends in themselves. Libraries are institutions which are more usually defined by their collections, and those whom they exist to serve. The period from the establishment of the (North) Brisbane School of Arts, the colony's first, in 1849 through to the economic downturn of the 1890s may be described as the golden age for schools of arts in Queensland. In the space of four decades the effects of mining booms and consequent population increases through immigration caused the number of these institutions in Queensland to grow to well over 100, covering much of the colony and encompassing collections exceeding

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[25] *The Queenslander*, 25 February 1882.

[26] D. Gibson-Wilde and B. J. Dalton, *Townsville 1888*, Townsville, 1990, plate 39.

150,000 volumes.[27] Although many acknowledged in their rules the utilitarian principles of self-improvement set out by Dr George Birkbeck for the mechanics' institutes in Britain, each school of arts was very much a product of its local community and "the reality of community demands took precedence over the lofty ideals the rules contained".[28] The communities of subscribers they were formed to serve were typically middle class, of better than average education, and dominated by Protestants.[29] In Rockhampton, each School of Arts committee tended to mirror its subscribers:

> Protestant, professional, Anglo-Saxon or Scot, possessed of a better than average education, and socially mobile (the School of Arts was always seen as one of Rockhampton's more socially superior institutions). Although the School imposed no religious barriers to membership, very few Catholics joined, a fact possibly due to the strong social and educational opportunities offered by the Catholic Church in Rockhampton. Though the School was a predominately middle-class institution, some working-class men did become members...[30]

Lacking the usual array of familiar diversions found in the more populous south, subscribers to the early libraries and reading rooms in Queensland were generally more interested in recreation and following the news from 'home'. Despite the use of the term 'School of Arts', ideals like self-improvement were apparently not foremost in the minds of subscribers, although the contents of numerous provincial newspapers indicated strong

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[27] *Transactions and proceedings of the Library Association of Australasia*, 1901, p. LXXIV.

[28] Carole Inkster, "Growth and decline of the Queensland schools of arts, 1849-1981", in P. C. Candy and J. Laurent (eds), *Pioneering culture*, Adelaide, 1994, p.268.

[29] *Ibid*, p.270.

[30] Wayne Murdoch, "The Rockhampton School of Arts Library and Museum in the nineteenth century", in Candy and Laurent (eds), *Pioneering culture*, p.296.

"political interest in all circles...[and] the need of intellectual nourishment shows itself."[31]

Not unlike Rockhampton, the population of early Townsville was characteristically "mostly male, predominately young, literate, single, and from urban backgrounds".[32] Gibson-Wilde suggests that reading was a popular diversion for these pioneers from the first days of settlement, and that books were readily acquired from mail-order lending-libraries located elsewhere in Australia, usually Sydney and Melbourne, and overseas.[33] The roll call of founding subscribers also indicates that the formation of the Townsville Library and Reading Room in 1866 was very much a product of transplanted middle-class and largely urban values. It was a common feature of schools of arts in Queensland that committee members were often prominent businessmen who also held many other voluntary positions and offices within their communities. The case of James Gordon in Townsville may have been extreme, his large collection of official and unofficial posts in the late 1860s earning him the title of "Pooh Bah"[34], but it was not uncommon. Besides his government duties as sub-collector of customs, postmaster, magistrate, harbour master, clerk of petty sessions, district registrar and inspector of police, Gordon also found time to conduct marriages and funerals in lieu of clergy, and initiate civic projects like the library and reading room.[35]

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[31]James Manion, *Paper power in North Queensland*, Townsville, 1982, p.2.

[32]D. Gibson-Wilde, "Entertainment in Townsville", in B. J. Dalton (ed.), *Peripheral visions*, Townsville, 1991, p.198.

[33]*Ibid*, p.197.

[34]*Townsville Bulletin Jubilee Souvenir*, 27 August 1913.

[35]Unidentified newspaper article available in the "Library" file, Local History Collection, Townsville City Library Service.

In much of what has been written about libraries in this period, the issue of subscriptions is largely passed over in favour of describing in detail the subscribers themselves. Prior to the takeover of the Townsville School of Arts Library by the Townsville Municipal Council in 1938, Queensland did not have any truly free libraries. Each school of arts operated on an essentially commercial basis with some support from the government in the form of land grants and financial contributions to building funds.[36] As was to be the case throughout the history of Queensland's schools of arts, government support waxed and waned with its own fortunes and could not be relied upon by local committees. It is interesting that the £1 subscription levied by the Townsville School of Arts Library in November 1866 remained unchanged until at least the turn of the century. The reason for this apparent unwillingness to take into account even the most basic form of inflation is unclear. However, in 1879 the fee was again advertised as £1 per annum, 10s per half year, 5s per quarter, or 1s per week. Up-to-date catalogues were also available for the cost of 1s.[37] At least part of the answer to the question of the subscription fees may lie in the fact that the School of Arts also opened Townville's first publicly-owned theatre in 1877.[38] This theatre was part of the School of Arts building constructed by Ward on Melton Hill and included attractions like a dress circle and grand piano. The School of Arts Theatre quickly led its rivals in the town and consistently enticed well known out-of-town performers.[39] It might be speculated that the Townsville School of Arts, like so many of its kind, used this theatre as its primary source of operating

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[36]Inkster, "Growth and decline of the Queensland schools of arts, 1849-1981", p.272.

[37]*Townsville Herald*, 18 January 1879.

[38]Gibson-Wilde, "Entertainment in Townsville", p.204.

[39]*Ibid*, p.205.

revenue and thus was able to maintain fixed subscription fees for so long. Either way, people wishing to avail themselves of the library still had to pay a set amount per annum and this in itself would have a guaranteed a predominately middle-class clientele well into the next century.

Although there are no surviving records which describe in detail the collections of the Townsville School of Arts in the period up to the 1938, two commendably thorough studies of institutions in Brisbane and Rockhampton do provide valuable insights. The Rockhampton School of Arts Library also relied on donations in its early years but in July 1866 began receiving regular consignments of second-hand books from Mudie's Circulating Library in London.[40] The arrangement had particular benefits for a provincial library in its infancy: the books were relatively cheap, up-to-date, and generally aesthetically appealing, and greater stockholdings in London allowed for multiple copies of popular titles as required. However, there was a drawback in that the proprietors of Mudie's exhibited quintessential Victorian mores and exercised great influence over the books despatched to their colonial customers. This led to criticism that they pandered to the "lowest common denominator of middle class intelligence ... [leading to] a collection that was safe, predictable, stifling and unchallenging."[41] Although it is not apparent whether the Townsville School of Arts Library entered into comparable acquisition arrangements, in 1879 it was advertising that "a large number of the newest works have arrived - and are arriving - from England."[42] An examination

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[40]Murdoch, "The Rockhampton School of Arts Library", p.284.

[41]*Ibid*, p.285.

[42]*Townsville Herald*, 18 January 1879.

of reports of the bookstock inherited by the Townsville City Council in 1938 suggests that the remarks made about Rockhampton's collection may also be applied to that of its northern neighbour.

Both Brisbane's and Rockhampton's libraries were heavily biased towards fiction, with novels comprising 71 percent of the Rockhampton School of Arts collection in 1872, and 65 percent in 1890. The Brisbane School of Arts Library was founded with high ideals of the utilitarian kind but by the 1890s was also catering primarily to the tastes of middle-class people seeking recreation. In 1889, for example, fiction accounted for 77 percent of all loans to Brisbane subscribers.[43] Of the remaining non-fiction titles in these libraries, great significance was placed on arts and humanities, particularly works of history, biography and travel. There was also an unsurprising "strong Imperial and British bias"[44] typical of other private middle-class collections of the era. In the reading rooms, there were wide selections of colonial and overseas newspapers and journals. By 1879, for example, the Townsville School of Arts could boast 18 colonial titles, six of which were sourced in North Queensland, and 22 from Britain and the United States of America. It is interesting to note that titles like the *Brisbane Courier*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Punch*, *Vanity Fair*, *Spectator* and *Scientific American* are still available over one hundred years later.

By the 1880s, Townsville was fast becoming the pre-eminent trading centre and port

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[43]Jim Cleary, "The North Brisbane School of Arts, 1849-1899", in E. Morrison and M. Talbot (eds), *Books, libraries and readers in colonial Australia*, Clayton, Vic., 1985, p.51.

[44]*Ibid*, p.293.

north of Brisbane. Local mercantile firms like Aplin, Brown and Burns, Philp had unrivalled access to the goldfields trade of Charters Towers, Cape River and Ravenswood, and were also active supplying the pastoral industries of the hinterland. As Townsville prospered it expanded rapidly, especially across Ross Island in the south and westwards along Flinders Street. It was not long before the location of the School of Arts was again questioned. Some expressed concern that the site of the building was no longer central to the main population of the town, and therefore could not be reached easily by subscribers. The complete absence of public transport at this time and the steep hillside aspect of the School of Arts were also factors in this assessment. In the years 1889-90 the bitter rivalry between Bowen and Townsville reached another milestone. As with many other facilities and services, the government agreed to relocate the Northern Division of the Supreme Court from Bowen to Townsville. With the blessing of the School of Arts committee, the building on Melton Hill was purchased and converted for this purpose, and remained as the Supreme Court until 1977.[45]

Little is recorded about the operations of the School of Arts over the next few years. Secondary accounts suggest that the present site of the School of Arts in Stanley Street was acquired not long after the government purchased the building on Melton Hill.[46] Taking into account the government's support for other schools of arts through land grants and building subsidies, it is reasonable to assume that Townsville also benefited from similar assistance. The new School of Arts building was constructed in red brick

[45]Gibson-Wilde and Dalton, *Townsville 1888*, plate 39.

[46]*Townsville Bulletin Jubilee Souvenir*, 27 August 1913.

and soon became known as one of the substantial buildings of its day.[47] It was opened to subscribers in 1891 and enjoyed immediate success, though this may have been due in large part to an adjoining but unconnected red brick building, His Majesty's Theatre. At the time of construction, His Majesty's was distinguished from private competitors like Norman Hall, opened in 1890, by its barrel-vaulted roof and sprung floor - features lacking elsewhere.[48] Like its predecessor, the original School of Arts Theatre, His Majesty's attracted many popular acts and was well supported. However, barely five years after the new School of Arts was opened, Cyclone Sigma struck Townsville on 26 January 1896. Sigma caused an estimated £600,000 damage to the town, some of which was inflicted on the School of Arts and associated buildings.[49] Bank loans for repairs were secured and services to subscribers soon resumed. Despite this financial setback for the School of Arts, a technical college of sorts was also begun on the Stanley Street site.

After an all too brief respite, a second major cyclone, Leonta, swept through the newly declared city of Townsville on 9 March 1903. Cyclone Leonta was a major disaster, causing the loss of at least ten lives and severely damaging many significant brick buildings, including the School of Arts, Grammar School and hospital.[50] The damage to the School of Arts building left it "almost entirely beyond repair" and compelled its

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[47]A. Lawson, *Townsville - an early history*, Brisbane, 1977, p.48.

[48]"Looking back", *Townsville Bulletin*, 18 August 1996.

[49]L. A. Watson, *The Townsville Story*, Townsville, [1951], p.18.

[50]Lawson, *Townsville - an early history*, p.48.

committee to obtain temporary premises in Flinders Street.[51] A journalist of the day summarised the unfortunate situation thus:

> The case of this institution is a particularly hard one, as there was a debt of £1500 on the premises, and the committee of management had just invested a further £300 in extensions and improvements.[52]

This debt was further increased by mortgaging the building to pay for repairs. These were conducted rapidly and the School of Arts reopened just under a year later on 16 February 1904. It is fair to say that the School of Arts never fully recovered financially from the Sigma and Leonta episodes. By the end of 1912, the institution was still carrying £1600 debt on its mortgage although it finished the year with a credit balance of a little over £177 in its operating account.[53] When the Townsville Municipal Council took over the School of Arts in July 1938 the mortgage had been whittled to £895 but an operating loss of £95 suggested that chronic bank debt would continue, and probably increase again in subsequent years.

Although the School of Arts was to continue offering library services until 1938, another option may have been available to the people of the city as early as 1897. On 21 January of that year, the Mayor, Alderman Hanran, proposed a motion "to convert the upper room of the Town Hall into a Free Public Library and Reading Room for the use of the public of Townsville and visitors thereto."[54] The motion was seconded by

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[51]*North Queensland Herald*, 4 April 1903.

[52]*Ibid.*

[53]*Townsville Bulletin Jubilee Souvenir*, 27 August 1913.

[54]Townsville City Council Minutes, 21 January 1897, p.17.

Alderman Lowry and carried by the Council with only two aldermen dissenting. Alderman E. Y. Lowry was an outspoken advocate of extending the Council's services to residents.[55] He proposed the "municipalization of public utilities"[56] including telephones, electricity, gas and baths along the lines of local governments in both Britain and the United States of America. With few exceptions, Lowry's ideas were not well accepted by his colleagues on the Council. In his study of Townsville's local government during this period, Lon Wallis has contended that "the projects the Council delighted in were those that would bring commercial benefit to either the Council, the town or its businessmen; providing services or being grandiose came very poor seconds."[57]

The idea of a free public library and reading room did not proceed any further at this time. On 28 March 1899 a special Council meeting was called to revoke and rescind certain motions made from February 1893 onwards, including that relating to the free public library.[58] Although Council records give no clear indications as to why this was so, the motion was passed unanimously. Perhaps the notion of a free service did not accord with the philosophy of a Council already financially committed to a number of large civic building projects, including the new Town Hall and Market Reserve Complex which cost £26,000. It is not surprising that the Council, comprised almost exclusively of businessmen, sought to maximise the return on its investment by leasing every square

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[55]L. Wallis, Some aspects of the Townsville Municipal Council, 1889-1901, BA (Hons) thesis, James Cook University, Townsville, 1972, p.v.24.

