

13. Port Mackay

After a dozen chapters on the history of the valley and its surrounds during the nineteenth century, it is fitting to conclude with the urban development that accompanied settlement. As in other chapters, emphasis in Chapters 13 and 14 is on pictorial evidence, augmented by use of the excellent compendium *Early Settlers of Mackay, 1860–1885*, and my own collection of primary sources, to create a series of biographical and topic-driven vignettes. As well, in 1912 *The Daily Mercury* published a special edition to celebrate Mackay’s first 50 years. Many of the early residents were still in the district and either wrote reminiscences or were interviewed, providing an excellent source on the early decades. Other special issues of *The Daily Mercury* have also been of assistance. Beginning with the 1860s, the chapter continues chronologically and through themes, to depict the urban growth that went with pastoral and agricultural development.



Map 13.1: T.H. Fitzgerald’s 1863 street plan for Mackay. He attempted to name the town after Princess Alexandra of Denmark, who became the Princess of Wales in 1863. The Queensland Government did not support this, and the town was named Mackay. Eventually, North Street became River Street and Albert Street became Gordon Street.

Source: QSA; and the Have you seen old Mackay Facebook site.

First Settlement: the 1860s

Until sugar became the dominant economy of the valley in the early 1870s, 1860s Mackay was entirely dependent for its existence on the cattle and sheep stations around Nebo, in the headwaters of the Isaacs and Burdekin rivers, and in the upper reaches of the Pioneer Valley. Wool from the sheep stations as far south as Peak Downs and west to Mt Cornish, Fort Cooper, and Bowen Downs began to be shipped through Mackay.

It is accepted that the first permanent urban settlers were Andrew Henderson and his cousins James and Andrew Robb, who arrived in September 1862. However, others had already used the riverbank as a port before they arrived. A few months earlier, Andrew Diehm carried wool bales, from Skull Creek station on the Isaac River, down to the area on the southern bank of the Pioneer River that became Mackay, and wool bales had also been brought to the river mouth from Collaroy station. They were sheltered under galvanised iron sheets while awaiting shipment. Diehm's party followed bullock dray tracks made by James Ready's team when collecting supplies for Spencer's The Retreat station. While John Mackay was in residence, he used the riverbank to collect supplies, but Diehm said that the only sign of settlement in the valley was the deserted slab huts at Greenmount (although we know that there was a caretaker there named Mr Vince). Diehm left the wool on the riverbank and travelled back over the ranges.

Henderson was born at New Aberdour, Aberdeenshire, Scotland in 1833. Early in 1860, he was an overseer on Newstead station between Dan Conner's Collaroy station, and Fort Cooper station. He was at the latter when he accepted an arrangement to drive sheep north from the Darling Downs for pastoralists Wilmot and Micklejohn, and to search for a new pastoral lease. Henderson chose Cardowan on the western border of Callaroy lease. He had heard rumours of a new river located on the coast further north. According to James Robb, Henderson met John Mackay at Fort Cooper station, returning with him to Greenmount. Realising the potential of the river mouth settlement as a port for the hinterland, Henderson relinquished his position and headed to Rockhampton where he had the frame for a building constructed and stored as numbered sections for easy reassembly. While there, he received a letter from his younger Robb cousins, James (born in 1838) and Andrew (born in 1844), both on their way from Scotland to Brisbane. Henderson travelled by ship to Brisbane, only to find they had already left to ride north. He caught up with them at the foot of Toowoomba Range; then the trio travelled back to Brisbane, catching a ship back to Rockhampton. He also made arrangements for several flocks of travelling sheep to bring in their first clip of wool and to pick up supplies at the river mouth.

Henderson and the Robbs gathered their supplies but could find no ship's captain who knew where the mouth of the river was located, as it was hidden behind a large sandbar. The only one who knew, Captain Till, was on his way north on the *Presto* with supplies for Vince at Greenmount and Dick Spencer at The Retreat. The *Presto* arrived on 29 June 1862, the first vessel to enter the Mackay (now the Pioneer) River. Henderson made arrangements for Till to bring up their supplies and set out overland with bullock drays. His party met no Europeans until they reached the foot of Connor's Range, where they came across two men on their way to set up the first hotel on Nebo Creek. (Presumably one of them was Ben Reynolds who had been part of Spencer's expedition and began Fort Cooper Hotel, Nebo's first building.) They reached The Retreat station where Richard Spencer and his Aboriginal stockman had just returned from the newly located river. Huts were being erected on Spencer's station. They proceeded to Greenmount where they found Mr Vince, and James and Mary Ready, the latter two living in tents while men were building huts at The Retreat. Henderson and the Robbs moved down the river until they reached The Lagoons (today's botanical gardens on Nebo

Road, West Mackay). They were thwarted by thick mangroves at the river and retreated, eventually setting up a camp on 10 September 1862 between the river and what was later the site of Wills Hotel in Sydney Street. Till arrived with the remainder of their supplies one week later, including the prefabricated house.

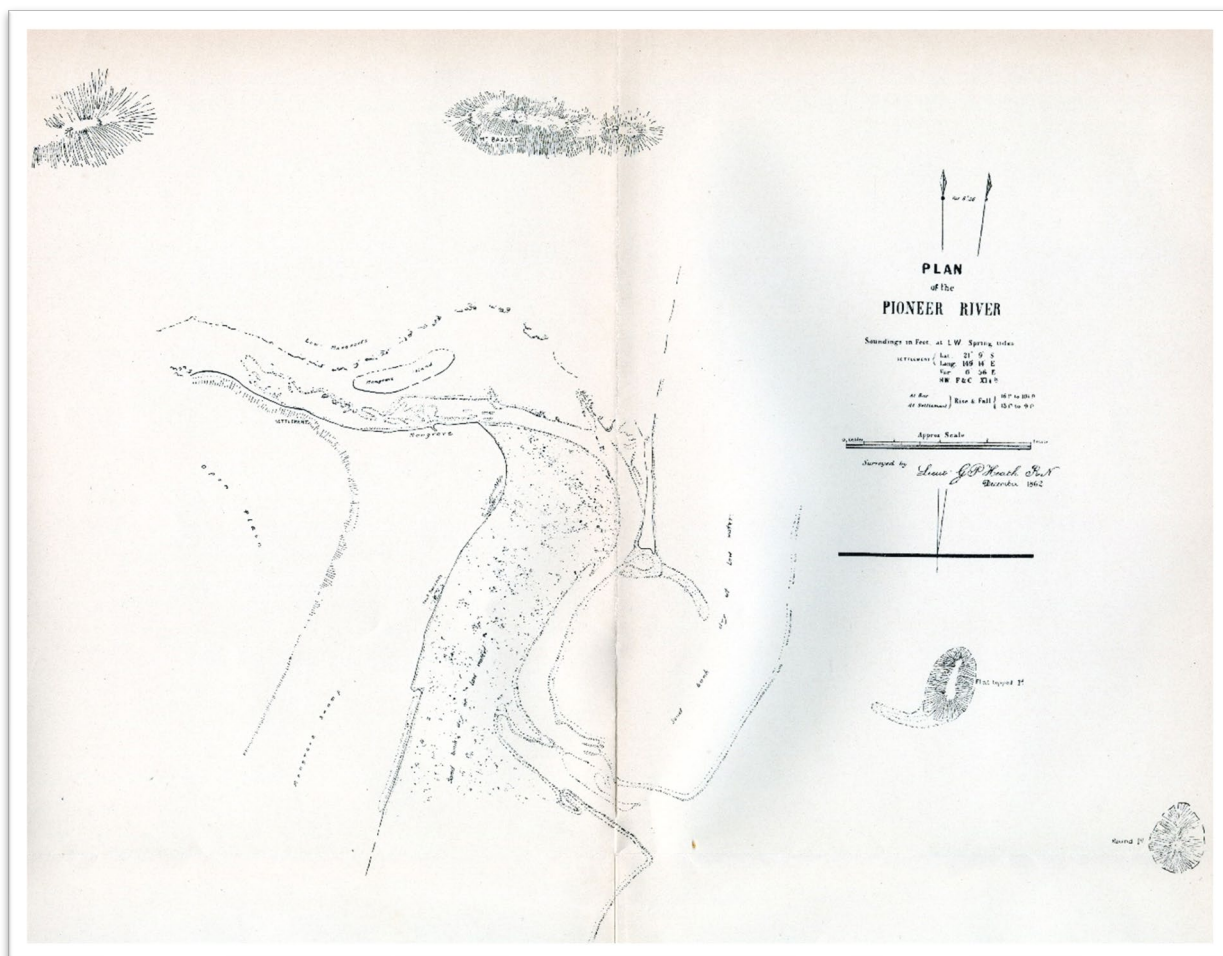
James and Mary Ready, and William Coakley, members of Dick Spencer's party which set up The Retreat pastoral run on Spencer's Lagoon at the head of Denison Creek, had arrived in mid-1862. Early in September, Louis Ross and James Muggleton entered the valley at Denison Creek, after a droving trip of 1,500 kilometres from New England with cattle owned by John Cook. Soon after, Ross was joined by Cook, and aided by Welshman William Hugh Williams, they began Balnagowan station in September on leases forfeited by Andrew Murray and Hamilton Robinson from the McCrossin-Mackay expedition.

On 2 October, the cutter *Pancake* arrived and landed supplies for The Retreat station at a site about three kilometres upstream from the Mackay settlement. Onwards from September, Henderson and the Robbs were busy preparing to receive wool from the stations over the range, and supplies arriving for the stations. Captain Till, on the *Murray*, began regular voyages to the river. Captain McEwan also called in regularly on the *Ben Bolt*, bringing the mail. In November, on the *Murray*'s first trip, several people came from Rockhampton to look over the new port. Initially, Mackay consisted of shanties on the muddy southern bank of the river, not far from the mouth, surrounded by dense scrub, 'devil-devil' clay mounds, mangroves, and ti-tree swamps. Two of the *Murray*'s passengers were Mr and Mrs M.V. Bolger—she was the first White woman to step ashore at Mackay. In late 1862, John McLean, his wife, and William Lobie arrived at Mackay with Captain Till on the *Murray*. The Leichhardt tree on the bank of the river—still there today in River Street—was just beginning to shoot up. There was a slab hut opposite what was later the AUSN Company Wharf, which served the purpose of a wharf shed. The southern bank of the river was about 15 meters further towards the Northside than it is today. The river was medium-sized, although with wide banks and tidal for several kilometres upstream. The land from around the present Central State School in Alfred Street down to Shakespeare Street was used for holding cattle, as was the area around what became Racecourse and Meadowlands mills.

