

Cairns Chamber of Commerce 100 Years of History

Pre 1909 – setting the scene

The decision to create a remote community on the banks of untamed Trinity Bay, and the arrival of several hundred intrepid settlers in **1876**, were the genesis of the City of Cairns.

Facing these pioneering men, women and children as they sailed into sight of land - on board the Leichhardt, Victoria and Porpoise – was an overwhelming contradiction of dense mangrove swamps, mudflats and sand dunes set against a spectacular blue-green mountain backdrop. Before them were timber shanties, tents, and make-shift jetties niched into small clearings around the water's edge.

Watching from a distance were members of the local indigenous clans who had occupied this land for over 50,000 years. These clans – Yiranydji and Yidinji – settled into a defensive and uneasy existence with the new arrivals. Government hydrographic and survey vessels and fishermen anchored in Trinity Inlet during the decade or two before the Far North's gold rush began.

Hardy prospectors chasing gold on the Palmer River had begun arriving in 1873. Primitive infrastructure was erected on the foreshore to service the promising goldfields to the wild north, and newly discovered tin deposits around Herberton and Irvinebank in the largely unexplored hinterland. James Venture Mulligan's announcement in Cooktown in early 1876 that alluvial gold had been discovered, led to a rush of nearly 3000 miners to Hodgkinson goldfield. His accurate warning that the find would not pay out went unheeded by miners and the government of the day, all in the grip of gold fever. However, the decision was made and establishing a port at Trinity Inlet went ahead.

Cardwell based senior police magistrate, Brinsley Sheridan, was commissioned to choose the site for the new settlement, which took its name from Queensland's Governor in 1875, William Wellington Cairns, who had a brief term in office and never visited the area.

Some settlers moved to the Smithfield valley and created a thriving settlement which did not survive a devastating flood some years later. Others moved further north to bustling Island Point – later to be renamed Port Douglas – to be closer to the goldfields.

In **1877** the fledgling Cairns hospital fund was established, and steps were taken to provide primary school education in a small building along The Esplanade, close to the present site of the Chamber's office.

Meanwhile, adventurer Christie Palmerston had pushed a track through the mountain rainforest and down to Island Point, which had established itself as a rival township to Cairns because of its accessibility via "The Bump" to the goldfields.

Legendary Cobb and Co mail and passenger coach services began operating between Port Douglas and Herberton. The first land sales were held in Cairns, and the following year a hospital opened on The Esplanade.

The death of Chinese workers at Maytown in **1878** during a clash with miners shocked the community. Chinese market gardeners and successful traders represented a significant proportion of the Cairns population, which grew to more than 20 per cent by turn of the century.

There was keen competition for advertising and readership amongst the area's early newspapers - The Advertiser, Smithfield Observer, The Chronicle, The Cairns Morning Post, The Telegraph, The Argus, and in 1909 The Cairns Post. Henry Abbott became the town's first land commissioner and surveyor, and Norman McLeod its first post master.

In what was the first step toward local governance for the city, the Cairns Divisional Board was established in **1879**, and was to serve through to 1902.

The first seafood industry, commercial harvesting of the lucrative beche-de-mer that began some decades before settlement, was based initially on Green Island. Demand, mainly by the Chinese population, gradually declined after World War 2. William Jack and John Newell discovered the Great Northern tin lode on the Wild River in **1880**, and three years later established one of the most enduring general merchant and supply partnerships in the north.

Sugarcane was introduced into Queensland around 1860. The first commercial cane in the Far North was planted 20 years later by the Fitzgerald family near Innisfail, with a small plant opening one year later. The Hambleton Mill at Edmonton came on line in **1883**, two years after businessman Thomas Swallow, planted his first crop. The mill served cane farmers in the district for 108 years. The Alley and Gordon families pioneered the industry in Mulgrave Valley and the Mulgrave Mill at Gordonvale began crushing in 1896, the same year the Mossman plant opened. The Babinda and South Johnstone mills began crushing in 1915 and 1916 respectively. Chamber stalwarts

Richard Kingsford and Alexander Draper were major players in the early development of the sugar industry. At national level, a Royal Commission into the “questionable and inhumane practices” of recruiting South Sea Islanders into the industry condemned it as slave labour. The newest mill at Springmount near Mareeba, owned by CSR, began crushing in 1998, and cane now flourishes where tobacco once dominated.

Another early settler, Daniel (Dan) Patience, was to show the entrepreneurial flair which has been the hallmark of Cairns business enterprise, and to make his mark on the commercial development of Cairns. A highly respected citizen, he was appointed by the newly formed Burns Philp Trading Company as its manager in 1883. He had an eye for the main chance, and dabbled in a series of ventures, including partnership in butchery.

Several of the town’s businessmen, aware that rice was being imported from Asia, invested in a local industry which at its peak included three mills on the Barron River and Freshwater Creek. The venture failed because it was not competitive with the imported product.

A young and eager solicitor named Alexander Milford, set up a law practice in **1884**, and his firm went on to become known as MacDonnells, which today remains one of the State’s leading legal entities.

From earliest times there was cooperation and much interaction between the progress association, the divisional board and the council. These organisations dealt with the highest levels of government of the day in their desire to improve the lot of Cairns and its citizenry. One of the major victories for this collective was a start on planning the route for the Cairns to Kuranda railway when the State Government accepted engineering opinion that the Barron Gorge route was the best option.

Outspoken and hard headed businessman, Richard Kingsford, became the inaugural mayor of Cairns Municipal Council in **1885**, when it replaced the Cairns Divisional Board. Kingsford, grandfather of famous aviator Sir Charles Kingsford-Smith, served with Mr Patience and a small band of civic leaders on the town’s progress association, which was the forerunner of the Cairns Chamber of Commerce.

Moves to form a Chamber flowed from a public meeting at the Hides and McCall Hotel on **May 6, 1886**, but it was to be 23 years before a constitution was adopted. Among urgent items on the agenda were:

- dredging a deep channel access into Trinity Inlet to allow bigger cargo vessels to navigate the new port
- the impact of Chinese immigration
- extension of much needed telegraph services in the area

With Dan Patience as its head, and holding the dual role of town alderman, the Chamber experienced tumultuous times. He married Sarah Ann Chard, and had an active civic life during which he served on the Justice roster of the Police Court, was elected Auditor of the Municipal Council, was President of the School of Arts, and Mayor for a one-year term following election in 1893.

In **1888** Richard Kingsford stood for the new Cairns seat in the Legislative Assembly, but was defeated after a bitter fight by Frederick Wimble, newspaper proprietor/editor, and owner of the world famous Wimble's Ink company. Kingsford bought the Hambleton sugar plantation in 1890 from Thomas Swallow, and leased it back to Swallow's sons. The vast plantation eventually was acquired by the Colonial Sugar Refining.

After five years of construction, the massive Cairns to Kuranda rail undertaking was completed in **1891**. With successful tender and engineer John Robb in charge, the line covered 75 km, included 15 tunnels and numerous bridges, employed 1500 workers, and cost the lives of 23 people. Seven workers were killed in one day in 1889 when a tunnel collapsed. Rail provided a vital link with the hinterland and allowed for exploitation of copper deposits which were discovered at Chillagoe in 1888. The rail line, considered the nation's most challenging engineering project, was rated by the Chamber as the Far North's most significant infrastructure, and an economic driver which would bring prosperity and development to the region. Despite lobbying, the line did not reach Herberton for at least another 10 years, by which time the once thriving tin mining town was in steep decline.

Mareeba flourished when the rail arrived in **1893**, initially as a major beef producing region. The district's timber industry began to boom, producing supplies for mines, industry and housing. The logs from many virgin rainforest species, including highly prized red cedar, were cut by hand and floated down local river systems to Cairns to be loaded onto ships.

Cairns was not immune from effects of a world recession, which temporarily closed the National Bank of Queensland. It resulted in strong competition between five rival

merchant traders - Michael Boland, Burns Philp, G.R. Mayers, Co-operative Cash Stores and the Cairns Co-operative Store Co.

The same year the Mt Leyshon goldmine opened, and was to remain in production for the next 116 years, delivering more than 3 million ounces. During the 1880's gold was discovered at the Kidston mine near Georgetown, and had a chequered history which ended in 2001, after 3.4 million ounces of gold had been extracted.

The new Queensland Labour Party contested its first election in 1893. Big burly Irish newspaperman and former sugar worker, Thomas Givens, nominated for Cairns, but J.J. Barnes won the seat. However, Givens was successful in 1898 and held it for several years. He was not finished with politics, and moved into the federal sphere by winning a State Senate seat in 1903. He served as President of the Senate from 1913 to 1926, and carried considerable political clout which helped promote the cause of the Far North, and his influence extended to the highest offices in the land.

The Gas Supply Company of Cairns was established in 1893, and went on to become one of the most successful in the state, shipping coal to Cairns from Newcastle, NSW, for gas generation. Queensland standardised its time at 10 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time to establish Eastern Standard Time in **1895**. Cairns Cooperative Weekly Penny Savings Bank initially set up as a locally owned children's savings bank, opened for business in **1899**, and is still going strong. One of the worst tropical storms in recorded history slammed into the coast above Cooktown, killing many and devastating isolated costal settlements.

Dr Edward Koch was a pioneer of tropical medicine and director of the Cairns Base Hospital at the turn of the century. He is best remembered for his leading edge research into malaria, and established the link between the disease and its vector, the mosquito. He encouraged local authorities and business leaders to clear and fill swampland to destroy breeding grounds and enhance quality of life.

Sikhs from India were among immigrants from varied ethnic backgrounds who began to arrive at the turn of the century. Many new settlers went on to become farmers, and contributed greatly to the cultural diversity of the local population.

The Chamber was advocating the urgent need of a town planning scheme for a rapidly developing municipality to avoid a hotchpotch conflict of land uses in a major centre servicing what was fast becoming a prosperous region. At a national level, the Commonwealth of Australia was proclaimed at a gala ceremony in Sydney in **1901**,

followed the next year by the establishment of the civil service. Cairns Shire Council was established in **1902**, and became Mulgrave Shire Council in 1940.

In **1903**, Cairns was proclaimed a town, and one year later got its first ambulance service. In a major boost for the Cairns waterfront and shipping, the Cairns Harbour Board was gazette in **1905**, many years later to become the Cairns Port Authority. A Greek migrant named George Cominos arrived in Cairns in **1906**, and after a period working on inland mine sites, opened a business. He had come to Australia as a penniless 16-year-old, and by 1926, with his wife, Bylio, set up G.E. Cominos Pty Ltd, and the once famous Cominos Café thrived in Abbott Street, opposite The Cairns Post building, for the next 26 years.

Prior to 1909, the unconstituted Chamber experienced several mercurial years, and amongst its other notable chairs were French born architect and builder, Louis Severin, Callaghan Walsh (Mayor in 1889 and president in 1898), William Alexander Carpenter, James Lyons (Mayor, 1895) and Richard Tills (Mayor 1900, 1901, and 1907).

1909-1918

The year **1909** marked the adoption of the Chamber's constitution. The nation's population climbed to 4.3 million, Queensland University was established, and the old age pension was introduced by the Commonwealth Government.

Manager of the local branch of the Queensland National Bank, **James Alison**, accepted nomination as the inaugural Chamber president. Monthly meetings were introduced, and an immediate drive to recruit new members began. Land issues, potential trade with Papua New Guinea, the need for better courthouse services, fishing, timber and sugar industry problems were addressed by the chamber during its first official year. During his two-year term in office, the Chamber also welcomed the establishment of the first butter factory on the Tablelands at Atherton.

The Commonwealth imposed its first direct federal tax in **1910** by way of land duties on all estates with an unimproved value of more than 5000 pounds - an unpopular tax which was kept in place until abandoned in 1952.

Leading wine and spirit merchant, **Patrick John Doyle** took over the Chamber's reins in **1911**, the same year Australia received its first bronze coins, and Dame Nelly Melba launched a national tour. The grand Jack and Newell building opened in Wharf St to be occupied by Fearnley and Co Ltd. Following years of frustration, the Barron River was

forged by its first low lying timber bridge at Kamerunga, opening up better trade routes to the north.

