

Newsletter of the

TOWNSVILLE MUSEUM & HISTORICAL SOCIETY Inc.

February 2024

1/27 Barbeler Street Currajong Q 4812

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Special Points of Interest:

- *The Central Hotel*
- *Townsville Cinemas—a paper from Dr Dorothy Gibson-Wilde Collection*
- *An article on the City Building by Nick Shailer*

A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

It is now 2024, the start of a new year and for Townsville Museum our 39th year of preserving the history of Townsville. January started off with very hot weather and just before Australia Day, a tropical cyclone decided to come our way. The Museum closed for several days with cyclone preparations done by Nick, Sue, Wendy and Daniel ensuring our most precious artefacts were stored away just in case the building received damage. Thankfully all went well.

Preservation is very important and late last year the Museum was given a large hard cover bound collection of Sydney *Sun* newspapers dated 1916 and 1917. The contents of these papers proved worthy with the names and photographs of Townsville and northern districts soldiers being found. One name was that of Private Carmody and Carmody Street, Hermit Park is named in his honor. The only known photo of the Lone Pine of Gallipoli is also in these papers. Daniel, our new volunteer is a qualified historian and has found details of the Townsville and northern districts soldiers who were wounded or killed. He has compiled their full history which will be preserved with the newspapers.

As always the Museum is looking for volunteers. Unfortunately we have lost some long standing ones to health issues, so if you have an interest in history, give the Museum a call so we can have a chat about joining the team.

Enjoy reading this issue.

Regards,
Trish Cronin
President

Monthly committee meetings are held at the Museum on the third Monday of the month at ten o'clock. All committee members are notified a week prior to the meeting.



The Opening of the Rooftop Garden Café on Tuesday night.

Townsville Daily Bulletin
Saturday 3 December 1927

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TOWNSVILLE MUSEUM AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BUSINESS HOURS

Monday to Friday

9:00 am to 2:30 pm

ENTRY Adults \$5 Chn \$2

MEMBERSHIP FEES

(12 months from 1st July to 30th June)

Single \$ 11.00

Couples \$ 16.50

Corporate \$ 32.50

A PUB CRAWL THROUGH TOWNSVILLE— CENTRAL HOTEL

The Central Hotel, formerly *Market Reserve*, was located on the corner of Flinders and Stokes Streets, on the present day site of the Hotel Grand Chancellor or the affectionately named “sugar shaker” building. The following information was obtained from Dorothy and Bruce Gibson—Wilde’s Book, “*A Pattern of Pubs*”, published in 1988.



75 Central, c. 1912.

As Market Reserve

1900 Daniel Fitzgerald Treehy
1900-1901 George J. Haylett

As Central

1901-1902	Edith Maude McCreedy	1903-1910	Edward Byrnes
1902-1903	Sydney Arthur Nottingham	1910-1923?	Thomas Virgil Coyle

In July 1896 the buildings on Townsville’s Market Reserve at the corner of Flinders Street and Stokes Street were destroyed in a disastrous fire.¹ Immediately the architect W.H. Tunbridge, of Tunbridge & Tunbridge, submitted a plan for new shops and market buildings on the Reserve but the Municipal Council decided to build a new Town Hall, together with a theatre and hotel, on the site.² A competition was held in 1897 for plans for the complex; the winner, who received a prize of £100, was Townsville architect W. G. Smith.

The foundation stone was laid in June 1899 by the Governor of Queensland, Lord Lamington, who returned in November 1900 to open the theatre.³ The hotel lease then included the theatre, named the Theatre Royal, so the licensee was required to manage bookings and staffing for the theatre as well as run the hotel.

In 1899 the Town Clerk Daniel Treehy, on behalf of the Municipal Council, applied for a provisional licence for the hotel. The police opposed the application on the grounds that ‘the reasonable requirements of travellers through the area did not justify ‘another hotel’’; there were already two hotels in the block: the *Queensland* and the *Alexandra*.⁴

1. *North Queensland Herald*, 15 July 1896.
2. *op. cit.*, 2 September 1896.
3. *op. cit.*, 26 June 1899 and 19 November 1900.
4. *op. cit.*, 25 September 1899.

