

RECOLLECTIONS 1920 Dalby — 1921 Travel to North Queensland

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A deep affection for the Navy has always been with me so, in 1911 I applied for entry to the Royal Australian Naval College, which was then being planned: I was at the time in the junior Naval Cadet Unit of Bowen House School. During 1912 a letter was received from the Secretary to the Naval Board advising that the College would not be established until the following year and, as entry would be confined to boys who attained the age of 13½ years during 1913, I would not be eligible on account of my age.

I had become an elderly person of 14 in 1912 so, in that year I joined the Royal Australian Naval Reserves as a cadet, and in 1914, the Commercial Banking Company of Sydney Limited at Brisbane Branch. In 1916 I was called up for active service with the Navy, became a Sub-Lieutenant in 1917 and, after demobilisation, rejoined the Bank at Brisbane in 1919, remaining there for a year.

Early in 1920 I was appointed accountant at the Dalby branch of the bank, and after arrival by the Western Mail train went to the Windsor Hotel run by Mr. & Mrs. de Stokar and lived there during my sojourn in the town. The Bank had a staff of three, Mr. Dunshea the manager, the accountant and the ledger keeper Ernie Farrar, who in the fullness of time became the General Manager. There were four other banks, the Q.N., Union, Wales and Commonwealth.

Among the citizens were Victor Drury, and Vowles, solicitors (Vowles was a member of the Queensland Parliament and a brother of Mrs. de Stokar), Doctors Hawthorn and Jamison, dentists Punch and Killen (the father of Sir James Killen, a Minister in the Federal Parliament).

The Sanatorium for tubercular patients (on the site of the present Dalby Hospital) situated a mile from the town, looked a desolate place with the dry conditions then prevailing in the district and on the odd Sunday walk in that direction one felt sympathy with those who had been brought there in the hope that the dry air would improve their condition.

During one week-end some of us travelled to look at Jimbour House, a large and most impressive residence built by Joshua Peter Bell in the 1870's. Unfortunately on our visit the house was unoccupied and showed many signs of neglect, though later it was bought by the Russell family who restored it to its former glory. The picnic races followed by the annual ball were much enjoyed, but the highlight of the year was the first visit by an aeroplane to Dalby. Everyone looked towards the east until the plane appeared on the horizon and landed on the racecourse. It was piloted by Captain Roy King, who took people up on short flights over the town. I went up on one of these and took a snap shot of Dalby from the plane with a Kodak Brownie box camera.

Not long afterwards Rowley McComb arrived in a plane and made a forced landing. He stayed at the Windsor Hotel and invited me to make a short test flight with him, which I readily accepted. The following week Darcy Donkin, a well known grazier came in his plane piloted by Bird, who afterwards became manager of Castrol in Brisbane. Donkin offered his plane for several flights in aid of charity. Tickets were sold in raffles for each flight, and in one of these I drew a winning ticket. Some of my Dalby friends thought it a little unfair that I should have been up in a plane three times when they had not been in a plane at all, but realised it was the luck of the game.

A visitor to the Windsor Hotel for a few days was Col. Harry Murray, V.C., C.M.G., D.C.M., etc., regarded I believe as Australia's most decorated soldier of World War I. He was quite a man and we enjoyed his stay. I met him in 1942 at Townsville, where he was commanding an army camp at the racecourse.

Conde, the accountant at the Union Bank, who lived on the premises, owned a fine gramophone with a complete set of records of 'Rigoletto': one or two of us from the other banks who were music lovers, spent some enjoyable evenings with him.

Private Transport

Farrar, Mervyn Parrott of the Bank of New South Wales and myself enjoyed the Sundays when we were invited to tennis at the Palmers, who owned a property five or six miles from Dalby. We had to arrange our transport and on such occasions the green grocer in Cunnington Street kindly lent us his horse and a set of harness. Having harnessed the horse we led him along the street to another obliging retailer who owned a sulky, which he made available to us. I had a small gramophone with a few records. One of us held the gramophone on his lap, winding it up and playing the records so that we had music as we drove along — a forerunner of the present day car radios and cassettes! A hurricane lamp was carried for the return

journey after supper, and of course we had to return the horse and sulky to their owners on arrival at Dalby.

