

The why and wherefore of queenslandplaces.com.au

IN AN URBANISED SOCIETY MOST OF US LIVE IN CITIES, SUBURBS, TOWNS AND VILLAGES. ALL HAVE A RICH AND SOMETIMES UNEXPECTED HISTORY. OVER THE LAST SEVEN YEARS A GROUP HAS BEEN WORKING ON A PUBLIC WEBSITE TO EXPLORE QUEENSLAND'S PLACES. PETER SPEARRITT, MARION STELL AND JOHN YOUNG EXPLAIN.



Today most people get their place information from websites, printed travel guides or in-car navigation systems. The quality of the information is varied and a great deal of it is 'now-ist', especially the up-to-date tone of travel sites and the promotional orientation of local government sites.

Travellers in the nineteenth century regularly had recourse to gazetteers, which listed place names and sometimes gave an account of the place. Guide-book companies flourished, publishing guides to many countries and responding to new commercial and travel opportunities. The discovery of gold in Australia saw a succession of guide books following the finds, from Victoria and New South Wales to Queensland and Western Australia.

The physical appearance of settlements first became widely disseminated via illustrated newspapers, but the photographic postcard soon became the single most common means of depicting a place. By the 1890s postcard manufacturers in Britain and Germany were churning out hundreds of images of Australian places, and in the early twentieth century home-grown firms, including Rose Series in Melbourne and Murray Views in Gympie, joined the fray. Murray Views emerged out of a photographic studio founded in 1908. The studio soon found itself depicting places not only in Queensland but throughout Australia.

queenslandplaces.com.au draws heavily on postcards, particularly from Murray Views.

Colonial officials started formally counting the population of Queensland places at the 1861 census. In the nineteenth century many settlements experienced rapid population rises, particularly those based on gold. Gympie's population doubled in the 1870s in the space of just ten years. Cooktown, serving as the port for the Palmer River Gold Rush, saw its population quadruple.

Aboriginal missions, set up by the Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian, or Lutheran churches, also experienced rapid population growth, as pastoralists forced Indigenous people off their traditional lands. Many Indigenous people were forced to move to island settlements, allegedly for their own protection, but also because of a sense of 'out of sight, out of mind'. Stradbroke Island from the 1890s and Palm Island from 1918 saw people from many different regions and tribal groups forming new and often fraught

settlements, overseen by government-appointed 'Protectors of Aboriginals', whose remit extended as far as Thursday Island and other islands in the Torres Strait. The Protectors could approve the employment, removal and relocation of Indigenous people, overseeing, in conjunction with church groups, the administration and development of mission stations, from Cape York to Barambah, renamed Cherbourg in 1932. In the 1920s Queensland Railways listed some mission settlements, including Yarrabah south of Cairns and Palm Island, on their standard tourism itineraries.

Many settlements owed their origins to the spread of pastoralism, and their fortunes reflected the growth in sheep and cattle numbers, and in times of drought, the sharp decline. The rapidly developing railway system took rural produce to major ports, and provided a conduit for manufactured goods—from farm equipment to furniture—to service the growing population. In the 1880s and 1890s some towns—such as Barcaldine, Hughenden and Clermont—were sites of political confrontation.

Sugar towns developed rapidly from the early 1900s and mills soon followed. All these towns were on riverine sites from Nambour and Bundaberg in the south to Innisfail and Ingham in the north. Sugar became a competitive business so some mills flourished while others languished. Indentured labourers from the South Sea Islands and later Italians worked the cane fields. German settlers gave names to places like Bahrs Scrub and Steiglitz, but many were changed in World War I: Tuetobourgh became Witta and German Gardens became Belgian Gardens. Chinese miners and gardeners left their mark on the landscape but not the names in places like Cooktown, Palmer River and Innisfail.

In the 1950s Port Douglas appeared to have had its day, its decline much remarked upon. The rapid growth in air travel and demand from southerners wishing to escape their winter gave Port Douglas a new lease of life from the 1980s, just as a sharp increase in Japanese tourism saw Cairns turn from a regional town with a trickle of tourists to a destination on the international resort circuit. But as with agriculture, tourism can be remarkably fickle, so Cairns now has to cope with a fall in international tourists and the need to find new markets.