The river mouth was then different from today, as there was a sand bank about 3.2 kilometres long that ran in front of Town Beach. The final stretch of the river entered the ocean at Far (Illawong) Beach. Captain Till cautiously sounded his way into the new port until the ship anchored alongside the bank in what is now River Street, running a plank ashore through mangroves onto the muddy ground. Rather alarmed, the Bolgers saw nothing that could be described as a town. They were met at the landing place by two New England Aboriginal men, who had arrived with John Mackay in June. They had brought down a wagon with a team of bullocks, and four horses from Greenmount to pick up the passengers and supplies. The Bolgers proceeded to Greenmount, where James and Mary Ready were waiting. To get to Mt Spencer, the Bolgers and the Readys had to follow a marked tree line from Greenmount as there was no track or even a bridle path. Mary Ready was delighted to have female company.

Water was in short supply during the first few months, as it all had to be carted from The Lagoons. The track was so rough that much of it spilled from the barrels before it arrived. The answer was a well, which Henderson and James Robb sank next to their house. On 23 November, Lieutenant G.P. Heath arrived on the HMS *Pioneer* to survey the mouth of the river. He found a settlement consisting of four stores, two of them large with galvanized ripple iron roofs. The largest was in the care of J.R. Palfryman for Burns, Bassett & Co., who since 29 July had held the Government mail contract between Rockhampton and Port Denison (Bowen). Dan Conner, co-founder of Collaroy station, was already in residence at

Landsdowne, on the river near what became Mackay Base Hospital in the 1870s. Conner was afterwards Excise Officer and Inspector of Distilleries at Mackay.



Map 13.2: Lieutenant Heath made a marine survey in December 1862, after which Mackay was gazetted a port. The river, hidden behind a long sandbar, reached the ocean at Far (Illawong) Beach. All this altered in 1898 when a powerful cyclone straightened the final stage of its course to the ocean.
Source: Roth 1908, 33.

Another early arrival was Frank Bridgman from Fort Cooper station who first visited the embryonic settlement in early December 1862, in the company of Vince from Greenmount. Bridgeman found a few tents and temporary iron humpies, and Henderson's store, a long low, temporary iron-roofed building with an earth floor, where a visitor could purchase a shirt and pair of trousers and be provided with a meal and liquid refreshments. Thomas Philip Cridland, who had been sent from Fort Cooper to receive stores and ship their wool, had a slab and shingle-roofed structure under erection, which stood for many years at the back of one of the businesses on the east side of Sydney Street, used as a bulk store. The town site was then a gentle muddy slope covered in long grass surrounded by patches of tropical scrub, with glimpses of the river through the mangroves.

A few days before Christmas, teamsters brought down several bullock drays to purchase rations to supply drovers travelling with stock. In a great hurry, as the camps were short of rations, on their way back they got no further than Greenmount. It began raining on Christmas Day and continued for months, until the whole area between Mackay and Greenmount turned into a lake. Late in December, Dominic Negretti, Thomas Anderson and Mr Burkitt arrived, the latter two intending to erect a store and set up a Post Office for the small community.

However, Burkitt's application to the Postmaster-General in Brisbane was unsuccessful, the reason given that it was the practice to appoint the Clerk of Petty Sessions in a community as Postmaster. John Tanner Baker, having just been appointed Sub-Collector of Customs and Clerk of Petty Sessions, was offered the position as Postmaster as well. He was also acting Harbour Master and became the first Magistrate in 1863. The first Post Office was opened on 9 January 1863, although when the Postmaster-General visited Mackay later in that year he found the postal service to be unsatisfactory and made arrangements for another man to take over the Postmaster's duties. This was J.S. Wilson, who remained in the job until 1870. The first Customs office, opened in 1863, was in a corner of the Burns, Bassett & Co. store on the riverbank. This was a temporary measure, with money for a separate timber building allocated in 1864. Completed by May 1865, it was on the riverside in a reserve for government buildings.

Henderson remained a Mackay storekeeper and publican for many years, eventually selling out to Arthur Kemmis and William Bovey. Ever entrepreneurial, his early interests included agriculture. He and James Robb worked for John Davidson, preparing the Alexandra plantation land for planting, and he was also an early managing partner in River Estate (before it had a mill), and operated a 50-acre farm at The Lagoons. In 1882, Henderson began his own plantation, Beaconsfield. He married twice, the first time to Mary Anne Elizabeth Allman at Mackay in 1863. They had three daughters, Mary Anne dying during childbirth in 1869. Two years later he remarried, to Lydia Jackson, also at Mackay. Their only child, a daughter, died in her first year.

James Robb began a bootmaker business and eventually became publican of the first Queens Hotel, 1869–71, and then of the Vulcan Hotel, 1873–74. He settled at Robbsleigh farm at The Lagoons where he erected a primitive sugar mill in 1871, which he sold in 1873. With his wife Margaret, daughter of Thomas Philip and Mary Cridland, he moved to Ravenswood and Charters Towers. They had no children. Andrew Robb began as a teamster and contractor, selecting land at Palmyra, then at Alligator Creek, and last at Ferny Grove. He was married in 1882 to Matilda Jackson (Lydia's sister) and they had four children, one dying at three months. Matilda died in 1882 and Andrew remarried, to Sarah Ann Burton. They had nine children. The Andrew Robb family left for the Cape River goldfield and then moved to Charters Towers where Andrew died in 1936. James died in Mackay in 1926. Andrew Henderson died in 1892.

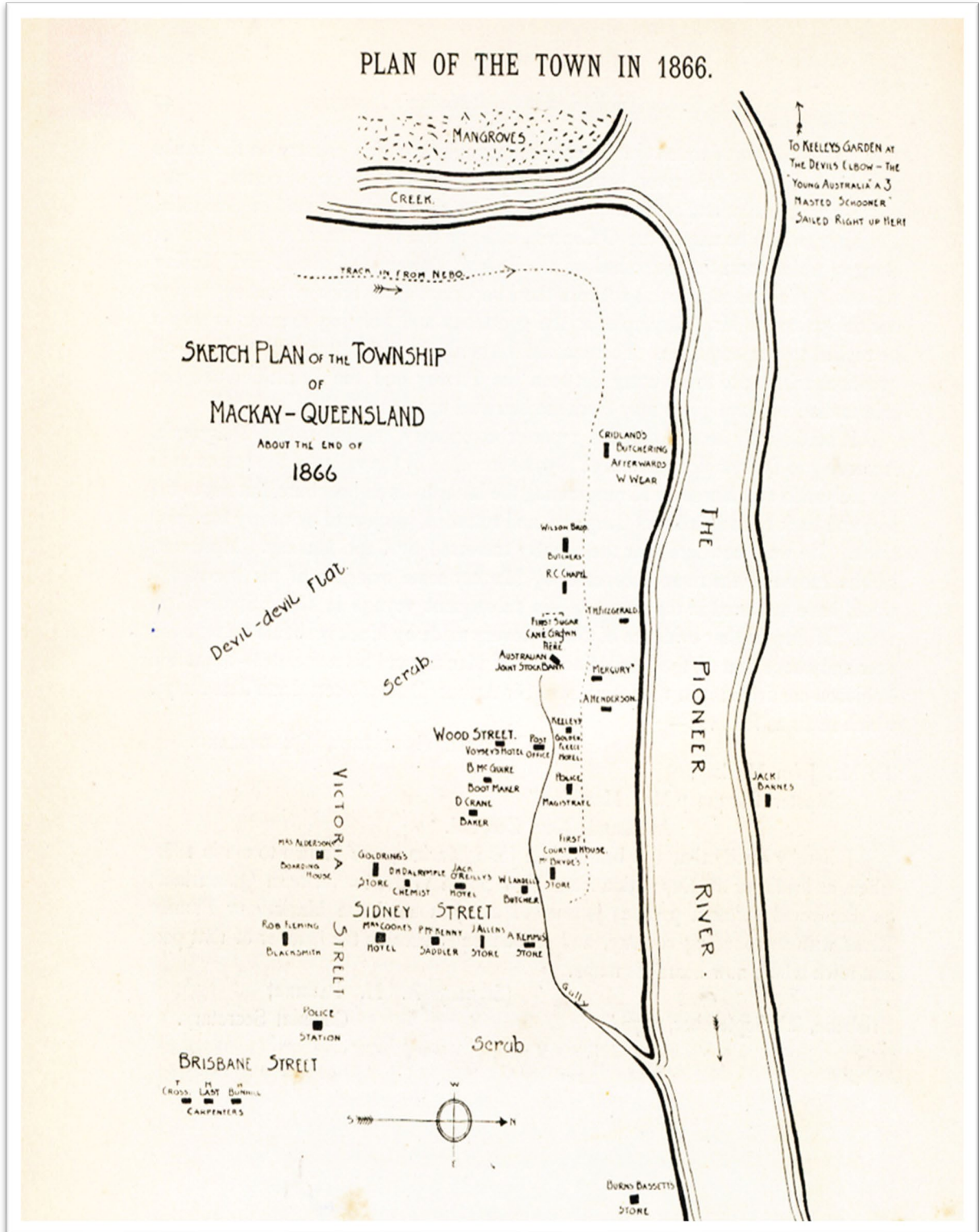
In 1863, William Bagley settled at what became Eton, erecting a crude shanty that served as a hotel, tapping into the traffic from the west to Mackay. George Voysey, a wheelwright, and Robert Fleming, a blacksmith, arrived together, at the same time as Mr and Mrs Jeffers. Three men, Finger, Smith and O'Brien, also arrived to begin a hotel, along with a barmaid named Jenny. The first two police officers were appointed during 1863. There was no lock-up and early prisoners were sent to gaol in Rockhampton.

In February 1863, the Pioneer River was proclaimed a port of entry and customs clearance. Mackay's first urban land sales took place in Bowen in October 1863. During 1863 and 1864, numerous settlers arrived, who later became well known in the district. Voysey and Fleming opened Vulcan Forge in Sydney Street. Voysey and his wife Sophia built the first two storey house, later occupied by sawyers Lobie and McClusky. Other early arrivals were auctioneer Alexander (Sandy) Shiels and his wife Catherine; a butcher, William Landells; Michael Fay, storekeeper, carrier and later publican and mayor; merchant John Allen; and station workers Abijah and Emma Goode. Pastoralist Henry Bell and his wife Alice set up at Plane Creek to the south. Other 1863 arrivals were 'puncher' (a person who broke-in teams of bullocks for ploughing) and farmer Abraham Ditton (and his wife Marion in 1864), carpenters John Ryan and Christian Ehsman, and bullock driver and farmer Johnstone Harris and his wife Jane. Surveyor and planter Thomas H. Fitzgerald, and pharmacist David Dalrymple, also arrived in 1863.