Our transport situation improved when I bought a 1914 model four-cylinder single seater Buick from Dr. Hawthorn, which had been newly painted locally. It had acetylene headlights connected by rubber tubing to a rather handsome brass acetylene gas generator on the running board; carbide was placed in the lower section, above which a compartment contained water from which drops regulated by a small valve, fell on to the carbide below to generate the gas. After supper on our first visit to the Palmers in the car, we prepared for departure. Parrott opened the bonnet and turned on the petrol tap at the carburettor whilst, after opening the water valve on the generator and waiting for a minute or two, I applied a lighted match to the headlight burners, but nothing happened. Visions of having to use a hurricane lamp for illumination, as we did in our horse-and-buggy days a week or two before, were fortunately dispelled on discovering that Parrott, when closing the bonnet had nipped the rubber tube connecting the generator with the headlights.

The Prince of Wales arrived at Brisbane in August, and I had been invited by Mrs. William Collins to spend a night at Nindooindah, where she had made arrangements to entertain the Royal party. There was also an invitation from the Websters of "Whinstanes" to a ball at which H.R.H. and his entourage were to be present. Thanks to Mr. Dunshea's permission and by travelling to Brisbane and back by overnight goods train with passenger carriages attached, I was able to attend both functions with a minimum period of absence from the bank.

In December, having been granted a week's leave for Christmas, I set forth for Brisbane in the Buick with my luggage firmly strapped on a wooden platform behind the driver's seat. For much of the way to Oakey, thick prickly pear several feet high had advanced to the fence on both sides of the road. After spending the night in Toowoomba I left early next morning and arrived at Brisbane without mishap, though most of the road from Ipswich onward, which ran over the Little Liverpool Range, was extremely unpleasant.

During the latter part of 1920 I had given some thought to my future in the bank, which would mean service for some years in country branches — a long way from the sea. I also had a great love for Moreton Bay, added to which it was mentioned in the press that the Naval Board was considering the resumption of Naval Reserve Training which had been temporarily suspended at the end of the war. For these reasons I felt it would be wise to return and live in Brisbane and, on arriving home, discussed the matters with my father who said that he knew a wholesale firm which intended making an appointment

to their sales staff in the near future. Having called on the firm and being accepted for the position, I went to the Brisbane office of the bank and tendered my resignation.

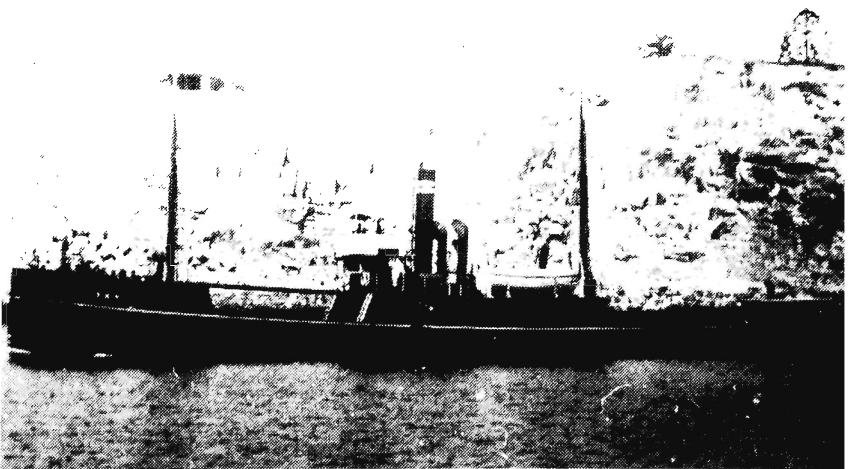
NORTHWARD BOUND

Early in 1921 I joined a Brisbane firm as sales representative, my territory covering the towns from Brisbane to Cairns, and the Atherton Tableland.

