"Shut the Gate" was a project initiated and sponsored by the Beef Cattle sub-Committee of the Mackay and District Agricultural, Pastoral and Industrial Association Inc., in collaboration with Central Queensland University. Its goal was to research, write and publish an attractive, engaging and informative account of the history of cattle showing in Mackay, with particular emphasis on the relationship between the regional cattle industry and the 123 year old annual Mackay Show. While the project throws considerable light on the influence that cattle showing has had on the development of the beef industry, and the important role it plays in generating and maintaining a positive awareness of the industry among town folk, it is essentially about people. The book celebrates the trials, tribulations and triumphs of those who breed, raise, and compete with beef cattle in the Mackay district.

"Shut the Gate" was a commissioned work, with the Beef Cattle sub-Committee its primary sponsor. The essential brief was to prepare 'a readable social history' for possible publication. This in effect meant that the book needed to be written in a style accessible to its anticipated target audience, such as participants in the beef industry, rural primary producers, regular patrons of the Mackay Show, and local history enthusiasts. Its content and tone therefore, reflects this audience. It is a work of academic scholarship presented in the form of a textually accessible local history that is not only informative but also a pleasurable experience for the intended reader. The book is introduced by a dissertation that reflects on the research and writing process.
“Shut the Gate!”: a social history of beef cattle exhibiting at the Mackay Show and its relationship to the region’s beef industry.

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Acknowledgments

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DECLARATION

I certify that this dissertation is my own work, based on my personal study and research. All materials and sources used in this dissertation have been acknowledged appropriately.

I also certify that this dissertation has not previously been submitted for assessment.

I have read the Central Queensland University’s policy on plagiarism and understand its implications.

Signed: [Signature]
Cattle Runs soon after Mackay's settlement.
The view from behind the fence
INTRODUCTION

This dissertation will identify and analyse the objectives of the "Shut the Gate" project, detail its structure and methodology, and explain the narrative tactics used in the book. It will also review and reflect on the project's processes and outcomes, including the effects of the limitations imposed by its being a commissioned project. The project commenced in August 2000 with the awarding of the "Shut the Gate" postgraduate scholarship sponsored by the Beef Cattle sub-Committee of the Mackay Show Association (henceforth the Committee) and Central Queensland University. The aim of the project was to celebrate the many people who have contributed to the success of the beef section at the Mackay Show in a book entitled “Shut the Gate.” The primary sponsor, the Committee, commissioned a social history that was inclusive of as many facets of exhibiting beef cattle at the Mackay Show as possible, within the limitations of a forty thousand word document. It was keen to see particular significant events and characters prominent in the text, and it retained all rights over the publication of the resulting document.

Local histories have become more numerous in recent years. While this is due to a number of factors, such as the marketing of tourism destinations and the advent of desktop computer publishing, at its core is the desire of local authorities and their communities to commemorate their history, and have their stories told to a wider audience. The Committee wished to celebrate over 120 years of involvement with the Mackay Show Association. The other
sponsor, Central Queensland University, regarded the project as an opportunity to become involved in a civic celebration, and to develop closer links with the Mackay community. The three main objectives of the project were to produce a community specific commemorative publication, promote this community’s activities to the local industry, the wider Mackay community, and prospective clients, and importantly, to contribute to the academic body of knowledge regarding the history of Mackay and district.

OBJECTIVES
The Committee’s reasons for instigating the “Shut the Gate” project may be summarised thus. Firstly, it required a permanent record of its activities as a community group over a 120-year time period. Also, the Committee wished to promote their community during the two-year term of the project, using the proposed publication as a means of attracting media attention. Regarding the first objective, it is neither surprising nor uncommon for specific groups to publish an account of their history and place within the wider community. The reasons for this are as diverse as these groups themselves, however they do usually concentrate on the themes of celebration and promotion. In the case of the commissioners of “Shut the Gate”, there was the feeling that a celebratory book focusing on exhibiting beef cattle in the district would be just reward for the many farmer Committee members who were now quite elderly. The Committee wanted the book to feature this previous generation, who were in many ways responsible for the current success of the exhibit.

To achieve its goals the Committee appointed a project steering committee consisting of a local Department of Primary Industries officer, a female administrative volunteer to the Committee, and a local semi-retired stock agent. Their role was to facilitate open and effective communication between
the researcher and the Committee during the project and significantly, as it relates to commissioned histories, to guide the project to its desired purposes. After it had been decided that a postgraduate student should write the history the concern soon emerged that a critical academic approach might not result in the desired favourable and light-hearted interpretation. The creation of the sub-committee was insurance against this. On the other hand, it was acknowledged that an independent university researcher would help to diminish the possibility of bias towards or against particular producers or breeds. It is interesting to note that none of the steering committee were involved in beef cattle production. Given the above, it is not surprising that in the course of the project some interesting issues were encountered relating to the validity of commissioned historical works as rigorous academic research, and this will be expanded on in the methodology section. The Committee planned to market the book at the Mackay Show and also present copies as mementoes to visiting beef industry representatives, many of whom are from interstate and overseas.

The Committee has throughout its history been a great innovator in the promotion of the beef showing community and their activities. The Mackay Show Beef Exhibit is renowned Australia-wide for its excellence, and the Committee regarded the “Shut the Gate” project as an opportunity to reach a larger and more diverse audience. In this it was successful because it gained considerable and valuable exposure through all strands of the media during the project. This was especially the case in the months leading up to the 2001 Mackay Show. Media commitments were mostly instigated and scheduled by the steering committee. While they were useful from a research perspective in alerting potential informants, as outlined in the Methodology section, the Committee sometimes appeared more interested in the publicity than in the
number of informants acquired through this process. This in no way should be seen as criticism, but it does highlight both the marketing skills employed and the importance that the Committee placed on promotion as an objective of the project. The emphasis on promotion when undertaking commissioned history should be clearly understood by the historian before embarking on such a venture. The higher profile that “Shut the Gate” achieved for the exhibit was no doubt a factor in near record entries and spectators in that year. “Shut the Gate” merchandise was produced, long and short sleeved shirts and beer coolers featuring the project’s logo, and these were made available to exhibitors, sponsors and industry identities. Many functions, ranging from informal beer and crisps at the showground bar to formal dinners with political dignitaries as guests, were held with at least one form of media always present. Thus, it may be confidently stated that promotion was integral to the project.

The “Shut the Gate” publication will add to the ever increasing body of knowledge regarding Mackay’s history. Within its pages lay accounts of many significant events and characters that have shaped the city. Much of the historical information has not been presented before, and a great deal of the old archival material, such as pre-1900 newspaper articles, is given a voice for the first time since it was written. While researched with academic vigour, the text of “Shut the Gate” is written in such a way as to be accessible to a non-academic audience. It is hoped that it sparks interest in Mackay’s history by inspiring the reader with an affinity with those who live on within its text. History is often said to have a great deal to teach contemporary society and the themes of resilience and commitment that run throughout the book are lessons that may need to be revisited. However, no lessons are learnt if the text is too dense to be understood let alone enjoyed. Local history can be a
gateway to wider historical study and knowledge, and for me an important objective in undertaking the project was to keep that gate of future historical study open.

**METHODOLOGY**

In the initial stage of the two year project a substantial amount of time was spent becoming familiar with as many aspects of the project’s aims and themes as possible. A variety of sources were used to conduct the research, including published sources, electronic media, web-sites, the local newspaper (*Daily Mercury*), Mackay Show Association records, and informal discussions with members of the Committee. This laid a solid foundation on which to begin to develop the project, and this preliminary evidence was documented and presented to the steering committee for comment and was subsequently approved by the Committee.

In the first six months the stakeholders arrived at an agreement about the scope and direction of the proposed book. The Committee indicated its satisfaction that what had been outlined would address the broad range of issues that might arise from the exhibiting of beef cattle at the Mackay Show, and the next twelve months were devoted to more in-depth research. This included interviews and a detailed search of newspaper records. At this stage, advertising and promotion were also undertaken in local television and radio, and in the newspapers. The idea was to raise the community profile of the project, and to invite and encourage prospective informants who may wish to contribute to the book. The next phase was most crucial, attending the 2001 Mackay Show held between the 19th and 21st of June. The project’s timescale only allowed one opportunity to visit the actual event, but it afforded opportunities for unsolicited interviews with Show patrons, formal interviews
with those exhibitors who only came to Mackay at this time of the year, photographing the event and fulfilling publicity commitments for the project.

The final six month period involved collating, formatting and writing the book, "Shut the Gate". The Committee was given a draft three months prior to the project's conclusion to allow for input regarding any omissions, necessary inclusions, deletions and general comments. Overall the timeframe was adequate to complete the book, but an additional three months, either at the start or finish, would have allowed time to cover two Mackay Shows and their beef exhibits, and thus collect significantly more anecdotal evidence.

The beef exhibitors of the Mackay district consider themselves a community, and like any community tensions between members do exist. Given the competitive nature of cattle exhibiting, it was only to be expected that an element of rivalry would surface during the project, especially with respect to the comparative qualities of show cattle. It was also anticipated that some participants might give voice, through the interview and commentary process, to longstanding 'personality clashes'. The steering committee gave prior warning of this likelihood, however while instances did arise, they were rare and no potentially slanderous interviews, comments, or documents were kept on the project's file. In this regard, ethical clearance was obtained from the University Ethics Committee during the early research phase of the project. The only issue that arose during the ethical clearance process was to do with the security of data supplied by the project's informants. In relation to this, all data collected from participants during the project was held in a secure filing cabinet at Central Queensland University, Mackay Campus. At the conclusion of the project all data was returned to those informants who had requested such action. At no time was any information that may have been construed as
negative to individuals or organisations discussed with any other person. During the project it became increasingly clear how important ethics are to those who delve into history.

A related issue was one of both participant and authorial bias. The steering committee predicted that beef breed chauvinism among the exhibitors would be one of the 'hot' issues of the project. That I was not a 'local', having only lived in the district for ten years, and having no previous experience with the district's beef cattle industry, meant a comfortable distance could be maintained on these issues. This impartial and outside view is the reason why many commissioned histories are sourced from outside the subject's community or organisation. This was a factor in the Committee's decision to seek a postgraduate student to research and write the book rather than a local historian, of whom a few were members of the district's beef community. This distance proved its advantage whenever the objectivity of the research came into question.