[56]*Ibid.*

[57]*Ibid*, p.v.1.

[58]Townsville City Council Minutes, 28 March 1899, p.75.

foot of available space in the new complex. Indeed, their ambition to include a hotel in the development, despite some objections from the community, seems to have been motivated purely by the desire to increase the Council's revenues. Clearly, a free public library would not have provided any commercial benefits to the Council.

As the nineteenth century waned so too did the fortunes of schools of arts in general. In Queensland, a number of factors conspired to bring about this decline. Although charges for services like rail freight and shipping began increasing greatly in the boom period of the 1870s and 1880s, government munificence diminished as funds were diverted into capital infrastructure projects like railways. The economic downturn in the 1890s exacerbated these difficulties and many schools of arts across the state, and Australia, became financially unviable and closed. This trend became the subject of detailed discussions at meetings of the Library Association of Australasia, founded in 1896. Much of this debate appears to have addressed the rather simplistic issue of whether billiard tables should be made available to attract subscribers, and thus increase revenues.[59] The purists expressed concern that "if the subscribers join for games and not for reading, they will soon elect committee-men who encourage the games at the expense of the reading...[and] the School of Arts under such influences becomes a sports club with a library attached to its tail."[60] Pragmatists underscored the downward spiral into which many schools of arts were falling, or had already tumbled:

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[59]A. W. Jose, "The difficulties of country schools of arts", in Library Association of Australasia, *Proceedings of the Sydney meeting, October, 1898*, pp.96-98.

[60]*Ibid*, p.97.

> Today the library is deserted. Old residents scarcely ever visit it, because they have long since read all they consider interesting, and newcomers are discouraged by the difficulty they find in procuring a book...the lack of proper shelf arrangement renders a search for it too much of an undertaking. Under such circumstances, what is a committee, however conscientious, to do? The membership roll is woefully small, and the lack of funds precludes the purchase of a supply of new books sufficiently large to attract attention... The principal revenue is derived from the hall, but it is very uncertain, not yielding, as a rule, more than sufficient for its own upkeep. If a forward movement is to be made it is manifest that another branch of activity must be developed...[61]

Apart from calls to organise social clubs and provide amenities for games, very few practical solutions were forthcoming. The meetings of the Library Association of Australasia thus helped to clarify the challenges facing schools of arts in general, but provided little comfort for their libraries.

By the early 1900s, however, such debates were largely academic as the schools of arts in most states were already irretrievably in retreat. Only in Queensland was this decline mitigated, and then thanks only to a fortuitous combination of government inaction and the unique geography of the state. In the first place, Queensland lacked any form of free library legislation which might have otherwise encouraged alternatives to the schools of arts libraries. The government also failed to establish any alternative, fully-funded lending services for people living outside Brisbane.[62] Instead, it continued to provide subsidies to local schools of arts until 1930. This trickle of funding, coupled with widely spread and highly parochial communities, kept many schools of arts lingering in a state of genteel poverty well into the twentieth century. On balance, it is probably

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[61]G. Allen, "The club side of institutes", in Library Association of Australasia, *Transactions and proceedings at the third general meeting held at Melbourne, April, 1902*, p.71.

[62]Inkster, "Growth and decline of the Queensland schools of arts, 1849-1981", p.273.

unfair to place the Townsville School of Arts Library wholly in this category as it maintained a respectable standard of service for longer than most. However, by the late 1930s it was clearly experiencing financial difficulties and losing subscribers. Overall, it also seemed to have lost the clear sense of purpose and direction which had energised its early development. Fortunately, influential people and events were already converging to suggest a new way forward.

Chapter Two

From School of Arts to free public library, 1938-1943

A little after 5.00 p.m. on Friday 8 July 1938, the Mayor of Townsville, Alderman J. S. Gill, officially took possession of the city's School of Arts on behalf of the Council. The significance of the short transfer ceremony was not lost on those aldermen and former School of Arts committee members in attendance. To the School of Arts committee it was the end of an ailing but once proud and vital civic institution: a deservedly dignified finale. For the aldermen, it signalled the genesis of a new era for library services in Townsville. The land, buildings, library collections, and staff thus brought under Council authority would rapidly form the foundations of Queensland's first free public library. The Townsville Municipal Library, as it was known when it opened on 1 August 1938, preceded the state's first attempt at free library legislation by a full five years, and the Library Board of Queensland by a further two years. It also formed the vanguard, and exemplar, of what might be termed a northern free library movement. By the early 1950s, Library Board subsidies and other initiatives had successfully encouraged 27 local authorities to conduct library services in Queensland. However, of this number, only five were actually free to residents and all of these were located in North Queensland: Townsville, Ingham, Innisfail, Atherton, and Gordonvale.[1] This chapter traces the development of the Townsville Municipal Library from Alderman Vic Hamilton's first proposal to Council in March 1938, through to legislative recognition in the Libraries Act of 1943.

By early 1938 the Townsville School of Arts Library was quite evidently in decline as a financially and culturally viable entity. Subsidy claims submitted to the Queensland Department of Public Instruction in the late 1920s and early 1930s show clear

[1] *Queensland Year Book 1954*, p.102.

indications of financial distress.[2] A claim lodged in 1930 indicated that receipts from subscriptions and the token government subsidy were insufficient to maintain the institution, let alone develop the library collection and make it more appealing to subscribers. The School of Arts relied heavily upon rental income to balance its books, but responsibilities as a landlord also demanded certain unavoidable expenditures, and the net effect was to erode operating surpluses. Between 1929 and 1930, for example, the credit balance carried over into the next year dropped from £97 to £79. Eight years later, this modest credit sum had become a vexing bank overdraft of £97. The mortgage acquired after Cyclone Leonta was a further financial millstone as this debt still had to be serviced, regardless of the institution's operating income. The sizeable outstanding balance of this mortgage, £895 in June 1938, and declining liquidity effectively precluded further loans to fund improvements. Despite public statements by the senior trustee, Mr T. G. Melrose, that the School of Arts was not "a defunct or insolvent institution"[3], finances and facilities suggested otherwise. In effect, by the late 1930s, the institution no longer appeared to possess the capacity to service its subscribers in the manner defined by its objects. It was less of a "centre of culture and recreation" than the old School of Arts on Melton Hill, and continually struggled to "maintain a Circulating Library, also Reading Rooms and Reference Library."[4]

The financial problems experienced by the Townsville School of Arts were further compounded by stiff competition from other subscription libraries. These libraries were

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[2]Subsidy claims submitted to the Department of Public Instruction by the Townsville School of Arts, 1929-30, "Library" file, Local History Collection, Townsville City Library Service.

[3]*Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 9 July 1938.

[4]*Rules of the Townsville School of Arts, and By-laws of the Reading Room and Library*, [1877].

dominated by the overtly commercial operations conducted by stationers and booksellers like Miss C. Keary, Willmetts, and Batchelor's Book Depot. Miss Keary traded primarily as a stationer and news-agent in the City Buildings on Flinders Street, a good central location, but widely advertised a circulating library containing "the most attractive collection of books to be found in the North."[5] Batchelor's Book Depot and Willmetts also conducted diversified bookselling and stationery businesses, which happened to include circulating libraries. In addition to these 'birds of a feather' businesses, organisations like the Townsville Book Club, Left Book Club and Railways Institutes provided selected residents with ready access to popular works of fiction and non-fiction. Aside from its ailing book collections and journal subscriptions, the School of Arts Library could offer little else to encourage subscribers and increase revenues. There were no trained staff to assist readers, implement modern library techniques, create new services, or arrange publicity. Indeed, the onerous duties of the Secretary-cum-librarian probably precluded her performing anything but the most basic clerical tasks with respect to the Library.[6] Services to young children and school students were barely developed and there seemed little incentive for residents to avail themselves of family subscriptions at £1/10/- per annum.

The monthly Council meeting of 21 October 1937 provided the first formal suggestion of a new way forward for library services in Townsville. In miscellaneous business, Alderman A. V. "Vic" Hamilton moved "that a Committee of three (3) be appointed to

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[5]Advertisement for Miss C. Keary, bookseller, stationer, and newsagent, in W. Doherty, *The Townsville Book*, Brisbane, 1920.

[6]*Ibid.*

investigate the practicability of establishing a free public lending library under the control of the Council."[7] The motion was seconded by his ALP colleague Alderman Illich and carried. In all respects the motion appeared to come from the blue. The issue of free libraries had not been discussed by the Council in nearly 40 years, and there appears little evidence of prior public interest in the matter around Townsville. However, in response to Hamilton's motion, two members of the dominant and highly conservative "Ratepayers' Team"[8] - Aldermen Heatley and Mindham - moved that the committee comprise the Mayor, J. S. Gill (ostensibly independent), Alderman Leach (Ratepayers' Team) and Alderman Hamilton (ALP). Such bi-partisan co-operation was unusual in Council at this time and suggested a depth and diversity of support for free libraries hitherto unanticipated. The issue reappeared again on 17 March 1938 when the Mayor reported that the committee had met but were "uncertain as to their legal position."[9] He indicated that this situation made it impossible to put forward a definite scheme to Council and that the committee hoped to do so at the next meeting.

Events began to move quickly though, and within the fortnight a representative sub-committee of the School of Arts met with Gill, Leach and Hamilton. Contemporary accounts of this meeting suggest that the initial idea for the Council to take over the School of Arts, and use it as the nucleus of a free library, came from the latter institution itself; an indication, perhaps, of the general hopelessness pervading the School of Arts. However, it is also possible that the Council sowed the seed in a letter to the

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[7]Townsville City Council Minutes, 21 October 1937, p.1139.

[8]I. Moles, *A majority of one*, Brisbane, 1979, p.55.

[9]*Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 18 March 1938.

School of Arts Committee on 25 March.[10] Either way, by 20 April the Secretary of the School of Arts, also its librarian, had made the following offer to Council:

> ...(2)...(a) That they [the School of Arts Committee] are prepared to hand over to the City Council for the purpose of establishing a Free Public Library, the whole of the assets of the Townsville School of Arts; (b) the City Council to take over the liabilities of the Townsville School of Arts existing at the date of the transfer of the property; (c) the City Council to take over the staff at present employed by our institution. (3) The offer now made is of course subject to confirmation by the subscribers of the Townsville School of Arts and the approval of the State Government. (4) Upon my committee being advised that your Council accepts the offer now made, my committee will immediately take action to obtain the necessary confirmation by the subscribers and the approval of the Government.[11]

In the subsequent Council meeting on 21 April, there followed an uncharacteristically good natured, well informed, and co-operative discussion. Gill noted that the School of Arts' assets included the land, building, and a rented cottage - all later valued at £16,500[12] - and that the liabilities of the institution did not exceed £1,200. If the offer meant nothing else to some aldermen, Gill's inference was that it should be seen as a sound financial transaction. Hamilton also spoke to the issue at length, evincing unlikely eloquence and a considerable knowledge of library issues. The *Townsville Daily Bulletin* provided this summary:

> Alderman Hamilton, speaking on the question, said the School of Arts had been caught in a vicious circle and English and American experience had shown that even public libraries would stagnate when they were without the means to buy sufficient books and pay trained librarians.

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[10] *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 22 April 1938.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 9 July 1938.

> When public libraries had sufficient means, experience showed that they stimulated a demand for informative and sound recreational literature that never came to a private subscription library. The Council was now being asked to try out an experiment. The rest of the world had proved the tax-supported free library the only solution of the problem of after-school and adult education.[13]

Hamilton went on to describe the highly praised free library services available in Manchester, England, and those provided since 1910 by the outback town of Broken Hill. He also intimated the support of an organisation ascribed almost genie-like properties at this time: the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Hamilton argued that the facilities offered by the School of Arts, coupled with funding from Council rates, would be enough to secure Carnegie grants for further improvements. The issue of whether a special rate should be struck was debated and eventually dropped. Alderman Leach provided the only dissension, calling into question the suggested costs of repairs to the School of Arts building and claiming that a new rate would have to be levied, "unless they took it [the cost of repairs] out of the hide of Alderman Mindham [Chairman of the Works Committee]."[14] As the minutes record, Hamilton then moved "that this Council accept the offer of the School of Arts Committee Townsville, to take over the Assets & Liabilities of the Institution at a sum not to exceed £1200, as from the 1st July 1938."[15] The motion was seconded by Alderman Illich (ALP) and passed by the Council.

Before examining the actual establishment of the Townsville Municipal Library, it is

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[13]*Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 22 April 1938.

[14]*Ibid.*

[15]Townsville City Council Minutes, 21 April 1938, p.1181.

helpful to have some appreciation of the national and state contexts within which it occurred. The Townsville City Council's decision to open the first free municipal library in Queensland did not occur in an information vacuum. As the Council meeting of 21 April 1938 indicated, local aldermen were quite well acquainted with the issues facing libraries in Australia and abroad. They were able to engage in informed discussion about the merits, or otherwise, of operating a free library service, and eventually reached a unanimous decision to go ahead.[16] This was not a typical Council response and suggested the influence of a grand vision operating within the wider Australian community. The vision in question can only have been that provided for the nation in January 1935 by Ralph Munn, Director of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, and Ernest Pitt, Chief Librarian of the Public Library of Victoria. Their broadranging report, entitled *Australian Libraries: a survey of conditions and suggestions for their improvement*[17], was instigated by a clutch of influential Australian librarians, funded by the Carnegie Corporation, and published by the Australian Council for Educational Research.[18] It was viewed then, and to some extent even today, as a watershed document which defined the beginnings of modern library practice in this country. Munn and Pitt spent two months in mid 1934 examining over one hundred Australian

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[16]*Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 22 April 1938.