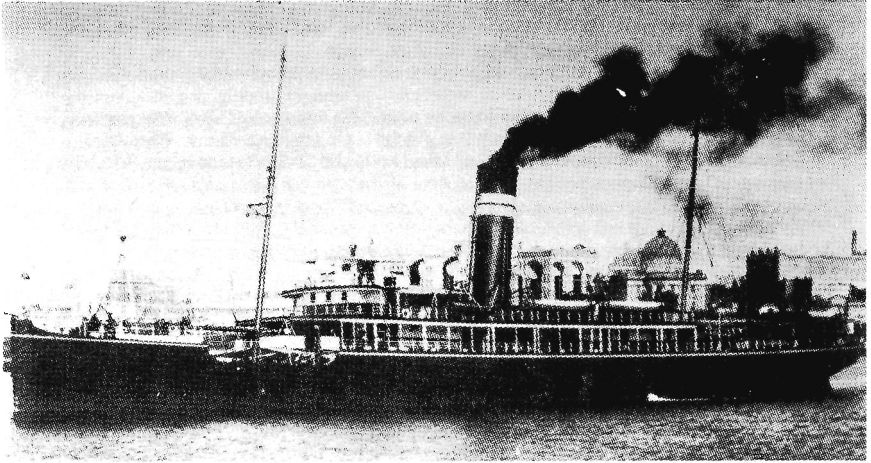
At that time there were several missing links in the railway line running North. The rail line from Brisbane extended only to Yamba north of Rockhampton. The prosperous sugar town of Mackay was isolated except for communication by sea for passengers, cargo and mails, as the railway south from Bowen went only to Proserpine. The line south from Townsville ended at Ayr and Home Hill, while that to the north finished at Ingham. The railway from Cairns south went only as far as Innisfail.

Thus to cover my territory required a combination of sea and rail travel. Rail to Bundaberg, Maryborough, Gladstone, Rockhampton and Mount Morgan, ship from Port Alma to Mackay and from Mackay to Bowen.

Bowen to Proserpine by rail thence by ship to Townsville, rail from Townsville to Ayr, Home Hill, Charters Towers and Ingham, on by ship to Cairns, then by rail to Innisfail and towns on the Atherton Tableland. Two small ships, the A.U.S.N. Company's *Kuranda* and Howard Smith's *Mourilyan* maintained a regular service with passengers and mails between Townsville and Cairns through Hinchinbrook Channel.



TAY (360 tons), built 1901



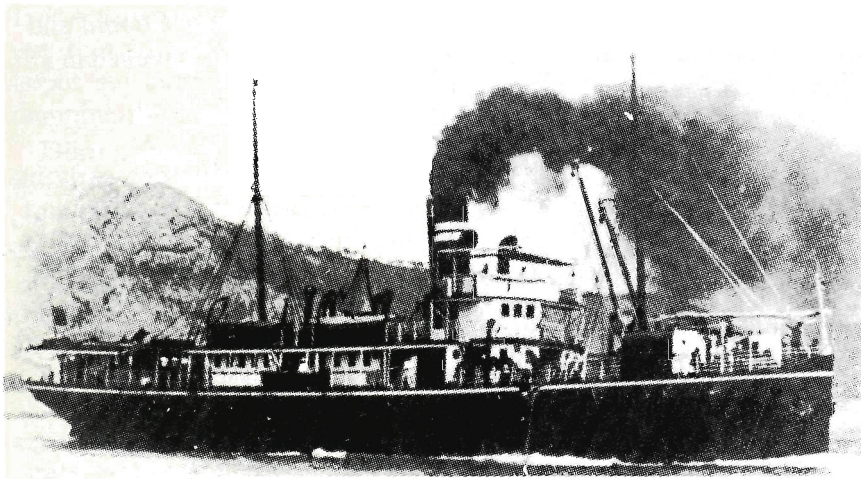
BINGERA (2092 tons), built 1905

It was also possible on occasions to take passage in ships belonging to Burns Philp, Eastern and Australia Line and Australia & Oriental Companies. On one occasion during a strike of coastal shipping, five of us shared a two-berth cabin on the overnight trip from Townsville to Cairns in the old *Tai-Yuan*, a clipper bow ship of the A & O Line: two slept in the bunks and three on the deck of the cabin — somewhat fitfully I might say.

When arriving by train late at night in some of the smaller towns, hotels would have a blackboard with the numbers of vacant rooms chalked on it for your convenience. I covered my territory, which also included towns on the Kingaroy line, every six weeks.