CENTRAL HOTEL

Nevertheless, the licence was granted to Treehy in November 1900. A month later it passed to George Haylett, an engineer; with no previous experience in running an hotel he quickly went bankrupt. The licence was then taken by Edith McCreedy, wife of well-known contractor Alfred E. McCreedy, Mayor of Townsville in 1898 and 1900.¹ changed the name to *Central*. In 1903 Edward Byrnes (brother of one of Queensland's premiers, T. J. Byrnes) took over the licence of the *Central* and established it as a popular hotel. With long experience in the hotel trade, Byrnes advertised that he ran it 'in his very best style'. He was a well-known figure in the community, serving on the City Council in 1905 and on the Hospital Committee. However, he was dogged by misfortune; his wife Ellen died in 1904 and their daughter Annie, aged 17, 1907. Byrnes himself was in failing health, suffering from Bright's Disease. In 1910 he sold out to Thomas Virgil 'Virgie' Coyle, leaving for Brisbane where he died two months later.² Coyle was a third-generation publican, the son of Thomas Coyle who ran the *Exchange* (Flinders Street), and a grandson of James Smith of the *White Horse*. He was nephew of both Mrs Thomas Lowth and Mrs Aylmer Campbell (of Cummins & Campbell).³

He proved a very successful landlord and theatrical entrepreneur. Some of the city's earliest moving picture shows were held in the Theatre Royal; films were then silent, with live performers and acrobats providing entertainment during intermissions between films or during reel changes. From his experience at the *Central* and the Theatre Royal, Coyle became a partner in the company Birch, Carroll & Coyle, which is still actively involved in film presentation at the Odeon and Forum cinemas in Townsville. The complex to which the *Central* belonged featured probably the longest cast iron decorated façade in Australia. It was unmistakably tropical building with wide verandahs shading the footpath. The hotel was a very convenient retreat during the interval in performances at the theatre, particularly on a summer's night, for both performers and audience. Sailors in port regarded it as the terminus of a popular 'pub crawl', starting at the *Metropole* as they left the harbour and continuing via the *Shamrock*, *Australian* and *Victoria Bridge*, then across Victoria Bridge to the *Central*, with a possible extension across the street to the *Queensland*.

The building was demolished in 1978 to make way for the *Townsville International*, which lacks the considerable charm of the old hotel with its festoons of cast iron.

1. It was Mrs McCreedy who unfurled an Australian flag for the first time at the Commonwealth Celebrations in Townsville on New Year's Day in 1901 [*North Queensland Herald*, 7 January 1901].
2. *North Queensland Herald*, 15 August 1903, 5 March 1904, 16 November 1907, 6 August 1910 and 1 October 1910.
3. op. cit., 2 July 1910.

FROM THE DOROTHY GIBSON-WILDE COLLECTION

Dr Dorothy Gibson-Wilde OBE was a local historian and a member of the Townsville Museum. When Dorothy passed, we were the beneficiary of a part of her vast collection. This paper on Townsville Cinemas 1940 to 1970 was amongst many in the collection. I have reproduced as closely as possible, with annotations handwritten on the typed pages. Dated as May 2016.

When World War II broke out in September 1939, Townsville had eight major cinemas – the Roxy, Wintergarten, Olympia, South Townsville, Estate, Sun, Regent and Plaza. In addition, there were probably two cinemas at Magnetic Island.

Though Australian servicemen were immediately engaged in the conflict overseas, the main focus was on Europe. Townsville remained relatively isolated. In 1940, the management of the Roxy Theatre opened a Drive in Theatre in the Sports Reserve. It was the first in Australia according to the *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, and caused a mild sensation. The *Mackay Daily Mercury* carried this report on 22 November 1940.

“Picture-goers of Townsville will be catered for in a manner eminently suited to northern summer conditions when Roxy Theatres Ltd. Open their new Drive-in Theatre at the Sports Ground, North Ward. Originally Drive-in theatres were designed to cater for the vast vehicular road traffic in California, where thousands nightly view the talkies from their cars; but the idea was also quickly seized upon by people who dislike indoor congregations and by others who found it inconvenient to attend theatres with children, aged relatives or invalid family members for whom mobility amongst crowds is a hardship. The new theatre at the Sports Ground will serve all these cases for the big grandstand is available to those not owning cars....”