The towns of Mackay and Eton were surveyed by T.H. Fitzgerald in 1863, aided by

various settlers, among them John McLean, who had arrived in 1862 and later assisted Surveyor Sutherland in the survey of the township of Lake Elphinstone in 1863 or 1864, near the station of the same name established by Sandy Ewan. Sutherland and his party travelled to Logan Downs, and on their return surveyed the electric telegraph line to Nebo. Subsequently, John McLean set up in business as a carter, remaining in Mackay for the rest of his life. Cremorne Gardens on the northern bank of the river opposite the town were begun by John Greenwood Barnes in 1865. He had migrated from England to Victoria where he was a gardener for well-known botanist Baron von Mueller, curator of the Melbourne Botanic Gardens. Von Mueller encouraged Barnes to go north to trial growing a wide variety of plants of tropical and temperate species. He found that coconut palms and pineapples were the most suitable, and by 1876 had planted 1,200 palms. His other crops suffered commercially because of the distance from markets. Gradually, he turned his fruit and vegetable gardens into a pleasure garden for Mackay's inhabitants. Once the Sydney Street Bridge was completed in 1888, visiting his gardens became a typical weekend pastime for the residents of Mackay. The 1918 cyclone destroyed most of Barnes' gardens.

At Mackay's first land sales—62 town allotments—the original residents were given first rights of purchase, and there was a great deal of speculative buying from investors. A plan of the Mackay settlement in 1866 appears in Henry Roth's history of the district (Map 13.3). The first small Post Office was built on the corner of Wood and North streets. The Telegraph Office was close by in Wood Street and the Customs House was on the corner of Sydney and North streets. The land east of Burns Street was a tidal sluice area, leading to mangroves and scrub. The first licensed hotel was Charles Keeley's Golden Fleece, so hidden by scrub that it had a sign on the riverbank to indicate the track. When Jane Cook rented the Royal Hotel, built by Henderson on the corner of Sydney and Victoria streets, she had a two-foot-wide track carved out, which became a shortcut into the town from the west. She took the name of the original Royal Hotel with her when she moved to a new building further down the street. The Henderson site was purchased by Korah H. Wills, who named it Wills Hotel. The Australian Joint Stock Company (AJS) Bank took over an existing house as its first premises. In all there were around six hotels operating in Mackay in the 1860s, and a slightly higher number in the small rural settlements between Mackay and Nebo.



Map 13.3: Plan of Mackay, 1866.
Source: Roth 1908, 48, Fig. 15.

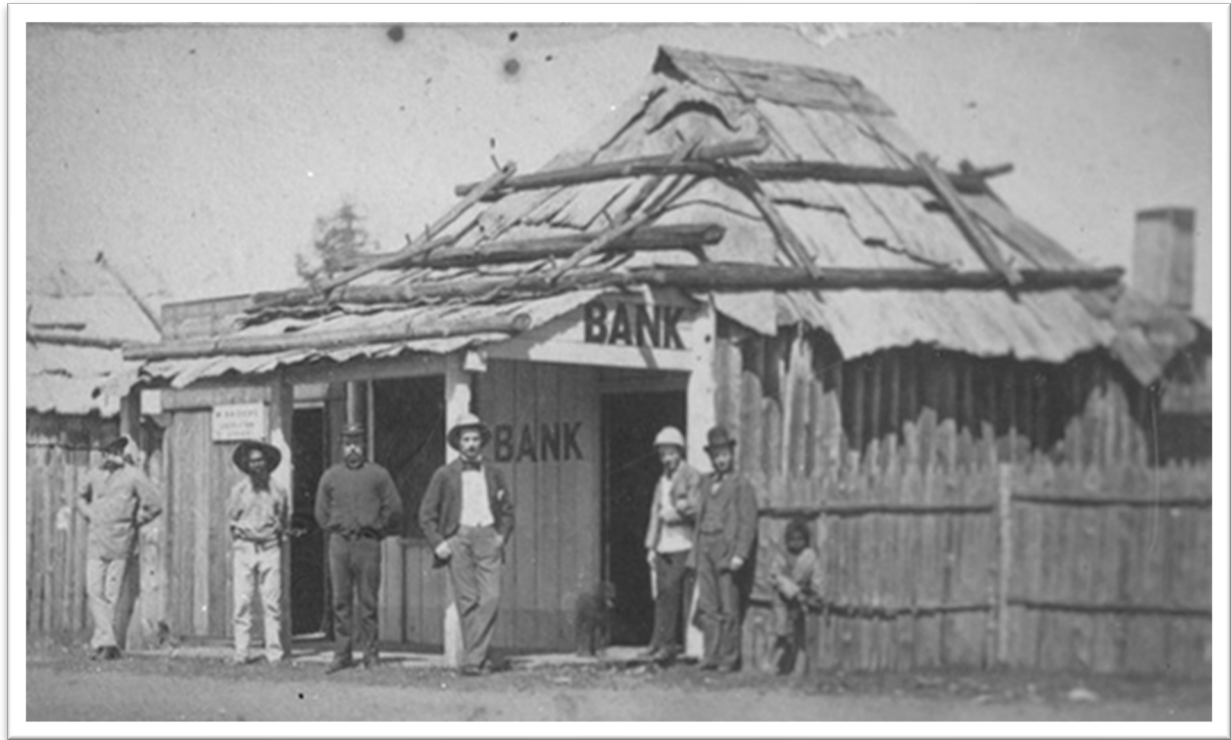


Plate 13.1: The Australian Joint Stock Company (AJS) Bank, Mackay, 1860s. Originally built as a house by Jack O'Reilly, then occupied by Philip Hott, the bark roof is strapped down with saplings, a standard early building technique. The first manager was George Geddes. The bank was robbed in September 1866. Note the Aboriginal child on the right and what may be an Aboriginal man second from the left. If this identification is correct, this is the earliest photograph of First Nations Australians in the Pioneer Valley.

Source: State Library of Queensland.

By 1867, Mackay had progressed from shanties to small wooden buildings. Some settlers were attracted from southern areas, while others relocated from nearby pastoral stations. Arthur A. Kemmis is a good example. Born in Sydney in 1834, in 1858 he married Jessie Holmes at Mudgee in New South Wales. They had two sons, one in 1859 and a second in 1860, who died within a few months. Jessie died in 1860, possibly in childbirth. By 1862, Kemmis had travelled north and became the first manager of Fort Cooper, then a sheep station. In 1864, he returned south to marry Jamaican-born Emily Slayter Gibson, who was living in Campbelltown, New South Wales. In 1865, he became part-owner of Greenmount with Edward Brooking Cornish, a partner in Fort Cooper. By 1867, the couple had moved to Mackay where Arthur Kemmis had opened a retail store with William Bovey. He contracted to bring copper from Peak Downs to ship from Mackay, and the next year was involved in building the Government wharf on the river. He also became agent for the Australasian Steam Navigation Co. In the 1870s, he joined with W.H. Paxton & Co. in these commercial activities. Arthur and Emily Kemmis built their home 'Varroville' on Nebo Road and had 12 children between 1865 and 1887.

Having moved from pastoralism to the retail, haulage, and construction trades in the 1860s, Kemmis decided to join the sugar boom. In 1872, the family took up 5,000 acres (2,023 ha) of pastoral and agricultural land at Oakenden, about 400 acres of which was suitable for cane. They built a substantial home, had a herd of 540 cattle, grew cane, and experimented with wheat and oats. In 1883, Kemmis formed the Oakenden Sugar Co., which, although a mill was ordered from Scotland and an Islander workforce was engaged, failed to eventuate. Kemmis seems to have overreached financially, and sold out to a Melbourne

company, although he still maintained a one-fifth share. The cane was crushed at CSR's Homebush mill and CSR incorporated Oakenden into its land in 1887. The family moved to The Chase and continued farming. In 1893, they moved to Sydney, where Arthur died in 1896 and Emily in 1913.

The first town photographs date from 1868. The multi-dutied Magistrate, the Police, and the Postmaster, were the only Government officials, and there was a bank, hotels and boarding houses, and a newspaper. There were Catholic and Anglican churches, three hotels, general stores and commission agents, a pharmacy, auctioneers, a surveyor, butcher, baker, builder, sawyer, blacksmith, saddler, bootmaker, and tailor, and private houses.

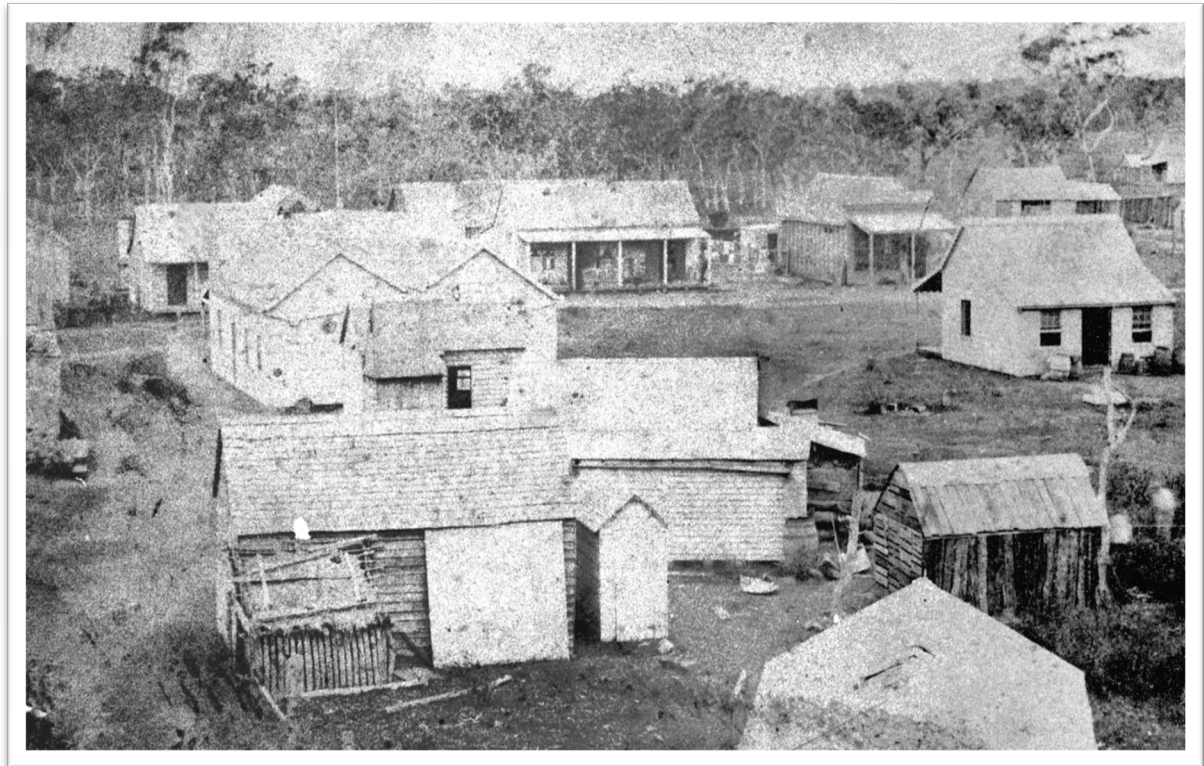


Plate 13.2: This is Sydney Street, Mackay in 1868. The first homes were rough but substantial structures, typical of frontier regions throughout Australia. The photograph was taken from the west. The first stage of Mrs Cook's second Royal Hotel is clearly visible in the centre back, with McKenney's saddlers on its right. About one-quarter of the town's buildings are visible.