Mr Doyle, whose company P.J. Doyle and Sons later expanded operations into Papua New Guinea, officiated during a year which saw the copper trunk telephone line pushed through from Cairns to Atherton, thus considerably improving regional communications. He reflected in his report at the end of the year on devastating flood damage caused to the Kuranda rail line, which left it out of operation for some considerable time. The Chamber agitated for quick repairs and also the introduction of pack horse teams to “keep the wheels of industry turning.”

Thomas Henry Donaldson, general manager of major general trading company, Samuel Allen and Sons, became president in **1912**, and was one of the distinguished Chamber heads to later become Mayor. The Cairns Shire Council building opened on The Esplanade. The commercial focus of the town had started to shift beyond Abbott Street. At long last the entrance of Trinity Bay had been deepened, and the channel made it possible for larger cargo vessels to tie up at the wharves, instead of anchoring off the heads and ferrying cargo to shore.

The city got its first taste of a new entertainment phenomenon with the opening of the Lyric Theatre in Spence Street, which screened “the very latest in motion picture art”. It closed soon after, to reopen as Royal Pictures, and later as the Palace Theatre.

In what was the start of a shift of business away from Abbott Street, Irish born entrepreneur Michael Boland opened the grand three-storey Boland Centre in **1913**, in time for Christmas shopping, at the corner of Lake and Spence Streets. The emporium, constructed entirely of reinforced concrete, had a flat roof that was waterproofed with bitumen. During World War I, musicians used it as a stage for patriotic performances. And in World War 2, part of the store was occupied by the United States Navy. In 1963 the business was sold to Sydney based David Jones Ltd, which relocated its CBD department store to Earville Shopping Centre in 1984.

Adopting a regional advocacy role for business and commerce, the Chamber applauded the State Government for signing off on a plan to push the railway line through from Dimbulah to Mt Mulligan colliery. The same year, the Commonwealth Bank opened its doors for business. Mr Donaldson commented that significant increases in shipments of sugar and timber were recorded through Cairns port, together with bananas and maize from the expanding Tablelands agricultural region.

Influential William McCormack became the longest serving local politician when elected as Member for Cairns, and served through to 1930 - along the way becoming State Labour Premier and Treasurer, and promoting the best interests of Cairns at every opportunity.

One year before the “war to end all wars”, leading businessman and former long serving Mayor, **Alexander (A.J.) Draper**, assumed the mantle of president. His considerable influence over the city and the future of the executive of the Chamber was to extend over many prosperous years.

During February of Mr Draper’s first term, Cairns and Innisfail suffered the worst flooding since settlement in the aftermath of a severe cyclone which damaged several properties at Cooktown. Accommodation was hard to come by and there were protests among seasonal cane workers about high rentals being charged, which was an issue addressed by the Chamber.

As vice president of the Australian Sugar Industry Producers Association, Mr Draper went on to become the town’s most influential individual, enjoying considerable political influence, and with business interests extending from cane farming, newspapers, agriculture, furniture manufacturing, mining and auctioneering.

The Cairns Harbour Board made the significant purchase of a permanent dredge, the SS Trinity Bay, to be stationed in port and carry out regular works to keep the channel clear of silt and debris.

Mr Donaldson returned to the chair in **1914** and the most significant commercial issue was the opening of the first dairy cooperative at Atherton. “The development of the Tableland scrub country, known broadly as the Atherton Tableland, is making itself felt,” he said, referring to the significance of this rich agricultural area.

Everything was overshadowed in August by the declaration of World War One, including introduction of compulsory voting in Queensland, and the basic wage rising to just over two pounds per week.

Mr Donaldson’s second term saw the rail line opened between Mount Mulligan mine site and Chillagoe, the surveying completed for the Mount Molloy township, and the vote made compulsory in Queensland.

Cairns was put on a war footing, and for the next four years remained so, but the wheels of industry kept turning. **Mr S.H. Warner** was elected president in **1915**, the same year 376 metres of new wharf space and storage sheds were constructed by the Cairns

Harbour Board to cope with an increasingly busy seaport. He was later elected a long-serving chairman of Cairns Shire Council (1919-1929), the precursor to Mulgrave Shire Council. He was also inaugural president of the Cairns Harbour Board when gazetted by the State Government in 1905.

Work began on extending the region's rail network between Cairns and Innisfail, and the Kuranda railway station was opened. At a State level, unpopular land tax was introduced. He referred to a severe drought gripping the region, which impacted on all crops and decreased exports through the port, setting back the development of the Tablelands and grazing country further inland, but he believed in the "resilience and recuperative powers of the district", and its ability to bounce back from adversity.

Former English Army sergeant, Percy Pease, was a major player in the political arena, but first made his mark in business as manager of Cairns Morning Post, and was also in partnership with his brother, Joseph as a general merchant. After serving on the Cairns Harbour Board in 1915-20, and as a Cairns city alderman in 1916, Pease narrowly won the North Queensland seat of Herbert in the Legislative Assembly in 1920, and held it till 1940, also at one stage becoming Deputy Premier, but always calling Cairns home.

Between **1916** and 1920, **Mr R.T. McManus**, the region's leading shipping and forwarding agent, was president. He noted "chaos in the sugar industry" caused by serious and protracted industrial issues. The effects were being felt for the first time of cheap imported sugar, bringing about inequities unknown in any other industry.

High school education came to Cairns in **1917**, largely through constant lobbying by the Chamber and the city council, when Cairns State High School was opened. At first it was an extension of Cairns Central State School, which dated back to 1878, and closed in 1994 when the site was sold by the Goss Labour Government. Both schools were located on the site now occupied by the Oasis Resort. The high school moved to its present site in 1923, and also accommodated the city's first technical college. In the early 1980s, TAFE moved into purpose built facilities in Manunda.

The Chamber took up the case of "Diggers" being repatriated from the European theatres of war by agitation for an injured veterans ward at the Cairns hospital, and also supporting soldier's rights in general. The State Government acquired the rail line in **1918** between Mt Molloy and Chillagoe as part of a controversial deal which included the Chillagoe smelters and the Einsleigh mine. At the peak of production, these smelters extracted massive tonnages of copper, lead, silver and gold.

The Chamber pressured for a new wireless station in Cairns, as well as making high level representation for a meteorological station on remote Willis Island about 400 km off the Far Northern Coast as a first line of defence against the threat of cyclones forming in the Coral Sea; pushed for shipping beacons along the east coast; raised the issue of railway rolling stock shortages which was threatening trade; saw the installation of additional telephone facilities between Cairns and the Tableland; supported the upgrade of railway station and goods sheds, and raised with the Federal Government some serious anomalies imposed upon regional Queenslanders by unfair Federal income tax regulations.

Its members also agitated for the introduction of compulsory education for all school age children. And at 6 pm on November 11, news arrived announcing the Armistice reached between the Allies and Germans ending the “Great War”, which claimed 59,342 Australian lives and left 331,781 injured.

1919- 1928

In **1919**, Mr McManus was still the Chamber’s head as all shipping in and out of Cairns came to a standstill for three months, when seamen took national strike action. The economic future of Cooktown seemed grim when a fire swept through the business district destroying most of the major buildings.

Expanding facilities catering for an increasing number of tourists visiting the Far North was high on the agenda, as was addressing what the city perceived was a general apathy being shown the region by the southeast corner of the state. A severe tropical storm on March 10, demolishing most of Innisfail and Babinda, caused severe damage in Cairns, Ingham and Cardwell, and claiming 17 lives.

McManus’s final year in office saw the State Government re-open the Mungana mine under State control. It was also around the beginning of the 1920s when Mr Reg Fogarty, later to become Chamber president and a Knight of the realm, created Northern Australian Breweries Ltd, and opened the town’s first brewery south of the rail line at Portsmouth. The Cairns brewer produced one of the State’s most enduring brews - NQ Lager - and his trademark Cairns Bitter Ale, later to become known as Cairns Draught.

In a move that revolutionised national and international air travel, the Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Services Ltd (QANTAS) was formed by Hudson Fysh, P.J. McGinness and Fergus McMaster, in November, **1920**.

The Chamber elected the district manager of Cummins and Campbell Pty Ltd, **Mr H.J. James**, as president in **1921**. The giant merchant company became quite famous across the state through the firm's house journal, "Cummins & Campbell's Monthly Magazine", which at one stage contained more stories about North Queensland than any other publication. Foreign timber imports were posing a serious threat to the viability of the local industry and the fight was taken to higher levels of government. When news arrived that Rockhampton and Mackay had been linked by rail, the pressure was turned up for better rail links south of the city.

In September, one of the nation's worst mining tragedies occurred when 75 coal miners were killed in an explosion at the Mt Mulligan mine. At a national level, legislation was passed to set up the Tariff Board and through it increased tariff duties, which were to have a significant impact on local industry. Experienced nurse Ms Janet Herries, established the city's first private hospital in a one-year-old building in McLeod St, and the district's sugarcane industry was revolutionised with the introduction of the mechanical harvester.

In **1922**, Mr James was re-elected for a further term, and the Chamber became affiliated with the national body. On a political front, Chinese nationalists formed a branch in the city, to support their homeland's fight against Communism.

The following year (**1923**), Cairns was proclaimed a city, and the municipal council became Cairns City Council. Alexander Draper again stamped his mark on the Chamber by being elected as its president. Francis Ireland created Ireland Motors under modest circumstances, and the Mellick family also began to trade, and both companies continue to operate successfully. Mr Draper reflected on major changes in the sugar industry, which saw the Federal Government flag the introduction of fixed pricing, and the Chamber worked hard to stabilise primary industry faced with threats from foreign imports. Mining was experiencing a severe downturn, but highlights were the opening of the Bacon Factory at Mareeba, and the Tableland continued to expand as a district food bowl.

For the next two years (**1924-25**), **Mr David. W. Olley**, manager of Samuel Allen and Sons, headed the Chamber, and during his first term, voting in federal elections became compulsory. Mr Olley was a keen supporter of lawn bowls and racing, and held positions on the executive of both clubs. The most significant milestone was completion of the gaps in the Queensland coastal rail network which provided an unbroken link between Brisbane and Cairns.

Construction of mechanised sugar loading transformed the Cairns waterfront, and that season handled a bumper crop's output of more than 60,000 tons. The Babinda and Mulgrave mills were now being run as cooperatives by growers, and also flowing through the busy port were large quantities of maize, timber, meat, silver, lead, gold, frozen produce, and general cargo. There was a welcome boost in communications between Cairns, Innisfail and the Tableland facilitated through a new copper wire network. And the fledgling tourism industry was given a fillip when the State Director for Tourism visited and met with chamber members to assist in establishing a local promotions branch.

There were signs that a local banana industry was viable when annual production increased, but the following year (**1925**) Mr Olley reported on an economically damaging three-month water front strike which brought the port to a standstill. By now sugar was being overproduced, and impacting on the entire industry's future prospects. There was good news, however, that the town was to get a new railway station, and permanent electric power was reticulated for the first time.

Also on the radar was the possibility of harnessing the Barron River for power supply, and on the Cairns Esplanade the cenotaph was erected in memory of the ANZACS, who served in all theatres of the Great War. "The Chamber was disappointed there was no announcement on a new post office for our town," Mr Olley said, of the State's decision to review this project.

There was deep commitment in helping host the city's 50th jubilee celebrations in **1926**; the difficult job of building the Gillies Highway was completed with the roadway opened for the first time to traffic. Manning's meat pies first came out of the ovens, and Queerah meat works slaughtering yards opened south of the town, and eight years later it was employing 800 workers.

Hambledon cane farmer, **Mr G.A (Charles) Campbell**, was elected president, and the chamber slated the Federal Government over failure to increase import tariffs, an action which allowed imports from Asia and South America to severely impact on the local timber industry. There were more than 30,000 acres under cane in the sugar belt.

Mr Draper's return to the post for a third time the following year (**1927**) was ushered in by a cyclone which severely damaged that season's sugar crop, but left the townships unscathed. However, he did say: "It is pleasing that the Federal Government has seen fit to renew the sugar embargo for a further three years." The Chamber worked with the State Government on a feasibility study for the proposed Barron River hydro electric

scheme, which also resulted in Mt Isa Mines being invited to consider establishing a refinery in Cairns

A rail motor to serve Cairns and Innisfail was on the agenda, as was a proposal to build a road between Cairns and Port Douglas, and to identify the best route for a road between Cairns and Innisfail. Mt Mulligan mine closed and a sugar mine strike at South Johnstone resulted in one picketer being shot dead.