Queensland's large cities have had a less simple trajectory than country towns and major regional centres, not least because their economies are more complex, even though their growth can be heavily dependent on government funding, from schools and hospitals to a veritable army of public servants to administer or regulate many aspects of life. As these cities grew, first out along railway and tramway routes, and later along road and then freeway routes, suburbs sprang up in every direction to house the growing population. Some of these suburbs had their origins in small rural settlements subsumed by urban growth, while particularly since World War II, more

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Port Douglas

Port Curtis Frenzlau

Photo Gallery

Port Douglas, a coastal resort town of about 1000 people, is 60 km north-north-west of Cairns. It was named after John Douglas, Premier of Queensland (1877-79). Established as a port and then sugar growing area, Port Douglas fell on hard times after the 1911 cyclone. Tourism came to its rescue in the 1980s.

The creation of Port Douglas came about from the need for a convenient port to tranship goods for inland gold fields at Palmer River (1873), north-west of Port Douglas, and on the Hodgkinson River southwards to Kingsborough (1876). Existing tracks to Cooktown and Cairns were hazardous and difficult, and a prominent bushman, Christie Palmerston, found a better track which came out near Island Point. By 1877 entrepreneurs from Cooktown erected a wharf and stores at the new port near Island Point and Palmerston's track was cleared and marked. In October 1877 the port township was surveyed and named Port Douglas.

A Port Douglas roads board was formed in 1878 to maintain the inland track; at sea, 13 km from Port Douglas, a light house was erected on the Low Isles cay. (The original iron clad, timber framed tower was decommissioned in 1994.) In the town itself a school and a courthouse were opened in 1879, along with a hospital. St Mary's Catholic church opened in 1880 and activity at the port was strengthened with the opening of the Herberton tin field in 1880. When copper was mined at Mount Molly freight costs for the non-aeriferous metals became a key factor, and an inland railway was planned. Mourilyan, Cairns and Port Douglas competed for the privilege and Cairns was chosen (1884), possibly unwisely when the geology of the Barron Gorge was fully understood. Investment in Port Douglas became less enthusiastic.

Minerals were not the only outwards freight from Port Douglas. Settlers came to the Mossman and Daintree River valleys and in 1883 the privately funded Brie-Brie sugar mill opened for Mossman cane growers. Cedar was brought down from the Daintree by Townsville timber merchants. Sugar production faltered in 1885, but grazing increased until the cattle tick outbreak in 1896. Fortunately Mossman had a second chance with sugar when a new mill was opened in 1897, a central mill with cane growers tied to it through mortgage arrangements. By 1900 there was a tramline from the Port Douglas wharf to Mossman, for passengers and freight. The town was described in 1903 in the *Australian Handbook*:

PORT DOUGLAS (16° 30' S. lat., 145° 28' E. long.), co. Cook, parish of Salisbury, Woothakata electorate, lies about the centre of the coast of Trinity Bay, 40 miles distant from Cairns, N.Y. Cooktown is 70 miles N., and Townsville about 164 miles SE.; the distance to Thornborough is about 56 miles, and to Herberton about 80. There is weekly steamer communication with Brisbane, and also with Townsville. A good road leads to the Hodgkinson and Herberton. Hotels: Exchange (a two-story building), Court-house, North Australian, Caledonian, Queen's (a two-story building), Mossman, O'Brien's, Exchange, Royal and Mount Pleasant. It received the name of Port Douglas after the Hon. John Douglas, Government Resident at Thursday Island. It is situated on Island Point, about six miles north-west of Howbrey River and ten of White Cliffs. The "Point" is a long, high grassy hill or peninsula, 190 feet high (being surrounded on three sides by water), projecting a considerable distance into the sea to the eastward; to the northward of which, and protected by it against south and south-easterly gales, is the entrance to Dickson's Inlet. The latter has a depth of between 7 feet and 8 feet on the bar at low water, and inside, and for at least three miles up, a channel wide and deep enough for large ships to float and turn. An uninterrupted deep-water channel continues for three miles still higher up, but narrows greatly beyond that point. The Inlet is entirely an arm of the sea and affected by the tide to its furthest extremity inland. The main street, called Macrossan Street, extending from beach to beach, having the sea at one end, and the waters of the harbour at the other, lies at the bottom of a hill, and is for the most part lined with buildings. The beach at the far end of the town is magnificent. It extends for about five miles along the coast, is fringed with beautiful green scrub, and the sand is white and land under foot. There is a sand bar which has been dredged to enable vessels to come up to the wharves. The cutting is 80 feet wide to 8 feet below low water, and extends from deep water outside to deep water inside the bar. The present anchorage is about 100 yards from the shore, and landing is effected by a jetty. The Inlet is to be dredged, when the channel will be deepened and a swing basin made to allow the steamers to come up to a wharf at the foot of Macrossan Street. There are here a custom-house, money-order office, post and telegraph, police station, pilot's residence, court-house, Lands office, and Government Bond store, a substantial Roman Catholic church, Church of England (St. Andrew's). Banks: Queensland National, and Government Savings Bank. Primary school (No. 234), school of arts (with library of 450 volumes), and hospital, a substantial building of hardwood, to contain 30 beds, to which is attached a residence for the surgeon. Masonic and Oddfellows' lodges are here. The extension of the Cairns line has been a detriment to the business of the town by diverting it to Cairns, but the establishment of central sugar mills on Mossman River, Saltwater Creek, and the Daintree River, under the Sugar Works Guarantee Act, will, it is believed, again bring commercial prosperity to Mossman Mill, which is the largest under the Sugar Works Guarantee Act, and which has 2½ miles of permanent and 6½ miles of portable tramway attached, crushed 60,000 tons of cane in 1896. A telephone line connects Port Douglas with the Mossman, and a tramway between the two places is being constructed. Port Douglas is the seaport of the Hodgkinson and Etheridge gold-fields, and the Herberton and Tate tin-mines. Mounts Spurgeon, Lewis and Fraser tin-mines, about 20 miles S.W. from Port Douglas, are producing a considerable amount of stream tin. Large areas of land have been taken up for agricultural purposes, and under cultivation for corn and fruit, such as oranges, mangoes, and other kinds, which grow in abundance, and are exported to all parts of Australia. Newspaper: Gazette. Formation: slate and soft sandstone. Population, 484 (census 1891).