[17]Hereafter referred to by its popular title, the Munn-Pitt report.

[18]The idea for a survey of Australian libraries is said to have come from Leigh Scott, Librarian of the University of Melbourne, at a meeting of the Library Association of Victoria in 1929. The Carnegie Corporation had recently completed a survey of South African libraries and Scott thought they could be persuaded to undertake a similar project in Australia. Frank Tate, president of the Library Association of Victoria and the first director of the Australian Council for Educational Research - established in 1928 with Carnegie financial support - initiated negotiations with the corporation, and arranged Ralph Munn's visit in May 1934. P. Biskup, *Libraries in Australia*, Wagga Wagga, NSW, 1994, p.7.

libraries, in all states, and distributing nearly 1,500 questionnaires.[19] In their forward "Note" to the report, they expressed regret that time constraints meant that "conditions north of Brisbane could not be observed at first hand".[20] However, their experience may have been, as a later observer was to comment: "you don't have to crawl far up a drain to know that it stinks".[21]

Over 60 years after its release, the far-reaching social influence of the Munn-Pitt report is difficult to appreciate fully, leading some revisionists to question its real impact.[22] However, responses at the time suggest that Munn and Pitt very effectively polarised, and challenged, library and community interests with their "candour and lack of temporising".[23] There was, for example, a stinging indictment of the Public Library of Queensland:

> Anyone wishing to carry away a favourable impression of the Public Library of Queensland should never make the mistake of entering it. Its exterior is dignified and pleasing but when the building is once entered almost everything appears wrong....The librarian's office is so small that when he has more than one visitor they must sit in tandem formation.[24]

Overall, the surveyors saw little to applaud in any of the government and subscription

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[19]R. Munn & E. R. Pitt, *Australian libraries*, Melbourne, 1935.

[20]*Ibid.*

[21]J. Metcalfe, *Public library service in and from Brisbane, 1945: a report, together with a new introduction*, Brisbane, 1974, p.x.

[22]Biskup, *Libraries in Australia*, pp.10-11.

[23]D. Whitehead, "AM and PM: The Munn-Pitt Report in Context", *Australian Library Journal*, 30(1), February 1981, p.4.

[24]Munn and Pitt, *Australian libraries*, p.61.

libraries operating in Brisbane, and by implication, Queensland at large. Instead, they chose to focus on remedies, including a recommendation that "cities of more than 20,000 inhabitants which do not form part of the metropolitan area of a capital city...should establish rate-supported municipal free libraries, using the existing institutes [schools of arts] as the nucleus when that is possible."[25] Then, as now, criticism of parochial interests guaranteed press coverage and the Munn-Pitt report was widely reported across Australia. It received particularly extensive exposure in New South Wales where people like W. H. Ifould - Principal Librarian of the Public Library of New South Wales - maintained good rapport with newspapers. This press coverage was also partly engineered by the sponsors, who deliberately withheld their release of the report until January 1935 "in the hope that it would gain additional coverage during the newspaper 'silly season'."[26]

Publicity surrounding the Munn-Pitt survey in Queensland was surprisingly desultory, and largely emanated from Brisbane's conservative *Courier-Mail.* Initial reactions to the survey became evident on 29 May 1934 with an editorial entitled "Dying of dry rot", and article headed "City library 'starved': American expert outspoken: 'Worst I have seen'."[27] The *Telegraph* went to press on the same day with a piece "Education for the masses: should be municipal libraries where Schools of Arts are open to criticism."[28] There followed a long period of silence until the release of the full report in January

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[25]*Ibid*, p.127.

[26]D. J. Jones, "From Munn-Pitt to Library Act", *Australian Library Journal*, 44(2), May 1995, p.55.

[27]I. Morrison, Newspaper coverage of the Munn-Pitt survey and report, MA thesis, Monash University, Clayton, Vic., 1991, p.145.

[28]*Ibid.*

1935. Both the *Telegraph* and the *Courier-Mail* trumpeted headlines like "Carnegie full report is scathing", "first steps towards a real library for Queensland", and "free libraries needed: schools of arts inadequate" for a period of several months and then began to fall away in March.[29] With respect to later events in Townsville, there are several interesting features of the Munn-Pitt press coverage in Queensland. Firstly, the metropolitan newspapers ignored country areas and focussed unashamedly on the paucity of library facilities in Brisbane, and the implied need for additional government spending in the capital. In contrast, the country presses were far less insular and tended to report the big picture with headlines like "Australian libraries: need for fundamental change: important recommendations made."[30] Coverage was also limited to the traditionally 'Tory' newspapers, with little emanating from the presses of Queenland's organised labour. For example, at the height of its notoriety, the Munn-Pitt report occasioned no comment in the ALP's *Daily Standard*. Recent analyses of the Munn-Pitt era have concluded that "proponents of 'free library service' were generally more influential in conservative ranks than they were in the Labor Party" and that "Labor indifference may have [had] more to do with the essentially conservative social and cultural values of the library reformers themselves."[31] In short, most on the left of Australian politics viewed the apparently bourgeois Munn-Pitt report with scepticism.

One tangible and highly effective outcome of the Munn-Pitt report was the founding of the Free Library Movement in 1935. The *cause celibre* of influential Sydney solicitor,

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[29] *Ibid.*

[30] *Ibid.*

[31] I. Morrison, "Culture, education, and municipalisation: libraries and politics in the 1930s", *Australian Library Journal*, 42(1), February 1993, p.54.

G. C. Remington, this lay-persons' movement proclaimed as its objects: "(a) To advocate and work for the establishment of free libraries, (b) to create and foster public opinion on the value of free libraries."[32] Once the movement was firmly established in New South Wales, Remington made several "missionary visits"[33] north of the border, and these led to the formation of a Queensland Free Library Movement in 1937. The Queensland group essentially represented metropolitan interests, although "it was intended to form branches at the principal centres of population throughout the State."[34] Sources are unclear as to whether any provincial branches were ever formed, but it seems certain that one did not arise in Townsville. The Queensland Free Library Movement proclaimed essentially the same objects as its NSW counterpart, although it may have been more overt in its articulation of "benign paternalism"[35] with respect to cultural pursuits. Foundation members of the movement included conservative statesmen like Sir Donald Cameron[36] and a few prominent members of the ruling ALP, like Forgan-Smith's Minister for Public Instruction, F. A. Cooper. Described as "less typical of Queensland Labor politicians"[37], Cooper was possessed of the tact, even-temper, and

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[32]C. E. Smith, "The role of the Library Association of Australia in the development of libraries in New South Wales", *Australian Library Journal*, 4(2), April 1955, p.52.

[33]Metcalfe, *Public library service in and from Brisbane, 1945*, p.xiv.

[34]W. H. Brown, "Library development in Queensland", in *Proceedings, Second Annual Meeting and Conference held at Melbourne, June 10th to 12th, 1939*, Australian Institute of Librarians, Adelaide, 1940, p.60.

[35]Morrison, "Culture, education, and municipalisation", p.57.

[36]Lt.-Col. Sir Donald Cameron KCMG, DSO, VD saw distinguished military service during the Boer War (1901-1902) and First World War (1914-1918). In a lengthy political career he was elected MHR for Brisbane (1919-1931) and MHR for Lilley, Qld (1934-1937). Sir Donald retired as an MHR in 1937 to contest a Senate seat but was defeated. J. A. Alexander (ed). *Who's Who in Australia*, 11th ed., Melbourne, 1941, pp.157-158.

[37]R. Fitzgerald, *A history of Queensland from 1915 to the 1980s*, Brisbane, 1984, p.124.

moderate social habits not usually evinced by cabinet colleagues, particularly the Minister for Health and Home Affairs, E. M. "Ned" Hanlon. Cooper also studied literature and drama for recreation, was renowned for his eloquence in the Legislative Assembly, and held lay positions in the Church of England. With regard to the latter, it should be remembered that the ALP government of the day was dominated by highly conservative Catholic interests, with only the Premier, Forgan-Smith, and two ministers - including Cooper - not of the faith. However, Cooper's Labor credentials were impeccable and included periods with the AWU old guard, Queensland Railways Union, Eight Hour Union, and Workers' Political Association.[38] It is this pedigree which suggests that a reputedly influential and urbane ALP man like Alderman Vic Hamilton[39] may have greeted sympathetically Cooper's advocacy of the Queensland Free Library Movement, and its underlying principles. Although only a circumstantial link, the timing of Hamilton's first suggestion of a free library to Council, October 1937, also hints at some communication of Cooper's interest in free libraries to selected members of the Townsville ALP. However, it is unclear whether this occurred via private letters and conversations, through publicity in forums like the *Courier Mail*, or by a combination of both.

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[38]*Ibid.*

[39]At the time of his free public library proposal, Vic Hamilton was arguably one of the most influential ALP aldermen on the Townsville City Council. Significantly, he was the only ALP representative on the Council's powerful Finance Committee. Hamilton was also Chairman of the Townsville Labor Council, Secretary of the Townsville Coachmakers' Employees' Federation, and Vice-President of the Townsville Branch of the ALP. In campaigning prior to the 1939 Council election, he was publicly described as "one of the most tactful and able in the history of the Council." Furthermore, he "made the anti-Laborites realize that Labor can produce men equal to those from any other section of the community." *The Clarion*, 24 March 1939. Other sources suggest that "friends and acquaintances privately referred to him as 'suave'." Moles, *A majority of one*, p.59.

With this background, it is possible to understand why a provincial union official like Hamilton was able to put the idea of a free municipal library to Council, and have it approved by both conservative and ALP aldermen. After Council had accepted the Townsville School of Arts' offer, the Trustees met with subscribers at a special general meeting on 5 May 1938 to vote on the necessary transfer resolutions. These were passed unanimously and the Council was duly requested to "take the matter up with the Queensland Government and arrange to have such legislation passed as may be considered necessary for the purpose of authorising the Trustees to sign and complete all transfers [of Crown land]..."[40] The Lands Department subsequently advised that the Trustees should be asked to resign on an agreed date as Executive authority could then be given for the Council to take possession of the land. On 19 June, the Council and Trustees signed a deed of indenture whereby all of the School of Arts' assets and liabilities passed to the Council, and the Trustees agreed to resign their positions, effective from 1 July.[41] This date was decided on the basis that the Council could not budget for the transfer prior to the end of the financial year. With the take-over assured, and the date of transfer only a fortnight hence, the June meeting of Council grappled with housekeeping matters. Although renowned for "his background of wide reading and private study"[42], Alderman Tom Aikens (ALP) seemed less than enamoured of conducting a 'free' library. He suggested that they would "soon find all the public library books all over Queensland" and indicated his preference for "a deposit of from

[40]*Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 20 May 1938.

[41]Townsville City Council Minutes, 21 July 1938, p.1216.

[42]Moles, *A majority of one*, p.53.

10/6 to £1/1/-, and when a person goes away he can get his deposit back".[43] Alderman Frank North (Ratepayers' Team) countered that "they could hardly call it free if they were going to ask for a deposit" and said that if this transpired he preferred it be called a "public library".[44] Hamilton concluded the discussion by saying that the Council's first agreed priority had been a free library, and that his committee had not overlooked the necessity to safeguard Council property. Other aldermen expressed their complete confidence in the committee comprising Gill, Hamilton and Leach, and it was formally assigned the task of framing suitable by-laws "to govern the distribution of books from the Library."[45]

It is reasonable to speculate that the committee was already well advanced in sketching a framework of by-laws as a gazettable draft was with E. M. Hanlon's Department of Health and Home Affairs by mid July for provisional approval. This sanction was given and the Council passed its first by-laws pertaining to the "Townsville Municipal Public Library"[46] at a special meeting on 15 September 1938. As befitted the first library of its kind in Queensland, the by-laws contained many contemporary ideas and practices. For example, section 596, paragraph (c): "any *bona fide* resident of the City of Townsville above the age of fourteen years shall be entitled, subject to these By-laws, to borrow books in the lending section free of charge."[47] However, some parochial

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[43] *Townsville Evening Star*, 18 June 1938.

[44] *Ibid.*

[45] *Townsville Evening Star*, 18 June 1938.

[46] *By-laws of the City of Townsville (Municipal Public Library)*, 1938.

[47] *Ibid*, p.2.

curiosities also persisted in the by-laws. There was, for instance, the matter of banning animals from the Library, or dealing with infectious diseases:

> 604. A borrower shall report to the librarian and return the books to the library within two days of the outbreak of an infectious disease in the house in which he may be dwelling, and the librarian may refuse to issue books to such borrower until the house shall be free from such disease and shall have been satisfactorily disinfected.[48]

The conduct of a 'free' library was presumably not felt to be compromised by the levying of a deposit "as security for the care, custody, and return of books".[49] This deposit was set at 5/- per book, up to a maximum number of four books. The Library did eventually become truly free in December 1964, when deposits were waived in anticipation of the introduction of decimal currency in Australia.[50] To celebrate its 50th Jubilee in 1988, the Library wrote to all borrowers who had not redeemed their deposits advising that the monies would be refunded on request. Those contacted invariably said they had received value for their money over the years and told the library to keep it. The deposits not claimed were subsequently transferred from a Council trust account and used to buy books.[51]

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[48]*Ibid*, p.6. The inclusion of this clause suggests input from Mr T. G. Melrose, senior Trustee of the School of Arts and Mayor of Townsville in 1919. This was the year of the Spanish Influenza epidemic and Melrose's council was credited with arresting its progress in the city. New ordinances at the time included a ban on public meetings and the introduction of a fine for spitting on footpaths. (Biographical information provided by Melrose's grandaughter, Mrs Judith Johnston, and local historian, Mr Ron Aitken.)

[49]*By-laws of the City of Townsville (Municipal Public Library)*, 1938, p.2.

[50]Townsville City Council Minutes, 17 December 1964, p.138.