Very early in the research it was apparent from both informal and formal interviews that the aims of the project were either not understood or misinterpreted by some possible participants who were not in regular communication with the Committee. There was an impression that the project and the subsequent book would be nothing less than a tribute to certain families who had a long history of involvement in the beef cattle sub-committees of the Mackay Show. On learning that it was the Committee who had supplied their names as possible interviewees, and after being informed of the wide ranging scope of the project, the doubters became increasingly enthused. This tactic, on the part of the steering committee, to include at the initial stage those who were not necessarily favourably disposed towards the
present Committee, had the effect of highlighting the inclusiveness of the project to prospective informants, while at the same time revealing the tensions that exist within the beef cattle community.

However, lack of participants in the interview process was a considerable hindrance to the project. While the number of interviews and commentaries was sufficient to complete the book, a greater number would have allowed for more judicious editing, and a greater quantity of voices would have resulted in a more informal tone. The necessity of attracting sufficient participants was identified at the initial project meeting as crucial to a successful outcome. The steering committee was adamant that interest in the project was high. This was true in the initial stages, which coincided with the publicity campaign mentioned above, when there was a good response to calls for interviews and publishable comments. I also attended the Committee’s functions where beef industry identities were reminded of the need to participate. At these gatherings contact information was distributed to all those present. A post-out was also conducted to those identities who were figuring prominently in the research. These initiatives gained some positive and useful information, however not in the quantity that was expected. The steering committee could only suggest that this less than satisfactory response had been caused by the dramatic downturn that the beef industry was experiencing at the time. Nevertheless, the paucity of informants forced a reassessment of the structure of the book.

Initially it was agreed that there would be three chapters based on Before, At, and After the Show. All the themes were then to be neatly placed within these sections and for some time, while the oral histories were still forthcoming, this structure seemed to be working quite well. The text was not constrained by a
chronological narrative, but was more relevant to the themes and issues. The style was quite innovative and quirky, leaping through time and space in a single paragraph if you will. As the oral histories diminished problems started to emerge with this structure. It was reliant on the informants being able to give coverage across the generations, and more importantly, covering most of the issues as well. Now even the chapters started to become unbalanced. The 'At the Show' chapter was overloaded while the other two chapters started to take on an uncanny resemblance to each other.

The need to alter the structure to a more traditional chronological framework was reinforced when one beef exhibitor noted dryly that there was no real 'After the Show', as one immediately started preparing for the next. The change to a chronological structure still enabled the themes and issues to be explored, but also allowed for a more seamless approach to my desired conclusion, the next generation of beef cattle exhibitors. Writing a 'readable' social history proved quite a literary challenge, as the book had to be based on solid historical data while still being entertaining and engaging. In short, a narrative history. A history that was a true story about the past.¹ A history that covered over 100 years of the men, women and children involved producing and exhibiting beef cattle in the Mackay district. It meant maintaining an accessible text relatively free of academic terminology without patronising the reader, sustaining a conversational tone, having an obvious and reliable narrator present within the text, having character driven narrative as well as anecdote and issue driven text, and structuring sentences and paragraphs with minimal word length. The change to a chronological narrative framework adhered more to the genre of rural-focused local histories and appeared to be the sensible approach given the limitations of the original format.

This approach was in most respects positive and resulted in a greater emphasis being placed on primary documentary evidence. There had been instances in which informants' testimonies regarding a certain event were in stark contrast to each other. This was not surprising given that interviews are 'the memories or impressions of individuals, often many years after the events discussed'.

When these divergent views arose, the archival record, if available, was referred to and identified as the source. "Shut the Gate" relied heavily on newspapers, described in 1961 by the new owner of Newsweek as, 'The first rough draft of history'. The primacy of the written public record over the oral interview, while seen as a limitation during the project, provided the positive outcome of a more 'factual' and reliable account of events.

In formulating an initial research plan it was important to identify, in consultation with the steering committee, the themes and issues that would form the basis of the content of the book. This process afforded access to useful historical sources that were at the fingertips of the Committee, and it also set the parameters for the research and publication. At a cursory glance it might be argued that commissioned history operates within the same framework and constraints as other historical sub-genres. It has a specific topic that must be its focus and this constrains the text to both physical and thematic boundaries, as with other historical writing. However differences and sometimes unique difficulties arise when it becomes apparent that the direction and depth of the work are controlled by the commissioners. Also, there can be restraints, both overt and covert, placed on access to individuals who, while possessing information useful to the project, are excluded by the commissioners, or feeling pressure, choose to exclude themselves. In the

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preliminary stages of "Shut the Gate" it became apparent that both these processes were at work.

The Committee's vision of the final product was keenly conceptualised and it did not include giving voice to certain issues and individuals. Also as the project gained momentum it became obvious that the project itself was by no means universally embraced by the wider beef cattle community. Many chose not to be included, thereby narrowing the focus of the finished document. It should come as no surprise then that as the themes and sources of information were at the commissioner's discretion, the drafts met with minimal editing by the steering committee. This in many ways makes the commissioned history publication, in all its forms, a problematic method of recording history.

In researching the project many issues arose that for a variety of reasons were not fully explored in the book. A commissioned work such as "Shut the Gate", a history of exhibiting beef cattle at the Mackay Show, is not the place to discuss in depth such emotive topics as: animal rights, the environmental impact of the beef industry, and Aboriginal dispossession. While these subjects and others would need to be fully explored in an academic history, "Shut the Gate" was not the vehicle for such analysis. This is not to say that these issues have been ignored altogether, but a commissioned work, in any medium, must have as its main consideration the fulfilment of the commissioner's vision of the completed work.

With these constraints noted and accepted, after a period of preliminary research, another document was presented to the Committee detailing the issues and themes that would be focused upon. The Committee regarded them as both comprehensive and suitable. Five themes were to be threaded through
The history of the district’s settlement by beef cattle pioneers through to contemporary times backgrounded much of the book. Relating the early settlement of the district, especially with respect to the beef industry, assisted in setting the scene for the chronological history that followed. Major historical events and trends in the region were used as reference points for the intended audience. The background included exploration, settlement, the economy, the climate, population, natural and human-made disasters and the social life of the district’s inhabitants.

The background to cattle showing in Mackay included the evolution of the Agricultural Show itself and the beef cattle section in particular. Also explored was the formation of the beef sub-committee and its role within the framework of the Show. As the Show was the site of the main focus of the book, its role and development within the community were frequently represented in the text. Issues that arose included: the Show as a site of competition, as a site of community, the physical development of the venue and facilities, the broader historical changes affecting regional Agricultural Shows, the Show as a place where country meets city, where industry information has always been exchanged, and where the beef product is marketed.

The book focuses primarily on the people involved in beef cattle showing. Their ‘local stories’ are an integral element of the text and are narrated to be both informative and amusing to the reader. The stories were drawn from both interviews and from the public record. This focus on people is reflected in the
book's tone, with prestige, community, competition, transport, accommodation, country meets city, following the Show circuit, judges, charity work, functions, youth, women, families, fundraising, promotions, lifestyle, safety, livestock agents, media, sponsors, cattle workers, prize money and the nature of volunteer work all being elements of the human face of cattle showing in the district.

The history of the cattle exhibited at the Mackay Show demonstrates the evolution of the breeds produced in the region. Two important developments were the introduction of 'Bos indicus' breeds and the entry of new classes and exhibits within the beef section. The book highlights the transition in the district from traditional British breeds to the more suitable tropical breeds. Also those cattle that performed with distinction at the Show are identified where possible, and amusing anecdotes regarding all things bovine are placed within the text for the readers' entertainment. Issues that arise from the overall theme of beef cattle include: selection of cattle for exhibiting, preparation of cattle, transport, special feed, exotic breeds, cattle at the Show for other than exhibiting purposes, the difference between show stock and paddock stock, cattle security, the cattle's adaptation to the Show environment and the dollar value of show cattle.

The history of the beef industry in the Mackay district forms the background to the main theme of beef cattle exhibiting. The relationship between the two is explored, as is the industry's role in the evolution of cattle showing, such as in the introduction of the carcase event. Industry issues include: the national and local economic context, the role of technology, new breeds, beef markets, industry's role in determining what cattle are exhibited, the role of government and private companies, and marketing the industry and the
product at the Mackay Show. The district industry and the Mackay Show beef section naturally complement each other, but although the history of the beef industry runs throughout the text it has not been allowed to dominate the stories of people.

With themes and issues identified, the next stage was to extract valuable nuggets of information from the available sources. As 'the contemporary historian's raw materials are his [or her] sources', it was important to decide how this information was to be collected, collated and stored. Sources that were used during the project were varied and covered a wide range of mediums. In order of precedence within the publication these sources were the Daily Mercury newspaper hardcopy and microfilm records, formal and informal interviews, other newspaper hardcopy and microfilm records, published literature, electronic sources and Mackay Show Association records. Images were acquired from all the above sources and submitted to the steering committee for their determination of suitability, with owners' approval for use being negotiated at the completion of the project. The Committee retains the right to use these images, or any others, in the publication (Therefore the images in the following “Shut the Gate” document are examples only). Enough nuggets of information were found, sometimes on the most barren looking surface, to complete the commissioned history on time and to a standard that satisfied the Committee’s initial vision.

Of considerable assistance in attaining this goal was the Mackay and District Agricultural, Pastoral and Industrial Association. It has an office on the showground site that is open throughout the year. The secretary of the Association, Mr. Jim Stuart, made available all records in his possession that

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*Seldon, op.cit. p 1.*
were relevant to the project. These included the general Mackay Show records and more importantly the minutes of the Beef Cattle sub-Committee's meetings. This search of the Mackay Show records yielded a considerable amount of information, including photographs and awards, which were directly related to the cattle section of the Show. In this search, notes and photocopies were taken of all relevant material. The minutes of the Beef Cattle sub-Committee meetings were important to the project as these documents contain a detailed account of the process and persons involved in the formation of the committee. The assistance of the secretary and staff at the Association office during this search was freely given and their support for the project also included hosting media promotional events and using their office for interviews.