Source: Queensland State Library.



Plate 13.3: Another view of Mackay in 1868. The Court House is on the left on the bank of the Pioneer River, and a butcher shop, general store and stables are towards the right at the river end of Sydney Street. Several outhouses can be seen, and washing is hanging on a line in the bottom left.

Source: State Library of Queensland.

Local Government Authorities

The Mackay district now has two histories commissioned by Local Government authorities: John Kerr's *Pioneer Pageant* (1980) and Kett Kennedy's *Mackay Revisited* (2002). These provide adequate descriptions of how Local Government began. In the 1860s, the new colony set up numerous Trusts to administer Works Department funds for roads. The *Municipal Council's Act* of 1864 provided for establishing local authorities to develop the new urban settlements. Late in 1868, 178 householders, freeholders and residents of Mackay petitioned the Governor to grant municipality status. The leaders of the movement were the local Catholic priest, Father T.A. Lonergan, and William McBryde. The McBryde brothers, James and William, were early settlers, who established themselves as wine and spirit merchants and general storekeepers in 1866. Other active campaigners were Arthur Kemmis, David Dalrymple, B. Brodnitz, Patrick McKenney, Charles Keeley, Joseph Holmes, Dan Conner, and F. Wilson. Municipal status was achieved on 22 September 1869, beginning a more organised approach to Local Government and the construction of roads and bridges. The first meeting of the Mackay Municipal Council was on 1 December 1869, its authority covering eight square miles. The first members were Dalrymple, Keeley, John Duffy, William McBryde, and John Allen. The Council and the Government busied themselves creating public institutions such as the hospital, cemetery, state school, and the racecourse, roads and bridges, as well as town services such as a water supply, and 'night soil' removal. Public parks began, although none were substantial until Queen Victoria (later just Queen's) Park in east Mackay opened in 1881, along with more central Jubilee Park in about 1897. Queen Victoria Park was swampy and began as an agricultural acclimatisation reserve.

The first burial ground was eight acres on the coast side of the Mackay township (the area is now between Chain and Endeavours streets). There were also graves on the eastern side of Byron Street, between Gordon and Park streets. Both sites were subject to flooding and were considered unsuitable for further graves. The first permanent cemetery was set up in 1869 on land off Nebo Road, between what are now Hume and Holland streets. The trustees were Thomas H. Fitzgerald, John Spiller, David H. Dalrymple, and William McBryde. The ground was surveyed and divided according to denominations, with the first burial in 1872. There was also an alien/heathen section, and areas for public burials, usually for paupers. Until October 1864, Mackay district deaths were recorded at Broadsound (St Lawrence) Court House, after

which local officials took over.

The Council also improved town streets and drainage, dealt with accumulated filth and rubbish, and attempted to control wandering pigs and goats. Tree stumps also had to be removed from what were now designated as streets. Early in the 1870s, the Council installed a 'time-ball' flagstaff on which the ball dropped at a set time each day, enabling residents to check their watches and clocks. This was replaced by a large public clock in 1875, which was erratic in its operation.



Plate 13.4: Mackay's Municipal Council first met on 1 December 1869 in the Court House. This photograph is of the first Council building, erected in 1870. There were six aldermen, until 1885 when wards were created, and the membership increased to nine.

Source: Clive Moore Collection.

In 1871 and 1872, separate Roads Boards were established to serve the settlers on each side of the river. The two Boards were combined in 1872 and began in earnest to lobby for a bridge across the Pioneer, which was completed in 1877, at the shallow crossing next to the new hospital. In 1879, the Government passed the *Divisional Board Act*, with the Pioneer Divisional Board proclaimed on 11 November 1879, meeting for the first time in March 1880, with John Davidson as its chairman. This covered all of the coastal land from the O'Connell River south to Cape Palmerston and inland to the ranges, exclusive of the Mackay municipality.



Plate 13.5: The members of the Pioneer Divisional Board, 1889.

Source: State Library of Queensland.

Between 1881 and 1887, the new Member of Parliament, Maurice Hume Black, negotiated with the Council, the Divisional Board, and the McIlwraith Government, to build the Pioneer Valley's rail network. As outlined in Chapter 10, in 1885 the new line reached down the valley to Walkerston, Eton, Newbury Junction near Marian, and Hamilton (now Mirani). The first railway station at Mackay was the repurposed Mackay Immigration Depot (erected in 1882) which was realigned, turned to face the new line, with a 140 feet (43 m) platform added. The entrance to the station was in Alfred Street, and it occupied the area between Tennyson and Byron streets. Mackay was connected to the south by rail in 1921 and to the north in 1923. In 1924, the passenger station was shifted to a vacant block south of Shakespeare Street, with the entrance in Boddington Street. The old station remained in use as the goods yard. In the early 1980s, the station shifted once more, to Paget on the outskirts of the town, eliminating 13 railway crossings.

The Council and the Divisional Board controlled Local Government throughout the valley and its coastal surrounds, much the same area as is now covered by the modern Mackay Regional Council. The new Sydney Street Bridge was negotiated at much the same time as the railway and completed between 1886 and 1888. The bridge allowed quick access to the Northside, and to Cremorne Gardens, the private leisure park on the opposite side of the river. Mackay's citizens promenaded across the bridge at weekends. In 1903, Mackay was proclaimed a town and on 19 August 1918 it became a city. Under the 1902 *Local Authorities Act* the Pioneer Divisional Board was abolished, replaced by the Pioneer Shire Council. The Shire of Sarina was gazetted on 1 January 1912, followed by the Shire of Mirani on 4 September 1913. In 2008, the Mackay Regional Council was formed, an amalgamation of the three shires and the City Council.

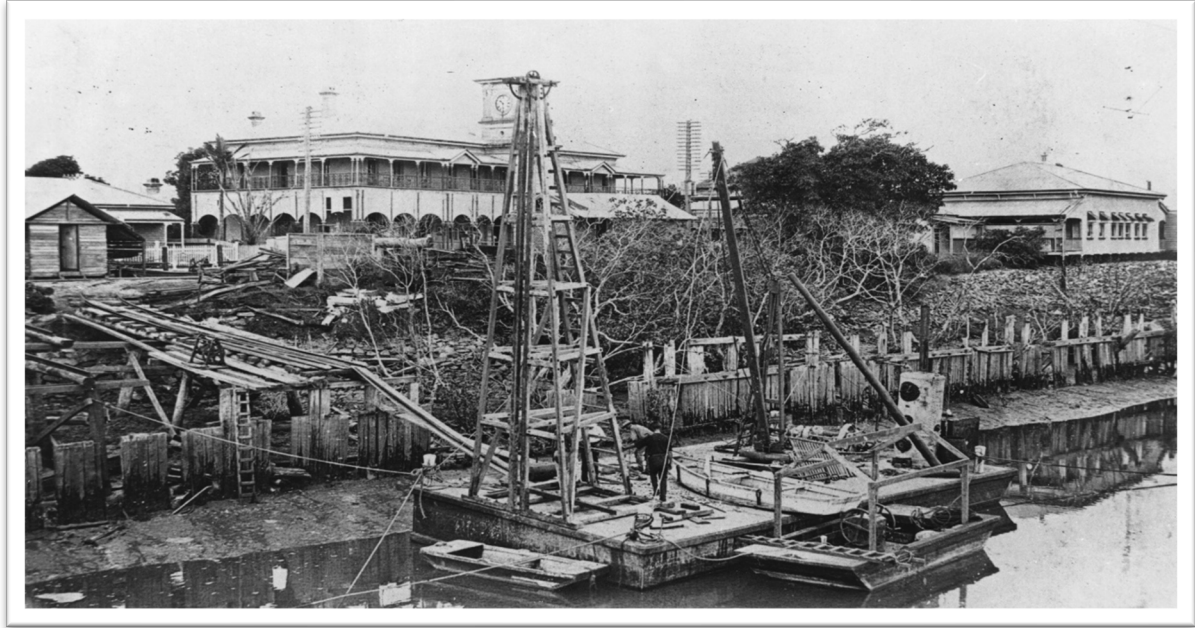


Plate 13.6: The Sydney Street Bridge was built between 1886 and 1888. Here, the foundations are beginning on the southern bank of the river on North Street. The Post Office with its clock tower is in the centre of the photograph.

Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 13.7: The North Street wharves showing the new Sydney Street Bridge in the late 1880s or early 1890s.

Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 13.8: The banks of the Pioneer River were constantly eroding and difficult to use as a major port. This 1870s photograph, taken from the coastal end, shows the early wharves. The river is tidal and was always too shallow to berth large vessels.

Source: State Library of Queensland.

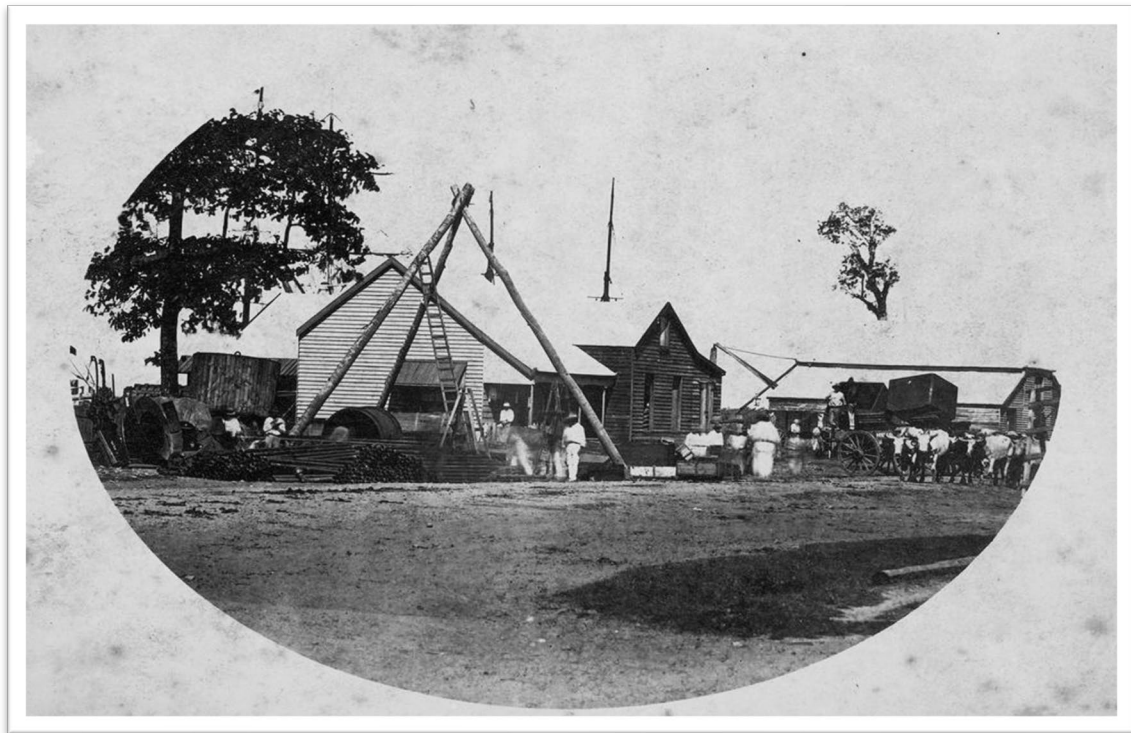


Plate 13.9: In River Street at the back of the wharves along the Pioneer River at Mackay in the 1870s. The Leichhardt tree, still a feature of the riverbank, is in the foreground.

Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 13.10: The Pioneer River wharves and warehouses in North Street at Mackay, in about 1880 at the same time as Plate 13.11. The Leichhardt tree is visible in the middle on the riverbank. The presence of the Leichhardt Hotel opposite the wharves dates the photo as after 1872.

Source: State Library of Queensland.

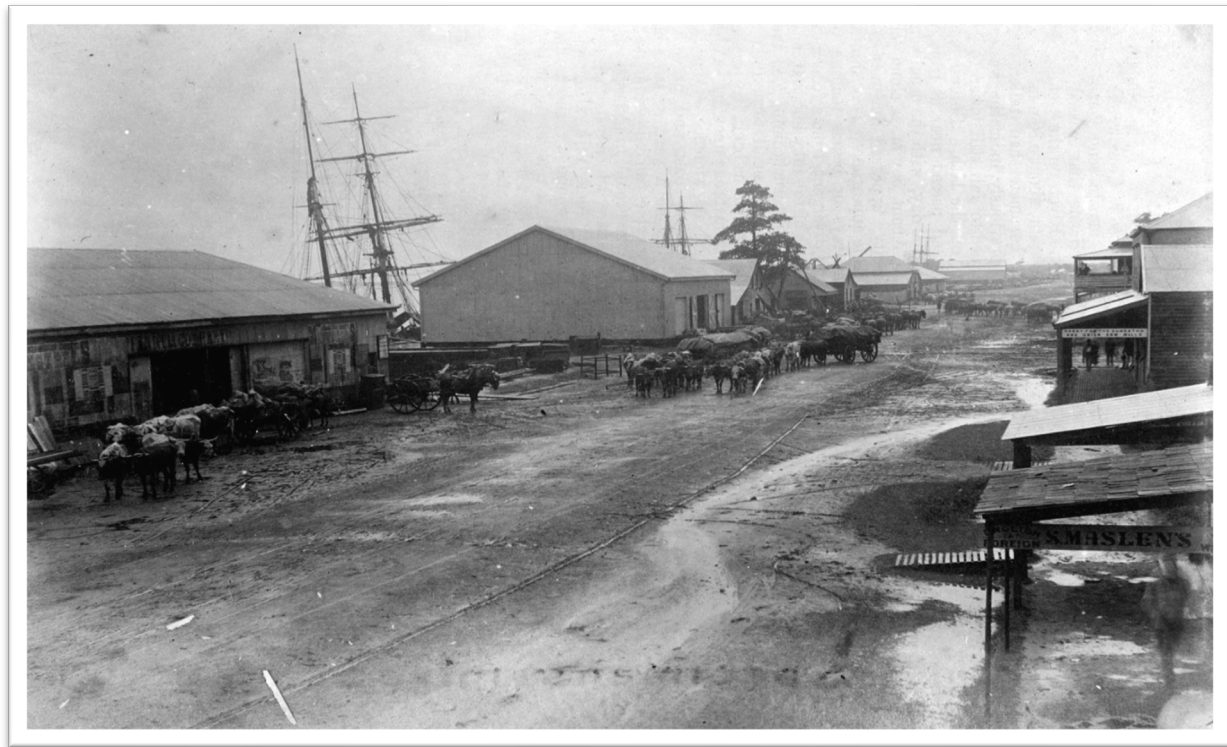


Plate 13.11: The wharves and warehouses in North Street in about 1880, a little further down towards the Leichhardt tree than in Plate 13.10

Source: State Library of Queensland.

A Port for Mackay

The transport difficulties in and out of the port were extreme, and improving the port was a long-term problem. The river was shallow and tidal, and its banks were subject to erosion. As early as 1868, it was clear that the water depth at the southern riverbank was becoming shallower and river side allotments were eroding away, several metres already in the water. That year, a public meeting urged that the Government build a wharf, which was constructed at the end of Sydney Street with a £500 grant. However, it was only 50 feet long. Other wharves followed: George Smith's Victoria Wharf in 1870; the Australasian Steam Navigation (ASN) Co. Wharf; and another more extensive Government Wharf in 1871, 253 feet (77 m) long and 10 to 27 feet wide. Even with the construction of wharves, in the long term the river was still not suitable for use as a major port.

Onwards from 1868, Flat Top Island off the mouth of the river had a manned light, which was upgraded to a lighthouse in 1874. Onwards from the 1870s, passengers and cargo to and from large ships were transhipped at Flat Top. Cannons were used to mark the arrival of a ship, as a signal to send out the smaller vessels and lighters. Later, there was also a signal station with a cable to the mainland. The ASN Co. introduced a regular mail steamer service in 1874. James Croker left W.H. Paxton & Co. in 1889 to set up his own sugar broker's business. In 1891, he secured the agency for the Adelaide Steamship Co., which had the contract to ship the sugar produced by the Government-sponsored central mills. The sugar arrived at the wharves first by bullock drays, horse-drawn wagons, and finally by train. It was then loaded onto barges which were towed out to waiting ships at the Flat Top anchorage. Later, steam lighters were added to the river fleet. Howard Smith Ltd operated their own wharf and steamers, also moving passengers and cargo. Plane Creek central mill sent its sugar out via Louisa Creek to Flat Top. It all had to be coordinated so that there was not too much stored in the warehouses, and the tides had to be watched as fully loaded barges were low in the water.



Plate 13.12: Passengers on Flat Top Island waiting for the coastal steamer in the 1870s or 1880s. The steam tender *SS Bronzewing* (anchored offshore) carried passengers from the port to the steamers. There was no wharf; passengers and cargo were swung aboard or unloaded in wicker baskets.
Source: State Library of Queensland.

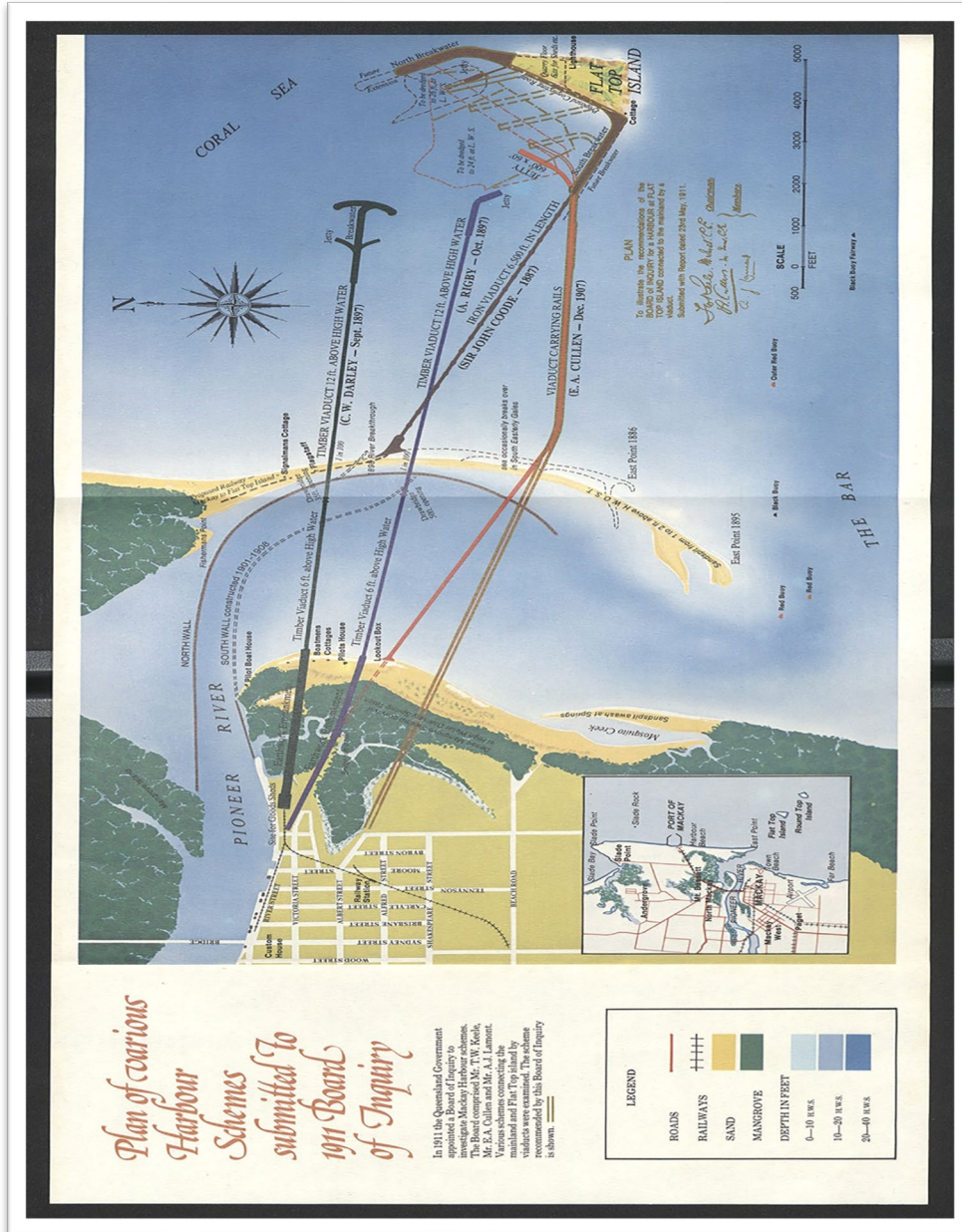
This all required double-handling and the waters around the Flat Top anchorage could be rough. In 1879, there was a plan to dredge a channel from the township to the sea through East Point, which eventually occurred naturally during a cyclone in 1898. In 1881, there was another plan to construct a sheltered harbour at Flat Top. A breakwater was begun using stone quarried on the island. Three years later, after a public meeting, a petition was sent to Premier Griffith to urge construction of a deep-water port. The engineering problems proved insurmountable: the sand bar at the mouth of the river was unstable, as was the offshore area out to Flat Top. In 1885, a new plan was to dredge a dock area in the river near Sandfly Creek, at considerable expense. Map 13.5 shows the various proposals in the 1880s, 1890s and 1900s. The next idea came in 1887: to build two stone breakwaters at the river mouth and a dredged channel from the new entrance of the harbour to the railway wharf, and to construct a sheltered berth for steamers at Flat Top, at a cost of between £337,250 (today \$48 m) and £472,300 (today \$68 m), depending on the complexity. In 1890, the river breakwater proposal was abandoned. Far from clearing sand from the river bar, the alterations added to the sand. Viaduct proposals in 1897 planned to use the sandbar at the mouth of the river. These became irrelevant after nature stepped in. Cyclone Eline in 1898 demonstrated the futility of the various earlier proposals, by altering the mouth of the river, cutting a new passage to the ocean at East Point, just north of Flat Top.