[51]Interview with Joycelyn Brent, 20 June 1996.

The Council formally took possession of the School of Arts premises on Friday 8 July 1938, although the Library was closed until 1 August to allow various administrative tasks, including a thorough stocktake. In their final annual report to subscribers, the Townsville School of Arts Committee noted a total library collection of 14,095 books. Although statistically impressive, the library was actually in net decline as 500 items had been withdrawn from circulation during the year, while only 388 had been added to the collection.[52] In one of her first official duties as Librarian, Mrs Mabel Classen[53] presented the Council with a full inventory of stock, as at the first day of operation. Total bookstock was quoted as 9,577 - a 32% reduction in the collection from one month before! It is probable the many items were pensioned out during the hand over period, and some may also have been returned to the School of Arts Association in Brisbane. Either way, the Council saw an immediate need to inject new life into the collection. After all, the School of Arts Library had only ever been perceived as the foundation upon which to build a more appealing collection. In October 1938 the Finance Committee began by approving expenditure of £150 for new library books.[54] Advice on collection development was sought from local booksellers, the Headmaster of Townsville Grammar School - Mr P. F. Rowland - and the Head Librarian of the

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[52]Townsville School of Arts, Annual Report for the year ended 30th June, 1938.

[53]Mrs Mabel C. Classen migrated to Townsville in March 1920 from Surrey, England. She became Secretary-Librarian of the Townsville School of Arts in August 1921 and remained in this position until the Council take-over in July 1938. Thereafter, she was placed in charge of the Townsville Municipal Library in Walker Street, and then the Adult Library in Flinders Street. Mrs Classen was regarded as something of a mother figure to the young, exclusively female, library assistants under her supervision. Some wags called her "Mother Hen" as she often described the library assistants as her "chicks" or "girls" and always chaperoned them at the Council's Christmas parties. Once, the "girls" went for a counter lunch at Lang's Hotel, and on their return to the Library received a stern remonstration from Mrs Classen. She thought it improper for "nice girls" to frequent hotels. Mrs Classen retired from the Library on 6 March 1964. *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 7 March 1964; interview with Judith Ormes, James Cook University, 10 July 1996.

[54]Townsville City Council Minutes, 20 October 1938, p.1240.

Sydney Municipal Library.[55] By January of the following year over 400 new titles had been purchased, more than half of which were fiction. This reflected Mrs Classen's comments to the *North Queensland Guardian* that "fiction is most in demand...eight volumes of fiction are taken out for every one of non-fiction."[56] As proposed by Hamilton, the Council also sought funding from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. This was not considered unusual at the time as the mere mention of Andrew Carnegie was said to evoke "cargo cult"[57] responses in many Australians. The Town Clerk wrote to Ernest Pitt, co-author of the Munn-Pitt report, on 29 July 1938 requesting information about Carnegie Corporation subsidies. After a reminder telegram on the 20 September, Pitt cabled 24 hours later with the following message: "understand present policy of Carnegie Corporation does not allow of assistance to individual libraries."[58] The matter was not pursued.

Despite the early disappointment of not securing a Carnegie grant, the Council did not lose enthusiasm for its new venture. The Library's first five years of existence were characterised by the steady growth of both collections and members. By approving substantial expenditure on new books, the Council broke the downwards spiral of collection development and sponsored new interest in the Library. For example, in September 1938 the Library recorded just 149 members, the majority of whom had been

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[55]Correspondence and booklists located in the "Library" file, Local History Collection, Townsville City Library Service.

[56]*North Queensland Guardian*, 20 January 1939.

[57]Metcalfe, *Public library service in and from Brisbane, 1945*, p.x.

[58]Pitt to Town Clerk, "Library" file, Local History Collection, Townsville City Library Service.

School of Arts subscribers.[59] After one month this number had climbed to 173[60], and by 30 June 1939 some 370 Townsville residents were members of the Library.[61] Thereafter, membership growth came close to doubling each year until 1943. It is true that a great deal of the growth after 1940 was due to the influx of service personnel, which by late 1942 had swelled the local population from "approximately 30,000 to 100,000, of whom 60 to 70 per cent were military personnel."[62] Mrs Classen wrote to the Council in October 1940 to ask whether Australian Army and Air Force personnel could join the Library: "The Air Force I think will be here for the duration of the War and as long as they enter on the Roll I think could join, the Army is a little uncertain as to their movements, so must leave the matter at your end to decide."[63] No reference was made to the thousands of American military personnel also based in the Townsville area. Gill replied in a handwritten annotation to the letter: "The Air Force may join up as the majority will no doubt be here for a lengthy period. The Militia men must be on the roll."[64] It is sobering to discover that of the 3,074 members enrolled in the year to 30 June 1944, 648 were removed and listed as transfers, enlistments or deceased.[65]

Growth of the Library was further helped by the election of Townsville's first socialist

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[59]Townsville Municipal Library, Monthly Report: September [1938].

[60]Townsville Municipal Library, Monthly Report: October [1938].

[61]Townsville Municipal Library, Annual Report for the year ended 30th June 1939.

[62]D. McIntyre, *Townsville at War 1942*, Townsville, 1992, p.53.

[63]Classen to Town Clerk, October 1940, "Library" file, Local History Collection, Townsville City Library Service.

[64]Gill to Classen, October 1940, "Library" file, Local History Collection, Townsville City Library Service.

[65]Townsville Municipal Library, Annual Report for the year ended 30th June 1944.

council in 1939. The ALP team, led by Aikens and including Labor stalwarts like Hamilton and Illich, also had the support of the first communist to be successful in any Australian election, Alderman F. W. Paterson.[66] Together they enacted a bold range of policies which included the public ownership of important services like ice manufacturing, wood distribution, fruit and vegetable retailing, and child care.[67] The Library accorded philosophically with these endeavours and generally received its fair share of financial support: for example, £635 - or 1.2% of rates collected - went to the Library in the first year of operation.[68] In its manifesto for the 1939 council election, the ALP also proposed an extensive renovation of the City Building in Flinders Street. The remodelling was suggested to include electric lifts between floors, a rest room for women on the second floor, and "quite separate and distinct on the same floor will be situated a Free Municipal Library, a creation of Labor."[69] This idea to relocate the Library did not proceed in the immediate post-election period, and the Council soon became distracted by the events of World War Two. However, in March 1941, the Council acceded to the Air Board's request to occupy *in toto* the former School of Arts building. The Air Board urgently required billet space for Air Force personnel and agreed to reimburse the Council for lost rent on the accompanying flat, cottage and hall.[70] The Library was thus removed to the second floor of the City Building in April

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[66]Moles, *A majority of one*, p.58.

[67]*Ibid*, p.62.

[68]*Ibid*, p.223.

[69]*The Clarion*, 24 March 1939.

[70]Townsville City Council Minutes, 20 March 1941, p.1513.

1941, only two years later than the ALP had planned, and reopened there in early May.[71]

As Townsville settled into the grind of peaceful wartime 'occupation', the state government of Premier F. A. Cooper (formerly Minister for Public Instruction under Forgan-Smith) was under considerable political pressure. Amid other issues, the conservative opposition parties used the embarassing findings of the Munn-Pitt report to attack Cooper specifically, and the years of ALP administration in general. The *Libraries Act of 1943* was introduced into the assembly by Cooper himself and occasioned debate which a later State Librarian described as "scarcely a tribute to the learning acknowledged by members to be so desirable in their constituents".[72] The act was rightly considered "defensive"[73] legislation, cobbled together without the benefit of much preliminary research or expert advice, and was not proclaimed until March 1945. In consequence of Cooper's haste, the *Libraries Act* was unclear on matters of implementation and this necessitated advice from John Metcalfe, Principal Librarian of the State Library of New South Wales, in December 1945. All of this washed over the people of Townsville. Cooper's act stated that "a Local Authority may if it deems fit and proper so to do establish, maintain, and conduct a library facility as a function of local government".[74] It also permitted local authorities to take over schools of arts if

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[71]The Library remained in this rather dour accommodation until 20 March 1978 when it was relocated to the former Commonwealth Bank building, several hundred metres further east along Flinders Street. This remains today as the City Branch of the Townsville City Library Service.

[72]S. L. Ryan, *The development of state libraries and their effect on the public library movement in Australia, 1809-1964*, Brisbane, 1974, p.97.

[73]Metcalfe, *Public library service in and from Brisbane, 1945*, p.xiv.

[74]Queensland, *Libraries Act of 1943*.

requested by their trustees, or it was deemed to be "in the public interest".[75] In effect, the *Libraries Act of 1943* was merely legislative recognition of actions that had already occurred in Townsville five years before.

[75] *Ibid.*

Chapter Three

"a long felt want": the first decade of children's library services in Townsville, 1953-1963

Not long after its takeover of the School of Arts Library, the Townsville City Council became aware of the need for a separate children's library. It was described quite truthfully by the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* as "a long felt want in the community."[1] By the early 1950s, the outstanding success of the Townsville Municipal Library was most clearly evidenced by the steady growth of its membership and collections. In its annual statistical return to the Library Board of Queensland for the year ending 30 June 1951, the library reported 4,145 registered borrowers and a collection comprising 22,419 fiction and 7,125 non-fiction books. The report also noted the existence of a substantial and apparently well used collection of 1,359 books for children.[2] As was common elsewhere in Australia at this time, children were not permitted to join the library as borrowers. Instead, they were issued books on the cards of their parents. As adults were only allowed a maximum of four books at any time, this had the effect of limiting considerably the numbers of books that could be borrowed by children. The arrangements also made it difficult for library staff to maintain detailed statistics of usage and thereby determine the particular needs of children. Nonetheless, the practice of allowing children to borrow, albeit through adults, and the maintenance of a children's collection indicated that the Townsville City Council was at least alert to its responsibilities to younger residents.

Despite the Council's apparent awareness of the need, it hedged for some years before making any commitment to the establishment of a separate library for children. Publicly

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[1]*Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 5 December 1953.

[2]Townsville City Council to Library Board of Queensland, 26 July 1951, "Library" file, Local History Collection, Townsville City Library Service.

it reasoned that suitable premises could not be found. However, in August 1951, for reasons not made entirely clear by official council documents, the State Librarian of Queensland - J. L. Stapleton - was finally requested to travel to Townsville. His brief was to survey the existing library facilities and advise the Finance Committee of the Council on the establishment of a children's library, and possible remodelling of the adult library. The unbearably congested state of the adult library may have finally precipitated the council's decision to call on Stapleton for advice. Besides exacerbating existing space problems, services to children were not developing as many in the city felt they should. Children themselves thought the premises "dark and foreboding"[3] and the staff generally unwelcoming. Stapleton inspected a number of potential sites, including the Townsville School of Arts building, and conferred with the Mayor, members of the Finance Committee, and the Town Clerk. On the 27 August he presented a detailed report to the Council. Chief among his findings was the suggestion that Blackshaw's Studio, a photographic business, on the mezzanine floor of the Market Reserve building "would be a good place for the children's library".[4] Stapleton considered the area of approximately 2,000 square feet to be sufficiently large for the library. He indicated that 1,500 square feet would be "the bare minimum for a central children's library for a city of the size of Townsville"[5] and anything less would almost certainly lead to cramped conditions in the future. Blackshaw's Studio was also recommended because of its close proximity to the existing adult library and the highly desirable encouragement of family visits to both libraries. Finally, Stapleton considered

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[3]Interview with Joycelyn Brent, 12 June 1996.

[4]Stapleton to Townsville City Council, 27 August 1951, "Library" file, Local History Collection, Townsville City Library Service.

[5]*Ibid.*

it the most cost effective option as it could be altered for library purposes at minimal expense to the council. In developing his case for the site, Stapleton also suggested that the adult library on the floor above could be usefully enlarged by resuming an adjoining commercial office and demolishing existing walls.

Even though Stapleton's assessment seemed to receive complete council support, a considerable interval of time elapsed before the children's library eventually opened its doors on 4 December 1953. At least some of this delay was ascribed to post-war shortages of building materials and tradesmen.[6] Council minutes record that the lessee of Blackshaw's Studio was not sent an official notification to vacate his premises until March 1952. In the meantime, as suggested by Stapleton, building plans for the children's library and modifications to the adult library were developed and then submitted to the State Library for advice in July of that year. The State Library replied that the council should defer expenditure on the project until the 1952-53 budget. In late October 1952 the council called tenders for construction, and in November it received official notification from the State Library Board of a 50% building subsidy.[7] Although progress thus hastened slowly, the resulting construction bettered Stapleton's estimates by incorporating an existing passageway and giving the children's library a generous 2,100 square feet of floorspace. The new library also benefited from its position on the mezzanine level of the Market Reserve (City) building, being close enough to the street to encourage access but with the benefit of a foyer to accommodate queues in busy

[6]A. M. West, "Townsville Municipal Children's Library", *Australian Library Journal*, 3(4), October 1954, p.130.

[7]Townsville City Council Minutes, 20 November 1952.

periods. Anecdotal accounts of the library's services in the mid to late 1950s indicate that queues of children were commonplace, especially on Saturday mornings. Indeed, it was not unusual for the lines of eager young library users to extend out of the library, down the stairs, through the foyer, and out onto the footpath.[8] The setting was also ideal in that it effectively insulated adult library users from any youthful high spirits on the floor below.

The delay in construction also gave the council sufficient time for the all important task of appointing its first professional librarian. In his 1951 report to the council, Stapleton had gone to considerable trouble to emphasise the need for a "trained Children's Librarian"[9]. He intimated the specialised nature of library services to children by suggesting that the successful applicant be brought to Townsville in sufficient time to participate in the planning and establishment processes. Initial duties were anticipated to include: assistance with preliminary plans for the children's library; collection development and purchasing of core book stocks; and, "cataloguing, classifying, lettering and lacquering of books"[10] in readiness for the opening. Prevailing local opinions on the matter were probably ambivalent at best. A letter from Mrs Mabel Classen - Adult Library - to the Town Clerk dated 17 November 1950 gives some indication of her feelings on the need for professional staff:

> ...up to the present date it has not been found necessary to employ a

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[8]Interview with Joycelyn Brent, 12 June 1996.