CHANGING FORTUNES

In 1911 a severe cyclone hit Port Douglas, destroying many buildings, including a large store, the Exchange Hotel, the Catholic Presbytery, the Government bond store and the tramway station and engine shed. Rebuilding did not fully regain the town's pre-cyclone building stock.

Screen capture, queenslandplaces.com.au 'Port Douglas'



Top: Mobile banking: moving the Commonwealth Savings Bank, Barcaldine, 1961 (photograph by Gladys Hartland)
 Above: Fumigating Parliament House Brisbane, 1979 (photograph by Ruth Read)
 Below: Flensing deck, Tangalooma Whaling Station, 1960—the station opened in 1952 and closed in 1962 (photograph by Richard Hopkins)



and more suburbs have been green-acre subdivisions started from scratch, especially on the Gold and Sunshine Coasts where southern retirees fuelled growth from the 1960s. But even here such landscapes may have a record of prior Indigenous occupation and pathways, and often agricultural use as well.

Undertaking the research for **queenslandplaces.com.au** has taken us from colonial and Commonwealth censuses to the rich resources of the State Library of Queensland, the Queensland State Archives and the Fryer Library at UQ. Because of the enormous amount of movement between colonies and then states, other libraries also have vital holdings of Queensland material, including the Mitchell Library, the National Library in Canberra, and the State Library of Victoria. We have received great assistance from all these libraries, as well as local studies libraries from Southport, Nambour and Ipswich, to as far afield as Cooktown, Roma, Longreach and Mount Isa.

To illustrate our entries we have called on both private and public collections of black and white photographs and coloured slides. In 2009 we were delighted at the response to our call for slides taken between the mid 1950s and the mid 1980s, a period not yet well represented in public collections. We have also been able to draw on the rich history of postcard publishing in Australia, and are particularly grateful to Murray Views in Gympie, Queensland's longest running and most important postcard publisher, for permission to reproduce from their extraordinary array of material.

queenslandplaces.com.au has over 1100 entries. It can be searched by place name or keyword, from agricultural products and people's names to events and themes in Queensland history. The site will be updated at each new census, and errors, notifiable via a feedback option to the editors, corrected.

As a website **queenslandplaces.com.au** is the first of four to be hosted by the Centre for the Government of Queensland at UQ, supported by a grant from the Department of Premier and Cabinet in Queensland. Its content is most closely aligned to the forthcoming *Queensland Historical Atlas* site, which traverses many of the grand themes in Queensland history, and can be used to situate particular places in their wider landscape. The other two sites to be launched in 2010, *Queensland's Past Online* and *Queensland Speaks*, provide avenues into the rich documentary history of the state and the oral history of Queensland.

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