The reference to those in the grandstand being able to see the screen indicates that it must have been installed opposite the Grandstand, which remains today, but how the sound was relayed was apparently from loudspeakers either under the grandstand or in front of the grandstand. One thinks it must have been extremely disturbing for those living in the vicinity.

That may have been a contributing factor to the short life of the venture. ~~For, though it may have been a good idea, it does not seem to have survived the wet season.~~ The entry of the Japanese to the war, as enemies [to the] allies in December 1941, and their rapid advances in Asia and the Pacific (would) most certainly have made it impossible to continue open-air screenings on such an exposed site which was so close to a number of military installations.

However other cinemas continued open, with the open-air section of the Olympia covered by a temporary canvas roof. Within months of the Japanese advances, not only Australian troops, but also thousands of American troops flooded the city. Most of the “Yanks” were keen cinema goers and the sudden upsurge of population placed a severe strain on Townsville’s entertainment facilities, though some films were shown at a number of military bases around the city. American film stars also came to entertain the troops – Bob Hope seems to have left the most lasting impression.

FROM THE DOROTHY GIBSON-WILDE COLLECTION

In 1910 Thomas Lowth, in partnership with George Page and C. Wood, opened the first purpose-built picture palace on land owned by either Tom Lowth or his wife Elizabeth at the corner of Stanley Street and Sturt Street, behind Lowth's Hotel. Named the Lyceum, it was managed by Harry Page, but in 1912 Virgil Coyle acquired the lease and renamed it the Stanley Theatre. He then moved his screenings from the Theatre Royal to the Stanley Theatre.

By June 1925 Coyle, now a partner in the firm Birch, Carroll and Coyle, had moved on, and the ownership of the lease passed to Miss Minnie Grace Mayer. She changed the name to Minna's Theatre, and by 1927 it had become the Palm Court Theatre.

Miss Mayer borrowed large sums from the Commercial Bank of Australia Ltd, not only for Palm Court Theatre, but also for the construction of a new theatre, the Hyde Park Theatre that she instructed George Lear to build about 1926. Sadly Miss Mayer failed to repay the loans, and the bank foreclosed. The properties were put on the market.

By then the Palm Court Theatre, the screen of which was apparently the white painted brick wall of Lum Mow's shop next door in Stanley Street, which had fallen well below the standards of other cinemas in Townsville. The Australian Natives Association purchased it in 1935 and demolished it to build shops. It seems that the present structure occupied in part by Chef's Café, at the corner of Stanley Street and Stokes Street, was then built on the site.

The site of the Hyde Park Theatre was referred to as being in Oxford Street, but Post Office Directories do not list it. There was a vacant block of land at the corner of Charters Towers road and Oxford Street that may have been the site but nothing appeared there until J.A. (Jack) Feldt built the Regent Theatre in 1938. That was not apparently on the exact site of the old theatre.

The other cinema that opened in 1910 was the Olympia Theater or Olympia Pictures. It occupied the former site of the Norman Hall, at the corner of Sturt and Stokes Street opposite the Magistrates Court (now the Courthouse Theatre). After the Hall was demolished during cyclone Leonta, the site remained vacant until the opening of a less than elegant roller skating rink that doubled as a cinema. Judging from a photograph of a couple of my relations on the skating rink, the walls were probably of galvanized iron, canvas or hessian, and there was certainly no roof.

In December 1918 the then owners, Birch, Carroll and Coyle refurbished the building, increasing its capacity and adding an upstairs gallery. The larrikins of the city found the gallery provided great entertainment. An itinerant pie seller was often stationed near the theatre where the likely lads could stock up with pies before mounting to the gallery to keep watch, with a view to spotting a canoodling couple in the seats below. Then they would drop their 'pie bombs' and skedaddle as fast as they could out of a side entrance. Apparently few were ever caught – they outran their pursuers!

This research will be concluded in the June 2024 edition of Townsville Museum & Historical Society newsletter.

FROM THE DOROTHY GIBSON-WILDE COLLECTION



*Advertisements for the cinemas in Townsville in 1955 on
 7th January.*

The City Building

Research by Nick Shailer



The City Building was erected for the Townsville City Council in 1927-8 for a cost of around £30,000.

The following article is an excerpt from The Townsville Daily Bulletin 27th September 1927.