[9]Stapleton to Townsville City Council, 27 August 1951, "Library" file, Local History Collection, Townsville City Library Service.

[10]*Ibid.*

> qualified librarian necessarily eligible for the associate membership of the Library Association of Australia. The Townsville Library consists mainly of fiction and the sections of non-fiction have been and can still be handled quite capably by the present staff of ten including juniors.[11]

Nevertheless, Stapleton counselled the appointment of a qualified librarian - that is, someone who possessed the Qualifying Certificate of the Library Association of Australia, or its equivalent - with experience in providing library services to children. The council accepted Stapleton's recommendation and also followed his subsequent advice to advertise in the major metropolitan newspapers and the recently inaugurated *Australian Library Journal*. Perhaps realising that the pool of potential applicants might be small, Stapleton also suggested that the council consult with the secretaries of the Library Association branches in each state, and the principal librarians of the various state libraries. In April 1952 the *Australian Library Journal* announced that Miss Joan MacKenzie, formerly Children's Librarian at the Launceston Public Library, had been appointed Children's Librarian in Townsville, and that she had arrived to commence her duties in March.[12] Miss MacKenzie was assigned a staff of three assistants and an initial budget of £1,000 for books and stationery.[13] As Stapleton had also suggested in his report, the first qualified librarian to be appointed by the council commenced duties by providing training for the library assistants in her charge. Together they then began preparing the new children's collection, described by Miss MacKenzie's successor as "the foundations of an excellent book stock.".[14]

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[11]Classen to Town Clerk, 17 November 1950, "Library" file, Local History Collection, Townsville City Library Service.

[12]"Branches", *Australian Library Journal*, April 1952, p.90.

[13]Townsville City Council Minutes, 20 March 1952.

[14]West, "Townsville Municipal Children's Library", p.130.

From the outset, the collection was divided into four distinct sections, in recognition of the special needs of particular groups of children. Picture books aimed at children aged five to eight years were displayed on sloping shelves located near the registration desk. Fiction items, the bulk of the collection, were filed in alphabetical order by author surname around the walls of one half of the room. Photographs of the library in the late 1950s show how the shelves were specifically designed to be no taller than the average child of 10 or 11 years old. The non-fiction collection occupied the remaining half of the library's wall space and was catalogued using the highly regarded Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) system. Items were located using a catalogue of the "card indexed dictionary type" which allowed searching by subject headings; a useful feature for students preparing school projects.[15] These innovations were clearly the product of Miss MacKenzie's professional training, and placed the children's library well ahead of the adult library in terms of organisation. Under Mrs Classen's direction, the adult library still retained the largely unhelpful school of arts system of non-fiction classification which assigned single letters for broad topic areas, and four digit running accession numbers.[16] The final section of the children's library was the Reference collection which comprised a fairly standard array of encyclopedia sets, atlases, dictionaries, and books thought too valuable to be borrowed. The Reference collection also indicated some surprising areas of interest:

> A comprehensive selection of illustrated art books was a justified inclusion here as there is no Art Gallery in Townsville, also a collection of illustrated books on the ballet which is a subject of overwhelming

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[15]*Ibid*, p.131.

[16]Interview with Judith Ormes, 10 July 1996.

interest amongst Townsville children.[17]

Popular non-book collections were also started under Miss MacKenzie's direction. These collections eventually included magazines, records, sheet music, pamphlets, and a cuttings file. Miss MacKenzie's work was highly praised by the council but she succumbed to ill-health in May 1953 and resigned her position in order to return to Tasmania. The council wasted no time in advertising for another children's librarian, with an attractive salary range of £674 to £754, with four annual increments of £20.[18] In July 1953 Mrs A. M. West was appointed Children's Librarian for a period of 12 months, with a review recommended at the end of that time.[19]

Like her predecessor, Mrs West was one of the emerging post-war generation of highly trained professional librarians. Educated at Edinburgh University, an Associate of the Library Association (United Kingdom), mother of two children, and in her early 30s, Mrs West possessed the energy, skills and vision needed to continue the work so ably commenced by Miss MacKenzie. Former children's library staff who were trained by Mrs West recall that everyone knew her to be "a proficient and professional librarian, so everything we learned was very important."[20] As the children's library neared completion, the staff became active around the city, publicising their services and registering new members. Mrs West proved particularly adept at generating publicity and her talks to school groups, youth organisations, local radio stations and newspapers

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[17]West, "Townsville Municipal Children's Library", p.130.

[18]Townsville City Council Minutes, 21 May 1953, p.3087.

[19]Townsville City Council Minutes, 23 July 1953, p.3118.

[20]Interview with Joycelyn Brent, 12 June 1996.

attracted many new readers and garnered widespread community support. In the two weeks immediately prior to the opening, library assistants managed to visit each school in Townsville and register children en masse. When the children's library finally opened in December 1953, over 3,000 children had already been registered as members and this figure climbed by a further 1,000 after just two months of operation.[21] Despite this forward planning, demand for registration on the Saturday morning following opening was so overwhelming that three queues had to be formed! Barely six months later, membership figures had exceeded 4,500, representing almost half the city's juvenile population.[22]

The Townsville Municipal Children's Library was officially opened by the Mayor, Alderman Angus Smith, on Friday 4 December 1953. It was recognised as the first of its kind in North Queensland, and one of only a handful in Queensland at that time. The event was attended by a large crowd of interested citizens and received extensive coverage in both local and state newspapers. It was also the focus of many fine words from both local politicians and journalists. Chairman of the Finance Committee, Alderman Harry Hopkins, waxed sonorous and spoke of children's libraries as "bulwarks of democracy".[23] The editor of the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* was moved to confer unreserved praise on all concerned with the project, quote liberally from Horace Mann's writings on children and books, and demonstrate an enviable, if somewhat monotonous,

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[21]West, "Townsville Municipal Children's Library", p.130.

[22]*Courier Mail*, 29 July 1954.

[23]*Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 5 December 1953.

capacity to list authors of classic children's fiction.[24] Mrs West's statements shied from grand allusions, but contained the essence of the philosophy which was to make the Children's Library integral to the lives of so many Townsville children:

> ...children need an ample supply of carefully selected books if they are to enjoy childhood thoroughly, and grow up able to make full use of their abilities and their opportunities for service and happiness. Books for recreation and information are too expensive for parents to buy in such quantity. The Library is the most economical way of providing boys and girls with these necessities for development.[25]

Later, she was to refine this theme for feature articles in the *Courier-Mail* and *Australian Library Journal*:

> Our first aim is to present to the young reader the best which can possibly be obtained, whether the literature is for the child's information or recreation.[26]

This aim has remained constant throughout the history of Townsville's library services to children.

Without doubt, the Townsville Municipal Children's Library was a facility richly deserving both praise and intense civic pride. The interior design was spacious and widely commended for being light and airy.[27] Although natural lighting in the former photographic studio was already considered quite adequate, fluorescent lighting, and

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[24]"A great library is the diary of the human race", *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 5 December 1953.

[25]Untitled brochure, Townsville Municipal Children's Library, circa mid-1950s.

[26]*Courier Mail*, 29 July 1954.

[27]*Australian Library Journal*, April 1954, p.70.

even ceiling fans, were installed. Such amenities contrasted favourably with the dark and tired-looking adult library on the floor above. Renovations also included replastering of the walls, which were then painted a more appealing pastel green, and the laying of dark green asphalt tiles over previously bare concrete.[28] In a corner near the entrance, dirty hands could be cleansed in a wash basin. With the help of this feature, reported the *Northern Churchman*, "children are taught to love and respect books".[29] Of more practical appeal to children, the maple furnishings, including book shelves, were all designed to comfortably accommodate smaller bodies. Although the initial book collection was modest by contemporary standards, between 4,500 and 5,000 volumes when the library opened, this number grew to 8,000 by November 1954, and nearly 12,000 at the end of the decade. Quality has always been of greater importance than quantity in children's librarianship - after all, what use is a large collection if children find it stale and unappealing? - and the collection benefited from imaginative book acquisition, including a license to import US$200 worth of juvenile fiction from the United States of America.[30] Governments in Italy, India and the United States also provided donations of books, maps and pamphlets.

Mrs West's influence was expressed most positively in the introduction of modern library practices, and a range of innovative new services. Most collection development, for example, had to rely on the librarian's professional judgement, and Mrs West

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[28]West, "Townsville Municipal Children's Library", p.129.

[29]"Children and Books", *Northern Churchman*, 1 April 1954.

[30]West, "Townsville Municipal Children's Library", p.131.

established firm groundrules in this regard.[31] However, from earliest days, children were also encouraged to recommend items for purchase in a Suggestions Book located near the front door. Sufficient space was provided for library staff to add written responses to each suggestion. A Reference Questions book was instituted to monitor common enquiries and assist staff in finding required information before children visited the library again. The existence of an Information Desk also encouraged many children to seek reference help from library staff. Borrowing of books was organised using the Brown, or 'public libraries', circulation system favoured in the United Kingdom. Brown required every borrowable book to have a unique card, usually stored in a pocket affixed to the endpaper, and for each child to be provided with pockets for the number of books able to be borrowed at any one time. To issue an item, staff transferred the book card to the borrower's pocket, stamped the book with the return date, and then filed the pocket in return date order. The system offered clear advantages for children's libraries: it was quick, efficient and did not require writing; this simplicity in turn meant that it could be worked by children if necessary, with minimal supervision; and, users were not required to carry borrowing cards.[32] In the 1950s, children were allowed to borrow up to two books, six magazines, and two records for two weeks.[33] School-age borrowers particularly benefited from the introduction of the Dewey classification system for non-fiction books, and structured card catalogue which listed books in alphabetical order by author surname, title, and subject.[34] The adult library did not provide these aids until

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[31]Interview with Joycelyn Brent, 12 June 1996.

[32]*A general introduction to library practice*, Sydney, 1955, pp.47-49.

[33]Untitled brochure, Townsville Municipal Children's Library, circa mid-1950s.

[34]*Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 5 December 1953.

the appointment of the first City Librarian, Miss Hilary Gray, in January 1964. Miss Gray re-catalogued the adult library's entire non-fiction collection shelf by shelf. As their children had done ten years before, older library users accepted the changes and occasional inconvenience because they appreciated the improvements.[35]

Over the next decade, with the Council's ongoing support, the Children's Library continued to build upon its early achievements. Significantly, it became an integral component of the cultural, educational and recreational lives of many Townsville children in the 1950s. One former member recalled how she and her older sister spent literally every spare moment at the Children's Library, after school each day and during the school holidays.[36] Two important features distinguish this period from later decades, and help to explain the influence of the Children's Library in the community. Firstly, the growth of the Children's Library in terms of its borrowers consistently surpassed that of the Adult Library until June 1969![37] In addition to providing a growing collection of desirable and useful reading materials, the Children's Library continually developed and publicised new services, thus encouraging steady membership growth throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Alderman Hopkins proudly described the work of Mrs West and her staff to the *Townsville Daily Bulletin*:

> They are popularising the Children's Library, not by expenditure of large sums of money on publicity, but by their enthusiasm and courtesy, by highly imaginative displays and by energetic catering for a whole galaxy

[35]Interview with Judith Ormes, 10 July 1996.

[36]Notes provided by Sandy Palmer, 20 June 1996.

[37]Townsville City Council Minutes, 1953-1969.

of child interests.[38]

As noted by Hopkins, displays were highly successful publicity tools which Mrs West and her successor, Miss Patricia Crosthwaite, used with consumate flair. There were, for example, the annual Townsville Show exhibits which cost as little as £5 to produce but incorporated novelties like full size chicken wire and plaster of Paris figures of children reading in a library.[39] In one year alone, the Show display was inspected by well over 1,000 people, encouraged some 200 parents to discuss their children's reading habits, and inspired 50 new memberships.[40]

A display case in the foyer of the City Buildings was also used to great effect. Displays were often deliberately topical, or designed around themes like shipwrecks or space travel which children found appealing. All of the displays were intended to extend literary horizons and introduce children to particular aspects of the collection. One particularly topical display in 1954 was entitled "Come on the Royal Tour of the World." The display featured national costumes, selected reading lists of well-known books from many countries, and a relief of the young Queen Elizabeth II in the background. Although the display did encourage moderate interest in the cultures of other nations, staff were hard pressed to meet demand for the library's 50 or so books about the Royal family![41] Another celebrated display seemed to foreshadow the later popularity of library-related *Dr Who* activities. Children's Library staff constructed a

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[38]*Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 26 May 1954.

[39]*Townsville Daily Bulletin*, circa mid to late 1950s.

[40]*Australian Library Journal*, October 1954, p.148.

[41]*Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 17 March 1954.

"time machine" in the display case which they then used to excite interest in historic events, and the books that described them. As reported at the time, the whole display was a cleverly improvised construction of "electric light bulbs, vacuum cleaner brushes, cellophane paper, all mounted on a child's tricycle."[42] The time machine brought to 1950s Townsville "Latest News - Cleopatra Stung by Asp."[43]

Close liaison with local primary and secondary schools also played a large part in the growth of the Children's Library during this period. Unlike the Adult Library which relied largely on word of mouth to attract new members, the Children's Library actively sought publicity and partnerships in the community. Highly influential overseas professionals like Lionel McColvin, City Librarian of Westminster, had long advocated closer working relationships between schools and public libraries:

> Books for children can be provided either through the schools or through the normal public library system - or through both. In general, where public library facilities exist, it is definitely better that they should supply the children with their general and recreational reading... The whole field is, of course, one requiring the closest friendly co-operation between Education and Public Library authorities.[44]

McColvin's advocacy of the role of public libraries was based on the belief that they encouraged children with greater feelings of relaxation and freedom, and were usually open at times - specifically evenings, weekends, and school holidays - when children

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[42]*Ibid*, 24 April 1954.