Newspapers were fundamental to the project. As the historical theorist Peter Hennessy noted 'The historian ignores newspapers at his or her peril' as 'For the contemporary historian picking his [or her] way through the most recent period without the benefit of official documents to guide him [or her], newspapers are a primary raw material, not an ancillary aid to understanding'. This was the case with "Shut the Gate". Newspapers allowed an understanding both of the chronology and the culture of the community being researched. In this respect it was fortunate that newspaper records for the district exist from just after European settlement.

The Daily Mercury search was conducted at the Mackay City Council library using both microfilm and hardcopy records. Access to the microfilm viewer, of which there was only one, was restricted to a two hour booking each day unless there were no other patrons wishing to use the machine that day. This

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was rare, because the machine was very popular with the general public conducting genealogy searches and also with other historians whose projects also demanded extensive microfilm searches. The records at the library covered the period 1928 to the present. Throughout these years the Mackay Show was held during the months of June or July. This helped expedite the search process, as it was then possible to concentrate on the microfilms for those months. Notes and photocopies were taken of every Mackay Show during these years with special reference to the cattle section, as well as any cattle stories or photos published immediately prior to or after the Show. These formed an extensive record and were valuable in both gaining a fundamental knowledge of beef cattle exhibiting at the Mackay Show, and as historical text for inclusion in the proposed publication.

It should be noted that there is no general public access to the microfilms for the *Daily Mercury*, and other now defunct district newspapers, prior to 1928. The pre 1928 *Daily Mercury* is stored at the Daily Mercury Building where the company employs it on a regular basis as part of its historical article series. However, the "Shut the Gate" project was given access on an appointment only basis. This phase of the research was time consuming and difficult. The microfilm viewer had to be manually operated, rotating the reels by hand, and in the pre-1928 years the Mackay Show was held at various times of the year. There was also no facility to photocopy these records and due to the poor quality of the images, the light in the microfilm room had to be left off when viewing. I therefore was unable to take detailed notes on-site. This problem was overcome by using a portable tape recorder and transcribing the research at a later date. While there was limited information on these microfilms they did prove extremely useful in both giving a chronological account of exhibiting beef cattle and background to how the beef industry was
integrated into the emerging town of Mackay. By going back through these records it was possible to draw an historical map of the peaks and valleys of the beef section of the Show and highlight the beef community’s commitment to the exhibit.

District and rural newspapers, besides the Daily Mercury, also proved a valuable source of information. While only selected items from these sources found a place in the final document they did provide additional comment and a rural perspective on the beef section at the Mackay Show. The Pioneer News, a free community newspaper, concentrated more on the community response rather than the results and judges’ comments. Queensland Country Life was constantly perused during the project to stay abreast of the state of the beef industry and to gauge how a rural newspaper reported on cattle showing. Articles dealing with the Mackay beef section were usually identical to the reports in the Daily Mercury. Nevertheless two articles concerning the 1960s from Queensland Country Life were used in the book. The Queensland Country Life also was used to place an advertisement soliciting interviewees and comments for the project. This was paid for out of the limited university funding for the project. It ran over two consecutive issues, but unfortunately no interviews were gained from this quite expensive procedure.

However, there was plenty of positive comment regarding the advertisement from the district’s beef community when I next met these people at a function a few weeks later. In some ways it appeared that the community was more interested in the promotion and publicity regarding the project than in actually making themselves available for interviews. This promotion of the “Shut the Gate” project to a wide rural audience may be viewed as the only benefit of running this advertisement. On communicating this observation to the steering
committee, their response was quite congratulatory regarding the promotional outcome. A reason given by the steering committee for the lack of replies was the traditional reticence of rural folk to give themselves a voice outside of a structured setting. This may be so, however, it was obvious that the newspaper was widely read by those involved in the beef section, and it was meant as another reminder to contribute to the project. For the purpose of promotion it was a success, however, in hindsight it may have been more economical to arrange for an article on the project to be published in the rural newspaper. From witnessing the marketing skills of the Committee I am positive this outcome could have been achieved with possibly a more rewarding return of information.

Formal interviews were a fundamental means of gathering information. Oral history is interesting in that ‘It is both the oldest type of historical inquiry, predating the written word, and one of the most modern, initiated with tape recorders in the 1940s’. The formal interview contributed detailed personal accounts of the issues, and also facilitated the recording, and in some cases collection of photographs, journals, publications, and other beef cattle memorabilia. Also, being readily available to record these oral histories furthered the desired goal of making it obvious to all willing participants that their stories had value. As the historian James Morrison noted ‘With the growth of oral research and its use by historians, the inarticulate have been given a voice and therefore a say in their past’. The compiling of oral histories was initially considered fundamental to the structure of the book. While this to a large degree remained the case, as the project progressed the drying up of participants willing to be interviewed forced a change in the

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6 Oral History Association, General Information, [online]
book's format. The use of oral histories did however remain the primary literary tactic to personalise the text: the interviews were all highly informative, and often very amusing. The interviewees were forthcoming with their stories and recollections and all were surprised at the amount of time that elapsed during the interviews. As most of the interviewees were quite elderly, fatigue had to be taken into account and the interviews were generally limited to an hour and a half. The obvious enjoyment the interviewees experienced in telling their stories expressed their desire to impart their knowledge and adventures in the beef industry to future generations.

As with any community, word of mouth played an important role and participants passed on their satisfaction with the interview process to the Committee, and to others in the community. With this in mind a post-out was undertaken to prospective informants requesting their involvement in interviews. This also was unsuccessful however, with only two responses, both negative, from 25 handwritten letters. Even so this method was not as intrusive as an idea instigated by the steering committee to telephone canvass prospective informants. From a small list of names supplied by the steering committee the first person called was literally on his deathbed. After this unfortunate experience, for all concerned, the method was quickly abandoned, as it became obvious that communication between the Committee and members of their community was neither constant nor contemporary. This is one example of how the commissioners of a work might intrude upon and subvert a researcher's methodology.

The nature of the project meant that there was considerable informal communication between researcher and the beef exhibiting community. These

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discussions usually were spontaneous and when a comment was made that might be of use in the proposed publication permission was sought from the individual concerned. The information obtained in this manner also proved valuable in identifying other less apparent sources. The number of these discussions was mildly surprising. It became apparent early in the research that most people in the Mackay district had some experience or relationship with the beef industry. Many were only too willing to name a friend or relative who was, or had been involved in either exhibiting or producing beef cattle. When contacted these people usually were unwilling to be formally interviewed, however, they did provide some useful comments and insights into the practices and culture of the beef cattle industry.

While no publications deal specifically with exhibiting beef cattle at the Mackay Show, some do address the wider beef cattle industry and Agricultural shows in general. Secondary reading informed the rendition of Mackay's settlement by non-indigenous Australians and the town's subsequent growth into the district's major primary industry centre. The range of local histories is extensive, but most use was made of Sweet Settlement⁹ and The Discovery and Settlement of Port Mackay.¹⁰ Although the beef industry was well represented in these, the information and analysis was rather dated. Rapid changes within the industry make even the most recent print publications, especially those concerned with the direction and goals of the industry, somewhat obsolete when compared to the Internet. However, Big Mobs: The Story of Australian Cattlemen¹¹ and Beef Cattle Production¹² were useful as informative background research. For Agricultural Shows, Agricultural Shows

⁹ M.Hislop and Booth, C. (eds), Sweet Settlement, Rockhampton, 1995.
¹⁰ L.Roth, The Discovery and Settlement of Port Mackay, Halifax, 1908.
in Australia; A Survey\textsuperscript{13} proved an excellent source on both the history and the future viability of the regional Show within Australia. In the area of social history it was pleasing to eventually locate a publication called Cardowan: From Packhorse to Pasture Pioneer: History of a Central Queensland Cattle Station.\textsuperscript{14} This was written by Alan Shannon and his wife Jean, two past stalwarts of the Mackay Show Cattle Section. While the Mackay Show is mentioned only briefly in the book, it contains numerous 'stories' and documentation dealing directly with the history of the beef industry in the Central Queensland region. Social histories such as this proved useful sources, providing examples of the genre to compare and contrast with the style and content of the evolving "Shut the Gate" book.

Television and radio were beneficial in acquiring current background information on the state of the beef industry both within Australia and overseas. Australian television and radio programs regularly have segments that analyse aspects of the beef cattle industry. In Queensland these programs are: Landline (ABC-TV, 12-1pm Sunday and 1-2pm Monday), Queensland Country Hour (ABC Local Radio, 12-1pm Monday to Friday), Breakfast Rural Reports (ABC Local Radio, 6-7am Monday to Friday), Country Breakfast (ABC Radio National, 6-7am Saturday), and Rural Reporter (ABC Radio National, 5-5.30am Sunday). As with most other sources there is little information about beef cattle exhibiting, but quite a substantial amount on the separate issues of regional Shows and the beef cattle industry.

As research tools the World Wide Web and e-mail have proved their worth throughout the project. The Internet was especially useful during the early

\textsuperscript{13} K. Darian-Smith and Wills, S., Agricultural Shows in Australia; A Survey, Melbourne, 1999.

research phase in gaining a fundamental knowledge of the practice of exhibiting beef cattle and the current state of the Australian beef industry. There are a number of sites exclusively concerned with exhibiting beef cattle, and this is especially true of the United States of America (USA). The tradition of exhibiting livestock is particularly strong in some regions of the USA and the large number of relevant websites reflects this strength. The websites of Agricultural Colleges in the USA and to a lesser extent Australia offer non-experts the opportunity to acquire a considerable fundamental knowledge of exhibiting beef cattle. There are also government, semi-government, and corporate sites which include information on herd distribution and size, regional breed suitability, export quotas, health regulations, scientific research, marketing for consumers, environmental requirements and regulations, processing and product standards, producer organisations, labour unions, product consumption levels and trends, buying and selling agents, sales and auctions, drug and chemical products, and property infrastructure. The Web also has an extensive number of sites that deal with Agricultural Shows, Fairs, and Exhibitions, their history and the space they inhabit in both the social consciousness and the evolution of society. It seems the desire to exhibit livestock for status and economic reward is as old as civilisation itself.