The city sadly marked the passing in **1928** of Mr Draper, the Chamber's highly respected president, who was also Mayor at the time – an office he had filled periodically for 10 years. He left an estate valued at more than 50,000 pounds, which was a considerable fortune at that time, and was fondly regarded as one of the city's true founding fathers.

The senior partner of the region's leading legal firm, **Mr H.K.N. MacDonnell**, then became president serving for two straight terms. Lebanese immigrants, the Deeb family, opened a drapery business the same year. The year 1928 also saw the State Government commit to call tenders for the Barron hydro scheme, and tourism received a boost when the Hayles family began fortnightly ferry services to Green Island.

Over the next two years energies were devoted to promoting consumption of Australian-made products; there was support for a plan to form a Tableland based promotions association, and a successful campaign saw improved navigation lighting on Fitzroy Island. Aviation took to its first tentative wings when pioneer flyer, Tom McDonald, started taking off in his Gypsy Moth from sandbars off the Cairns foreshore at low tide. Some signs of revival of the mining sector - the lifeblood of the region's economy up to the turn of the century – were seen in the opening of the Chillagoe smelters.

The long awaited road to Mossman was still some way off, and a bush track was advocated just to see the road link opened. Not for the first time, the Chamber joined forces with the council to fight a proposal to shut down the railway workshop in Cairns. Work was well advanced on an automatic telephone exchange, and aerial transport progressed with the launch of the Woodward Aviation Company.

1929-1938

Dark clouds of world-wide depression were looming in **1929**, and Mr MacDonnell soberly and prophetically reported: *“Any man who has any sense of civic responsibility cannot view with equanimity the very serious financial outlook facing Australia at present day, and it is obvious to all that in the present year there will be great financial*

stringency throughout the length and breadth of this land bringing in its train poverty and unemployment.”

Mr Olley returned to the presidency in **1930**, the same year the first Rotary club was formed in the city. World famous underwater explorers and adventurers, Noel and Kitty Monkman, arrived to set up home on Green Island, and their movies and documentaries inspired generations of filmmakers, divers, and marine biologists. Both were professional musicians, and they pioneered scuba diving and snorkeling on the Great Barrier Reef, focusing world attention on the region’s outstanding natural attractions.

Sales tax was imposed on business for the first time by the Federal Government, and the State Government paid a “dole” to the deserving needy, and also issued free rations. Coastal steamers, such as the MV Manoora and Manunda, were staying in port for up to four days so that visitors, who could afford to travel, got a far better experience of the “tropics”. Phar Lap won the Melbourne Cup, which was first run in 1861.

Around the Mareeba district, tobacco allocations were made under a government process to select growers, and the industry seemed to present “unlimited scope” in terms of value adding to the regional economy. Agitation for establishment of an airport in Cairns began in earnest, and the Barron Hydro Electricity Board was activated. The town received a further boost in such economically uncertain times when the first subscribers were signed up to a new town telephone network.

New president, **Norman Edgar Percy Draper** took office in **1931**, and was to serve an initial three terms. As a member of one of the district leading families, he was already well established as a businessmen and chairman of The Cairns Post, Northern Australian Breweries, A.J. Draper Pty Ltd and P.J. Doyle liquor merchants.

The State Government allocated 100,000 pounds towards the start on the Barron hydro scheme and also called tenders for the work. By now, 700 tobacco farmers were established around Mareeba and Dimbulah, growing leaf across more than 3000 acres. While work progressed on the Cairns to Mossman road, it would be another couple of years before any traffic could move between the two towns. It was a record year for tourism in Cairns, thanks mainly to the efforts of the Chamber in helping promote the region nationally.

Australia’s population passed 6.5 million, and several leading Queensland Government politicians, including Premier Ted Theodore, went before the court to face corruption charges over the Mungana mine sale, but the jury found in favour of the four defendants. The Cairns Show received a new lease on life as the district’s showcase a

public meeting was called in 1931, with a view to holding the first show in 17 years later that year at Parramatta Park. The show had previously been staged near the Cairns racecourse at Cannon Park, and the first was in 1891.

Cairns City Council was commended for acting to support the local tourist industry by building a new wooden jetty on popular Green Island to accommodate Hayles ferries, which previously had to row passengers ashore in dinghies. The “Battle of Parramatta Park” flared up when “squatters”, affected by the Great Depression, set up camp at the Cairns showground, and were evicted by angry locals and civic leaders in an ugly incident.

Another medico who made an outstanding contribution to life in Cairns was Dr Hugo Flecker, who in **1932** went into general practice. He had established a considerable reputation as a botanist and natural historian, specialising in treatment of bites and stings by exotic creatures. During the 1950s he discovered the box jellyfish was the cause of several mysterious deaths off the Northern Beaches. *Chironex fleckeri* was named after him, as were the city’s first botanical gardens and several flora species he helped identify.

Sugar rebounded the same year with a good growing season, but there was an unsuccessful bid to prevent a review of the sugar pricing scheme, which saw poor returns for producers at half a penny per pound. The Government accepted a tender for work to begin on the Barron hydro scheme, and despite harsh economic conditions, the confident Harris Brothers drapery began to trade in the CBD. At long last, Cairns was linked with Innisfail by road.

In **1933**, the resilient Norman Draper continued to head the Chamber, the same year the road between Cairns and Mossman was officially opened to traffic via what was soon to become known as the Cook Highway. The tobacco industry struck difficulties through a lack of proper industry science, leading to the establishment of a tobacco research facility in Mareeba. There was a push for trade shipping links to be re-opened between Cairns and Papua New Guinea, and protest over the introduction of the Sugar Cane Prices Act by the Queensland Government, stating: *"The Chamber does not support any changes to the industry without first consulting with the growers."*

For the next three years (**1934-36**), general manager of the Cairns Timber Company, **George Gummow**, held the reins, and the first season a massive cyclone wreaked havoc between Thursday Island and Townsville, leaving 75 people dead in its wake.

A public campaign gained momentum in Cairns, with private citizens digging into their wallets and purses for donations to help build a local airport. The focus was also on raising all low lying bridges, which became flooded every wet season, isolating the town by road in all directions - sometimes for weeks on end. A road connecting Cairns with the inland town of Hughenden became an issue for the Chamber, and **1935** saw the commissioning of the Barron hydro-electric scheme, which supplied the whole town with electricity. Van Dorssen's tobacconist shop opened in Abbott St, and remains in business to this day under management of former deputy mayor, Lionel Van Dorssen.

"It is pleasing to note the continuous building activity which took place in Cairns during the year, and demonstrates confidence of the business people of the city in their district," Mr Gummow said in the same year that Green island was declared a national park. In a bid by the sugar industry to counter the impact of the cane beetle, cane toads were released into Gordonvale paddocks - which had devastating environmental and economic consequences for no material gain. The cane beetles infested the tops of cane plants and the toads could never reach them.

The next year - **1936** - a new customs house building was nearing completion to add to the number of major government facilities already serving the town, and the Chamber sought to promote the tourism experience in Cairns by encouraging exploitation of more attractions. The city council took further steps to build a local airport by purchasing a large parcel of land to create three unsealed runways, and Hugo Brassey opened Dunk Island resort.

Local commerce was affected when Japan banned imports of various Australian primary products in retaliation for the introduction of a trade diversion policy, while the US also followed suit and withdrew Australia's preferred nation status. Cairns got to hear live broadcasts with signals going out over the airwaves from the first commercial radio station, and the 51st Battalion Far North Queensland Regiment was formed.

Mr Draper returned to the chair in **1937**, and reported meeting attendance had declined to an average of nine. Coming on stream were a new State Government Insurance building, and a new telegraph office "a credit to the respective governments." The Chamber was unsuccessful in its bid to have Cairns declared an airport base for flying boat operations between Australia and Britain, but the town was included on the route for air services between the mainland and Papua New Guinea. A severe cyclone struck the Far North's coastline, creating a tidal surge with widespread localised flooding, and reports of 90 people drowned at sea.

Reginald (Reg) Fogarty, founder of the Cairns brewery, and manager of the National Bank assumed the presidency during troubled times in **1938** leading to outbreak of War World Two the following year, and held the post through to 1941. He told members that every citizen had a national obligation to make a contribution to the war effort, following Germany's invasion of Poland. He led the charge when air mail services were terminated at Townsville instead of Cairns, and only through the Chamber's work was that decision reversed. There were concerns about the lack of defence of the north which was high on people's minds. Nationally, a uniform price for petrol was established, and the headquarters for the federal seat of Kennedy moved from Charters Towers to Cairns.

Mulgrave Shire Council was established as a separate local authority to Cairns City Council, with its headquarters on the Esplanade, in recognition of growth and development in what was once a predominantly rural area.

1939-1948

Mr Fogarty continued to head the Chamber in **1939** when work began on the Kuranda range road; the Far North's abandoned copper fields were again being worked, and a trial power alcohol plant was established in the north.

Produce merchant and former Cairns Show president, **David (Dave) Headrick**, took over in **1942**, through to **1944**. The Chamber was unable to publish many statistics due to wartime censorship rules, and members were also fearful a drift south by many people would impact adversely on business.

Minefields were laid on the Great Barrier Reef, and Australian and US troops began flooding into the region to establish forward bases in Cairns and on the Tablelands. The Australian Navy also set up its first base here. The war effort caused supply shortages, and lack of spare parts started to impact on farm machinery and local industry.

Catalina flying boats began night raids out of Cairns, and the airport runway was sealed to accommodate fighter and bomber aircraft operating into the South Pacific theatres of war. Tea, sugar, butter, meat and clothing were rationed, and significantly for business, the Commonwealth became the collector of income taxes.

Stan E. McKewen, Manager of Cummins and Campbell served for two terms from **1945**, the same year Robert Menzies notified Federal Parliament that his United Australia Party had become the Liberal Party, and the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima

and Nagasaki. The Cairns Regional Electricity Board (CREB) was formed and took over all electricity generation and distribution from the Barron Falls Hydro Electricity Board.

Northern Breweries director, and leading accountant, **Jack Warner**, served two terms starting in **1947**, the year the Commonwealth Arbitration Court granted a 40-hour week, and the city's population climbed past 16,000.

A strike by Queensland railway workers in **1948** forced the State Government to declare a state of emergency. Price control was transferred from Commonwealth to States, and the first Holden came off the assembly line. In what was a major infrastructure boost for the dairy industry, bulk milk containers began operating between the Malanda factory and Cairns depot.

North Queensland Engineers and Agents Pty Ltd (NQEA) was founded by Richard Fry and his wife, Celia. About 30 years later, under engineer son Don, the firm won a massive Navy contract to build 14 Fremantle class patrol boats to be based in Cairns. At its peak NQEA employed 840 people, and was a major economic powerhouse of the city. NQEA revolutionised reef travel by developing the first "big cat" vessels, and also built a Cairns based \$200 million hydrographic vessel for the Australian Navy.

1949-1958

A polio epidemic struck in most states in **1949**. William (Bill) Collins was defeated at the local elections after serving a record 22 years as Mayor of the city, with former railway worker and leading citizen, William Murchison becoming the city's new Mayor.

Toyota and Mercedes dealer **Clive Williams**, served as president between **1950** and 1952, and then took charge as a commanding officer of the 51st Battalion Far North Queensland Regiment for the next three years with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. His brother, later to become Sir Sydney Williams, took command of the 51st after Clive retired from the post and held it until 1955. Australia gained support from all Commonwealth nations for establishment of the Colombo Plan to give economic aid to South East Asia, and the first Australian troops landed in South Korea at the start of the Korean War.

Cairns based Bush Pilots was registered as an airline in **1951**, and began to provide an invaluable link to the Cape, Gulf and many outback centres isolated through the tyranny of distance; National Service was introduced for all males over the age of 19. The ANZ Bank was formed from a merger of the Union Bank and the Bank of Australasia.

In **1952** tragic news was received from London that King George V1 had died in his sleep, and a special tribute was recorded in the Chamber's next annual report, as was the succession to the throne of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, whose spectacular coronation took place the following year.