[43]*Ibid.*

[44]L. R. McColvin, *Public libraries in Australia*, Melbourne, 1947, pp.12-13.

were more likely to use them.[45] Mrs West and her staff began visiting Townsville's schools before the Children's Library opened, and this practice continued into the 1960s. School visits were well received by teachers and education authorities alike. As Laurel Clyde explained in her PhD thesis *The Magic Casements*, by the 1940s school libraries in Queensland had become fossilised and "ceased to have much relevance to the life of the school".[46] School visits principally involved speaking to individual classes about the library's extra-curricular activities, and extolling the benefits of membership. Appetites were usually wetted by passing around eye-catching items from the collection, after which staff would hand out application cards for children to take home for their parents to sign. In March 1959, Miss Crosthwaite and her senior assistant, Miss Joycelyn Harding[47], went to the extent of organising a tour of state schools in Townsville. The exercise was praised by the Regional Director of Education and had attracted 2,054 new members by 30 June, bringing the total membership of the Children's Library to 6,177.[48] By comparison, the Adult Library could not boast of similar numbers until the late 1960s!

Services to schools were not limited to classroom visits. Mrs West believed that the

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[45] *Ibid*, p.12.

[46] L. A. Clyde, The Magic Casements, PhD thesis, James Cook University, Townsville, 1981, p.324.

[47] Mrs Joycelyn Brent ALAA commenced her career as a library assistant in the Townsville Municipal Children's Library (1957-59). She then spent five years in Sydney working for the CSIRO's Division of Food Preservation Library and completing librarianship training at the University of New South Wales. Mrs Brent returned to Townsville in 1964 and was asked to rejoin the Children's Library. Thereafter, she became Children's Librarian (1967-76), City Librarian (1976-85), Librarian for the Joint Library Service with Thuringowa (1985-91), and Library Manager - Townsville City Library Service (1991 to the present). Mrs Brent's later career was distinguished by two consecutive three year terms on the Library Board of Queensland: the first serving public librarian to be appointed.

[48] *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 7 March and 30 July 1959.

Children's Library should be an "information bureau"[49] and in this capacity it was a boon to many school children. One Townsville High School student became a library convert when staff were able to find for him the "specific gravity of cream".[50] Teachers were encouraged to take advantage of special arrangements if they wished to borrow books for teaching purposes. They were also permitted to bring their classes to the Children's Library in order to make most productive use of the non-fiction and Reference collections. For their part, library staff undertook to locate information sources for school projects and prepare suitable reading lists, and make these available to groups of students on request. Arguably the most valuable service was the provision of bulk loans of books to new schools, especially high schools, lacking even the most basic libraries. Pimlico State High School and Bohlevale Primary School were early beneficiaries of these arrangements, each receiving loans of up to 300 books in 1959.[51] Overall, the Children's Library supported local school children simply by providing good quality, yet appealing recreational and informational collections. Once discovered, the wonders of their contents were often reason enough for children to join the Library.

The second feature of this period was the development and subsequent popularity of clubs and other extra-literary activities organised by Children's Library staff. All were initially intended to stimulate interest in the library's services and collections. However, over time, many clubs assumed significance in their own right and gave the Library a whole new dimension of purpose. Such was the novelty of these clubs in the early

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[49]*Ibid*, 5 December 1953.

[50]*Ibid*, 29 March 1960.

[51]*Ibid*, 8 August 1959; 3 March 1960.

1950s that the *Courier-Mail* even described them collectively as "this experiment in child psychology."[52] In some respects they were apart from other activities of the time. With few exceptions, the clubs encouraged individual creativity, self expression, personal achievement rather than competition, and were in some way related to the collections held in the Library. The first activities were simple storytelling sessions in the Children's Polio Ward at the Townsville General Hospital. These were soon joined by storytelling circles in the Library, and regular sessions with young children from the day-care centre on the first floor of the City Buildings. A very unreliable old lift used to bring the young children down to the Library on the mezzanine level and it often became stuck between floors.[53]

It is difficult to tell which club was formed first, but in the days before television puppetry was a popular pursuit and received much publicity. When the Children's Library put on a Christmas Eve puppet show just a few weeks after opening, 600 children attended.[54] The Puppet Club began with 45 members in early March 1954. Not surprisingly, the boys were charged with building the puppet theatre while the girls made the puppets and their costumes. One former member of the club was able to recall her first show:

> We made papier-mache puppets by moulding the puppet's head around a cardboard cylinder placed over the top of a Coca Cola bottle. Then we painted the faces and sewed garments to cover our hand. We then took our puppets, together with the props made by the library staff, up to the

[52]*Courier Mail*, 29 July 1954.

[53]Interview with Joycelyn Brent, 12 June 1996.

[54]West, "Townsville Municipal Children's Library", p.131.

> Children's Ward at the hospital and put on a show. I think it was Punch and Judy. It was a wonderful experience and well received by the kids.[55]

Despite modest beginnings with hand puppets, by 1963 some enthusiastic puppeteers had graduated to more sophisticated marionette puppets. A stamp club and theatre group soon followed the puppet club, and each in turn attracted a dedicated following. The stamp collectors formed a particularly steadfast band and were early beneficiaries of council largesse, with opened envelopes sent over from the Council Chambers in large boxes.[56] The club also attracted many guest speakers and held educative, if somewhat bizarre, competitions like "the best short talk on interesting facts about Newfoundland stamps".[57] The theatre group received £60 from the Council to stage its first play, *Make Believe* by A. A. Milne, in the Theatre Royal on 11 December 1954.[58] This group grew in strength and was soon receiving instruction and guidance from members of the St. James Players - a local amateur adult theatre group.[59] Other clubs followed quickly and in their heyday catered to youthful interests in music, art, chess, pen-pals, and photography. Twenty children formed the first camera club in October 1954 and they too received guidance from local experts, including professional photographer Mr Alex Trotter. Under Mr Trotter's supervision, members of the group were able to develop their talents on expeditions to photogenic locations like the Town Common.[60] Painting

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[55]Notes provided by Sandy Palmer, 20 June 1996.

[56]Interview with Joycelyn Brent, 12 June 1996.

[57]*Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 11 September 1954.

[58]Townsville City Council Minutes, 21 October 1954, p.107.

[59]*Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 3 March 1959.

[60]Interview with Joycelyn Brent, 12 June 1996.

and drawing classes also proved consistently popular, and it was not unusual to have upwards of 350 children entering art competitions organised by the Children's Library.[61] It is worth reflecting that library staff supervised all of these activities, except in cases where volunteer experts assisted, in addition to their normal duties, and often in their own time.

A specifically library-related club grew from an early group of volunteers who wanted to participate in the running of the Library in their spare time. They eventually became known as the Bookman's Brigade and were organised along the lines of a small army. Members joined on the understanding that they could be asked to do a minimum of 30 minutes work each time they reported for duty. Tasks were of the type now undertaken by many 'friends of the library' groups and included helping to find books and information for other children, shelving, drawing posters, sticking labels on new books, mending damaged books, and running errands. The simplicity of the Brown circulation system meant that members of the Brigade could also be called upon to issue books. This helped many children to feel worthwhile and important.[62] In return for their labours, members of the Bookman's Brigade were able to borrow more books, and received promotions in rank according to their proficiency.[63] With well over 150 regular members at its peak, the Brigade was easily the most popular club organised by the Children's Library. Over the years, similar ideas were used to encourage more extensive reading, especially by younger children. There was the Indian competition of 1960-61,

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[61]*Townsville Daily Bulletin*, November 1954.

[62]Notes provided by Sandy Palmer, 20 June 1996.

[63]*Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 27 October 1954.

for example, which required children to read at least 10 books during a set period of the Christmas school holidays. Over 200 children joined the competition, reading books covering diverse topics like natural science, poetry, painting, American Indian culture, and the lives of saints. Those who completed the course received Indian head-dresses from the 'Chief', Miss Crosthwaite, and were allowed to display them on a wig-wam erected in the Library.[64] The popularity of this competition, and others developed using different themes, was such that some families were reported to have cut short their annual holidays in order to return for the presentation of awards.[65]

By the time of its tenth birthday celebrations on 4 December 1963, the Townsville Junior (Children's) Library had become an integral part of the city's cultural, educational and recreational infrastructure. The renovated building, modern library management techniques, appealing new services, and highly trained staff had helped to more than double membership numbers from 3,071 to 6,565 children. The collection had also blossomed from 5,466 to 15,300 books, and included 35 periodical titles, 120 records, 100 pieces of sheet music, and substantial offerings of maps and pamphlets.[66] Perhaps not unexpectedly after such a long period of sustained annual increases, the Junior Library's high rate of membership growth began to plateau, and at times even diminish, in the early 1960s. In 1962, for example, monthly membership numbers went from 6,423 in January down to a low of 5,486 in April, before gradually climbing again to 6,213 in November. These figures had recovered to a respectable 6,567 by June 1963,

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[64] *Ibid*, 27 December 1960; 27 January 1961.

[65] *Ibid*, 27 January 1960.

[66] *Ibid*, 4 December 1963.

but remained erratic throughout the remainder of the decade. Although the full impact of television broadcasting was not felt in Townsville until 1963, the incorporation of Telecasters North Queensland Limited in 1959 may have been cause for concern.[67]

At the August 1961 meeting of the Townsville City Council, Alderman Harry Hopkins drew attention to the increasing number of children living in outer suburbs, well away from existing library facilities. Referring to a report prepared by the Junior Library, he indicated that "use of book mobiles or branch libraries would have to be considered"[68] in order to best serve the informational and recreational needs of these children. It would take the better part of a decade of community lobbying to finally realise these goals. However, as had been proved with the School of Arts Library in 1938 and the Townsville Municipal Children's Library in 1953, once the seed of a worthy idea was sown, growth seemed assured.

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[67]"History in the making", *Image and Lifestyle Magazine*, May 1996, p.9.

[68]*Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 25 August 1961.

Chapter Four

Library services to the suburbs, 1963-1981

In January 1964, after a decade operating independently of each other, the Townsville Municipal (Adult) Library and Townsville Municipal Children's Library were finally joined under the management of one City Librarian, Miss Hilary Gray.[1] Thereafter followed a rapid acceleration of the process of modernisation, begun with the appointment of Mrs A. M. West, which eventually removed any remaining vestiges of the School of Arts era.[2] Crucial to this process was an understanding of the need to take library services into the rapidly expanding outer suburbs where young families were offered little by way of educational and recreational facilities. The progress of the next two decades was marked by the opening of the Aitkenvale (Branch) Library in November 1971, addition of a separate Children's Library at Aitkenvale in 1975, relocation of the City Library's operations to a more accessible site in Flinders Street, and the commencement of a dedicated Mobile Library service to residents in nursing homes and on Magnetic Island. This chapter describes the evolution of the branch and mobile libraries, and demonstrates how Council discussions and planning at this time were very clearly dominated by the need to provide library services to Townsville's suburban areas.

The issue of establishing a library to service suburban residents seems to have been a

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[1]Miss Gray took charge of the two libraries on 6 January 1964. She was not the first qualified librarian to be appointed by the Council, but she was the first to manage the Adult Library. Born and educated in New South Wales, she completed a short course in library practice at the Public Library of New South Wales in 1944. Five years later, after a period working at the Ku-ring-gai Municipal Library in Sydney, she received her certificate of registration as a librarian. This was followed by two years of library experience in London (1950-51), and a return to Ku-ring-gai to work as a branch librarian, then cataloguer, and finally Deputy Librarian in 1956. Miss Gray spent a little over 12 months in Townsville before leaving for Darwin in 1965. She was replaced by Miss Helen Mays. *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 21 December 1963.

[2]There was, for example, the comprehensive recataloguing of the non-fiction collection using the standardised Dewey Decimal Classification.

chestnut which appeared before the Council on a semi-regular basis from at least the 1890s. As Townsville expanded westwards and northwards around the base of Castle Hill and beyond, some residents complained that library facilities in the city were too hard to access. The matter simmered without effect until well after World War Two, presumably eclipsed in the 1920s and 1930s by the troubles of the School of Arts and eventual establishment of the free public library. In his influential 1951 report to the Council, the State Librarian of Queensland - J. L. Stapleton - formally raised the possibility of opening a branch library in Hermit Park. Citing consultations with Alderman G. V. Roberts and the Town Clerk, he recommended that it accommodate sections for both adults and children, and be located close to Charters Towers Road and the main schools in the area.[3] Although much of Stapleton's report was incorporated into the planning of the Children's Library which opened in 1953, it appears that the branch library concept was placed on hold. However, lobby groups comprising residents from outlying suburbs like Wulguru did not let the matter languish for long. By January 1962, pressure from ratepayers was evident in Alderman Roberts' remarks to the *Townsville Daily Bulletin*:

> The establishment of a second library to serve the suburbs was still being considered by the City Council...the city needed an extra library, especially in the western suburbs, but the Council had not decided on a site. The use of bookmobiles had also been discussed.[4]

Further evidence of lobbying appeared in the Council Minutes of October 1962. They

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[3]Stapleton to Townsville City Council, 27 August 1951, "Library" file, Local History Collection, Townsville City Library Service.

[4]*Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 12 January 1962.

recorded the receipt of a letter from the Wulguru Progress Association requesting that consideration be given to the establishment of a branch library at Rising Sun.[5] The residents were hastily advised that the Council already had this matter under consideration. It seems that no further action was taken by either side.