The abundance of information available on the Web regarding the project's themes, meant that acquiring background was less time consuming than would be the case in a more traditional literary search. E-mail was also very useful in corresponding with the project's participants, especially in regard to gaining feedback on the accuracy and content of the book's numerous drafts. A contact

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15 For instance, www.showcattlepage.com
16 For instance, www.abs.sdstate.edu/ars/animaliss/fairetc.html
18 For instance, www.fairsnet.org
e-mail address was also made available to the steering committee that distributed it to prospective informants. While it may be stating the obvious, it needs to be said that this technology is a boon for historians, especially those in regional and rural areas, and will only continue to be more useful in the future.

As stated earlier, the promotional activities of the “Shut the Gate” project appeared at times to overshadow the commissioners’ other purpose of publishing a social history. The Committee had financial backers to appease, and an obvious method of demonstrating that the project was progressing was to gain coverage on, or in, the district’s media. This also elevated the beef showing community into the public spotlight thereby in itself fulfilling one of the aims of the project. Many commissioned projects, for whatever reason, fail to reach publication, and it is understandable that sponsors might wish to promote their community and practices heavily while the project is ongoing. Also the promotion aided the exhibit in both entries and spectators. It also was important that the project reflect well on Central Queensland University, the other principal source of funding. As can be seen, in a commissioned work there are many obligations to fulfil.

CONCLUSION

With a commissioned history it is imperative that the writer understands the many issues that may arise from the endeavour. In this project publicity and promotion were accorded a heavy emphasis, and this imperative needed to be grasped from the outset between researcher and commissioners. In the case of the “Shut the Gate” project, there was communication, however its efficiency in relaying the importance of promotional activities to the researcher was less than satisfactory. Also, in non-commissioned research the writer may explore
the many interesting themes and issues that arise and incorporate them into the thesis, or indeed change the boundaries of the topic, this process is heavily constrained in a commissioned work. "Shut the Gate" is a sanctioned history, and if it is typical of commissioned works, the restrictions placed on the writing of such histories are considerable. While these projects might assist in gaining or honing historical research skills, the outcome can be predetermined by the commissioners. This tends to limit analytical dexterity and vigorous independent research. The project can become one of following the processes solely to achieve the commissioner's vision. While commissioned histories are welcome projects at universities for the purpose of post-graduate training, the experience has convinced me that they are academically flawed as they tend to subjugate the intellectual freedom that should ensure outcomes are determined by a rigorous and uncompromising scrutiny of the sources.

While the book is a sanctioned history, its methodology was constantly reviewed to maintain an academic standard that would be beyond reproach. Ethical procedures regarding all facets of the research and writing were followed scrupulously. This was crucial in a project which delved into a community's past because 'skeletons do fall out of the cupboard', and long forgotten issues can find their way back on the public record. In reflecting on the project I have emphasised the frustrations experienced by the limitations imposed by the very nature of commissioned history, however this did not detract from the learning experience, or diminish the academic research skills acquired in the process. In the final analysis the commission was successfully fulfilled, and the client's vision of their history has been given public voice.

In the book the reader initially opens a gate to a world vastly different from that of today. It is the world of a community that refused to be denied its place
in the Mackay district. The area was explored 140 years ago for the sole purpose of producing beef, but within a few short years the bovine footprint was being replaced by stands of sugar cane and Mackay quickly became known as the sugar capital of Australia. Shunted to the backlots of the district, and to the margins of its history, beef producers continued their struggle to survive. More than this, they wanted to show the district that they were surviving, and the site to demonstrate this was the Mackay Show. As you will read, their survival was on many occasions in doubt. There were periods of public ridicule, as beef exhibitors at the Show often only just managed to remain in the plural. However enough people persisted with their passion for showing their produce that the exhibit survived and expanded. This was achieved through dedication, a sense of community, and innovation. Times are tough on the land now, but imagine a time and place when there were no roads, but still droughts and floods through which hardy pioneers had to travel great distances to bring their cattle to the Show.

These people lived tough lives on an unforgiving land and depended on each other for survival. When a commitment was made to exhibit at the Show, nobody wanted to let their neighbours down. They also wanted to demonstrate that they were part of a wider district community and just as dedicated to its progress as those who lived in or around the thriving township of Mackay. These pioneers’ futures depended on having an expanding, accessible beef market, and that the product needed to be showcased. “Shut the Gate” tries to convey the sense of mateship and community that was, and is, fundamental to surviving in a harsh landscape and turbulent industry. It explores how innovation was used not only to survive but also to succeed. To be innovative one first has to be willing to take chances. Since World War Two many chances have been taken by the district’s beef producers. From introducing
new tropical breeds, viewed in some quarters as foreign interlopers (and
downright scary) to commissioning a history of their community. They have
always made clever use of technology, from converting surplus army trucks to
cattle carriers, to devising the ways and means to accurately measure carcase
performance. With community, mateship, and innovation all combining
against a harsh, yet beautiful landscape, “Shut the Gate” is a very Australian
history.
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SHUT

THE

GATE!
FOREWORD

For some in the Mackay community whenever they hear the words "shut the gate" a wry smile and a brightening of the eyes transforms their faces, suggesting to the observer that this somewhat common phrase holds a special meaning to these people. This local history gives voice to these men, women, and children who have been involved in exhibiting beef cattle at the Mackay Show. The 'Shut the Gate' story is only one of many in a Show history that dates back to 1878. It is a narrative of perseverance and innovation. In 1908, H. Ling Roth, in his book *The Discovery and Settlement of Port Mackay, Queensland*, made the observation that the Mackay district "is inhabited by a class of people who are second to none in Australia for 'go-aheadness'" (p viii.). This certainly applies to the many people over the years who have developed the beef cattle section at the Show into one of Australia's finest industry exhibitions. By the telling of their history it becomes possible to witness the growth not only of the cattle exhibiting community but also of Mackay's and the region's beef industry.

INTRODUCTION

On the day before a Mackay Show was to commence, there was a hive of activity around the cattle yards at the showgrounds. The volunteer work-force were racing the clock to complete any last minute preparations that would ensure another beef cattle show could be run and won. These volunteers had toiled together through many shows and each worker knew the value of teamwork in overcoming that most common of cattle showing hazards, the escaping steer. All eyes lifted from their work, as at first they sensed, then heard the commotion swelling among the cattle in the yard. They saw one brown steer that appeared to be riding the backs of its nearest companions, as if stretching for a mark at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, before the beast
flung itself into the air, landed smack on the yardrail, where it balanced for a few seconds, and toppled unceremoniously onto the packed earth outside the enclosure. Both the steer and workers remained rooted to their respective spots. Time passed, and then an imaginary starting gun fired and the workers and beast exploded into motion. The role of the workers was to shut each of the four gates to the showground. The role of the steer was to rush around in ever widening circles while in a blind panic. In this regard the steer was giving an Oscar winning performance. As each worker raced to their objective, their cries of "shut the gates" could be heard all over the showground. The steer in its attempt to circumnavigate the showgrounds had found itself fifty yards from an open gate, the same distance as one of the workers. As both steamed in from opposite directions, it was clear to all those watching that it was coming down to a footrace between man and beast. While the outcome was too close to call for many, and they continued with their shout of "shut the gate", it was one worker's words that sounded that the battle was lost. For he knew that in a footrace four feet are better than two and his, "you'd be better off shutting the bloody City Gates", drew a resigned chuckle from everyone before they all set off in a more relaxed pursuit of the escaped steer.

In the retelling of this story and others like it, local history can come alive. Not all local history is to be found in dusty old texts that act as ballast in the basements of council buildings. In the recording of peoples' histories their character not only emerges but also leaps out to be recognised as an historical entity. These stories tell us not only about the past, both distant and near, but also about our community and ourselves.

Within a community there are many local interest groups. In the Mackay district one such group is the beef cattle exhibitors. Every year these people
travel from all over the district to converge upon Mackay for the Show. Even in a growing city like Mackay, the Show remains the special community event. For the beef cattle exhibitors the Show is not only an opportunity to compete but also to socialise and to exchange industry information. Indeed one of the traditions of the Show, and this is true of similar events around Australia, is the once a year socialising with friends and acquaintances. At these occasions new stories are born and many more are told. They cover a wide range of experiences that weave through the landscape of the wider Mackay and district community. In this way the cattle exhibitor's social history becomes a window to identifying and understanding the larger social history of the region.

A history of cattle showing in Mackay is not just about which animal won what award in which year, but teases out stories about the evolution of the cattle exhibited at the Show. By tracing the bloodlines of these cattle it is possible to gain a perspective on the wider beef industry in Central Queensland. A prime example is that of the earlier exhibitor's reliance on cattle of British stock and their lack of enthusiasm for the 'Bos indicus' breeds such as the Brahman. In both the wider beef industry and cattle shows there was reluctance on the part of producers to accept the greater suitability of the Brahman for the country and climate of Central Queensland. In contemporary times the diversity of breeds exhibited at the Mackay Show parallels that of the expanding range of breeds found in the district's beef producing country. Not only are the beef breeds expanding but also so is the land that can sustain cattle. This is directly attributable to the crossbreeding of many types of beef cattle that have been sourced from around the world to produce a hardier animal that can inhabit areas previously thought too inhospitable for a profitable beef concern to survive. This trend is worldwide and cattle shows,
including the Mackay Show, are the venue for promoting and marketing these new breeds.

Beef cattle, like the men and women who produce them, have to be resilient and yet adaptable to the changing conditions of the industry. For the people of Mackay who have little contact with the beef industry throughout the year, these changing conditions are usually first viewed at the Mackay Show. The debut of new beef breeds attracts great interest among both the public and exhibitors. These days there is greater willingness on the part of the beef cattle section organisers to embrace the inclusion of new breeds in the Show. Gone are the times when imported breeds such as the Brahman were kept hidden from view in some far off yard, well away from the 'real' beef cattle, those of British stock such as the Hereford and Shorthorn. The Mackay cattle section of the Show has used this diversity of cattle breeds in the marketing and promotion of its shows by nominating a category for a different breed each year. For a cattle show to be successful, the organisers and exhibitors need to be every bit as adaptable as the cattle.