Construction began on the Tully Millstream hydro scheme with the installation of two 18,000 kilowatt turbines, and water was drawn from Freshwater Creek to augment the city's supply through a gravitation feed network. Cairns Mulgrave Water Board was formed and began to build the Behana Creek supply south of Gordonvale. The Chamber joined the rest of the nation in celebrating the 50th anniversary of Federation, and during the 50s on Green Island Vince Vlasoff opened the world's first underwater observatory off the jetty.

Mr Williams noted in his report: *"The Great Northern Cooperative Cannery's establishment on Smith's Creek is undoubtedly the finest step towards stabilization of the fruit industry in Far North Queensland ever accomplished."*

By now more than 2100 acres of the Tablelands was under peanut cultivation, producing more than 800 tonnes. A record tourist season saw visitors coming via coastal steamers, with many enjoying a seven-day "Wonderland Tour" of the region. Tourists were also flooding in via car, plane and train, but the Chamber believed there was a serious threat to the industry from an acute lack of first class accommodation. An experiment was introduced to trial day and night Chamber meetings to increase attendances, and it made representations to a Royal Commission sitting in Cairns for more sugar mills to be established to service the region.

The Chamber campaigned for the abolition of sales tax, or for a far more equitable system. Talks on the need for a new town plan began in earnest with the city council. The Gillies Highway needed upgrading, and the Chamber took its case for more industrial development in the region right to the Prime Minister's office.

Mulgrave Shire and Cairns City councils joined the Chamber and Canegrowers Association in an attempt to encourage more migration of workers to help in the sugar industry, which was crying out for labour. There were also concerns about the number of dairy farmers converting to cattle fattening, and the long term consequences for the dairy industry on the Tableland. The two airlines policy was enacted to maintain competition between Australia's two domestic airlines, ANA and TAA.

Both Cairns and Townsville chambers addressed the State Government over an urgent need to complete parts of the national highway, and while in Cairns the Deputy Premier,

Vince Gair, discussed the issue of extending the highway north to Cooktown, as well as improvements needed to the Cairns port. The Chamber's campaign to have accommodation on the mail train services between Cairns and Brisbane was rewarded with the inaugural running of the "Sunlander", which proved a very popular decision. The State Government's decision to increase motor vehicle registration discriminated against residents of the Far North, and a campaign spread nationally calling for uniform petrol prices.

Leading contractor and builder, **Mr T.J. Watkins** became president in **1953** and served through to 1955. The Cairns Junior Chamber of Commerce was formed and took a major role in the activation of the New Settlers League of Australia. Queensland Railway Department was asked to consider local companies when calling tenders for various works, which usually were awarded to southern companies. Now that the Sunlander was up and running, the Chamber went one step further and campaigned for dining cars. Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies enjoyed a highly productive meeting with Chamber members during an official visit.

England's newly installed HRH Queen Elizabeth II became the first reigning monarch to visit Australia, and included Cairns on her **1954** Royal Tour itinerary to be greeted by thousands of people, many of them school children. The Queen visited Cairns again in 1970 and 2002.

In the Chamber's 45th annual report, Mr Watkins raised the issue of income tax reform. There was a serious problem emerging in terms of Australia's ability to compete globally and the Chamber joined a push to help increase productivity by backing a national public education campaign. A move was on to attract more secondary industry, and an expansion of chemical and fertiliser manufacturing which had been well represented in the north for eight years by the North Queensland Fertiliser and Chemical Company.

The fishing industry received some good news when the massive refrigeration ship, "Trader Horn", was launched at the Cairns Shipbuilding Company slipway. Built at a cost of 20,000 pounds, this project led to the company negotiating with the Cairns Harbour Board over a site on the waterfront to establish a permanent boat building yard. In another coup, the organisers of the national Redex Reliability Trial agreed to a request for a 24-hour stopover in Cairns, and the Chamber agitated for the Gillies Highway to be upgraded as a vital transport and defence link to the hinterland

Geologist, Harry Evans discovered the potential of the Weipa bauxite deposits in **1955**. Mining company Comalco signed an 84 year lease agreement with the Queensland

Government to develop the deposit in 1957, and began working the site in 1961. The mine now produces more than 16 million tonnes per year for refining at its Gladstone plant. The first shipment of raw ore left Weipa for Japan in 1962. The site, located about 900 km northwest of Cairns, employs 800 workers and negotiates with 11 separate Aboriginal tribal groups. In 2006 Comalco formally adopted its parent company's name, Rio Tinto.

In his **1956** report, president **Mr William (Bill) Munro Warner**, referred to the 40-hour week as "here to stay", and believed this "*put Australia at a decided disadvantage compared with so called socialist countries.*" Mr Warner, a one-time cane farmer, was a lay canon with the Church of England, and served terms as president of Rotary, Legacy, and Queensland Federation of Chambers. He was a qualified accountant, and became the inaugural president of the Far Northern Chambers of Commerce.

The Chamber was successful in having the organisers of the Melbourne Olympic Games include Cairns as the relay starting point, and for the runners to pass along the east coast through most town and cities on its way south. Several members of the Chamber were on the relay's local organising committee, and among the torch bearers was a young local lad named Bill Cummings.

Japanese fishing vessels had been observed in northern waters, threatening viability of the local prawn fishing fleet. While the Federal Government was touting the national highway between Cairns and Brisbane as a first class facility, it was at best second class. The curtailment of the popular and well patronized passenger cruise services along the east coast was of grave concern, and the Chamber called for their reinstatement. A new railway station to service the city was officially opened, and the first class Cairns Continental Hotel, purpose built for tourists, opened for business, accommodating 100 guests. The construction of a high level bridge over the Burdekin River was welcome news.

Across the nation wharves came to standstill for a month because of a waterside workers strike. Cyclone Agnes hit a strip of coast from Cairns to Townsville, causing widespread damage. State Health advised the Chamber that the Government would increase the remuneration for taipan venom for the purpose of preparing antivenene, due to the dangerous nature of its collection. The Chamber also turned its attention to preliminary investigations taking place regarding the introduction of decimal coinage.

The cruise ship, Manunda was sold and replaced on the Cairns to Melbourne run by the Canberra and the Duntroon in time for the 1957 season. Local traders were encouraged

to put “Christ back into Christmas”, and regain the true meaning of the celebration through their shop front displays. Author and historian, Ian Idriess, was congratulated on his book, “Back ‘O Cairns” which contained many photographs sourced by the Chamber, and was an excellent depiction of the life of early Cairns.

Ansett Transport Industries absorbed ANA in **1957** to become Ansett-ANA. The basic weekly wage increased by 10 shillings (\$1), and Labour lost government in Queensland after a 25-year run. The Federal Association of Chambers of Commerce was formed, and the Cairns Chamber passed a sincere vote of appreciation for the late Mr A.H. Clark, who had been its honorary auditor for more than 40 years.

The fortunes of farmers as well as towns on the Atherton Tablelands were considerably enhanced when the Irrigation and Water Supply Commission built the Tinaroo Dam on the Barron River, near Kairi. It took five years to build at a cost of \$12.7 million and was completed in **1958**. It covered 545 sq km, required the resumption of 20 farms, and flooded the townships of Kulara and the original Tinaroo. The construction of the dam and network of irrigation channels required the establishment of a new town at Tinaroo, as well as Walkamin, and a settlement at Paddy’s Green, near Mutchilba. The dam supplies water to these towns, as well as Mareeba, Dimbulah and Yungaburra. Originally built to mainly supply water for the tobacco industry, it now sustains farms of mango, macadamia, lychee, rice, peanut, coffee, vegetables, maize and fodder under irrigation. It is vital to the life of Cairns and to the Barron Gorge Hydro Electric Power station. The capacity of the dam is three quarters that of Sydney Harbour.

The council began the enormous task of sewerage the entire city area, and the Cairns Historical Society came into existence as custodians of the district’s legacy. The city’s population was 24,000, and twice that number was now visiting the region every season. The inaugural meeting of the Far North Federation of Chambers was held at the RSL and attended by delegates from Cairns, Mossman, Atherton and Innisfail.

There was no joy in the campaign to have an agricultural college established on a site near Mareeba, despite repeated representations. The Chamber took up the cause of calling for sales tax to be removed from domestic refrigerators sold in the Far North, as they were “an absolute necessity”. Cairns Brewery installed state-of-art technology in the form of a 60ft Ziemann brew house at a cost of 200,000 pounds. The Chamber noted the company was already paying more than three million pounds annually by way of excise duties into government coffers.

The State Government advised it had permitted the commercial taking of turtle meat in a very restricted area of the Far Northern coast. Both the Great Northern and Strand hotels announced major rebuilding programs to help meet the growing demand for tourist accommodation in the city. The Queensland State Cabinet was welcomed to Cairns, and the Chamber made representations over reclamation of the Cairns waterfront, asking that any plan be restricted to recreational use only. Work began on Cairns West High School, (Trinity Bay High School) which opened for the 1960 school year.

1959-1968

In **1959**, the Mareeba Chamber was formed with the assistance of Cairns, and an assurance was given by the State that an early warning radar station would be established at Saddle Mountain in time for the next cyclone season. A major issue involved talks between unions, the Chamber, State Government and employers over serious slack season unemployment, and in a first for the state, a working committee was formed to investigate this issue.

The city of South Coast was re-invented as the Gold Coast, and Qantas took delivery of its first 707 jet aircraft. The name "Tropicana" came out of a local competition and was forwarded by the Chamber to the tourist association to promote the region, and it had another success when it secured improved postal services, with a new post office opening along Mulgrave Road at Parramatta Park.

Following his election **Mr Arthur Myers**, Manager of the ANZ Bank, served two years as president. Tea pioneer, Dr Allan Maruff, established the Nerada tea plantation in the foothills of Mt Bartle Frere. The Far North Queensland Amateur Turf Club was formed, and behind it were Sydney Williams and colleague Reg Gallagher, with their desire to "bring the country to the city". They promoted the race meet as the Cairns Amateurs. Former Chamber president, Alan McPherson, has been a club committee member for 34 years, and is the Amateurs' current president.

Cairns Chamber celebrated the silver jubilee of adopting its constitution, and also marked the centenary of self-government in Queensland with a special feature in its annual report which received wide praise as a worthwhile contribution to those celebrations.

The Federal Treasurer, Harold Holt, introduced a credit squeeze in **1960**, raised interest rates and heavily increased sales tax on new motor vehicles. The cyclone early warning station was completed at Saddle Mountain. The Chamber's former president, Mr. W.

M. Warner, was elected inaugural President of Queensland Federation of Chambers of Commerce. He was also a director of NQ Breweries, and served terms on the Harbour Board and Cairns City Council. The Gordonvale chamber was formed with the support of Cairns.

Representations were made in **1961** to the Minister for National Development and Queensland Minister for Main Roads for urgent priority to be given to construction of beef roads in the Far North, and members protested the closure of the railway workshops in Cairns. The first homes in Cairns were connected to a new sewerage system. The first jet passenger service touched down from Brisbane, and the last of the coastal passenger liners, the SS Manoora, was sold to Indonesia at the end of its final voyage. A vast iron-ore deposit was discovered at Pilbara in Western Australia, and a college of the University of Queensland was established at Townsville, which in 1970 became James Cook University.

William (Bill) Maloney was elected president in **1962** and served through to 1965. He was a very popular choice, and had the distinction of being the city council's first public relations officer. A journalist, script writer and radio broadcaster, Bill Maloney went on to become the managing director of the Far Northern Theatres chain, and served 25 years as a Chamber member.

The Cairns Tourism Festival was launched, and the Chamber participated in celebrations which also marked the opening of a new jetty on Green Island. The next year the festival changed its name to Fun in the Sun and was again transformed during the 1990s into the Reef Festival, before its most recent metamorphosis in 2002 as Festival Cairns. A constant feature and favourite over the years has been the staging of the grand parade on closing night. The campaign for a small boat harbour off the city waterfront also intensified. Cairns successfully hosted the Queensland Federation of Chambers of Commerce annual conference.

A new hydro power station was commissioned on the Barron Falls in **1963**, and two years later television was first broadcast in black and white. The tourist season saw a huge influx of visitors by road, with caravan parks and motels unable to meet demand, and the Cairns and District Travel League was formed – sponsored by the Junior Chamber - to attract off-season tourists to the region.

Cairns Regional Electricity Board (CREB) moved into new purpose build premises between Lake and Grafton Streets, and the Chamber had another success in its call for reduction of sales tax, on bagged cement transported between Townsville and Cairns.