Yet again the issue appeared to settle into the sediment of Council politics and be lost from view. However, strongly felt public needs are like Lazarus - they can be raised from the dead! In January 1969 the matter re-emerged, but this time in relation to correspondence from the Queensland Country Women's Association (QCWA). It is no longer clear whether the QCWA's representations actually precipitated the events which ensued or merely coincided, although hindsight suggests the latter. The need for expanded library services was rapidly approaching critical mass anyway: Townsville's western suburbs bounded by Wulguru in the south and Heatley in the north were growing quickly; the City Library was under increasing pressure to service this demand, in less than ideal conditions; and, people were becoming more vocal about the need for improved library services. The February meeting of Council considered a report from the City Librarian, Miss Helen Mays[6], regarding "improvements and extensions of library services to Townsville suburbs."[7] This report led to the formation of a Library

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[5]Townsville City Council Minutes, 18 October 1962, p.5614.

[6]Helen Mays BA, ALAA, graduated from the University of Queensland in 1961 and completed her librarianship registration exams in 1964. Prior to joining the Townsville Municipal Library as City Librarian in 1965, she held positions at the Kelvin Grove Teachers' College (1961), State Library of Queensland (1961-63), and Rockhampton Municipal Library (1963-65). Miss Mays resigned her position as City Librarian in 1971 to become Reader Services Librarian at the James Cook University of North Queensland. G. A. Kosa (ed.), *Biographical dictionary of Australian librarians*, 3rd ed., Melbourne, 1984, p.150.

[7]Townsville City Council Minutes, 20 February 1969, p.8423.

Sub-Committee[8] which was directed to "investigate and pursue the establishment of branch libraries in Townsville."[9] Curiously, within a few weeks the Sub-Committee determined that a branch library should be sited somewhere in Mundingburra or Aitkenvale. The reasons for this sudden decisiveness are not clear, although it seems that the Council's Property and Town Planning staff may have put forward a strong case for the area based on population growth patterns. Former library staff were also aware of representations to Council, especially from residents in Aitkenvale. In early March, the Sub-Committee "directed that further investigations be made regarding the suitability of Council-owned land at the corner [of] Ross River Road and Petunia Street as a site for the establishment of a Branch Library."[10] By May, the Library Sub-Committee was in a position to recommend this site to Council and present a preliminary building design prepared by Mr Peter Lee, the City Architect. Set in parkland well back from Ross River Road, Lee's design incorporated two levels, with the upper floor combining adult and children's libraries, and the understorey providing space for community activities and future mobile services. The large corner allotment also accommodated off-street parking for up to 20 cars.[11] Unfortunately, the design lacked substantial input from library staff and this contributed to later frustrations with some services. For example, despite the predominance of young families in the Aitkenvale area, only limited space was made available for services to children. However, in a hint of the practical innovations to come, Lee's design was amended to include ramp access to the

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[8]Comprising Aldermen Griffiths, Power, Dean, and Innes-Reid (Chair).

[9]Townsville City Council Minutes, 20 February 1969, p.8423.

[10]*Ibid*, 20 March 1969, p.8483.

[11]*Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 28 May 1969.

first floor and public toilets on the ground floor. He was then directed to proceed with plans and specifications for submission to the Treasury and Library Board of Queensland. Construction would ultimately depend upon State Government loan funds and subsidies.

The Council's plans were eventually publicised in the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* later that month. Chair of the Library Sub-Committee, Alderman Joan Innes-Reid, did not mince words with reporters:

> The establishment of suburban branch libraries is long overdue in Townsville. In terms of Townsville's population figures, and suburban development, extension of the library service should have commenced over 10 years ago. Libraries are as much a part of recreation for citizens as parks and sports fields. For this reason, they too should be in the suburbs where the people can make use of them.[12]

However, as had happened with the Children's Library in the early 1950s, tangible progress did not occur as rapidly as the Council's original decision to proceed. Loan funds of $56,800 for the new library were approved in August 1969, as was a Library Board building subsidy of 10 per cent. The State Government also promised 50 per cent subsidies on furniture and books.[13] In October the Council decided to make provision for air-conditioning in the new building, and commenced acquisition and processing of an initial branch collection of about 15,000 titles.[14] This necessitated an application for additional loan funds of $28,916 in early 1970. Tenders for the branch library building

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[12]*Ibid.*

[13]*Ibid*, 17 November 1970.

[14]Townsville City Council Minutes, 23 October 1969.

were finally called in February of that year and construction commenced in October. The building phase took longer than expected and the initial completion date of mid April 1971 was extended into late May. In the meantime, Council debated the merits, and financial implications, of enclosing the ground floor area. A decision was deferred until suitable uses for the area could be properly considered.[15] As indicated by the Council's Minutes, most attention and energy had already been diverted to the interior fit-out of the first floor.

Decisions regarding the interior furnishings and fittings were generally the province of the City Architect, acting on advice from Library staff as required. However, collection development was a professional matter and the early stages of this all-important task fell to the City Librarian, Miss Helen Mays, and a small band of library assistants based at the City Library. In late 1970 the Library was given an establishment budget of $20,000 with which to initiate the branch collection. The Council's stated target was a collection of 15,000 items by the time the new library opened, with this figure to grow to 50,000 items in three to five years.[16] Mays' collection development strategy clearly recognised the evolving suburban demographics of Townsville - that is, young families moving out of the older residential areas in search of affordable homes - and the need to juggle adult and juvenile reading interests in a single facility. For a start, it was decided that one third of the available books would be aimed at children. In time, the wisdom of this decision became obvious:

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[15]*Ibid*, 22 April 1971.

[16]*Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 17 November 1970.

> The majority of the Library's clientele were parents with young families and the children's picture books were very popular. Homework and projects also saw a great influx of young users after school.[17]

The information requirements of school-age children, and even adults undertaking training or self-development courses, thus necessitated a heavy emphasis on up-to-date non-fiction items. Also, the recreational needs of the comparatively younger adult population had to be acknowledged: "adult book stocks will initially comprise reading matter selected from the 'best read' books, and additional subject material will be drawn from city library stocks on request."[18] The rather experimental nature of collection development for the branch was evident in the purchase of paperback novels, hitherto frowned upon, and a decision that teenagers' books would be incorporated into the adult collection.

With building construction apparently nearing completion in March 1971, Council agreed that the branch should have its own distinct identity as the Aitkenvale Library.[19] This sense of independence was enhanced several months later when Ms Shirley Mitchell was appointed the first Branch Librarian at Aitkenvale. She arrived from Brisbane in time to oversee the final stages of preparation and select an initial staff of four library assistants. This group grew to be very close, bonded by the challenges and excitement of working in a new library with fresh collections - and air-conditioning![20] Besides a temperate interior climate, Aitkenvale offered many other innovations. Extra-

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[17]Notes provided by Mrs Rita Bisley, 25 October 1996.

[18]*Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 28 May 1969.

[19]Townsville City Council Minutes, 18 March 1971.

[20]Notes provided by Mrs Rita Bisley, 25 October 1996.

literary features included an access ramp for people in wheelchairs and parents with prams, semi-outdoor reading area with garden view, photo-charged loans system, and off-street parking. Ironically, the latter was directly responsible for enticing many inner-city residents to use Aitkenvale instead of the City Library in Flinders Street. This situation was exemplified by the first borrower to enter Aitkenvale Library, Mr Richard "Dick" Payne, who preferred to travel from his home across town in North Ward simply because the parking was more convenient.[21] Easy access via side streets also encouraged use by children who could walk or bicycle to the Library in safety.

For many people who used the Aitkenvale Library the most intriguing development was the new photo-charge loans system, which had been selected in preference to the Brown and Newark[22] systems already in use at the City Library. Although more costly to establish - $3,348 for photo-charging versus $2,200 to implement Brown - the Council estimated an annual economy of $2,290.[23] Even with the benefit of hindsight it is still not clear how this figure was calculated. Nonetheless, the system was implemented at Aitkenvale in 1971, installed at the relocated City Library seven years later, and finally phased out when computer automation arrived in the mid 1980s. Photo-charging was a complicated process which began with staff placing a date-stamped and uniquely numbered transaction card in the book pocket at the rear of each item. The borrower's

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[21]Interview with Mr Richard Payne, 17 May 1996.

[22]"The essential feature of the Brown system is the actual joining of the borrower's card or ticket and the book card. The essential feature of the Newark system is the recording on a book card of the borrower's name or number alongside a date of issue or a due date, and the recording on the borrower's card of the same date. When the book is returned the date of return is added to the borrower's card. The record is made by writing on two cards, and not by joining two cards together." *A general introduction to library practice*, Sydney, 1955, p.47.

[23]Townsville City Council Minutes, 19 August 1971.

card was then placed beside the book pocket and the whole area photographed using a camera mounted above the desk on a T-shaped apparatus. Once finished, films were sent to Kodak's city branch for processing. In the words of one member of staff, "we didn't know who had what until the film was used and developed."[24] The processing took about three weeks to complete and it was at least another week before overdue notices could be sent.[25] When books were returned, the transaction cards were removed and filed in numerical order. Besides being numbered, transaction cards were also tagged with a series of small holes, representing coded information about each loan, which enabled a rudimentary form of data searching and retrieval using a hand-held sorting needle. Routine tasks designed to check items back into the collection would thus require staff to make use of the developed films, returned transaction cards, and a card sorting needle. The fine details of this process do not bear explanation, but they were time-consuming, cumbersome, and not well regarded by staff.[26]

To the delight of some people, and the chagrin of others, Miss Mitchell brought some refreshing new ideas on library practice to Aitkenvale. For example, she initially insisted that all sex education books be placed on the open shelves. In contrast, the City Library relegated such items to the Stacks, a locked room at the rear of the building, and people had to ask for them at the circulation desk. The experiment at Aitkenvale worked well until curious young children discovered the cache of educational volumes and began leaving them on tables on the outside verandah. Eventually, it was agreed

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[24]Interview with Joycelyn Brent, 20 June 1996.

[25]This is the simple explanation for Townsville's unusual loan period of three weeks. Most other public libraries tended to favour 'even' periods of time like two or four weeks.

[26]Interview with Joycelyn Brent, 20 June 1996.

to compromise and keep them behind the circulation desk.[27] In retrospect, this anecdote is tinged with more than a little irony. The 1970s in Queensland were not universally enlightened times and this was demonstrated when the state member for Townsville South, Mr Tom Aikens MLA, officially opened the Aitkenvale Library on Friday 5 November 1971. Subsequent *Townsville Daily Bulletin* headlines ignored the opening and proclaimed "Filthy books selected for school study says Aikens."[28] A reporter paraphrased the gist of Aikens' typically idiosyncratic speech thus:

> The most distressing feature of literature today is the fact that there are some people - few in number but most vociferous - who exercise considerable influence on the Government, and have the nerve to decide themselves what books should be read by young students studying for higher education...Some of the books chosen for study are incredible filth...But where a library is concerned, I think there should be some limit to the type of book which should be made available.[29]

It was left to the Mayor's deputy, Alderman J. S. Dean, to remind people that "the branch library was another of the Council's projects aimed at bringing necessary amenities closer to the people."[30]

Barely seven weeks later, these amenities were very nearly scattered to the four winds, literally! Cyclone Althea lashed Townsville in the early hours of Christmas Eve 1971, laying to waste great swathes of the city's residential suburbs, totally incapacitating communications and electrical distribution networks, and damaging or destroying

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[27]Notes provided by Rita Bisley, 25 October 1996.

[28]*Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 6 November 1971.

[29]*Ibid.*

[30]*Ibid.*

numerous public buildings. The recently-constructed Aitkenvale Library fared better than most of the Council's properties, but still received extensive roof damage which enabled torrential rain to penetrate to the first floor. A member of staff at this time recalled the situation when she and Miss Mitchell were finally allowed to re-enter the building:

> The first floor was six inches deep in water and there was a waterfall right over the camera on the Loans Desk. We had no power. The temperature and humidity were incredibly high and working conditions terrible as there was very little natural ventilation.[31]

These conditions persisted for some weeks:

> At closing time we had to cover all the shelves with plastic which was a very tedious task but repairing the roof proved to be a long process. We also took the camera down each night so it would not get wet again.[32]

Library facilities in Flinders Street also received comprehensive water damage when the City Building lost much of its roof. The damage was so extensive that tarpaulins could not be used to render the building waterproof until repairs were made. Consequently, heavy wet-season rain cascaded into the City Engineer's Department on the top floor and leaked through the floor onto the City Library's collections below. Every morning for two weeks after the cyclone, staff would use wide boards fitted on broom sticks to push water out of the Library, down the stairs and into Flinders Street.[33] The sodden

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[31]Notes provided by Rita Bisley, 25 October 1996.

[32]*Ibid.*

[33]Interview with Joycelyn Brent, 20 June 1996.

collections and tropical conditions - high temperature and humidity - favoured the growth of fungi and mould. Aside from the smell of decomposition, the effects were quite visible as books at both the Aitkenvale and City libraries blossomed with multicoloured arrays of pink, red, and green growths. For many years afterwards, the bound volumes of the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* stored at the City Library grew moss which had to be wiped off.[34] A surprisingly small number of books, some few thousands overall, were thrown out although total water damage to stock was estimated for insurance claims at between $4,500 and $5,000.[35] Overall, recovery at Aitkenvale was more rapid and services resumed shortly after the cyclone.

The events of Christmas Eve 1971 aside, Aitkenvale Library rapidly prospered in its suburban location. Within three years it had attracted more members than the City Library - approximately 11,300 at Aitkenvale in April 1974 compared to 10,280 in the city - and boosted overall community interest in library services (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Total Membership, Townsville City Library Service, 1969-1974[36]

	Members	City Population
1969/70	14202	66560
1970/71	15849	69210
1971/72	20810	71265
1972/73	19976	73500
1973/74	18519	76500

[34] *Ibid.*

[35] *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 29 January 1972.