What sticks in the memory of many a Mackay local when recalling the exhibit, are the instances when cattle have not felt particularly comfortable in the show environment and have behaved rather badly as a result. Especially at earlier shows, cattle would find their way into sideshow alley or even into the backyards of surrounding houses. While the Show is well known as a place where the country meets the city, for some city dwellers this kind of meeting was a little too familiar: looking out their bathroom window to be confronted by the sight of a heavyweight bull trimming the grass in their garden. Yet, it is also this experience, of seeing an animal out of its natural element, that is so appealing and memorable, and an integral part of the charm of the Show.
The Mackay district's beef industry forms the background for many of the discussions and stories in this book. This is not surprising when you consider that the Mackay Show cattle section exists to showcase the district's beef industry. There are also many people who, while involved in the section, are not exhibitors but beef industry participants. The industry encompasses a vast range of occupations and organisations. These vary from butchers to scientists, from government departments to meat processing companies. They all have their stories to tell regarding the beef cattle industry and the exhibiting of its product, and as you would expect, their views reflect the diversity of the industry.

The beef cattle industry in the Mackay district has a long history. Indeed, the present city of Mackay was first settled by Europeans as a cattle run in 1862. From these early times to the present, the industry has been through its peaks and troughs, and these can be gauged quite well from its level of participation in the Mackay Show. In its infancy the local industry had to battle not only the tropical climate, unsuitable breeds of cattle, and lack of a large market for its product, but also the dairy and sugar industries. The growth of these industries, especially sugar, saw the original cattle runs of Mackay dwindle in area. While the Mackay cattle runs steadily became a carpet of cane, and thereby at least providing a local market for beef among the sugar workers, the industry found itself being squeezed further away from the fledgling town of Mackay. It should be remembered that in these early years there were no roads and it was a struggle to get cattle to market let alone exhibit them at the Mackay Show. However, some hardy and committed beef producers made the trek to town each year for the Show. In tough times this trip was certainly not a profitable venture, and yet these pioneers went anyway. They saw something in exhibiting cattle besides monetary reward, and thankfully that tradition has continued through to the present day.
This feeling of belonging to a community is a powerful motive for many cattle exhibitors in their continued attendance at the Mackay Show. The business of beef production usually means that its participants are isolated from each other not only by distance but also by the constant nature of the work involved in maintaining a beef cattle property. Although this isolation would appear to hinder a sense of community among cattle exhibitors, this is not the case, especially when modern communication methods are taken into account. The district's cattle exhibitors have a strong and vibrant network that makes full use of technology to stay in touch throughout the year. However, it is usually only at the annual Mackay Show that these exhibitors can physically come together to celebrate and reinforce their part in the beef industry community. Herein lies the beauty of the Mackay Show: it provides a site not only to display industry knowledge and produce at the one venue, but for a brief time each year it provides the opportunity for the life of that community to be captured in an enlightening snapshot.
EARLY YEARS OF STRUGGLE, 1861-1940

When the first fleet arrived at Port Jackson with 1,000 people aboard 11 ships, their stores included two bulls and five cows loaded at the Cape of Good Hope. This was the birth of the now powerful Australian beef industry. In a colony struggling to feed itself, cattle were to become critical both for milk and meat and each successive ship carried new stock. The industry grew rapidly with the first well-bred Shorthorns being imported in 1825 and Herefords in 1826. Pioneer cattlemen soon pushed into Queensland to find new grazing lands. One such pioneer was John Mackay.¹

In the year 1859 this young Scotsman was trying his luck as a digger at the Rocky Creek gold fields near Armidale in New South Wales where he met several young men who were following pastoral pursuits in that vicinity. John Mackay's magnetic personality quickly attracted attention and his camp became the rendezvous for a group of young men who were fired with enthusiasm about the bright prospects of taking up land to raise cattle in Queensland. At that time many squatters were pushing their way northward, and John Mackay's love of adventure induced him to accept the leadership of a small party who wished to try their luck in the northern wilds. The party consisted of two native-born, Robinson and Murray, an Irishman named Macrossan, an Italian named Barberi, and an Aborigine named Duke. The 21-year-old John Mackay assembled the party at Armidale where 28 horses and the necessary supplies for the journey were procured. Leaving Armidale on the January 16th 1860, Mackay led his party straight to Rockhampton, which was then the starting point of many land hunting expeditions.²

¹ Cattle Council of Australia, History of Beef in Australia, 2002, online at www.farmwide.com.au
² R. Chalmers, John Mackay, 1996, online at www.zeta.org.au
The party left Rockhampton on March 16th, 1860, and two months later reached the summit of the main coast range. Continuing south-east towards a gap in the range they came upon a large stony creek [Bells Creek] running eastward, which brought them to—and here I quote from John Mackay's diary:

A bold deep river with well defined banks, the landscapes on both sides being rendered picturesque by clumps of palms which, with their tall erect stems and feathery crowns, appeared like sentinel giants keeping watch over the surrounding expanse of rich tropical vegetation and which, embellished with the rich and variegated foliage of the tropics, presented to us on the whole a scene and landscape unlike anything we had hitherto seen on our travels. Having confirmed our belief of its being a new discovery, Macrossan suggested it should be called the Mackay River, to which the others readily assented.³

Heading east-north-east, they travelled over what Mackay described as "rich black soil flats, timbered with Bloodwood, Ironbark and Moreton Bay Ash with clumps of immense Ti-trees." Mackay and his party continued along the river to its mouth, blazing conspicuous trees on both banks to mark their prospective cattle runs. The party, minus Duke who succumbed to illness on the return journey, arrived back in Rockhampton on July 10th and after disposing of their horses and equipment and tendering for the blocks of land in accordance with the Crown Lands regulations, sailed for Brisbane on the SS Tamior. Returning to Armidale, they were notified that their tenders for the Mackay River country had been accepted and they were given nine months in which to stock the land. Mackay succeeded in obtaining 1200 head of mixed cattle, 50 horses, two teams

³ Cited in R. Chalmers, John Mackay, 1996
⁴ Ibid
of bullocks and drays, which, with a party of four stockmen, two bullock drivers, a cook, carpenter, and two Aborigines, he drove from Armidale on 26th July, 1861. The rapid growth of the early Australian beef industry saw to it that Mackay had plenty of stock to choose from as there was estimated to be nearly four million head of all types of cattle in Australia in that year. After an adventurous journey, they reached Mackay River on the 4th January, 1862. By the end of March a head station had been firmly established at Greenmount, some twelve miles from the mouth of the river, where two uncharted islands [Flat Top and Round Top] were discovered.

The settlement of the Port and its surrounds was swift. By January 1863, there were 50 inhabitants in the emerging town. There is no better source than John Mackay’s diary to acknowledge the first of these new settlers and to explain how the Port and its river came to be officially recognised.

When I left Greenmount, Messrs. Ridland and Henderson were awaiting the arrival of building material and stores wherewith to commence business. Mr. James Ready and family, who came out with Spencer, followed shortly afterwards; so that I have no hesitation in rightfully designating these gentlemen the fathers of the hamlet. Mrs. Ready was assuredly the first white woman in the district, and many of the early pioneers now scattered far and wide must retain a grateful remembrance of the kindness and attention she so unsparingly dispensed to fever-stricken bushmen.

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5 H. Ling Roth, *The Discovery and Settlement of Port Mackay, Queensland*, Halifax, 1908, p 41.
7 Chalmers, *op.cit.*
The diary later continues:

Leaving for Rockhampton early in September, I met on Denison Creek, Messrs. Ross and Muggleton with a mob of cattle, the property of Mr. John Cook of Tamworth, New South Wales. They were in search of a block of country purchased from a Mr. John Allingham somewhere on the coast. I sold them the leasehold of the run opposite Greenmount on the north side of the Mackay River. This is the run which ever since has been in the possession of Mr. John Cook, known as Balnagowan. Some time afterwards Commodore Burnett visited the Queensland coast in H.M.S. Pioneer and, observing that a river named Mackay flowed into Rockingham Bay, suggested that, to avoid geographical mistakes, our discovery should be named 'Pioneer River,' in honour of that ship's visit to Mackay. Kind friends pointed out the injustice of such a proposal and were informed the Queensland Government intended naming the town then being surveyed on its bank Mackay. 10

John Mackay did not remain in possession of the cattle run he had so painstakingly marked out less than two years before. Legal wrangling and lack of financial backing were possible reasons for this, but whatever the case Mackay, still determined and adventurous, left the district and skippered several vessels in the south Pacific. His friends petitioned the Queensland Government to make him a land grant of 1000 acres, but the fall of the McIlwraith Government meant this never came to fruition. Nevertheless, Mackay was offered and accepted the post of harbour master at Cooktown by the succeeding government. After six years he was promoted to Brisbane harbour master and

9 Chalmers, op.cit.
10 Ibid.
later became permanent head of the Marine Department and Chairman of the Marine Board. John Mackay, after leading a productive and expansive life died on March 11th, 1914.11

Queensland, as a self-governing colony, was only three years old when Mackay was settled in 1862. Consequently it was not surprising that initially the town suffered from a lack of infrastructure and direction. However one of the constants was the presence of beef cattle. From the time of John Mackay driving his mob of cattle to Greenmount there has always been a beef industry in the district. Also from the early days there was the desire to have a venue to exhibit the district’s produce. This came to pass in 1878, and the venue became known as the Mackay Show. In this era the town of Mackay continued to grow and the surrounding countryside underwent radical change. The most profound change came about as the result of the introduction of sugar cane. John Spiller planted the first cane in the district on June 15th 1865, and his story of why he decided to plant in the district illustrates the rapid shift from beef to sugar that was to occur. “I always remember so well the grass being so high there [north side of the Pioneer River] by my Javanese boy and myself being very much startled by a bullock rushing past us and we could not see, but afterwards picked up its tracks. The first grass I burnt was on the Pioneer and it was twelve feet and over in height; it was what is known in Java as sugar grass, it contained saccharine and was quite sweet at the joints.”12 Over time the bullock tracks would lead further away from the coast as the early cattle runs were subdivided into cane plantations.

11 Kerr, op.cit. p 112.
12 Roth, op.cit. p 60.
Of less importance to the long term prosperity of the district was the early and short-lived wool trade. In 1867 wool was Mackay's chief trade.\(^{13}\) However a run of poor wool prices, footrot and the spread of spear-grass would see the industry all but abandoned by 1871. These figures illustrate the suddenness of the collapse. In 1868 there were 483,575 sheep in North Queensland, by 1871 there were 63,344.\(^{14}\) The impact of this exodus affected many of the smaller district hamlets, such as Fort Cooper [Nebo], as the cattle that replaced them required fewer employees and thus these communities struggled to develop.\(^ {15}\) The wool industry did advantage the beef producers as it necessitated upgrading the tracks leading into Mackay in order to carry the heavy wool drays. With the advent of better tracks beef producers felt less isolated from the Port of Mackay.