The State Government agreed with a sugar cane trial at Cooktown, and the Chamber believed that the naturally deep harbour would lend the area to a new sugar mill.

The Cairns bulk sugar terminal opened in **1964**, bringing new infrastructure and some very modern technology to the waterfront. The first shipment of bulk sugar left for Japan on the Sally Stove. The final shipment of bagged sugar left the new wharves the same year. Australian Army advisers serving in Vietnam were committed to active duty. Mt Isa Mines was forced to shut down operations when faced with a major industrial dispute which saw the State Government declare a state of emergency to try to break the deadlock.

Cairns doctor, Jack Barnes, searched long and hard that year for evidence of a jellyfish responsible for “irukandji syndrome”. Irukandji was the name of an aboriginal tribe from the area. Dr Barnes allowed one of the thumbnail-sized jellyfish to sting him, landing the good doctor in hospital, but the tiny, nasty creature was later named after him - Carukia barnesi.

The **1965** tourist season saw the city being promoted as “Queen of the Coral Sea”. Chamber life member, Reg Fogarty, was knighted by the Queen, and his company donated a spectacular fountain in Fogarty Park which was dedicated to the people of Cairns. It was demolished in 1999 to make way for the new look waterfront precinct.

The Chamber joined its Brisbane counterpart in advocating for more regional development and decentralisation of industry through the establishment of a Northern Development Authority. A People of the North organisation was founded to promote public awareness in the southeast of the importance of this region to the State’s economy.

The length of the Cairns airport runway was substantially increased to cater for DC9 jets, after the Chamber provided evidence to a parliamentary committee which had been investigating strengthening the airstrip.

The State Government wrote to the Chamber advising that it was in negotiations with other parties over the potential for developing a road link between Mossman and Cooktown, and the Chamber called for a review of television licenses, which were unfair on those people who lived in non-reception areas. The State Treasurer announced further delays in the Cairns Cultural Centre Project due to a lack of funding, and a campaign was launched to harvest guinea grass along highways in the region to serve as cattle fodder in times of drought.

A separate state for the north was an issue raised at the State conference, as was the need for a steelworks. Members welcomed news that Townsville was to become a permanent forward Army base for 4500 soldiers, and 1000 homes would be built as part of the project. The seasonal ravages by fires around the foothills of the city were of concern, and a committee was formed to set up an auxiliary to work with the established fire fighting organizations and to educate the public on fires hazards.

Mr S.A. Watkins, from a later generation of the well known building and construction firm which had enjoyed a long association with the Chamber, became president in **1966** and served two terms. Decimal currency, which the chamber had championed for ten years, was introduced, and a limited free trade agreement was signed between Australia and New Zealand.

American ex-serviceman, George Bransford, claimed the first world record for a black marlin caught off Cairns fishing from Sea Baby, and one year later the Cairns Game Fishing Club was formed. Celebrities began arriving to chase the big fish, including television celebrities Bob and Dolly Dyer, Academy Award winning actor Ernest Borgnine, golfer Jack Nicklaus, politicians Gough Whitlam and Malcolm Fraser, and movie star Lee Marvin who made Cairns his second home, staying as a guest of the Kamsler family.

The Chamber introduced quarterly lunch meetings and reformed its standing committee structure to specialize in areas of civic progress, industry, publicity, membership, attendance, transport, and traffic, and helped with the formation of a development bureau for the city by drawing up a constitution and providing financial support. The Chamber backed the "Buy Queensland" campaign, and lobbied for a bus transit centre in the central business district, and took tentative steps to back extended trading hours in the CBD to cater for tourism demands.

A special visitor to the chamber was Canberra based Mr W.S. (Bill) Cummings, research officer with the Associated Chambers of Commerce of Australia, who gave a comprehensive analysis of the state of chamber membership across the USA. The first local television stations went to air that year.

Local pharmacist Peter Cominos led what was at first a true David and Goliath struggle against the Cairns Harbour Board's decision to negotiate with leading Australian business giant, Sir Peter Abeles, over the commercial and tourist development of a large portion of the Cairns waterfront, which was being offered to his company – Altrans

- via a long term lease. A petition raised more than 2000 objections, and saw the harbour board change its mind in favour of retention of the open public space. *"I was prepared to face all the criticism because I was not against development, but for the people, and working in the best interests of foreshore preservation,"* said Mr Cominos, who today is a Chamber life member.

In **1967** the Cape Flattery silica mines began production 200km north northwest of Cairns. It became obvious to the Chamber that the Cairns airport runway was not long enough to accommodate jet aircraft, and Qantas pilots began a world-wide strike action which lasted one month.

The same year saw the city pass the 30,000 population mark, and in a bid to attract more members Mr Watkins wrote: *"The white ants of freedom – are you one? Apathy is a certain killer of freedom – your Chamber is the bulwark of economic freedom. Get behind it and attend meetings regularly."*

Construction began on St Monica's Cathedral and on Bethlehem Home for the Aged, and the Chamber had 165 fully paid up members. The Regional Development Bureau was off to a flying start with a \$5000 boost from the Chamber's development fund, and nationally the Postcode system and Trade Practices Act were introduced. Prime Minister Harold Holt disappeared off Portsea, Victoria.

Transport costs in northern Australia were a big issue addressed that year, including impacts of road and sales taxes and rail freight costs. Whilst the Chamber supported every move to protect the Great Barrier Reef, it also raised concerns with Federal Tourism Minister, Don Chipp, over exaggerated international reports about crown of thorns starfish impact on the reef.

Mr Vincent Donnelly took the chair in **1968**, the year Captain James Cook's cannons from the Endeavour Bark were recovered off Cooktown. Vince Vlassof captained the "Tropic Seas" which made the historic find. Mr Donnelly served as deputy mayor and was later awarded an MBE. He had a distinguished war record, having been one of the legendary "Rats of Tobruk", was wounded in action, and went on to serve in the Pacific campaign, spending more than 1100 days on active duty overseas.

A \$3 million expansion began at Cairns Base Hospital to provide 170 more beds, and the Chamber took up the campaign for better television coverage for the whole region. The Chamber opposed and helped defeat a proposed head tax on airline passengers, which would have led to increased air fares in regional Australia.

1969-1978

The Calvary Private Hospital began to take patients in **1969** in a grand old former convent between Abbott and Lake Streets. The Chamber began making representations to all levels of government for a significant upgrade to airport facilities that was vital if Cairns was to win its fair share of the domestic air travel market. There were 250,000 tourists visiting Cairns, and this prompted the Director of Queensland Tourism Services, Mr J. Wilson, to write to the Chamber: *“The overseas market is important but the tourist industry in Australia is currently based, and will continue to rely heavily, on the domestic market, and it is extremely important that the needs of the local market are not neglected.”*

The introduction of container shipping facilities at the Cairns port was a major step in terms of ability to move massive quantities of freight, and the Chamber joined a push to find a new National Anthem as part of the Captain Cook Bi-Centenary celebrations planned for the following year. The 16th black marlin over 1000 lb had been landed in just four fishing seasons by **1970**, when New Zealander, Sir William Stevenson, hooked a fish weighing 1231.5 lb (558.5 kg).

Street litter was becoming a major issue, and an anti-litter campaign was launched with the support of local radio station 4CA. The Chamber carefully studied the council’s new town plan, and commented via a detailed submission. The 3.3 mile (5.3 km) cableway to Mt Bellenden Kerr was commissioned, enabling access by technicians to the communications transmitter at its summit. Poseidon mining announced discovery of a massive nickel lode at Windarra, and its share price jumped from \$1 to \$280.

Mayor Dave De Jarlais warned in a submission to the Chamber that there needed to be better communication and coordination of the tourism effort, citing 15 separate bodies pulling in different directions. He called on everyone to rally behind the Cairns and District Tourist Development Association. The Chamber backed the move, and went one step further by supporting the Association when it called a public meeting to help form the Far North Queensland Tourism Authority to be the single voice for the region.

Aussie troops started to withdraw from Vietnam. On the home front, traffic and pedestrian congestion was a major concern in the city at peak times, with the city council promising installation of traffic signals to ease the problems. There also was a call on the Police to increase patrols to deal with “undesirable elements” in some sectors of the city at night.

Navy Minister James (Jim) Killen visited Cairns to officially open a Navy base in **1971**. Mr Killen announced that HMAS Babette and HMAS Bayonet would be stationed permanently in the city. The base at that time was worth about \$1 million to the local economy. HMAS Cairns was commissioned in 1981, and by 1996 was estimated to be worth at least \$15 million annually. The base has undergone several refits over the years, but none as large as its present upgrade, estimated to be worth more than \$75 million, turning it into one of the most strategic forward operation Navy facilities in the southern hemisphere.

The Chamber helped form the Cairns Noise Abatement Committee in response to complaints of loud aircraft noise over the city. A complaint to Civil Aviation led to all pilots being instructed to abide by new procedures, except for reasons of safety, low cloud and poor visibility. Cairns City Council rejected the Chamber's request that it appoint a city architect, following concerns about building bylaws not being enforced by building inspectors. A Chamber steering committee began to agitate for the establishment of a technical training college in Cairns.

The combined value of all building activity in Cairns city and Mulgrave shire climbed by 96 per cent that year to reach \$12.67 million. The Australian Industry Development Corporation began operations. Australia became a full member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) ten years after its formation; retail price maintenance was declared illegal, and payroll tax was transferred to the states.

Contracts were signed for a new civic theatre in **1972** with work to take 12 months. A 30-month expansion program at a cost of \$43 million at Comalco's Weipa mine site included an export wharf, two bridges, and a railway network. The Royal Flying Doctor Service began operations as the largest regional base in the country, with more than 1000 outstations, and attended 12,000 patients a year. Gough Whitlam led the ALP in from the cold years of Opposition, forming the first Federal Labor Government in 32 years.

In Mr Donnelly's final term as president, a Board of Tourism and Travel was set up within the Far North Queensland Development Bureau, and a full-time promotions officer was appointed. The Chamber expressed grave concern to Federal and State governments over *"the evils of drug abuse"*, and urged stiffer penalties for all drug traffickers. The city's first set of traffic lights were switched on at the intersection of Abbott and Shields streets, and that year also saw the giant Captain Cook statue erected on the Captain Cook Motel site along Sheridan St. The motel has gone, the site vacated,

but the solitary, pigeon spattered statue remains to point the way south, and is in need of a new home.

The road linking Cairns with Yarrabah was pushed through and opened to traffic in **1973**, and insurance broker and agent, **Gordon Weir**, took over and served for the next nine years as president.

Marlin Marina came on line and the foreshore development included a public boat ramp, service station, café-takeaway, restaurant, and a tackle shop. A modern Federal Government two-storey office block opened at the corner of Shields and Grafton streets, now the premises of MacDonnells Solicitors. The Newmarket Hotel was built on former ti-tree swamp as a subsidiary of Samuel Allen and Sons, and the Bungalow Hotel, built at cost of \$700,000 was opened by Carlton and United Breweries.

The executive called for allowance for depreciation of all buildings utilised in the production of assessable income. There was strong objection to any increases in insurance premiums with storm and tempest cover. The Prices Justification Tribunal was established, and self-government was achieved by Papua New Guinea.

By **1974** national airline carriers TAA and Ansett were providing regular services to Cairns and most capital cities as well as to PNG, operating out of limited facilities located on what is now the general aviation side of the airport. Prime Minister Gough Whitlam came to town for the official opening of the new Cairns Civic Theatre built by the council, and it continues to serve the community.

The Northern Permanent Building Society opened for business, later to become the Northern Building Society, First Australian Building Society, and Bendigo Bank before the most recent merger of Bendigo and Adelaide Banks. NPBS absorbed the Starr-Bowkett Building Society, which began in Cairns in 1906 and operated on a lottery drawn interest-free loan system for members.

The Federal Government took over all responsibility for tertiary education, at the same time abolishing fees. A campaign by the Chamber for higher educational facilities to service the region gained momentum with support from all authorities and parliamentarians, prompting Labor Member for Cairns, Ray Jones, to comment: *"With the Chamber behind it, this could become a reality within five years."*

Radio and television licenses were discontinued, and Bankcard was introduced. Chamber members shared deep concerns over perceived socialist tendencies of the Federal Government, which appeared anti-business, leading to an inflationary situation

within the economy, withdrawal of incentives for industry, cut backs in bank lending, drying up of overseas capital, and a downturn in the share market. The council's CBD shopping mall proposal required engineers to prepare a plan for Lake Street which was the subject of wide community debate, and a survey of Chamber members showed the vast majority was opposed to the mall.