The City Building

Research by Nick Shailer

The following article is part of the article included in:

Townsville Daily Bulletin (Qld. : 1907 - 1954), Saturday 24 September 1927, page 11.

“From the main entrance a beautifully polished floor leads to the stairway and lift. A handsome scroll work iron railing, manufactured at Robertson’s Foundry, guards the stairway.

The first floor is divided into a magnificent range of offices, 12 in number if the Council Committee room is excluded. These are subdivided by beautiful partitions in polished rose walnut, and

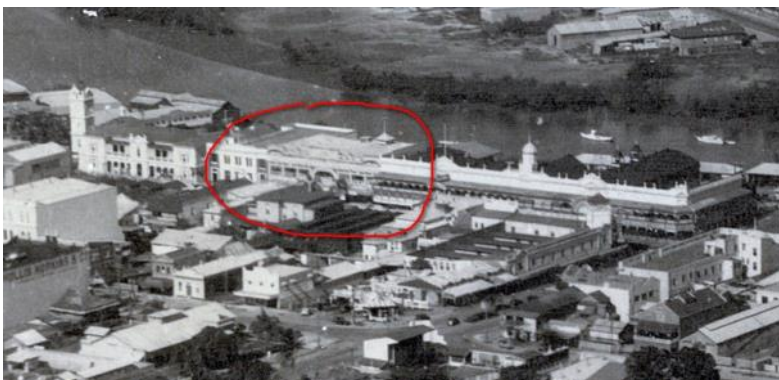
over every door is set out the Australian coat-of-arms in fretwork design. Along the front of the first floor runs a colonnade, which sets back the offices some 6ft and provides shelter from the sun and at the same time provides opportunity for artistic architectural work, of which Mr Harvey has taken full advantage.....



From the first floor the stairway continues still another storey opening out on to a handsome roof garden half of which is open to the sky and floored with concrete for skating and the other half covered in with beautiful teak flooring for dancing. Every provision has been made for the comfort of patrons of the roof garden which may be accepted will become the fashionable dancing floor of the city.....”

“From the stairway between the ground and first floor opens a mezzanine floor, leading to a most up-to-date suite of photographic parlours, the main rooms of which are over the buildings facing Ross Creek. This portion also includes the caretaker’s cottage, and a series of safe deposit vaults, which latter will doubtless be sought after. Every attention has been paid to the sanitation, and a large septic tank is now being installed to which the lavatories and conveniences of every floor will be attached. It is only to be assumed that shortcomings will as time goes on be discovered in the structure—it would not be natural to expect otherwise—but certainly it is difficult to see them now. At present the new lift, a very fine piece of workmanship is being installed in the centre of the building, and it is expected this will be completed in about a month by which time the rest of the building should be complete, and the contractors expect to be able to hand over the completed building some time in November.

In the work of construction, a fine concrete mixer owned by the contractors has played an important part, whilst the workmen have carried out their part with willingness and zeal. In Mr Stewart, the City Council have had the services of a very efficient Clerk of Works who has proved himself competent and obliging throughout, and has got on well both with employer and employee. In conclusion it can only be said that the architect (Mr S. Harvey) and the contractors (Messrs Hanson & Son) have between them provided one of the finest specimens of architecture in the north, of which they may well be proud.”



THE CITY BUILDING OPENED IN 1927



Above: the Opening of the City Building Rooftop Garden Saturday 3rd December 1927. The price on signing the contract on 26 February 1926 was £27,033/17/6, with £1,156 for the lift plus extras unspecified.

Below: Photos of the City Building and interior before demolition in 1978.



Stairs to the Engineers Dept formerly the Day Nursery and Roof Garden Café 1978



The demolition has begun. 1978

FROM THE TOWNSVILLE MUSEUM PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION

These two photos were donated by our very dedicated member, John Mathew, in 2008. It shows two horse drawn carts going up and down the Hervey Range road. The road is in good condition, indicating it was well used and the country either side of the road was very well timbered. The photos are undated but most likely around the turn of the twentieth century.





Townsville Museum

&

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This book is a sketch of the life of James Morrill who resided among the aboriginals of North Queensland for seventeen years between 1846 and 1863, and who wrote a narrative of his life, shipwreck, landing on the coast and residence among the Aborigines, and gave an account of their manners and customs and mode of living. Cost: \$39.95