Plate 13.13: Flat Top and Round Top Islands viewed from the Far (Illawong) Beach when the tide is out, June 2022. The extent of the sand exposed gives some idea of the difficulties involved in making a serviceable port.
Source: Courtesy of Alison Carmichael.

A totally new proposal came at the end of the century. In 1899, the Queensland Government purchased McBryde and Finlayson's 6,198 acre (2,508 ha) Seaforth estate, to the north of Cape Hillsborough, for farms and as a gateway to Port Newry, which had long been under discussion as a new harbour for the district. Once more, the plans never eventuated, although the Port Newry site remained under discussion over decades. A 1907

proposal aimed to build a viaduct to Flat Top, which included a road and rail connection and construction of a jetty at Flat Top Island but was deemed unsuitable. An inquiry in 1911 produced the Cullen scheme—a proposal to build embankments and timber viaducts out through the mouth of the river to Flat Top, leaving from Town Beach, with a breakwater and jetties at the island. Work began in 1913 but halted when there was a dispute relating to the stability of the foundations for the viaduct.



Map 13.4: This map shows some of the 1880s to 1900s plans to improve the Pioneer River as an anchorage, or to make links to Flat Top Island.

Source: Moore 1978.



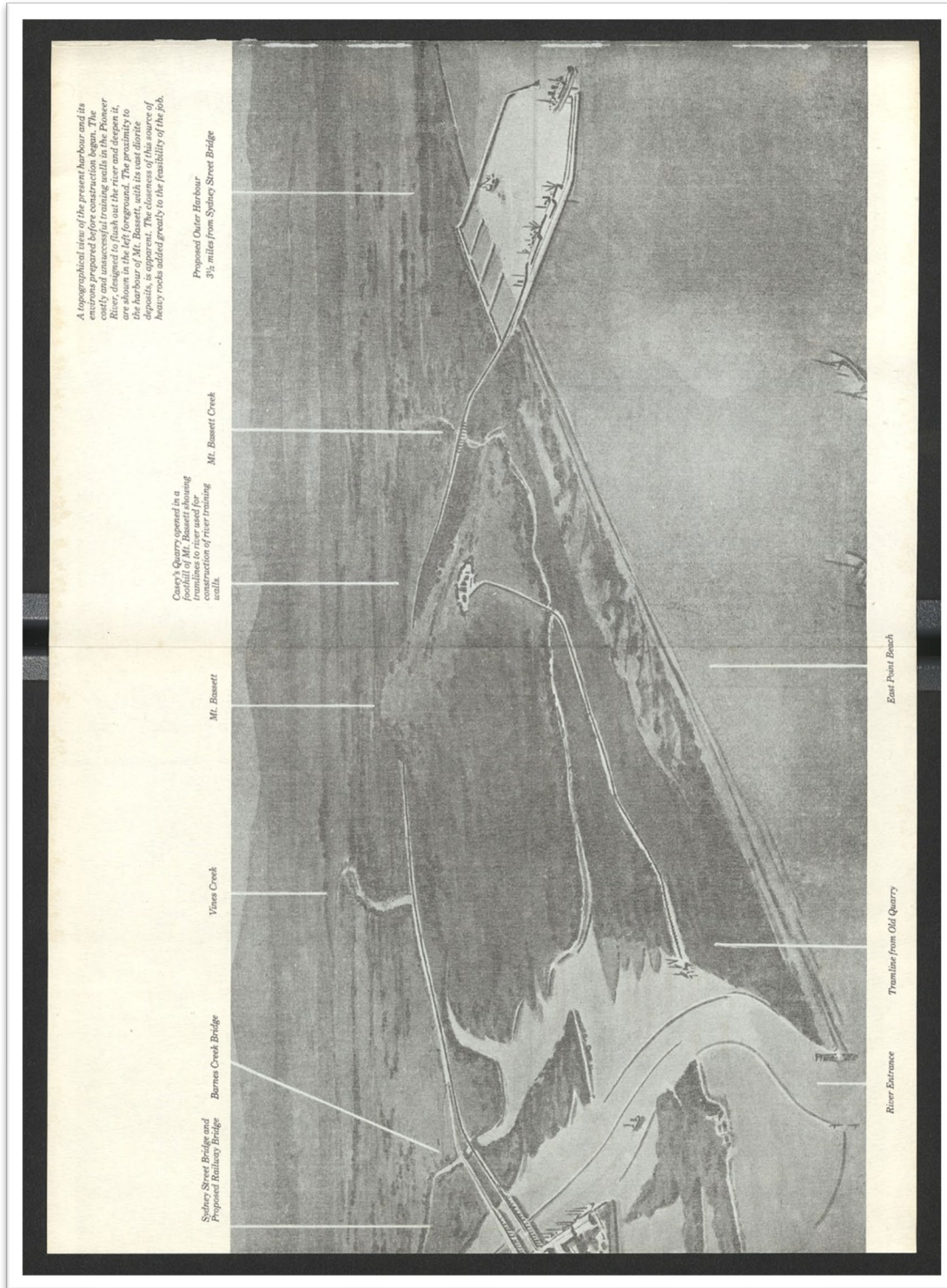
Plate 13.14: The mining of granite from Mt Bassett quarry, used to create the outer harbour.
Source: State Library of Queensland.

World War I stopped further plans, and then the 1918 cyclone destroyed almost all the Harbour Board's assets. The repair bill was huge, shared with the Queensland Government. In 1928, there was a revamping of the Cullen scheme from 1911, which did not progress. The final solution did not come until the 1930s. Based on plans prepared in 1928 by Jim Love, the next year a public meeting called for the construction of an artificial 'outer harbour'. This proposal was accepted by the Government, with the extra advantage that it created a Great Depression employment project. Granite boulders from Mt Bassett were quarried to construct Mackay's outer harbour, opened in 1939. It was a huge but successful engineering project.



Plate 13.15: The opening of the Outer Harbour in 1939.
Source: State Library of Queensland.

Often, looking at the Pioneer River opposite the town I wondered at various rock walls and groins that appeared to have been built and abandoned. Once the tortuous history of building a harbour at Mackay is revealed, the purpose of the strange incomplete rock walls becomes clearer.



Map 13.5: A topographic view of the environs of the Outer Harbour in the 1930s.
 Source: Moore 1978.

Population

Calculating the population of nineteenth century Mackay is not easy as the statistics are spread through those for the municipality or combine the municipality and the divisional board. They can also be gleaned from the censuses (roughly every ten years) and the electoral divisions, the boundaries of which altered over decades. Before 1868, the population statistics

are for the whole of the Kennedy Lands District. The first reliable population statistic for Mackay is 658 residents in 1868. The 1870s figures increased from 500 in 1870, to 1,500 in 1879. The fastest increase was in the 1880s: from 1,600 in 1880, to 3,500 in 1889. The 1890s figures remained around 4,000 (in 1892), increasing to 4,800 by 1899. The 1901 census recorded 5,157 inhabitants. During the 1880s and 1890s, the populations of the agricultural areas increased rapidly and from 1910 the Pioneer Divisional Board area was separated from the Mackay Municipality. Very few of the municipality statistics included non-Europeans, and they never counted First Nations Australians. For example, in 1891 the Mackay district had 4,228 Melanesians and Asians, a larger number than the inhabitants of urban Mackay. There was a Chinatown inhabited by Chinese and Japanese, and on Saturdays Melanesian came to Mackay for shopping and recreation. The population of Mackay on any Saturday in the 1890s could easily have been six or seven thousand. Even so, it remained a small rural town and an *entrepôt* for the valley and its hinterland.

Political Power: Mackay’s Parliamentary and Local Government Representatives

The political power at local level and in the colonial Parliament was totally controlled by males. Almost all originally from the British Isles, and from the counties, not the larger cities, they were mainly Mackay town businessmen and plantation owners aged in their 40s and 50s. Most were secure financially and were also involved in other local organizations and associations.

Table 13.1: Members of Parliament with connections to Mackay

Name	Seat/Years	Occupation	Place of Birth	Year of Birth
Members of the Queensland Legislative Assembly connected to Mackay				
Fitzsimmons, Charles	Port Curtis; Clermont, Kennedy, Rockhampton; Rockhampton; Clermont, 1860–68	planter	Cavan, Ireland	1802
Fitzgerald, Thomas Henry	Bowen; Kennedy; Rockhampton, 1867–75	planter	Monaghan, Ireland	1824
Macdonald, Peter Fitzallan	Blackall, 1873–78	pastoralist, partner of J.A. and J.B. Macartney, and R.W. Graham	Campbelltown, NSW	1830
Francis Tyssen Amhurst	Bowen, Mackay, 1875–81	planter	Norfolk	1843
Macfarlane, John	Leichhardt, Rockhampton, 1877–80	pastoralist, relative of the Miller sisters, wives, of J.B. Macartney and R.W. Graham of St Helens	Scotland	1823
Black, Maurice Hume	Mackay, 1881–93	planter	London	1835
Murphy, Francis Reid	Barcoo, 1885–92	pastoralist	New South Wales	1842
Dalrymple, David Hay	Mackay, 1888–1904	pharmacist, pastoralist	Berkshire, England	1840
Chataway, James Vincent	Mackay, 1893–1901	newspaper proprietor	Warwickshire	1852
Paget, Walter	Mackay, 1901–16	planter	Worcestershire	1854

Trueman				
Members of the Queensland Legislative Council				
Raff, George	Brisbane, 1860–70	merchant, planter	Morayshire, Scotland	1851
Fitz, Henry Bates	1860–76	planter	Windsor, England	1817
Long, William Houston	1873–78	planter	Yorkshire	1843