In a defining day for aviation, Air New Guinea became the first international carrier to fly out of Cairns in **1975**, and one of the town's colourful businessmen, Rusty Rees, established Rusty's Markets in Grafton Street on a site that was once part of the city's old China Town, and is now incorporated into Gilligan's Backpackers Motel. Freeport Indonesia was established, and at its peak was worth \$74 million to the local economy by way of services to the Irian Jaya gold mine site.

The same year, the Chamber sponsored the incorporation of the Far North Queensland Promotions Bureau (FNQPB), with George Chapman, Alan McPherson, Peter Cominos, Dave De Jarlais, Keith Geary, Don Fry and Don Michael as its board of directors. Three years later, the FNQPB merged with FNQ Development Bureau to form one financially robust promotional entity.

Bill Cummings, then with the development bureau, prepared a detailed submission on behalf of the city in support of a college of advance education for Cairns. Chamber members were appointed to a committee to work with the city council on a new Cairns Structure Plan, and at State level the Government was preparing to consider legislation to increase the level of payroll tax exemptions, which the Chamber had been fighting for since 1959.

Attempts to secure a replacement for the old dredge SS Trinity Bay intensified, and the danger of cane trains moving across suburban streets was addressed, as was the need for more bike lanes leading to schools across the city and suburbs.

Copperlode Dam on Lake Morris came on line in **1976** with a holding capacity of 45,000 megalitres, ensuring a year-round water supply, subject to the vagaries of each wet season. Besser's new factory was commissioned at Portsmith with a batching plant that could produce 800 concrete blocks per hour, and cigarette and tobacco advertising was banned on television.

Chamber member, lawyer and philanthropist, Thomas Covacevich - later Sir Thomas - donated \$100,000 towards the establishment of much needed tertiary facilities in Cairns, and the Chamber hosted the annual conference of FNQ Chambers at the RSL. Former pearl industry scientist, and seventh dan black belt karate sensei, Kazu

Matsumoto, opened his academy in an industrial shed off Ishmael Road, and later established a major dojo in Anderson Street.

The city celebrated its centenary year in fine style with the releasing of 10,000 hot air balloons. The chamber had been well represented on the 100th birthday planning committee, which included: Kevin Crathern (Cairns Mayor), Ald. Joan Wright, Ron Norman, Mick Borzi, Thomas Covacevich, Robert Norman, Warwick Trundle (town clerk), Ken Alley (Mulgrave shire chairman), Dave De Jarlais (former Mayor), Bill Johnson, Mick Sargent, Peter Cominos, Ron Ireland, George Cannon, Geoff Holmes, Sydney Williams, Ray Jones (Member for Cairns) and Peter Forness. The Catalina memorial on the northern end of the Cairns Esplanade was unveiled at a ceremony honouring the RAAF's No. 11 and No. 22 squadrons.

There was concern in **1977** about increased crime such as break and enters, theft, violence and serious vandalism, with a call for extra Police leading to an increase in the number of CIB officers stationed in Cairns. The Chamber joined in the call for an urgent review of how fire brigades were funded, and asked state and federal governments to take over this responsibility. At state level death duties were abolished. The SS Trinity Bay was given a new lease on life as a floating restaurant and maritime museum by being permanently berthed. The inaugural Air Niugini F-28 jet service from Port Moresby touched down in Cairns.

Radio 4CA switched on a new 5000 watt, 92 metre transmitter at Bessie Point in **1978** to bring the region's radio broadcasting network into the 20th century, only three years after its first broadcast went out over airwaves. Tom McDonald, local jeweler and founder of North Queensland Airways, died at the age of 86. The pioneer aviator whose aerial exploits were the stuff of legend, had been honoured at a special ceremony in 1960, hosted by the Chamber and city council, at the Cairns Airport. His work had done much to improve the lot of residents of outback North Queensland.

1979-1988

In **1979** expansion plans began for Calvary Hospital, the city's population climbed to 64,000, and the first major group of Japanese visitors arrived by jet. Apprentice motor mechanic, George Lee Sye, became the first winner of the Chamber's annual apprenticeship award, presented to him by Vice President Allan McPherson. Late night shopping began, largely through the Chamber's efforts via a submission on behalf of all CBD retailers to the full bench of the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Commission, which sat for two days at Gordonvale and Cairns.

The \$1 million Cairns Waterworks, described as an engineering triumph, opened in Grafton Street. Its slides relocated to Sugarworld Gardens at Edmonton after the venture closed down in Cairns. Work began on the 10-storey, 180 room Pacific International Hotel, which opened the following year as a joint venture between the Kamsler family and Ansett Airlines. The 16-storey Aquarius Building on the Esplanade also started to take shape.

Former “Z” force commando, and Chamber stalwart, Ross Wintour, was elected president of the FNQ Federation of Chambers, and the campaign began in earnest for an alternate route into the city via Portsmith from the south to alleviate peak hour problems along Mulgrave Road.

A significant increase in traffic showed the airport could not cope with demand by **1980**, and the Federal Government was approached to hand the airport over to local ownership. A small band known as the “magnificent seven” - Cairns Mayor Ron Davis, Mulgrave chair Tom Pyne, harbour board chair Mick Borzi, Atherton shire chair Bill Allen, George Chapman, Ron Entsch and Richard Murray-Prior - headed a local action committee and lobbied for the Airport Local Ownership Plan, which met with some bitter community opposition.

Flinders Street Mall opened in Townsville but the Cairns City Council was yet to bite the bullet over the proposed City Place. Earlville Shopping Town opened for trade. The year saw the end of a 70-year association with K.M. Kehoe and Associates, which had provided secretariat services to the Chamber for 70 years, during which membership grew from 39 to 267. Cairns became a high rise city when the first of several multi-storey hotel tower complexes was built.

The old dredge which had served the city well since turn of the century, the SS Trinity Bay, was sunk off Euston Reef in **1981** by RAAF jet fighters, after several attempts. The first three Fremantle patrol boats ordered by the Australian Navy were launched by NQEA, and a new northern fisheries research station opened. Problems of box jellyfish invading the Far North’s swimming beaches during the high season saw the Chamber help raise funds for research through James Cook University

The State Government overlooked two consortium tenders for a casino in Cairns which were supported by the Chamber, and the first regional casino license was awarded by the State Coalition Government to a Townsville consortium led by the Thies group. Queensland Railways was pressed to consider moving the marshalling yards out of the CBD and into a Portsmith industrial estate. The city council announced plans to build a

six-storey car park in Lake Street, adjacent to the council chambers. Nationally, Japan's Mitsubishi took over Chrysler Australia Ltd.

Cairns Port Authority evolved from the Cairns Harbour Board, which was established in 1905. The Great Barrier Reef gained universal protection when placed on the World Heritage Register, Townsville's international airport opened, wage indexation was dropped, and in two giant financial manoeuvres, the National Bank of Australasia and the Commercial Banking Company of Sydney merged to form National Australia Bank, while the Bank of New South Wales joined forces with the Commercial Bank to create Westpac, which began to trade under its new name the following year. Cummings Economic Research took over the running of the chamber's secretariat.

Mr Weir, a former manager of TAA, said **1982** was a watershed year for Cairns, which rated as the nation's leading regional centre, boasting 780,000 domestic and 60,000 international visitors per year through its airport. Those tourists could now get to the Great Barrier Reef onboard "Big Cats" catamarans in 40 minutes, travelling at 30 knots. The Chamber also witnessed a surge in coach touring, with seven operators in the market, and a combined fleet of 22 buses. Horticultural industries were worth more than \$50 million to the regional economy. Bananas, pumpkins, watermelons, vegetables, avocados, flowers, pineapples, pawpaws, mangoes, lychees, tree nuts, rare/exotics fruits, tea and coffee were the main produce grown.

A lack of street lighting became a big issue, as did the need for a central visitor information office in the heart of the CBD. The need for an FM broadcasting license to be issued for the region was taken up by the Chamber, which also pushed for improvements to the Kuranda tourist train service. City Place was officially opened by State Premier, Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen.

Civil engineer, **Alan McPherson** stepped into the role of president in **1983**. It was a new era for Australia with the dollar allowed to float against all international currencies for the first time.

The following year at 8.45 pm on March 31, a Qantas Boeing 747B jumbo jet touched down at Cairns International Airport from Brisbane and then left for Honolulu. As part of the opening celebrations for new \$37 million Cairns airport extensions, including domestic and international terminals, a world record 22-person parachute stack was set, and "Freedom" - a grand old DC3 once used by both the US and British air forces - was raised on a pole outside the new domestic terminal.

Onboard a later “jumbo” flight in June were Gordon McKauge, Alan McPherson, Ray Rogers, Graham Gordon, Charlie Woodward, Peter Miller, Paul Kamsler Junior, Denis Ferguson and Peter Cryan – all early, active participants in promoting Cairns overseas. There were already 20 scheduled international aircraft movements per week out of Cairns.

A request by the Chamber for more police foot patrols in the CBD was successful, and the problem of bicycles on footpaths also was addressed. The Great Ring Road concept – a brainchild of Ross Wintour - was raised and pursued, as were the need for a national school of tourism in Cairns, a helipad on the foreshore, and a museum.

The controversial 33 km road to Cape Tribulation was opened by State Minister for the Environment and Member for Barron River, Martin Tenni, watched by Douglas Shire Mayor Tony Mijo and a busload of Mossman senior citizens. Protesters opposed to its impact on the pristine wilderness dug themselves in and were chained to trees on the day, when all vehicles became bogged as the heavens opened. It followed a year of passionate protest.

Mr McPherson championed the cause for a fulltime secretariat, but said the Chamber’s financial position would first need to improve. The Australian stock broking industry and all banks were deregulated, and one dollar coins began circulating.

Cannon Arthur Malcolm of Yarrabah became Australia’s first ordained Anglican Bishop in **1985**, the same year the CPA withdrew from the local airport ownership agreement, and with government support took over full control of all Cairns airport operations. Kidston mine near Georgetown went back into full production, following its height during the 1880s. Sixteen years later it closed, after a lifetime yield of more than 30 million ounces of gold.

The giant Japanese condominium developer, Daikyo entered the local market in **1986**, buying up a vast amount of property. Over the next 12 years, Daikyo held 35 per cent of all foreign owned land in the State with assets of \$1.5 billion. Its chairman and president, Mr Shuji Yokahama, went on a buying spree and the company acquired the Hilton, Paradise Palms, Smithfield Royal Palms site, Cannon Park farm (later to be developed with Delfin into Forest Gardens), land in Digger and McLeod streets, Cairns International, Matson Plaza, National Mutual Tower, Great Adventures, Village Lane and the Yamagen Restaurant. Daikyo held leases over Trinity Wharf, Marlin Wharf, Fitzroy and Green Islands. Mr Yokahama said at the time: “Tourism is a very complex industry with many interactions and covering many industries.”

On the reef, semi-submersible vessels had been introduced for underwater viewing, rendering the old glass-bottom boats redundant. Development of sea hatcheries and barramundi farms was growing as was crocodile farming, with the animals bred in captivity and harvested for skins and meat.

The FNQ Tertiary Education Committee had been formed earlier with Chamber executive members on it, and had persuaded JCU Townsville to give in-principle support to a university college in Cairns. A highlight of the year saw the Chamber's unrelenting community campaign rewarded with the opening of the James Cook University campus, in buildings attached to the Cairns TAFE College, with an initial enrolment of 110 students.

Peter Kendall took up what was almost a fulltime role as secretary, and the Chamber marked the centenary of its first meeting prior to constitution. Cairns Park Royal Hotel (later to be re-named the Cairns International Hotel) opened as did the Hilton, Tradewinds Esplanade, and the Sheraton Mirage at Port Douglas. Lack of after-hours shopping to cater for the tourist trade was a major issue, and members played a key role in the redevelopment of the Cairns Post Office, and in plans to welcome cruise ships into port.