Building an adequate transport system was a priority for all those in the district in these early days. Unfortunately, it remained a 'priority' for most of the Twentieth Century.\(^{16}\) Road works on the track from Mackay to Fort Cooper began in 1863. This track was well used by pioneers and their stock. In 1864 work was concentrated on improving the crossing of the Range through Spencer's Gap. By the end of June 1870, £2700 had been spent on the road from Mackay to Peak Downs. Smaller amounts of money were spent on sections of the Mackay to Bowen road by arrangements with local residents such as Robert Graham of St. Helen's cattle station.\(^ {17}\) From April 1871 to January 1874 the 'Road Trust' expended almost £4,500 on roads around Mackay. The greatest part went on the main southern and northern approaches to the town.\(^ {18}\) During 1877 nearly £4000 was spent on roads in the district, nearly one third of this on

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13 Kerr, op.cit. p 60.
16 Ibid, p 233.
17 Kerr, op.cit. pp 60-67.
18 Mackay Mercury, January 31 1874.
the approach to the Pioneer [Hospital] Bridge and nearly £1200 on the road from Mackay to Nebo and Clermont. Closer settlement on the north side of the Pioneer River led to calls from residents for a bridge connecting the town's centre to this rapidly expanding settlement. The bridge, known as the Sydney Street Bridge, although completed in August 1887 could not be used until two years later because of the widening of the river by floods. Beef producers by this time had a good local market because of the labour intensive sugar industry, but it was desirable for all concerned that cattle arrived in Mackay by the easiest and quickest route.

The Australian beef industry commenced its push for overseas markets not long after Mackay's settlement. The *Mackay Mercury* reported that the enterprising manager of the London Australian Meat Agency, Mr. Tallerman, called upon the Emperor of France, Louis Napoleon on the 3rd of December 1869 to convince him of the high quality of Australian preserved meat and its suitability for French troops. Napoleon tasted the meat but kept his own judgement while 25 of the 30 soldiers on hand for the taste testing were more than satisfied with the Australian product. This innovative marketing strategy was not confined to France. The *Mackay Mercury* again reported in November 1870 that the war between Prussia and France had created strong demand for preserved meats and Australian meat traders were in correspondence with both countries in an effort to sell their product. Australia's beef export trade began in earnest a decade later in 1880 with a world-first shipment of frozen beef carcases from Sydney to London. The new freezing process had its admirers in North Queensland and by October 1883, Robert Christison had, against the odds, established a freezing plant on Poole Island, off Bowen. However, after only three months of limited

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20 *Mackay Mercury*, April 2 1870.
21 *Mackay Mercury*, November 26 1870.
22 Cattle Council of Australia, *op.cit.*
operation the works were destroyed by a tropical cyclone and although reconstruction was considered, no capital for such a project was forthcoming. Finding a market for their product remained a primary consideration for beef producers in North Queensland. This often necessitated driving mobs of cattle long distances to find the most profitable market.

On October 15th, 1870, George. F. Bridgman, who would later play a significant role in protecting the remaining indigenous population of the district, started 104 head of cattle from Homebush Station for Rockhampton. They had been purchased by W. Pattison of Rockhampton for £4 / 10 per head delivered. The expertise and dedication of drovers to deliver their stock in good condition to the marketplace was one of the true marvels of Queensland’s early settlement. Profits from such cattle drives could be enormous in certain circumstances. Mineral fields not only attracted large numbers of hopeful diggers but also drovers with their mobs of cattle to feed these workers. In May of 1874 it was estimated that there were 3000 bullocks being driven from all over North Queensland to the Palmer River goldfields to reap the £10 per head on offer, though this price did not hold long. For the district’s beef producers, good drovers and station managers were a necessity and George Bridgman was admirable in both regards. New breeding stock was also driven into the district to improve the area’s herd vitality. In July 1876, 150 head of breeding cattle were being driven to Fort Cooper South by a Mr. Flannigan. The station’s proprietor at the time was a Mr. Adams. In most instances, there are always exceptions, drovers were treated with dignity and respect by all involved in the industry.

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24 Mackay Mercury, October 22 1870.
25 Mackay Mercury, May 23 1874.
26 Mackay Mercury, July 8 1876.
In 1870 there were numerous meat processing establishments in operation along the eastern seaboard of Australia. At this time the citizens of Mackay also desired a processing plant, however their wait would be a long one. It was well known in 1870 that most of the cattle runs in the Mackay district carried only a fraction of the stock that they were capable of holding. Consequently the supply of fat cattle in the district was limited and the demand from butchers and plantation owners exceeded supply. While Mackay’s leading citizens considered the emerging beef industry an excellent investment, they had to concede that it was a lack of capital that prevented the runs from being fully stocked.27

Cattlemen who did invest in the district experienced a steady rise in beef prices in the early 1870s, and this added greatly to the prosperity of the district.28 There were various establishments connected with the industry in the fledgling, but bustling, township of Mackay, among them butchers, Daglish and McKillop, on Sydney Street29, W. Fooks, on Brisbane Street30, Dufficy and Kelly, on Brisbane Street31 and Messrs. J. B. Dalhunty and Company who, in early April 1870, acquired the oldest established butcher in Mackay from W. Landells.32 There were also Boiling Down Works in operation such as, Hamilton Ramsay and Company who paid nine shillings per head for cattle.33 In October 1870, Hyne and Company’s boiling down works processed 30 beasts from the Homebush Run, with each animal yielding an average of 170 lbs. of clean tallow.34 Regular sales of stock also took place in Mackay. On the 18th of April 1874, a public auction of 80 head of mixed cattle was held at a yard near

27 Mackay Mercury, June 18 1870.
28 Mackay Mercury, January 4 1873
29 Mackay Mercury, January 22 1870.
30 Mackay Mercury, January 17 1874.
31 Mackay Standard, January 9 1888.
32 Mackay Mercury, April 16 1870.
33 Mackay Mercury, February 12 1870.
34 Mackay Mercury, October 22 1870.
the corner of Victoria and Wood Streets\textsuperscript{35}. The beef industry added much to the economy of early Mackay, however some aspects were not always welcome.

\textit{Moonlight Serenade}

In those early days there were cattle owners and workers from the properties alongside the Pioneer River who were known to the townsfolk as the 'River Mob'. These men would come to town once a month to collect their mail and not surprisingly partake in a few alcoholic refreshments during their stay. While local businesses appreciated the regular influx of money this 'mob' brought to town and their willingness to spend, the Police Magistrate and other local residents were not impressed by their antics. They would usually end their visit to town, around 4 a.m., with a 'bottle chorus'. This was a selection of sailor's shanties accompanied by each man dragging an empty bottle down the side of a weatherboard house in imitation of hauling in a ship's ropes.\textsuperscript{36} After ensuring that the townsfolk were made aware of their departure, the cattlemen still had to negotiate their way back to their respective properties. This was hazardous enough sober, as we shall see, let alone after a day and night of revelry.

Stray stock was a major concern for all of Mackay's early settlers and would remain so for a considerable amount of time. On Friday the 15\textsuperscript{th} of April 1870, a Mr. Sharp was riding on horseback along the road near the Hibernian Hotel. Before he had time to take evasive action his mount collided heavily with a bullock that was lying in the middle of the road. The unsuspecting Sharp parted company with his horse and landed heavily and awkwardly on the roadway. The patrons of the hotel were quickly on the scene and on first appraisal it appeared as though Sharp had only suffered some relatively minor cuts and abrasions. However the seriousness of the situation soon became apparent when

\textsuperscript{35} Mackay Mercury, April 4 1874.
\textsuperscript{36} Roth, \textit{op.cit.} p 58.
it was realised that he was unable to move his lower limbs. Tragic accidents involving stock such as this continued for many years despite repeated cautions from some of Mackay’s leading citizens. In 1893, Mackay’s Police Magistrate, Major R. A Moore, commented that there were too many stray cattle around the town. And the Police Magistrate was concerned about more than just safety. He was witnessing a seemingly never-ending procession of court cases involving the ownership of straying stock.

This avalanche of court cases was in part due to the long-held practice of paying reward money for information leading to the conviction of person or persons convicted of stealing cattle. The size of the reward, a £100, was posted in 1873 regarding cattle branded A W and half-circle over H, and the need for a criminal conviction provided the motivation and the venue for numerous court cases. Cattle duffing was prevalent throughout the district as can be witnessed by the formation of associations to halt this criminal activity. A £200 reward was offered in 1876 by the Bowen River Cattle Stealing Prevention Association. Members were Messrs. Ferguson of Byerwen Station, Tucker of Exmoor and Blenheim Stations, Henderson and Skene of Havilah Station, and Cramp and Hughes of Birralee Station. The Mackay Cattle Stealing Association after a meeting at the Royal Hotel on June 23, 1876, posted a £100 reward for information leading to the conviction of cattle thieves. It is rather unfortunate that the Mackay association did not give due consideration to its name, as it does tend to be a tad misleading regarding their objectives. The rewards on offer were only for information regarding both Association member’s cattle.

37 Mackay Mercury, April 23 1870.
38 Mackay Mercury, June 28 1893.
39 Mackay Mercury, January 3 1873.
40 Mackay Mercury, June 3 1876.
41 Mackay Mercury, June 10 1876.
42 Mackay Mercury, September 2 1876.
The early cattle producers of the district also had to contend with the consequences of appropriating the land of the area's original inhabitants. A report in the *Mackay Mercury* on October the 24th in 1874 gives an indication of this clash of cultures and the tone of the reporting of such incidents.

