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. In the 1930s 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 as the 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. Because sugarcane did not grow well at locations, some sites were changed. For example, the place of Ingham was changed to Ingham. Sugar became a competitive business, and mills flourished while others languished. Italian labourers from the South Sea Islands and later settled in places such as Bahrs Scrub and Steiglitz, but many were changed in World War I.

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 is 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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and more suburbs have been green-acre subdivisions started from scratch, especially on the Gold and Sun-
shine 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 Com-
monwealth 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 publish-
ing 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.

PETER SPEARRITT, MARION STELL and JOHN
YOUNG are the editors of queenslandplaces. com.au and are attached to the Centre for the
Government of Queensland at UQ.

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