With more than 23 per cent increase in visitor nights, a brilliant future was predicted for the region's tourist industry, which was further enhanced when an East West Airlines F-28 jet touched down direct from Brisbane in the first scheduled flight that heralded a major expansion of the airline's routes.

The Cairns Group of 19 agricultural exporting countries played an instrumental role in achieving global trade reform. The meeting at Palm Cove brought together representatives from developed and developing countries from the Americas, Africa, Asia and the Pacific region. The Cairns Group, founded in and chaired by Australia, continues to play a key role in setting the agenda for agriculture reform.

Cyclone Winifred impacted along a 200 km front between Cairns and Ingham destroying hundreds of properties and claiming one life. The "Queenslander" train began the run between Brisbane and Cairns. Fringe benefits taxes came into effect.

Share prices plunged to record lows on the stock exchange in **1987** as part of a world-wide crash. The new Marlin Marina was completed, but was destroyed by Cyclone Joy in 1990. The possibility of a space port near Weipa, estimated to cost between \$500 million and \$1 billion, was investigated by the Chamber. The location was considered ideal because of its proximity to the equator and the polar orbits.

The Chamber marked the passing of Kevin Kehoe, who served with distinction as treasurer for 27 years between 1948 and 1975. Mr Kehoe was head of one of the city's leading accountancy firms, and made an outstanding contribution to the civic and business life of the city. Past president Gordon Weir was also honoured for his service to the Chamber, which spanned 30 years on the executive.

Eight Cairns High School students were killed and many others seriously injured when a school bus crashed down a steep section of the Gillies Highway while returning from a Tablelands excursion. The Chamber joined with principal Bernie Mackenzie, parents and students in remembering those who lost their lives.

Federal Environment Minister Graham Richardson arrived in town to announce the demise of the Far North's timber industry, and the establishment of the Wet Tropics Management Scheme, which was ratified the following year with World Heritage listing of the Wet Tropics. He and Federal Member for Leichhardt, John Gayler, met a hostile reception at Ravenshoe when he stated that 900,000 hectares of forest in the area would be preserved.

Some final observations by Alan McPherson on his five years as president: "The move from a part-time secretariat to a full-time secretary was one of the defining moments for me. The Chamber has always played a lead agency role in the evolution of our tourism industry and in business development. In the early 1970s, the Chamber agitated for tertiary education facilities to be established in Cairns, and formed an education sub-committee to progress this, which led to the opening of JCU at the TAFE college. Having a university campus in Cairns meant that young people would not have to leave the community and drift south. This provided equal opportunity for our young people for the first time. There was the debate with the council over where the city mall should go, and we still think they got it wrong. The issue of homeless park people led to the Chamber sitting down with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders to discuss what we should do. The Chamber helped foster the establishment of both the Far North Queensland Development Corporation and later the Far North Queensland Promotion Bureau. I have to mention the significant and extensive role played over many years by Bill Cummings, who has been a steadfast and loyal supporter and officer of the Chamber."

Real estate consultant **Frans Hamer's** election in **1988** began the longest serving presidency in the Chamber's history, with his last term ending in 2002. The winds of change were blowing through local government when the Alliance team came to power on the back of a controlled development and environmental agenda, with Keith Goodwin as mayor. In a controversial decision, the Cairns Port Authority approved the

go-ahead for the Pier Marketplace to be built on reclaimed mudflats out into Trinity Inlet.

A man, who helped put Port Douglas on the map while changing it irrevocably, grew up as a likely lad in Tasmania. Christopher Skase was a finance journalist when he fatefully decided to go into business. At its peak his Qintex Group was worth \$1.5 billion, and included a string of hotels and media holdings. In 1988 Skase invited more than 300 guests to a preview of his five-star Mirage Resort on Four Mile Beach, Port Douglas. Shortly thereafter it was all over, when his company collapsed owing creditors more than \$700 million and he and wife, Pixie, fled to a safe haven in Spain.

Brisbane hosted the World Expo at Southbank, stage one of the Burdekin Dam irrigation scheme was opened, and Australia celebrated its bi-centenary. The Cape York North Queensland Enterprise Zone was established to focus on Cairns and Townsville, and promote business development, but this was short lived. The Chamber opposed any suggestion of a curfew for aircraft operations into and out of Cairns International Airport.

The Cairns region's population climbed by 6 per cent, and Member for Cairns, Keith DeLacy, became State Treasurer as part of the Goss Labour Government. Cairns lost one of its most popular and progressive former mayors when Bill Fulton died at the age of 79. He had served on the council since 1946, and was mayor between 1952 and 1960, and whilst still in office won the Federal seat of Leichhardt, which he held until his retirement in 1975.

1989-1998

All 1645 pilots employed by Australia's domestic airlines resigned en masse in **1989**, in the face of the airlines moving to sack and sue them over an industrial dispute. This forced airlines to import pilots, and also call on the armed forces to keep aircraft in the sky by utilising Hercules transports to ferry passengers in and out of the city. Twelve months later, the dispute had cost the local economy more than \$60 million. Prime Minister Bob Hawke came to town on the election hustings and ran into protests, and claims that 60 per cent of tourist companies were going broke. One placard read, "Stay with us Bob, you are the only tourist we've got." Some businesses never recovered, and the city gradually got back on its feet over a number of years.

The Chamber changed its constitution to become an incorporated entity, and membership climbed to 400. The Chamber won a solid victory when extended shopping hours to suit the tourist nature of the town began. Several large corporations crashed,

among them Equiticorp, Hooker Corporation and Spedley Securities, followed one year later when the John Fairfax Group went into receivership.

A separate international terminal was part of a complete make-over of the Cairns International Airport costing \$80 million when it entered a new age in **1990**. Compass Mark 1 was established by Melbourne businessman Bryan Gray, but was short lived as was the second valiant attempt at freeing up the skies with Compass Mark 2. Doing business with the Central Post Office in the historical building at the corner of Abbott and Spence streets ceased, and a new mail exchange opened at the lower end of Grafton Street to service the CBD.

The Mt Emerald plane crash near Tolga claimed 11 lives, and robbed the city of its mayor Keith Goodwin and colleague Cr Rose Blank. The tragedy also took the lives of Sister Nadia De Popolo, far northern councillors Harry Rankine, Ivan Wilkinson, Graham Luxton, Hector Wallace, Joseph Newman and Bruno Riedweg, pilot Stan Lindgren and Elwin Phillips. Popular pharmacist and alderman, John Cleland, took over as Cairns Mayor, and he too died in office one year later.

A.J. Hackett opened his bungy tower at Smithfield as part of his world-wide operation, and the city witnessed the end of the 1980s building boom. Long time Chamber member, Peter Cominos, opened Orchid Plaza between Lake and Abbott streets. The waterfront crisis, which followed the earlier collapse of John Burke Shipping, saw the decline of stevedoring in Cairns. And whilst the State Government purchased the Smithfield site for a university campus in Cairns, the Chamber was unconvinced by the slow pace of securing capital guarantees from the Federal Government and JCU Townsville.

Federal Treasurer Paul Keating announced that Australia was in a "recession it had to have". The Queensland Government copped flak from the Far North following the introduction of permanent daylight saving, and domestic aviation was deregulated, effectively ending the two-airline policy. Former Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen was charged with corruption. Floor trading on the Australian Stock Exchange ended.

Former journalist, and Douglas shire Mayor, Mike Berwick announced a breakthrough in **1991** when the Federal Government provided initial funding to kick start the Daintree rescue land buy-back campaign. Cairns developer George Quaid was the largest owner of private land across the river at the time. The Federal Government provided a further \$23 million in the 1993 Budget to consolidate the rescue scheme. Two new airlines boosted air traffic and capacity when Garuda began flights to Bali and Jakarta, and

Solomon Airlines also arrived in Cairns. The national carrier, Qantas, made Cairns the hub of its operations.

In June **1992**, six months after his death age 56, Edward Koki Mabo, teacher, activist and citizen of Mer Island in the Torres Strait, achieved national prominence as the successful principal plaintiff in a landmark High Court ruling on native title. The High Court, for the first time, gave legal recognition to the fact that indigenous land ownership existed in Australia before European settlement.

The Cairns and district population passed 100,000, and Cairns airport was ranked in the top five for number of international arrivals, and in the top 10 for domestic arrivals. The area also recorded a substantial growth in the manufacturing sector with over 3000 new jobs created. US Vice President Dan Quayle paid a visit, played golf at Port Douglas, and helped draw international attention to the wonders of the region.

In **1993**, the Chamber held a “Future Cairns” seminar to gauge business opinion for response to State Government’s “Far North Queensland Urban Growth and Transport Management Strategies” draft discussion paper. The Far North Queensland Development Council’s operations were absorbed into the Chamber,

Coles Myer and Suncorp were granted preferred developer status by the State Government, and announced plans to build Cairns Central as a landmark project on the old railway site in Lake Street with a planned opening date in late 1996. The \$200 million project would include a new central railway station fronting Bunda Street, which required the part closure of Aplin Street. Because the land use was a controversial ministerial rezoning, it fell outside the city council’s planning scheme.

The Cairns Area Mining Industry Task Force was established by the Chamber in **1994** to promote the region as a major mining industry supply and service centre. Around this time, all city aldermen became councillors, and all shire chairmen became mayors as part of push for political correctness within local government.

In **1995**, after clearing every possible environmental and legislative hurdle in its path, developer and former city alderman, George Chapman and his family company opened Skyrail cableway, which travelled over the spectacular rainforest canopy between Smithfield and Kuranda. Cairns city and neighbouring Mulgrave shire were amalgamated, and Mulgrave mayor Tom Pyne won the day over Cairns mayor Kevin Byrne, in one of several forced mergers across the state.

It was around this time that the Chamber realised a major objective to help promote the region, not only as a tourist destination, but also as a trading hub. The Federal Government helped fund a three-year program to promote the region's goods and services overseas. The Chamber participated in the city council's rates summit, and consulted over a very controversial proposal to introduce a pay-for-use water policy.

Tertiary education came of age, and the Chamber's relentless endeavours were rewarded, when the stand-alone James Cook University campus opened to students on a site at Smithfield. Today, the "campus in the rainforest" has students enrolled from 26 countries and offers courses in arts, education, social science, law, business, creative arts, science, engineering, information technology, health, medicine and molecular science. Other JCU campuses are located in Townsville, Brisbane and Singapore.

The visitor experience in the city heart was enriched, and cultural tourist enhanced, with the official opening of the Cairns Regional Gallery by famous local artist, Ray Crooke, in the heritage listed two-storey Public Curators building erected in 1936.

President of the United States, Bill Clinton, arrived with a full entourage in **1996**, cuddled a koala at Port Douglas and gave recognition to where "the reef meets the rainforest", which renewed overseas tourism interest in the Far North.

The Reef Casino opened with a gala affair staged under canvas in Abbott St, as did the Cairns Convention Centre, to be managed by former head of the Far North Queensland Promotions Bureau, Geoff Donaghy. The Chamber formed the Cairns International Trade Centre to promote the region's export of goods and services, and the draft report on the Wet Tropics Management Plan was released. One major project on the drawing board was the massive gas pipeline project between Papua New Guinea and Cape York.

FNQPB developed a new domestic and international marketing and promotional strategy in **1997**, and changed its name to Tourism Tropical North Queensland, but retained as its mantra: *"To create sustainable visitor growth."*

Australian Navy hydrographic survey vessels, HMAS Leeuwin and Melville, built in Cairns by NQEA, were stationed at HMAS Cairns, consolidating the base as one of Australia's four major naval operations centres. A study was commissioned into tertiary education in North Queensland, with recommendation that Cairns Campus of JCU be upgraded to the status of a University College, and the Chamber helped form the Far North Queensland Business Chamber.

There was strong support among Chamber members for the proposed development of a stadium to host a National Basketball League team, and the world famous Tjapukai Dance theatre opened at Smithfield next to Skyrail. Cairns International Airport underwent further expansion, and new international services commenced from Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and Seoul. The Asian financial crisis caused a slowdown in tourism. The Chamber welcomed news of the appointment of Justice Stanley Jones as the first Supreme Court judge to be permanently stationed in Cairns.