The blacks are getting worse than ever on the St. Helens and Bloomsbury cattle runs. Soon active measures will be needed to drive them away or they will make it quite impossible to hold the country. A fortnight ago a mob of 200 blacks descended on the St. Helens station with a view to attacking it. They hunted two men into the station cottage with spears. Mr. Graham however was on his guard and heard the shouts, and knowing from his blackboys that a number of blacks were in the neighbourhood, he was quite prepared to give them a warm reception. This tribe of blacks has since, despite visits from Sub Inspector Stuart and his troopers, remained on the station hunting and spearing cattle. They have speared several stud stock in the paddock and several of the milking cows. Altogether some 50 head have been killed by them. The same blacks have also created mischief on the Bloomsbury cattle run. It is not only the cattle that are killed but also the harm done to the herd by hunting them. These attacks take the condition off the cattle. It is clear that the Native Police Force needs reinforcing at least for a time until these blacks have been taught to respect the rights of property by argument of the most forceful nature.

While recognising the hypocrisy of settlers expecting the indigenous people to “respect the rights of property”, it should be remembered that in those times,
and for too many years after, the problematic principle of ‘Terra Nullius’
governed land acquisition throughout Australia.

*Let the Show Begin*

The first Mackay Show in June 1878 was held at Ooralea Racecourse and was
conducted by the Mackay Agricultural, Pastoral and Mining Association. The
notion of forming an association with the purpose of holding an annual
exhibition of Mackay's produce was raised by Charles Rawson, of 'The Hollow',
the previous year.⁴³ Charles and his brother, Edmund, had been raising cattle on
this property since 1867 and were well respected in the fledgling Mackay
community.⁴⁴ When appointed to the inaugural Show committee in October
1877, Charles Rawson proposed the motion "that the objects of this Association
shall be and are: first, to promote the agricultural and pastoral interests of the
districts, and, second to hold annual exhibitions of machinery implements,
stock, and produce on a portion of ground to be obtained at or near Mackay for
the purpose." ⁴⁵ Thus began the Mackay Show.

There were three Silver Cups on offer to beef cattle exhibitors at the inaugural
Mackay Show. These prizes were donated by, Dyson Lacy, for best bull,
Charles and Edmund Rawson, for best breeding cow, and Henry Finch-Hatton,
for best two-year-old Shorthorn heifer.⁴⁶ All these men were involved in the
various expeditions between 1877 and 1884 to climb the Mount Dalrymple
peak and all contributed greatly to the prosperity of the district.⁴⁷ Indeed the
Rawson's pioneering spirit was well known throughout the district. This spirit
even had a name, the 'Swizzle'. A high-octane concoction based on over-proof

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⁴³ *Mackay Mercury*, October 6 1877.
⁴⁴ Kerr, *op. cit.* p 12.
⁴⁵ *Mackay Mercury*, October 27 1877.
⁴⁷ Roth, *op. cit.* pp 75-76.
rum, it attracted many visitors to 'The Hollow'. A frequent visitor to the Rawsons was the winner of all three prizes at the inaugural Show, Robert Martin. His property, 'Hamilton', lay a small distance across the Pioneer River from 'The Hollow'. Rob took up the lease on the property in 1864 and his brother, Jim, leased nearby 'Hopetown' two years later. At the Show, Rob Martin was so rapt in winning the Silver Cups that he invited all those present "to drink champagne in mayoral fashion out of his three finely-made and artistically engraved loving cups." The tradition of cattlemen coming to town to exhibit their stock, catch up with friends and imbibe in some well-earned refreshments had begun. Cheers!

After this auspicious beginning for the beef section came many years of low entries, due to poor weather and the rise of sugar cane, in an agricultural show that was itself struggling to find its place, both spiritually and physically, in the emerging Mackay community. From the inaugural Mackay Show till the turn of the century, intending patrons would find that more often than not there was no Show scheduled to attend. This uncertainty also played havoc with organisers and exhibitors in all sections of the Show, including the beef section, as they could never be confident that 'the Show would go on' in any particular year. However, in this period Shows were held, ribbons and trophies presented, and all involved dreamed of the better times ahead.

In 1883, there were 18 classes advertised for competition in the beef section. When the Show was held only ten classes had attracted entries. This dropping off was to a large degree expected by organisers, as there had been a continued lack of rain in the district throughout the year. Indeed the drought conditions

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49 Wright, op.cit. p13.
50 Mackay Mercury, September 8 1883.
51 Mackay Mercury, September 22 1883.
saw many cattle starve to death that year. The local press called on producers to consider all means of saving stock, including supplementary feeding. The newspaper’s advice to boil or steam cabbages and turnips, as was the practice in England, to tide the animals through the dire times highlights how Australia still looked for answers from the old country rather than adapt to the different conditions they faced. 52 Considering the conditions it was quite amazing that the beef section went ahead that year with as many as ten classes. Those winning exhibitors who did attend were presented with their prizes by Messrs. McBryde and Finlayson. A silver medal was won by Mr. H. W. Swayne for his bull being judged best bred in the district. The Rawson Brothers continued their successful association with the section by winning the best cow and young bull classes, while Rice and Company took out the prestigious champion prime bull class. 53

The following years were extremely difficult for the Mackay Show, with low entries across all sections. The cattle exhibit suffered more than most as was illustrated by the turnout for the 1887 Show. Messrs. Bagley and Shannon were asked that year to judge both the beef and dairy sections and it must have been quite a shock to these gentlemen when the only entries they saw were one milking cow, from Mr. A. Ball, and one working bullock team, from Mr. A. C. Mather. 54 The situation did not improve and after a poor Show in 1889 the district’s only site for exhibiting produce went into abeyance until 1899. The new century saw similar low entries in the beef section. In 1904 there were only six entries contesting three classes. The exhibitors that year were J. Michelmore, the Mackay Butchering Company and D. Walker. 55 It should be noted that there was a shortage of beef that year, and the town’s publicans held

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52 Mackay Mercury, September 29 1883.
53 Mackay Mercury, September 22 1883.
54 Mackay Standard, July 11 1887.
55 Mackay Standard, May 27 1904.
a meeting to discuss ways of ensuring a cheaper supply. Proposals included hiring their own butcher, and the economics of starting a wholly owned butchering company were discussed. By 1910 the numbers had not improved in the beef section with only four classes of which none had more than two entries. Sharing the prizes were Messrs. Ussher and Brown and J. Dalton. While there was a distinct lack of cattle at the Show, there appears to have been still quite a number roaming the streets of Mackay making mischief at this time.

From Mackay’s first settlement to well into the second decade of the twentieth century there were many instances of cattle causing problems in the township. In 1913, the Pioneer Rivers Farmers and Graziers Association expressed concern over the number of stray stock being allowed to run on the public roads at night. A spokesman for the association, Mr. Powell, asked the council to rectify the situation. “It is a misery to put up with stray cattle. We pay rates for little return in Mackay and the employ of a herdsman or some other steps should be taken.” Apparently little had changed since 1870 when Mr. Sharp was crippled by a stray beast. The Police Magistrate's bald statement in 1893 regarding the number of stray cattle in town had not been acted upon. Nearly a year after Powell’s condemnation of the situation there were still unrestrained cattle on the streets of Mackay. As is sadly the case even today, it usually takes a tragedy before such dangerous practices and situations are rectified.

On Friday afternoon of July 10th, 1914, Thomas Sambrook, a toddler of only two and a half years of age, was watching the world go by from the front yard of his parents’ home in Sydney Street. The boy’s mother noticed that the child’s attention was drawn up the street to where a youth was walking beside a cow. From this point a chain of events unfolded with frightening speed. The beast

56 *Mackay Standard*, May 30 1904.
57 *Mackay Mercury*, June 16 1910.
bolted onto the footpath making a beeline for young Thomas. The youth started off in pursuit of the cow, yelling at it to stop. The frantic mother started to move the few paces to pluck her child to safety, but watched helplessly as the beast hit the hysterical child at full tilt, goring him through the upper left arm and tossing him into the air. Completing its horrendous rampage it took off down Sydney Street. The youth needed only a quick inspection of the child to gauge the severity of his injuries and, ignoring his departing cow, quickly ran to notify the ambulance. Nothing is known of the consequences of the attack for young Thomas Sambrook, except that he was taken to a doctor for surgical attention. For the growing town of Mackay however, some municipal action regarding unrestrained stock must have been instigated as sad incidents such as this no longer, thankfully, appeared as regularly in the local press.59

Exhibiting the District's Finest

While the Show has seen some interesting displays, a baby show in 1912 certainly was extraordinary in its motive for being held. The Show is known as a place where stock, of all species, are judged on their suitability and adaptation to the local climate and environment. However when human babies were exhibited at the 1912 Mackay Show with this same judging criteria, it becomes evident how much has changed in the last century. In that year the Daily Mercury sponsored a baby show to, "see the effect of the local climate on two generations, a very interesting experiment in eugenics." 60 Judging this exhibit were Dr. Kay, Dr. Hoare, Dr. Williams, and Nurse Barlow. Their comments and final analysis of the event were recorded for posterity by a Daily Mercury reporter. The judge's report was "flattering in the extreme as to the fine babies exhibited". It went on to state that "Wherever degenerative processes, if any, may occur as the result of the climate, in childhood there is no doubt the

58 Daily Mercury, July 14 1913.
59 Daily Mercury, July 11 1914.
Mackay natives are as fine babies born as elsewhere. All the winning babies were breastfed, a fact which also says something for the mothers." As can be seen by this story, and indeed also the next, political correctness was not a journalistic consideration in the early 1910s.