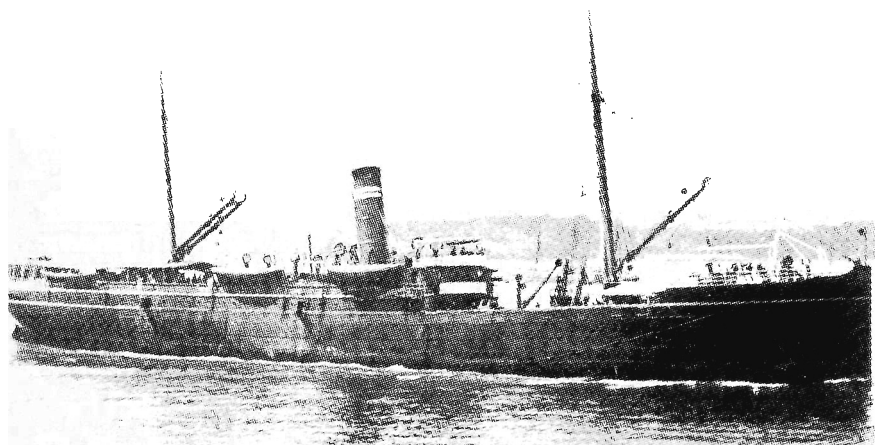
WYANDRA (4058 tons), built 1902



KURANDA (928 tons), built 1901

Sometimes it was convenient to travel direct by ship from Brisbane and work on the way south, landing at Port Alma thence to Rockhampton.

The A.U.S.N. Company's *Bingera*, 2092 tons, ran a weekly service from Brisbane to Townsville, calling at Gladstone for the mails (which came by rail from Brisbane), thence to Flat Top Island off Mackay to land and pick up passengers and mail in the company's tender *Tay*, thence to Bowen and Townsville. The return journey omitted Gladstone. Other ships of the Line were *Wyreena*, *Wyandra*, *Arawatta* and *Wodonga*.



ARAMAC (2114 tons), built 1889

Ships of the Howard Smith Company on the run were *Cooma* and *Bombala*, their tender at Mackay being the *Iceberg*: I travelled in all the ships mentioned during 1921.

THE FIRST TRIP

I left Brisbane for Townsville in Burns Philp's *Montoro* early in January 1921. Included among the passengers were F.C. Urquhart on his way to Darwin to take up his appointment as Administrator accompanied by his wife and daughter. He had just retired as Queensland Police Commissioner.

After working Charters Towers, Ingham, Ayr, Home Hill and Townsville, I took passage to Cairns, thence by rail to Innisfail and the towns on the Atherton Tableland. Returning to Townsville I boarded the *Bingera* for Mackay. A cyclone developed after sailing, so we had to take shelter in Whitsunday Passage for some time. After the weather eased, *Bingera* proceeded to Flat Top Island and anchored under its lee: there was a fairly heavy sea running with rain falling, nevertheless the little *Tay* came alongside and got her lines to the ship, but the vessels surged apart and the lines parted. She made one more attempt and, this time, another passenger and myself stood on *Bingera's* rail, jumping on *Tay's* deck as she surged up alongside, our suitcases and the mails being quickly lowered into her hold from *Bingera's* derrick, though one of the suitcases went into the sea during the operation.

As the *Tay* fell away, her lines parted again, and she made off for Mackay carrying back the passengers who had been hopefully waiting to board the *Bingera* for Brisbane. As we approached the mouth of the Pioneer River my companion gloomily remarked: "That was my suitcase which was lost overboard, so my trip to Mackay will be useless. I came here to do an embalming job and all my equipment was in it!"

Dave the "handy man" at the Grand Hotel, Mackay was at hand, whatever the hour, to look after those arriving or departing. He was also a mine of useful information and consequently was a popular and almost legendary figure among the regular travelling fraternity.

Leaving Mackay in the tender *Iceberg* with other passengers, some of whom had been unable to join the *Bingera* from the *Tay* a few days before owing to the weather, we boarded the *Cooma* off Flat Top Island and went direct to Brisbane. I then completed the first trip by visiting the towns in the southern portion of my territory from Rockhampton to Mount Morgan south by rail and, after a few days in Brisbane, was ready to go north once more.

On one occasion a group of us was stranded at Cairns awaiting passage to Townsville in the *Kanowna*, which was doing a trip for the

E & A Line, but was several days overdue. On two mornings, looking out from the Strand Hotel verandah, smoke on the horizon raised our hopes but each time it was the dredge *Trinity Bay* returning after dumping the spoil from dredging the channel cutting.