Table 13.2: Mayors of Mackay, 1869–1901

Name	Years	Occupation	Place of Birth	Year of birth
Dalrymple, David Hay	1869–71, 1873–74	pharmacist, pastoralist	Berkshire, England	1840
Shields, Alexander Sinclair	1872	auctioneer, publican	Berwickshire, Scotland	1840
Smith, George	1873, 1875, 1876, 1881	shipping and commission agent, auctioneer,	Lancashire, England	1840
Wills, Korah Halcomb	1876–77	publican	Kent, England	1828
Marsh, William	1878, 1880	merchant	Somersetshire, England	1837
Dutaillis, Charles	1879	merchant, publican, auctioneer, labour trade ship-owner	London	1849
Paxton, William Henry	1880	merchant, wharf-owner, ship-owner	Northumberland, England	1844
Rawson, Edmund Stansfeld	1882	pastoralist, butcher	Durham (?), England	1845
Pearce, Thomas	1883	draper	Cornwall	1825
Fay, Michael Joseph	1884	storekeeper, publican	England	ca. 1840
Harney, John	1885	pastoralist	Cork, Ireland	ca. 1841
Dimmock, George	1886, 1894	publican, town clerk	?	1852
McIntyre, Archibald	1887	builder	Dumbartonshire, Scotland	?
Black, Henry Lindsay	1888	commission agent, auctioneer	Scotland	1847
Robertson, William	1889	engineer, foundry owner	Elgin, Moray, Scotland	1845
Hodges, William George	1890, 1896, 1901	teacher, town clerk, accountant	Stafford, England	1855
Byrne, W.J.	1891	surveyor and engineer	Pallas, Tipperary, Ireland	1859
Black, Henry Bowyer	1891, 1895, 1897	planter, newspaper-owner	London	1844
Pirie, Alexander Leith Ross Foote	1892	engineer	Angus, Scotland	1846
Morthensen, Neil Christian	1893	cordial manufacturer	Aarhus, Denmark	ca. 1856
Hynes, Patrick Maurice	1895	accountant, publican	Roscommon, Ireland	1854
Thornber, James Henry	1898	merchant, town clerk	Lancashire	1860
Lambert, Samuel	1899	merchant	Yorkshire	1858
Morley, Charles	1900	pharmacist	British Isles	?

Source: My thanks to Glen Hall for the basic list, to which I have added their profession, date and place of birth.

Table 13.3: Chairmen of the Pioneer Divisional Board, 1879–1901

Name	Years	Occupation	Place of Birth	Year of Birth
Davidson, John Ewan	1880–83, 1896–99	planter, company manager	London, England	1841

Port Mackay

Walker, Robert	1883–85	plantation manager	British Isles	1845
Jane, Henry John	1885	farmer	ca. 1830	St Austell, Cornwall
Paget, Walter Trueman	1885–1890, 1901	planter	Whitechapel, London	1854
Bagley, William	1890–95	publican, wholesaler	London, England	1840
McBryde, John	1895	planter	British Isles	?
Inverarity, Willoughby	1895–96	farmer	Montrose, Angus, Scotland	1855
Neil, Richard	1899–1901	dairy and cane farmer	Meath, Ireland	ca. 1845

Source: Kerr 1980, 226–27. I have added their profession, date, and place of birth.

My thanks to Yvonne Peberdy from the Mackay Family History Society Inc, for filling in some of the gaps.

Religious and Educational Institutions

The Christian religion was a key part of the cultural and social life of Mackay. Going to church was a constant activity, for men, women, and children. Households said grace and prayers regularly, and women, excluded from many of the other district organizations, often found fellowship in the churches. The early settlers were almost all from the British Isles and covered by the Anglican, Catholic, and Presbyterian denominations. The addition of settlers from Scandinavia and Germany in the 1870s and 1880s soon brought a Lutheran pastor.

James and Mary Ready, and William (Billy) Coakley, were among the first Catholics, followed over the next decades by many Catholics from Ireland and Scotland. Led by Thomas Fitzgerald, Catholic colonists petitioned Bishop Quinn in Brisbane for a church and priest. Father Thomas A. Lonergan arrived in 1865, his parish extending as far as Clermont. He was replaced in 1869 by Father Pierre-Marie Bucas, already mentioned in Chapter 6 in relation to his work with First Nations People in the district. When Bucas arrived, he set up two schools, one in North Street which was housed in the first church, built in 1866, on an area now in the grounds of St Patricks' College, on land donated by Fitzgerald. The second school was at Meadowlands in 1872, a plantation part-owned by Fitzgerald until 1876. Both schools were staffed by the Sisters of St Joseph who had arrived in 1871. Bucas also established an orphanage at what is now Bucasia for Aboriginal and White children, also run by the Sisters of St Joseph, who were replaced by the Sisters of Mercy, until the orphanage was moved to Rockhampton in 1885. Although he was transferred to other posts during the 1880s, Bucas returned and remained Mackay's Catholic priest for decades.



Plate 13.16: Built in 1866, St Patrick's Catholic Church doubled as a school. This photograph is of the students and teachers in *ca.* 1880s.

Source: State Library of Queensland.

The Church of England was not far behind, with a presence onwards from 1867. A public meeting was held to set up a church and appoint a minister for the district based at Mackay, with a parish south to St Lawrence, north to what is now Proserpine, and inland to Nebo. Rev. E. Tanner was appointed. A temporary chapel was built in Mackay in 1868, which collapsed in an 1878 cyclone, replaced by a stone church built in 1880, which collapsed during the 1918 cyclone. The replacement, the present Holy Trinity Church, was completed in 1926.

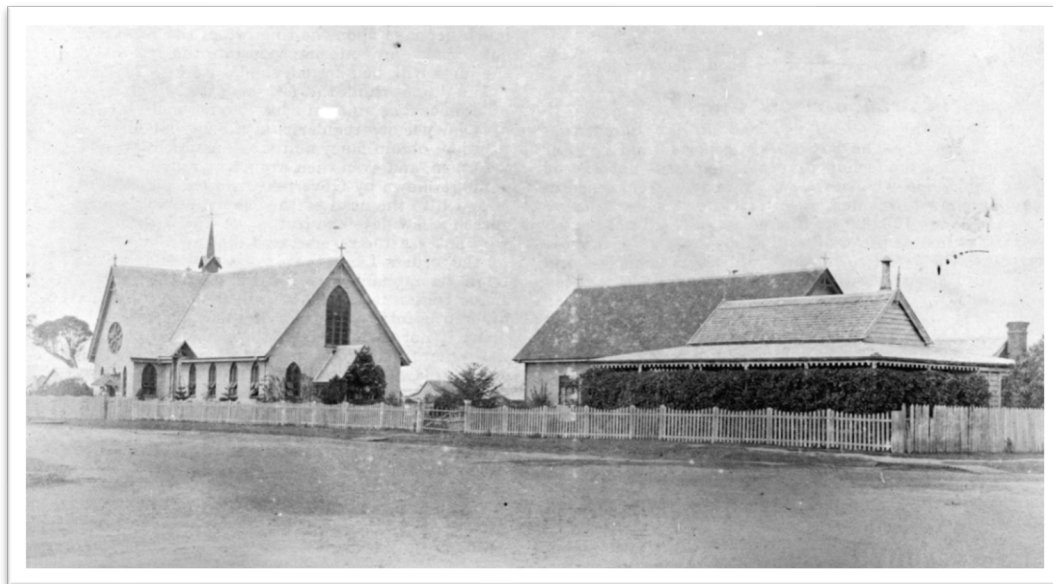


Plate 13.17: Holy Trinity Church of England Church (built in 1880), hall and rectory (built *ca.* 1882).

Source: State Library of Queensland.

Onwards from 1872, visiting Presbyterian ministers looked after the congregation, with services held in Martin's Assembly Room, until Rev. T. Blain was appointed in 1874. He began a Sunday School in a building in a timber yard belonging to a member of the committee, then opened the first church in 1875. Blain left, and for six months there was no minister, until Rev.

Thomas Hume was appointed and remained until 1882. Various ministers followed and in 1897 the foundation stone of St Paul's Church was laid, the new building dedicated in 1898. Is it the oldest surviving church building in Mackay, and the oldest timber church in northern Australia. Many Presbyterians joined the Uniting Church when it was founded in 1977, although there is still a separate Presbyterian congregation at Mackay.

The next denominational presence was the Lutherans, begun in 1871, when Pastor J. Haussmann arrived to run services at Mackay, staying until 1883. The first Lutheran church was built in 1879. The other denominations did not have churches or ministers until the twentieth century.



Plate 13.18: St Paul's Presbyterian Church, Mackay. The foundation stone was laid in 1897, with the church dedicated in 1898.

Source: Clive Moore Collection, 1979.

State Schools

As Mackay's population increased, the need for a government School became obvious. In 1871, the Department of Public Instruction sent Joseph R. Norris, born in Sydney in 1849, to open a school—the youngest head teacher in the colony. He had joined the teaching service in 1864 as a pupil teacher (an apprenticeship system). The first Mackay School was housed in unpretentious structures on the outskirts of town, in the grounds of what is now Mackay Central School. Norris enrolled 41 students, both girls and boys. In the second week there were 78 students, and 120 by the time of the Christmas holidays. Norris added two pupil teachers, James Wareham, and William Kemp, and gained a trained assistant, William H. Hodges, later town

clerk, mayor, and a newspaper proprietor. When the enrolment reached 650, the boys and girls were separated. Miss Large arrived from Brisbane to take charge of the Girls' State School, built in 1885, while the boys remained in the old school, until the premises were overflowing, and a new school was erected.

Aside from the teacher-apprenticeship training method, there were other peculiarities in the early government education system. When communities proposed new schools, they were designated as one-teacher Provisional Schools, where the community supplied the premises and the Government paid the wages of the teacher, who was billeted locally. In this way education was established throughout small rural communities.



Plate 13.19: Mackay State School ca. 1873.

Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 13.20: The students at Mackay State School in about 1880. In 1893, the school was expanded using the timber and iron from the defunct Kanaka Hospital next to the Mackay District Hospital.

Source: State Library of Queensland.



13.21: Nindaroo State School. Nindaroo mill is in the background.
Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 13.22: Finch Hatton State School, about 1900s.
Source: State Library of Queensland.

There was also a private school onwards from the 1870s. This was taken over by George Perkins, a graduate of the University of Oxford, who arrived in Brisbane in 1881 and four years later moved to Mackay. He reoriented the curriculum to the English system, and was also a musician, conducting a small local orchestra, as well as teaching singing to private students.

The Substantial Town of the 1870s

Mackay in the 1870s was not a prepossessing town. The most charitable word to describe the central buildings would be utilitarian. However, the shanty village of the 1860s had given way to a large town, although built mainly from sawn timber, with galvanized ripple iron roofs. The roads were unpaved and rutted from wagon wheels. There were only minimal gutters, bridged with planks, leaving everything muddy, which played havoc with the bottoms of the women's long dresses. The river continually eroded away the riverbank allotments. Most of the shops and houses were still clustered around the central streets close to the river: North, Sydney, and Victoria. There were around 15 hotels of varying quality, on every town street corner and in between, supplying refreshments and accommodation.