Cairns City Council moved out of the heritage listed 1930s chambers in Abbott St - known as the “White House” - in **1998** and into a new \$38 million purpose built city administration building on the outskirts of the CBD. There was considerable angst within the business community when more than 400 employees made the move to the new building in Portsmith. Twelve months later, the old chambers got a new lease on life when renovated as the city’s library.

The Chamber successfully lobbied for petroleum giant, Chevron, to establish a corporate centre in Cairns, and hosted the Australia-PNG Ministerial Forum. Continental Micronesia commenced its Cairns to Guam service, and Flight West began direct flights to Papua New Guinea. The Australia-Papua New Guinea ministerial forum was held in Cairns over two days, and the Chamber and the Cairns International Trade Centre played key roles. Sixteen ministers from both countries attended to hold trade discussions.

A vast area of degraded vacant land at East Trinity was purchased by the State Government, preserving the area which as once the subject of a major development proposal, and the clock was ticking on the millennium bug, and the Y2K “threat”, which saw the Chamber sponsor a business seminar to address the issue.

The face of the city centre had gradually changed over a number of years, with the exodus of long standing institutions from the CBD to the fringe of the city or into regional shopping centres. Among these were David Jones, Coles, the Court House, MBF, the Central Post Office and Mail Exchange, and Queensland Ambulance and the ABC studios.

1999-2008

A major expansion program by the Cairns Convention Centre at a cost of \$30 million was completed in **1999**, and planning was well underway for the city council’s Cairns Esplanade redevelopment and CPA’s CityPort projects.

The Chamber moved into its new headquarters in the old Mulgrave Shire Council chambers on The Esplanade. The State Government began to canvas ideas for the revitalization of the CBD, and on the sporting front, the Cairns Taipans entered the National Basketball League.

The Concorde supersonic jet was welcomed to Cairns as this generation of aircraft reached the end of its working life, and Cairns consolidated its position as Australia's Number Two cruise port. The Chamber was saddened by the death of long standing member, Sir Thomas Covacevich at the age of 84. The war hero, leading lawyer and businessman was also remembered as a benevolent local philanthropist.

There was widespread uncertainty when the Federal Government introduced a Goods and Services Tax (GST) in **2000**, which required significant changes to the way people conducted their businesses, and the Chamber helped its members to prepare. Sydney hosted the Olympic Games, and the State Government launched its \$10 million refurbishment of the CBD commissioning the city council workforce to carry out the facelift.

The Cairns and Regional Economic Development Corporation, Austrade, Mayor Kevin Byrne and Chamber members headed off to Guam on the first of a series of "trade missions" to widen horizons, boost exports, foster new business and attend the Guam business show.

A memorandum of Understanding was signed off in **2001** between Cairns, Guam, Lae and Port Moresby Chambers of Commerce to help foster mutual business interests. The State Government gave the green light to a \$300 million upgrade of the Kuranda Range Road on the Kennedy Highway, and also started to upgrade the Bruce Highway southern access route into the city via Portsmouth.

Under a joint arrangement between the city council and the State Government, the redevelopment of the first stage of Barlow Park as a multi-purpose regional sporting venue began. And there was another dramatic incident which affected the skies over Cairns, when Reg Ansett's airline collapsed with all aircraft grounded permanently. Flight West and Impulse Airlines also ceased operations. On the other hand, Virgin Blue began flying into Cairns, and 12 months later expanded internationally.

Major developer **Bob Norman** became president in **2002**, and went on to serve six terms. International carrier, Australian Airlines, based all its operations in Cairns and began flights to Osaka, Nagoya, Fukuoka, Singapore, Taipei and Hong Kong. Qantas also introduced larger aircraft on many of its existing Cairns routes.

The Chamber championed the social need for more affordable housing in the city with a submission to the State Government, and at a Federal level, \$33 million was approved in funding for the establishment of an Australian Tropical Forest Institute that would investigate how to best use and conserve tropical forests both in Australia and overseas.

The State Government approved \$55 million for advancement of the CityPort project, and a further \$6.1 million funding was allocated for Cairns Airport upgrades. Cairns became Australia's busiest cruise port, with over 100 ship visits, and also was rated Queensland's busiest commercial port, with 26 scheduled daily services. There was an increase in the value of exports through the Cairns airport of 42 percent, to \$135.8 million, and the year also saw the establishment of Superyacht Group and BioNQ regional industry clusters.

The Federal Government declared the Peninsula Developmental Road "a Road of National Importance", making it eligible for 50 per cent federal contributions towards upgrading projects. Mayor Kevin Byrne was instrumental in helping form Advance Cairns, an organisation aimed at bringing together the region's major stakeholders for business development purposes. The controversial Bedminster composting facility was commissioned at Portsmouth to handle and minimise the entire city's and Douglas shire's waste.

The Chamber won a victory when dispensation was granted for Air Niugini to continue to fly F28 aircraft into Cairns, in order to maintain important links between the Far North and its closest international neighbour. A third trade mission to Guam and a submission to the State Government over the vital need for another major water storage facility in the region – Nullinga Dam – were other significant Chamber advances made that year.

Finally, in **2003**, the bell tolled for the Mareeba/Dimbulah tobacco industry, which at its peak had been worth more than \$50 million per year to the local economy, with 500 growers producing 60 per cent of the national crop.

The Guam Hotel and Restaurant Association moved its hospitality training from Hawaii to Tropical North Queensland Institute of TAFE, and discussions with telecommunications suppliers were held to enhance the quality of broadband and mobile phone services across the region. The Cairns and Townsville chambers co-operated to lobby for all-weather road linkages between the two cities. Severe Acute

Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) reached near pandemic status in Asian countries, which together with global instability, impacted on international visitor numbers.

Celebrations were held to mark completion of stage one of the Esplanade foreshore and 4000 sq.m saltwater lagoon project, which completely transformed the city's waterfront. Historic Indigenous Land Use Agreements paved way for the project to proceed, and over the next five years, it was to extend the full length of the foreshore, costing almost \$50 million, and involving all three levels of government.

The new reef fleet terminal was also completed, and the Gateway Discovery Centre opened on Cairns Esplanade in the FNQPB offices. Cairns Convention Centre was ranked fourth in the world for the second consecutive year, and rated the leading venue in the Asia-Pacific region by the Association of International Congress Centres. Queensland Rail completed a \$350 million Rockhampton to Cairns track upgrade, and the Tilt Train service began operations between Brisbane and Cairns. The United States declared war on Iraq, which led to a decrease in international arrivals through Cairns.

The Chamber shared with the rest of the community in honouring Sir Sydney Williams, who died aged 83. Sir Sydney was not only the founder of the Cairns Amateurs, but also the former chairman of Air Queensland, and head of his family company, Willtrac. He served on the inaugural JCU university committee in 1988.

The number of international students coming to Cairns for study grew 66 per cent over five years, to be worth \$50 million, and business tourism also played its part by injecting a further \$220 million into the region's economy. The Chamber became a lead player as a certified agent under the Department of Immigration to assist employers fill skilled vacancies through the Regional Migration Program.

In **2004**, the Qantas low cost airline – Jetstar - began services across the country, and international tourism began to recover from the dual blow of the Iraq War and SARS. The Chamber also re-instated its popular annual golf day. Changes along the Cairns foreshore included the takeover and redevelopment of former Radisson at the Pier by Shangri-La chain and the start of work on the Harbour Lights project by George Chapman and partners, and Cairns International Airport celebrated 20 years since its official opening.

Two of the most distinguished town clerks to serve the people of Cairns district died that year. Warwick Trundle had been town clerk from 1966 to 1982, and Arthur Forno was Mulgrave shire's clerk for 30 years.

Cairns Port Authority completed the second phase of International Terminal redevelopment in August **2005**, which included construction of a concourse and aerobridge, and a central services building. Comalco completed construction of its \$230 million NeWeipa expansion project, and Kagara Zinc mine was pumping \$2.5 million into the regional economy every month, and developing regional reserves at Balcooma and Mungana

One of the city's civic fathers, Jack Woodward, a decorated World War 2 aviator, died aged 89. He had served two terms as a city alderman, and during his working life had been a cane farmer, property valuer, and successful land developer.

More than 40 super yachts visited Cairns, where their owners spent \$40 million on refits. The Chamber developed a new logo for branding, marketing and promotional purposes, and formed the Young Chamber to facilitate personal development, provide a platform for mentoring and develop potential of the next generation of business managers and leaders in Cairns.

Cairn Port Authority celebrated its own centenary in **2006**, and the Cairns Group again met in the city, 20 years after its historic gathering at Palm Cove, this time with representatives from Australia, Africa, Asia and South America attending, to discuss general agreements on tariffs and trade.

Severe tropical storm, Cyclone Larry, struck the coast in March, causing estimated \$350 million damage to homes and property at Innisfail and Babinda, and a further \$400 million to banana and sugar crops. In April, a weaker Cyclone Monica slammed into Cape York. The Chamber marked the passing of one of its highly respected life members, Crofton Clauson, at age 92. He had been a leading city businessman and skilled jeweller for generations.

Business adviser and consultant, **Jeremy Blockey**, took up the role as president in **2007**. His steady hand at the helm, and a strategic vision for the region, saw his re-election in 2008.

The Far North mourned the death of Sir Robert Norman, at the age of 93. Sir Robert and the late Lady Norman made a massive donation of \$250,000 to start the JCU Cairns fundraising campaign. Their son, Bob, was Chamber president for six terms from 2002. Sir Robert chaired the campus coordinating committee, receiving an honorary degree in 1994. He was a highly distinguished World War 2 pilot officer with the RAAF's 459th Squadron, which flew Baltimore bomber sorties behind German lines, and he founded Bush Pilots Airways in 1951.

Flood mitigation works along the Bruce Highway were considered vital by the Chamber because the region relied so heavily on road freight, and each wet season saw lengthy disruptions due to flooding. Ministers from 21 nations gathered at the Cairns Convention Centre for the latest Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation summit (APEC) to try to resurrect efforts to liberalise world trade. Faced with the threat of demonstration, extra police were flown into Cairns from various parts of the State.

Wolfram mine about 90 km southwest of Cairns had a brief resurgence in **2008**. Tonnes of wolframite and molybdenum were mined from 1894. It had a chequered history and ceased real production in the 1980s. There was a mini-amalgamation, which saw Cairns city merge with neighbouring Douglas shire to create Cairns Regional Council, and the election Cr Val Schier as the region's first female mayor.

Deputy Premier Anna Bligh announced plans for a \$135 million redevelopment of Cairns International Airport, and the airport's general manager, Kayleen Collins, was appointed to the Queensland Tourism Board. In September, the global financial crisis, which began in the US, impacted locally, forcing the Rudd Labour Government to step in and guarantee bank deposits and building societies, and inject billions of dollars into the economy to hedge against the threat of recession. By December, jobs were being shed across the country, and the prospects for a bright New Year seemed unlikely.

In a move which dismayed the tourist industry, Qantas ceased direct flights between Cairns and Japan, with its economy carrier Jetstar talking over its routes. Owner of the Cairns Taipans, and philanthropist John O'Brien announced he was unable to continue to finance the national franchise team for a further season, and within days his own leading car dealership, Pacific Toyota, went into receivership as one of the city's first casualties of the global recession.

On Fitzroy Island things were a lot brighter and a \$100 million eco-friendly redevelopment was opened, including a complete revamp of the badly run-down council camping site. The new resort was able to cater from backpackers to five star guests.

And in a pre-Christmas announcement, the State Government advised it had sold Cairns International Airport to a major consortium for \$530 million, of which \$446 million would go towards redevelopment of the Cairns Base Hospital on its existing Esplanade site. The consortium, which also purchased the Mackay airport, included Westpac Bank, J.P. Morgan Asset Management, and Perron Investments.

Fittingly, some closing remarks by incumbent chamber president, Jeremy Blockey: *“While there has been no specific defining moment during my term so far, there has been a period of strong growth, and plenty of opportunity to capitalize with a view to diversifying our economy. The Chamber has led the way and put in the hard yards over the past couple of years. We have increased our business networks and interaction with members. Despite the troubled times, we get 200 people at our dinners and most walk away enthused and encouraged. There are opportunities out there and it is not all gloom and doom. If we keep our heads, we will probably come out a lot stronger. These things have given me the greatest satisfaction - working hand in hand with some good people to progress the aims and objectives of the Cairns Chamber of Commerce.”*

End

Researched and written by Gary Schofield