[36] *Statistical Bulletin*, State Library of Queensland, Brisbane, 1968-72, 1972-73, 1973-74.

Aitkenvale's success was such that Alderman Innes-Reid publicly entertained ambitions of opening another branch library if funds became available.[37] Of more immediate significance perhaps, the demographic composition of Aitkenvale's total membership figure showed an almost even division between adults and children. After just three years in operation, it seemed clear that Aitkenvale required more space for both the growing adult and children's collections, and the increasingly popular children's activities. An obvious solution seemed to be the development of a separate Children's Library, possibly achieved by enclosing the ground floor. The Council had first considered this option at Aitkenvale before the building was opened. After lengthy consideration, a decision was deferred pending more information about possible uses for the area. In February 1973 Council revisited the matter and gave approval for the City Architect to proceed with plans for enclosing the ground floor. At least one lesson from Cyclone Althea was evident in the brief which stipulated "sufficient doors and windows to provide natural ventilation".[38] Not unexpectedly, the project took nearly two and a half years to filter through both the Council's and State Government's planning and funding processes. Finally, on 31 May 1975, the Aitkenvale Junior Library was opened to the children of Townsville's suburbs. In all but one respect, the provision of a mobile library, Council had now realised its original plans for services to the suburbs.

Mobile libraries had been part of public library services in the United States of America and the United Kingdom since the 1920s.[39] Lionel McColvin, author of the 1947 report

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[37]*Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 1 April 1974.

[38]*Ibid*, 16 February 1973.

[39]*Library Journal*, July 1996, p.62.

Public libraries in Australia, was one highly influential exponent of their use in the 1940s and 1950s. McColvin based his advocacy on the philosophical (and practical) belief that "the best possible services must be available everywhere...from a sufficiency of appropriate service points so that no reader is unduly prejudiced because of where he happens to live."[40] Although McColvin's views were shared by many librarians in country areas across Australia, even some associated with the School of Arts movement, others still preferred "voluntary centres or deposit stations".[41] Often, deposit stations amounted to little more than boxes of largely mediocre recreational books being shunted around remote rural settlements. Despite being cost-effective solutions on paper, these services did not provide users with much choice in terms of the books available to be borrowed, and often served only to heighten, rather than alleviate, any sense of isolation. The debate continued throughout the 1950s but gradually moved in favour of mobile services, which enabled personal contact with library staff and larger collections from which to choose. Contemporary advocates of mobile libraries still echo sentiments articulated more than 30 years ago:

> Mobile libraries do what all public libraries do, only more so. The mobile library not only provides the public with immediate access to information and reading, listening and viewing materials, but it actually delivers this service directly into the community.[42]

Furthermore:

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[40]McColvin, *Public libraries in Australia*, p.8.

[41]"Luxury or economy?" *Australian Library Journal*, 1(2), October 1951, p.33.

[42]B. Monley and R. Pestell, "Mobile libraries in the age of technology", *Aplis*, 9(2), June 1996, p.78.

> Mobile libraries are the ultimate in flexibility, providing services to people wherever they may live and in areas in which it may be difficult or uneconomic to locate a public library building.[43]

The Townsville City Council did not publicly acknowledge a need for mobile services until the early 1960s. No action followed until the end of the decade when planning for the Aitkenvale Library incorporated ground floor work space for a bookmobile to "carry reading matter for people in outlying suburban areas."[44] Although this idea came to naught, public lobbying for mobile services - particularly from residents of Magnetic Island - continued sporadically throughout the decade and into the mid 1970s.

Townsville's first mobile library service was finally developed in 1976 by Mrs June Van Rooy, the Reader Services Librarian. It was a modest start, providing bulk loans of suitable books to residents of three aged care facilities: Garden Settlement, Loreto Home, and Villa Vincent. The loaned items were all selected and packed in boxes by library staff, and delivered on a monthly basis by Mrs Van Rooy. The first 'bookmobile' was a standard sedan borrowed from the Council's Financial Services Department as required.[45] A form of housebound service was initiated the following year when staff at the Garden Settlement no longer wanted to be responsible for administering the bulk loans. Instead, library staff became acquainted with the reading tastes of the residents they serviced and selected items on their behalf. These selections were then delivered to each person by Mrs Van Rooy. By the end of 1977 the Masonic Home at Kirwan had also joined the mobile service. There the residents selected one of their number as

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[43] *Ibid.*

[44] *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 28 May 1969.

[45] Notes provided by Vivienne Feltham, 28 June 1996.

an 'honorary librarian' and all loans were taken to her room for later distribution. Mrs Van Rooy continued to make all selections and deliveries until permanent procedures and guidelines were developed and a library assistant could be given responsibility for the service.

While library services to Townsville's mainland residents surged forward in the 1970s, the people of Magnetic Island lobbied to receive a share of the attention. Their representations began to gain momentum in the mid 1970s, beginning with a petition to the November 1975 meeting of Council.[46] The matter was duly referred to the Arts and Culture Committee for consideration. The petitioners were advised in early December that the Council would investigate "acquiring premises on Magnetic Island to establish library facilities."[47] Three months passed before the Council revisited the issue, without any report of progress. Remarkably, it was decided to transfer the onus for library provision onto the State Minister for Education, and he was thus advised of the Council's concern about the complete lack of library services on Magnetic Island. This precipitated an offer of space for a deposit station in the 'library' area of planned extensions to the Magnetic Island State School.[48] This shared service with the primary school was at least a tangible beginning, but it did not offer a permanent solution. The idea to extend mobile library coverage to Magnetic Island eventually came as a natural corollary of the services already offered to residents of aged care facilities. All were by definition 'remote' from the city's existing libraries.

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[46]Townsville City Council Minutes, 3 November 1975.

[47]*Ibid*, 1 December 1975.

[48]*Ibid*, 7 June 1976.

In September 1981 the Townsville Municipal Library acquired its first dedicated bookmobile: a Toyota Hi-Ace van with extended roof. Thus commenced an era of library service which continues today, albeit with a larger vehicle, and is still regarded fondly by users and library staff alike. The first van became something of a travelling landmark around Townsville, with an eye-catching 'Ginger Meggs' cartoon character and the words "Book Mobile" painted on each side of the roof extension.[49] A Senior Library Assistant, Mrs Vivienne Feltham, was given charge of the Bookmobile and her first task was to develop a suitable collection. The assignment was not simple because although the majority of mainland users were elderly, the service also had to cater for a cross-section of Magnetic Island residents, including young children. Furthermore, this diversity had to be achieved using a vehicle which could accommodate only 700 books![50] Initial stocks were sourced from the City Library's collections and exchanged on a regular basis. Money was also budgeted to purchase bestselling novels specifically for the Bookmobile. Early fiction stocks tended to favour the evergreen adventure/mystery, romance and western genres, but people were encouraged to reserve and request other items as desired.[51] The walls of the Bookmobile were fitted with multicoloured rectangular plastic boxes attached to racks. These boxes proved ideal for storing the uniformly sized fiction books, and colour coding them into genres. Oversized non-fiction volumes were stacked around the edges of the shelving, and children's books were stored in portable plastic cubes. The challenges of Bookmobile collection development were largely overcome by ensuring quality rather than quantity;

[49]Unpublished report from Sandra Dean, Acting Bookmobile Librarian, [1986].

[50]Notes provided by Vivienne Feltham, 28 June 1996.

[51]*Ibid.*

in other words, being totally responsive to the needs of users.[52]

The Bookmobile service to Magnetic Island started on 6 October 1981 and in just two months grew from 30 to 140 members. The service travelled to the Island once a week on the car barge and made single stops at each of the four residential bays: Picnic, Nelly, Arcadia, and Horseshoe. Stops were arranged near post offices on the premise that "because there was no delivery to homes, residents had to collect their mail, so there was more chance of people noticing that a library service was available."[53] At each stop, a card table became the circulation desk, a colourful beach umbrella provided shade, and a manual circulation system, based on Brown, enabled simple but effective administration of the collection. Overall, the service developed a very special rapport with its users, sometimes collecting older Magnetic Island residents from their homes and taking them to the regular stop where they could congregate and chat with friends.[54] Services to aged-care facilities also benefited from the Bookmobile, with many residents encouraged to retain a measure of autonomy by entering the van to select their own books. Over time, the bonds which developed between Bookmobile staff and users came to epitomise the best of what could be achieved by taking library services directly into the community. In 1982 the Bookmobile was officially recognised as a separate branch of the Townsville Municipal Library and acknowledged as a service point in annual statistics compiled by the Library Board of Queensland.[55]

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[52]Interview with Vivienne Feltham, 28 June 1996.

[53]Notes provided by Vivienne Feltham, 28 June 1996.

[54]Interview with Vivienne Feltham, 28 June 1996.

[55]Notes provided by Vivienne Feltham, 28 June 1996.

In summary, library developments in the period 1963 to 1981 were driven by a basic community need for recreational and educational facilities in Townsville's rapidly expanding outer suburbs. The opening of the Aitkenvale Library in 1971, and construction of a separate Children's Library in 1975, occurred in direct response to the migration of young families from established inner-city areas to new suburbs like Aitkenvale, Mundingburra, Heatley, and Wulguru. Likewise, mobile services were largely the product of sustained lobbying by the people of Magnetic Island, and representations from residents of aged-care facilities. By the end of 1981, the Townsville Municipal Library's innovative provision of both static and mobile services meant that all residents now had ready access to the collections of Queensland's first free public library.

Conclusion

This study of the development of free public library services in Townsville has had a threefold purpose: to establish the actual timeframe of library development from the first recorded static collection in 1866 through to the advent of mobile services in 1981; to document the broad themes of this development through detailed examinations of watershed events; and to recognise the achievements of the free Townsville Municipal Library since its establishment in 1938. Overall, two striking features of Townsville's library services in the period 1866 to 1981 became apparent during this study. Firstly, with the exception of a brief hiatus in the mid to late 1930s, these services were consistently characterised by active community interest and steadfast popular support. In some instances, this interest preceded and precipitated key events: for example, the founding of the Townsville Library and Reading Room in 1866 occurred after a public meeting convened by the Police Magistrate. However, at other times, support was the product of astute anticipation and fulfilment of emerging community needs by library staff and members of Council working in concert. This situation was most evident when the city's first separate children's library was established in 1953. Secondly, until recent times, Townsville's library services were constantly at the forefront of general library development in Queensland. Although the events of July 1938, the establishment of the state's first free public library in Townsville, underscore this point, other prime examples of leadership include: the employment of qualified librarians in the early 1950s - decades ahead of other major cities in the state, including Brisbane - and the provision of extensive extra-literary activities for children before they were recognised as important features of library services elsewhere.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Townsville's three free public libraries - City,

Aitkenvale, and the Bookmobile - have continued to be characterised by strong bonds with the local community, and a willingness to look ahead to the future informational and recreational needs of those whom they serve. However, the period has also presented many internally and externally generated challenges, some of which have been met successfully, while others seem set to continue into the foreseeable future. Major issues and challenges after 1981 have included: a less than satisfactory joint library service with the Thuringowa Shire (City) Council from 1985 to 1991; the highly successful introduction of automated library management systems, including 'online public access catalogues', in 1985; updating and refinement of these systems in 1993 and 1996; and major building extensions to Aitkenvale Library in 1992. Those issues still facing the Library are essentially external ones, and for the most part merely new manifestations of traditional challenges: overcoming diminishing public funding; making best use of emerging technologies such as the Internet; and, meeting the changing needs and expectations of users. As was made clear at the outset, it is not within the scope of this study to offer comment on issues arising after the early 1980s. In many respects, it is still too early to offer any meaningful analysis of the period post 1981. Likely outcomes of crucial issues like public funding are as yet unclear, and the ultimate effects of challenges like the Internet remain to be seen.

In March 1996 the Townsville City Library Service commissioned its first comprehensive review of current and future library services. In a program of community outreach characteristic of the Library, independent consultants spent a week distributing surveys, conducting focus groups, and meeting with users, non-users, community representatives and members of the Council. The consultants' report was handed to the

Library Manager, Mrs Joycelyn Brent, in June 1996 but the recommendations have yet to be made public. This is likely to occur in early 1997, after appropriate consideration by Council. A recent Council decision to reduce the City Library's opening hours on Friday nights for "budgetary reasons"[1] suggests that the review is timely. Although very few responses were returned from non-users, reactions from library users - a substantial 44% of the total population of Townsville in 1992-1993[2] - were numerous and generally positive. Those respondents who did make criticisms were essentially constructive, offering useful suggestions for improvements to services. Many explained their ready support on the basis that they feared the review was a precursor to Council cut-backs to library services. If nothing else, the review caused people to re-examine the adequacy of Townsville's libraries, and in so doing, shed some of the complacency built up over decades. In terms of outcomes, the review has already helped the library's staff to better understand the changing needs and expectations of their clientele. It is to be hoped that the review also serves to focus Council's attention on supporting and funding library services into the next century. In some respects, 58 years after opening Queensland's first free public library, the City of Townsville has apparently come full circle. The views of a Townsville journalist, published in January 1939, seem vaguely prophetic:

> Much remains to be done. But with progressive ideas and plenty of hard work the Municipal Library will be made into an institution of which the Townsville people will be justly proud.[3]

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[1]"Council decision closes book on Friday outings", *Townsville Bulletin*, 17 August 1996.

[2]*Statistical Bulletin*, State Library of Queensland, Brisbane, 1992-93, p.168.

[3]"Free Library - Townsville Council Sets Splendid Example", *North Queensland Guardian*, 20 January 1939.

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