In the mid-1870s, there was the beginning of a prosperous merchant class, many of whom clustered their villas close to The Lagoons in Nebo Road. They had what we would today call 'acreage' on which they built substantial homes, creating splendid gardens, as well as stables and often croquette and tennis courts. In 1899, sub-artesian reserves at The Lagoons began to be used to create reticulated water for the town.

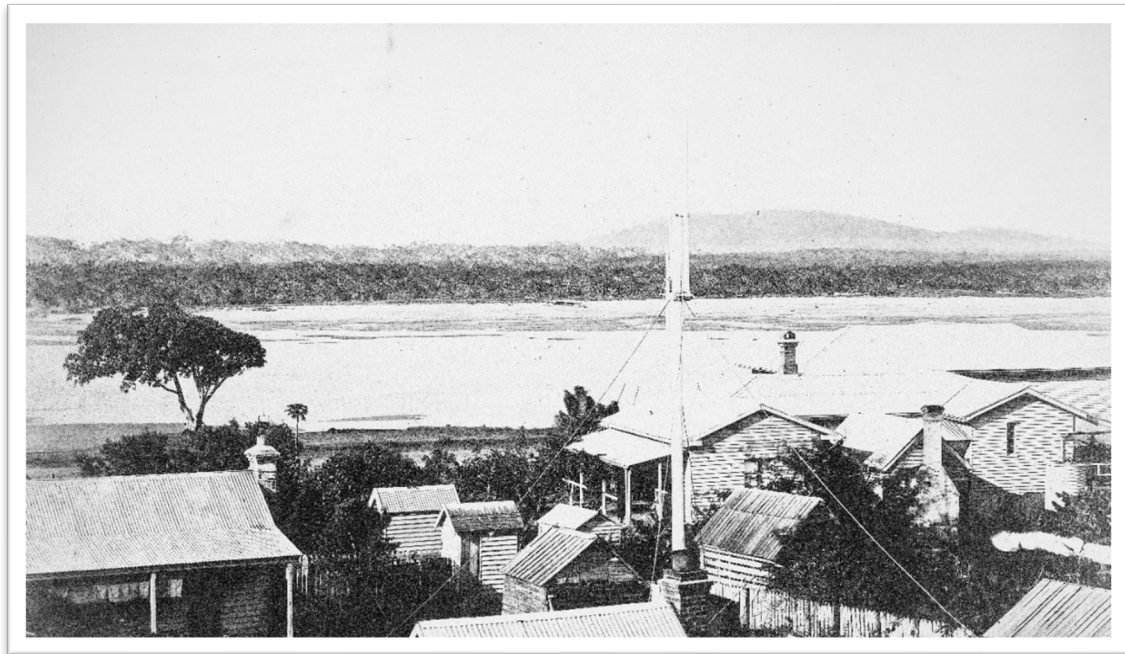


Plate 13.23: A navigation beacon for shipping is obvious in this early 1870s photograph. The chimneys are made from brick, probably brought to Mackay as ballast on ships, and the roofs were galvanized ripple iron. The backyard toilets are also obvious.

Source: State Library of Queensland.

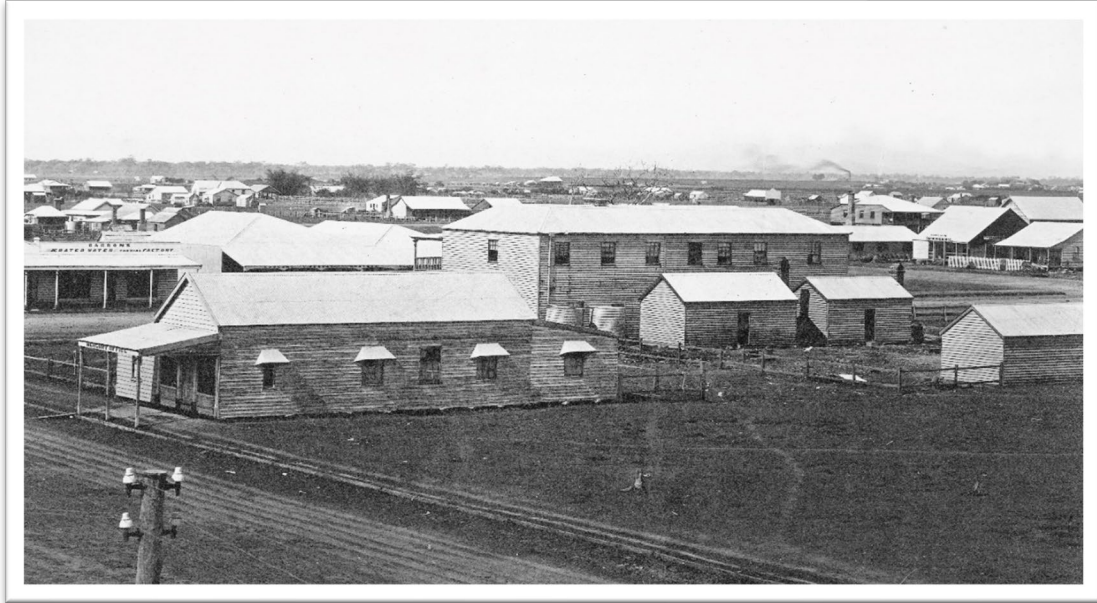


Plate 13.24: This is an 1870s view to the west, as smoke from one of the mill chimneys can be seen; it may be Meadowlands (begun in 1870) or Balmoral (begun in 1873). The office of the *Mackay Mercury and South Kennedy Advertiser* is in the foreground. Barron's aerated water and cordial factory is on the middle left. The Criterion boarding house is on the top far right. Most of the houses are cottages built on one level, although there is a raised house behind the boarding house, an early example of what became a typical 'Queenslander' style, with a front verandah. Electric telegraph wires are on a post at the left front, providing morse code telegraph communication with Brisbane and other Queensland towns, transmitted as electrical impulses.

Source: State Library of Queensland.

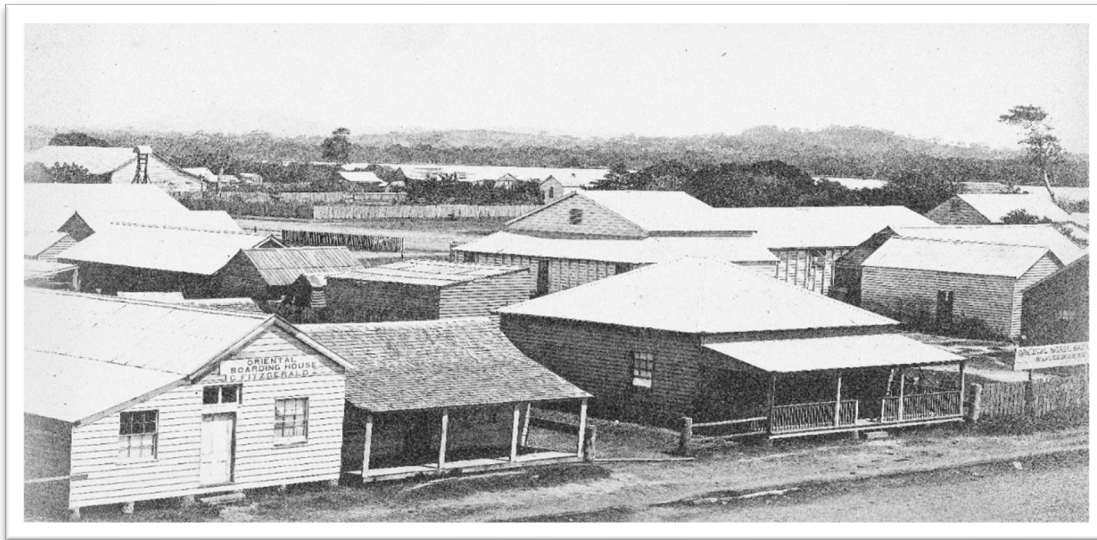


Plate 13.25: This photograph shows the beginning of what became Chinatown. The buildings were crowded together, and some are typical of small cottages from the early settlement. G. Fitzgerald's Oriental boarding house and horse bazar are in the front, which was in the river end of either Macalister or Nelson streets (Map 13.7). One roof is made from shingles, although the others are all galvanized ripple iron. St Joseph's Catholic church and its bell tower in North Street in the grounds of present-day St Joseph's College can be seen in the top left. The photograph is from the late 1870s.

Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 13.26: This is the Oriental Hotel, the adjoining building to Fitzgerald's boarding house and horse bazar on the corner of North Street and either Macalister or Nelson streets. The name 'Oriental' began to be used in 1877, which would date the photograph as late 1870s.

Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 13.27: Wills Hotel on the northeast corner of Sydney and Victoria streets is in the foreground, previously known as the Royal, the Standard, and Mrs Cooks Royal Hotel. It is on the site of the first building in Mackay, erected by Andrew Henderson in September 1862. Thomas Read owned the hotel in 1864–65, after which it transferred to Jane and James Cook. They sold it to Korah Halcomb Wills in 1870, who used his surname as the hotel's name. Jane Cook moved a few doors down Sydney Street towards the river and built another Royal Hotel; its upper crossed railings can be seen in this photograph. Wills sold out in 1882, although his name remained on the hotel. P. Michaelis's store is next door, then J. Duffy's bakery and grocery. The photograph is from the 1870s.

Source: State Library of Queensland; and Hotels of Mackay L to Z, www.Mackaythistory.org.



Plate 13.28: Wills Hotel on the corner of Sydney and Victoria streets in the 1870s. George Dimmock's saddler's shop is on the right, with P. Michaelis's store, and J. Duffy's bakery and grocery on the left.
Source: State Library of Queensland.



Plate 13.29: Jane Cook's Royal Hotel in Sydney Street in the 1870s.
Source: Clive Moore Collection.



Plate 13.30: Enlarged from Plate 13.29. This is the adjoining building to Jane Cook's Royal Hotel in Sydney Street, 1870s.

Source: Clive Moore Collection.



Plate 13.31: Enlarged from Plate 13.29. This shop is further down Sydney Street from the Royal Hotel.

Source: Clive Moore Collection.



Plate 13.32: The Mackay Post Office and residence were designed by the Government Architect Francis D.G. Stanley in 1874, although construction was delayed, and the buildings did not open until 1877. The buildings were on the same site as the new Post Office which was built in 1883–84 (Plate 14.20–22). The original buildings were moved next door to be used as the Customs House.

Source: State Library of Queensland.

Mackay was growing fast by the end of the 1870s, with the sugar industry heading into its boom years. Substantial wooden buildings were constructed, although since then several cyclones have ensured that none of the early structures have survived. By the 1880s, the decade which begins Chapter 14, several substantial brick and concrete rendered buildings had been constructed to house government facilities like the Post Office and the Court House, and the AJS Bank, all of which have survived until today.

Bibliography

The bibliographies for all chapters are in a separate file.