During the day of the second disappointment I went on board the *Ceduna*, an old Adelaide Steamship freighter and had a chat to the captain who was indulging in his hobby of wood-working at a carpenter's bench. The ship was sailing for Townsville that evening and he said he would be glad to take me if I did not mind sleeping on the deck as there was no spare cabin. His offer was accepted with alacrity. However my movements had not gone unobserved: some of my companions must have viewed my visit to the ship with suspicion, and followed the clues, for that night when the ship sailed, five others stretched out with me on the deck for the overnight trip.

There were other "identities" who regularly travelled the North. Among them was Bill Northern representing Johnson and Johnson, who said that he realised his responsibility in providing the wherewithal to powder the thousands of babies in Queensland. In subsequent years he won a medal at the Tokyo Olympics for sailing. He and Dawn Fraser created a minor sensation with their antics during the grand march past at the conclusion of the Games.

Another was cheerful Sam Harris, who represented a Queensland manufacturer of windmills, as at that time the cane fields around Ayr, which is in a dry belt, looked a forest of windmills used for irrigation.

TRAVEL BY RAIL

In the North, as most of the trips were made in daylight hours, sleepers were not required. On the return journey from Ayr to Townsville the train which left at an early hour of the morning, made a stop at the small town of Guthalungra where breakfast was obtainable for which we were quite ready. For this reason someone had christened it "Gutsanunga", by which name it was referred to by some of the more vulgar travellers. On the coast between Rockhampton and Brisbane, sleepers were always used: these were all Pullman type, the seats being transformed into sleeping berths on each side of the carriage. At the end of each a section was curtained off for ladies.

In the early morning two cheerful conductors, one with a large teapot and the other with tea cups, woke us and were welcome. On one occasion, two English women were in the sleeping section of our carriage: the conductors knocked on the wooden section then drawing the curtain to one side entered saying — "Coming ready or not". I did not hear what the response, if any, was.

On one trip from Rockhampton it was sad to see three lepers who were travelling on the train in the care of a police constable with whom

they got out to stretch their legs at various stations. The three, who were youngish men, were on the way to spend the rest of their lives at the leper station on Peel Island in Moreton Bay.

It is of interest to remember that all of the considerable rolling stock on the railways of North Queensland, including of course the locomotives and the rails, had been transported by sea to Bowen, Townsville, Cairns and Cooktown.

In Townsville I called on Sister Kenny, the remarkable woman who had established a clinic for the treatment of infantile paralysis in the Queen's Hotel building. My uncle, Dr. Aeneas McDonnell of Toowoomba had suggested my paying her a visit, as Sister Kenny had done her nursing training in his hospital and it was he who gave her encouragement during the early and difficult days of her long crusade which lay ahead.

(In later years the film "Sister Kenny" portrayed Dr. McDonnell as a dark-haired Scot who spoke with a strong Scottish "burr", and that depiction bore little resemblance to the real Dr. McDonnell, who was born at Kangaroo Point, graduated at Sydney University, and had greyish hair at the time of Sister Kenny's appearance on the Australian nursing scene.)

I met in Townsville on my first visit a number of contemporaries of my father, who was there during the 1880's. These were Cradock of Alfred Shaw's, Cummins of Cummins & Campbell, Green of the Townsville *Bulletin*, J. Willmetts of J. Willmetts & Sons, Spencer Hopkins of Hollis Hopkins, and L.C. Woolrych of L.C. Woolrych & Son. Woolrych, with my father, had won the doubles tennis championship of North Queensland on several occasions. With their families and other friends whom I met in the coastal towns from Maryborough to Cairns, I maintained the friendships during my many trips during the subsequent thirty-five years.

At the time of which I have spoken, the closing of one area of rich achievement in North Queensland and the opening of another was not far off. By 1924 the isolated sections of the railway along the coastline had been joined together, so at last Brisbane and Cairns were connected by rail. In terms of communication and supply, the rail link was of immense benefit to those who lived in the North. It paved the way for the burst of development which was to come, along the northern coast, in the vast hinterland of which Townsville was the port, and the wonderful country, including the Atherton Tableland in the Cairns area.

All of this was richly deserved by the fine people of North Queensland, whose capable and experienced hands were ready to grasp the new opportunities that offered.