An innocent enough story of two calves brought to town to fulfil their destiny highlights the nationalist and anti-German sentiments that were common in 1913 throughout Australia. This edited account of a Daily Mercury report also gives an interesting insight into everyday life in early Mackay:

Two innocent specimens of the bovine family were brought to town yesterday [18-07-1913] to complete their life stories. The man in charge of the youngsters was not an Australian as the made in Germany note in his language proclaimed and his knowledge of stock was as apparently as limited as his acquaintance with the Australian tongue. According to the man, the two calves were too heavy to lift into the tray of the conveyance and so he simply tied a rope around the calves' necks, the other end being attached to the dray. Starting from just outside town, the man jumped into the dray and dragged the two beasts. They kept up bravely until they reached Wood Street, just opposite the telegraph office, where the bigger of the calves groaned and dropped to the ground. The driver, being appraised of the situation, pulled over and attempted to raise the animal to its feet. However it lay on the ground with its eyes staring out of its head as though dead. A crowd soon began to gather and abraded the 'stockman' on his cruel method of bringing in the animals. A few hotel patrons who had witnessed the collapse of the

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60 Daily Mercury, June 21 1954, p 5.
animal came over to witness the fun. The excited little German in charge of the beasts had a hot time of it from these newcomers from the hotel, especially a fellow who loudly proclaimed his name as Ginger. This man told the German in no uncertain terms that his knowledge of stock was poor. Ginger then proceeded to tell the gathering of his own wide experience in dealing with cattle. While this was going on the beast still lay motionless on the ground. A man came up to the animal and suggested gentle pressure be applied to the beast to assist it to breathe. The German took this advice and started to pound the animal furiously and the crowd roared with laughter. Somebody else suggested a bucket of water be thrown on the animal’s face and the German was quickly away to fetch it and at the same time a butcher approached the scene to see what all the commotion was about. Whether it was the sight of the beast’s dreaded enemy that caused the second calf, who up till that point had been standing quietly, to slip its noose and bolt off with a departing backheeler to Ginger’s shins. Soon after the German returned with the bucket of water to find the other calf missing and the butcher manhandling the comatose beast onto the back of the dray. The little German, for some reason known only to himself, thought this the opportune time to splash the animal with water. It regained consciousness with a flurry of hoofs, knocking the butcher to the ground before departing to join its mate on the run. This turn of events had the crowd howling with laughter. Those with nothing better to do assisted in recapturing the calves from a paddock next to the Harbour Board offices and loading them onto the back of the dray. All present farewelled the German with much derisive laughter.62

62 Daily Mercury, July 19 1913.
While the Great War was a huge fillip for the region’s beef industry, beef producers still had to contend with that age-old enemy, the weather. There were heavy stock losses in 1915 due to a drought with the district suffering its driest period on record. These adverse conditions were reflected in the beef cattle exhibit of that year with only a very limited number of entries contesting the event. The section’s judge, Fred Elworthy, was not overextended in his duties with the largest class having only three entries. Prize winners included J. H. Dalrymple, Chas Froggatt and Wallis and Company. In winning the primest and heaviest bullock class Wallis and Company were awarded a set of copper branding irons valued at £1/5 shillings in addition to the prize money of £1. There was great interest from show patrons in the 1916 ‘guess the bullock weight’ competition with approximately 400 entries. Only three of these guessed the correct weight, 833 lbs. Wallis and Company was the sole entry in most classes at the 1916 fat cattle exhibit. This was despite prize money ranging from £1, for primest and heaviest bullock, to £3, for bulls under four years. The only other winners were J. R. Smith with his Hereford bull ‘Nabdo’ and J. Michelmore with his Shorthorn bull ‘Apollo’. Show Association president, W. B. Fordyce, said in his closing address to patrons that the 1916 Mackay Show “was practical proof of what the Mackay district was capable of producing.” Difficulties with transporting cattle to the Show would continue to keep the number of entries small in the beef section for many years. However, those producers who did exhibit from the first Show through until motorised transport enabled easier access to Mackay, displayed great dedication to the continuation of the section.

63 Daily Mercury, June 22 1915.
64 Daily Mercury, June 23 1915, p 3.
65 Daily Mercury, July 1 1916.
66 Daily Mercury, June 29 1916.
The Mackay Show resumed after an enforced break of three years in 1920. The effects of the Great War and the devastation of the 1918 cyclone forced the annual event to mark time during those years. Although the 1920 Show was restricted in its exhibits, the patronage of the public on opening day was an encouraging sign to the Pioneer River Farmers and Graziers’ Show Association. The editor of the *Daily Mercury* spoke for the Mackay community in 1920 when he stated, “The resumption of the annual show was welcomed by town and district alike. The war checked enthusiasm for public gatherings that were designed to entertain. This year they [Show Committee] decided to open a new chapter in the history of the association.” There were again only a small number of exhibits in the beef cattle section in 1920. Winners included: C. Froggart, B. Keane and the Gilham brothers. The champion bull of show class had six entries and the winner was F. J. E. Holt’s ‘Commodore of Nestles’. The judge, T. Gaylard, commented that, “Although the exhibits were not numerous the animals were the best he had seen in Mackay for many years.” The Singer Sewing Machine Company continued their sponsorship of the extremely popular ‘guess the bullock weight’ competition in 1920. Fred Rolleston of Eton and J. Harris of Mt. Dukes were among the contestants who correctly guessed the dressed weight of the fat bullock to be 1090 lbs. The calamitous events both globally and locally in the previous decade understandably led to a more subdued Show season in 1920 and this was reflected in the behaviour of the district’s citizenry.

There was not the drunken revelry of earlier years at the 1920 Show. The presiding Magistrate was not over extended in his duties during this time of community celebration, which allowed the *Daily Mercury’s* court reporter to

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70 *Daily Mercury*, July 2 1920, p 2.
comment, "Considering the jollification that usually accompanies Show week the court records this week were small." There were only two offenders charged with drunkenness over the period. One repentant fellow told the Magistrate that he had now 'sworn off' drinking altogether.\textsuperscript{72}

The emergence of Mackay from frontier town to the district's commercial centre in the 1920s saw a shift in what the community found oddly appealing. In late April 1876 a calf was born on Homebush Station with two tails. The second tail, about nine inches long and rather flat, rose up from between the animal's shoulders. There was a call to bring the animal into town for display with any monies raised from interested viewers to go to charity.\textsuperscript{73} By the 1920s, cattle had become such an uncommon sight in the Mackay township that the public grew increasingly interested in viewing these beasts, even the one-tailed variety, at the Show. This was especially true regarding those overgrown examples of the species. The 'guess the bullock weight' competition remained a very popular promotion for the Show and the beef cattle section. In 1921, many learned citizens entered the competition, however the correct weight of 1214 lbs was missed by all. The nearest entries were lodged by Edna Ridley, S. S. Beatty, J. Jorgensen, G. Celey, R. S. Robinson, H. R. Hill and Mrs. F. Knoble.\textsuperscript{74}

With entries so low in the 1921 beef breeds section that most classes were won by the sole exhibitor, special attention was placed by the organizers and the local press on the 'primest and heaviest bullock on ground' class, which was won by C. Froggatt\textsuperscript{75}. The sight of these huge beasts captured the public's imagination and continued to do so for many years. It was not until the 1950s

\textsuperscript{71} Daily Mercury July 5 1920, p 4. 
\textsuperscript{72} Daily Mercury, June 30 1920, p 10. 
\textsuperscript{73} Mackay Mercury, June 8 1876. 
\textsuperscript{74} Daily Mercury, July 2 1921. 

\textsuperscript{75} Daily Mercury, July 5 1920, p 4.
when, in relation to beef anyway, quality rather than size became the determining factor in exhibiting. F. Purdie, a beef cattle judge at the 1955 Proserpine Show, argued that “heavyweight bullocks are sideshow pieces” and that Shows should “get rid of this class.” 76 But in the 1920s an opportunity to view these bovine oddities still enticed patrons to the Show. The biggest bullock on record was presented for the edification of the public at the 1922 Mackay Show. Messrs. Meekin and Fox claimed to have bought the beast from a Maori chieftain in New Zealand to exhibit on the show circuit in Australia and Argentina. ‘Tiny’, as the bull was ironically named, was seen by over 27,000 patrons while on display at the Royal Show in Sydney. 77 Whether due to Tiny’s popularity or other factors, the influx of visitors to Mackay for the Show in 1922 stretched the limits of the town’s accommodation. While most visitors lodged with friends and family there were still difficulties for many in securing rooms that year. 78

**The Industry**

In 1921-22, the livestock returns for the Commonwealth indicated that there were 14.5 million cattle across the country. Of that total, Queensland’s herd totalled no fewer than 7 million. This was a significant rise from the 1916 total of 4.7 million head. These figures show the importance of the cattle raising industry at this time to the economy of the State. Many landholders during the Great War were induced to enter the beef industry by the relatively high prices offered for meat. As a consequence when demand for beef slumped after the war its effect was more widespread across the rural community. Both large and small cattle concerns were faced with a negative return if they sold their stock, and so many chose to hold onto their cattle in the hope of better returns in the

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75 *Daily Mercury*, July 1 1921.
77 *Daily Mercury*, June 28 1922.
78 *Daily Mercury*, June 29 1922.
future. This strategy bred up a surplus and kept prices low. This led, in August 1922, to the Queensland Cattle Growers Association's president, R. C. Philp, to investigate the plausibility of the introduction of a co-operative scheme for the industry. The scheme would enable the industry to establish meatworks, direct exports and open distribution centres in the United Kingdom and other countries. A hurdle to the scheme was the £5 million needed as start-up capital. 79

During the 1920s it was a struggle just to keep the beef section on the Mackay show program. Lack of competition in the exhibit at the 1924 Show drew this comment from a Daily Mercury reporter, “The exhibits in the beef cattle section were small in number, considering that there is excellent country around Mackay it would be thought that there would be far heavier entries.” There were only 16 entries in the section, three of the classes had only one entry and another three classes had only two entries. W. S. Wallis and Company and A. A. Cook shared the prizes on offer. 80 Breeds on display at the 1925 Mackay Show were Shorthorn, Hereford and polled Angus. A very large Shorthorn, exhibited by W. S. Wallis and Company, won the prize for the primest and heaviest bullock. 81 Herefords prevailed at the 1926 Show and were described by the Daily Mercury as, “in good condition despite the season.” The same report lamented the quantity of stock on display. “This section should be built up to much greater proportions. Entries within easy reach of Mackay should make the effort to attend.” 82 A. A. Cook and W. S. Wallis and Company again shared the awards, as they would the following year when they were the only competitors. The beef breeds section in 1926 was judged by H. H. Kynaston with J. G. Galey acting as steward. Oddities were again on display when in 1927 a visit to the

79 Daily Mercury, July 11 1923.
80 Daily Mercury, July 3 1924.
81 Daily Mercury, July 1 1925.
82 Daily Mercury, July 2 1926.
Show meant gazing in wonder at the giant trotting ostrich and the world's only horned horse. Veterinarians were admitted free to these exhibits to ensure the authenticity of the animals. While the Show itself remained strong during the 1920's and 30's, the beef section survived only because of the consistent support of a handful of exhibitors.

The high profile of the beef cattle exhibit at the Mackay Show by the end of the 20th Century is in direct contrast to Shows earlier in the century. In 1928 the beef exhibit results occupied only a small space within the Show edition of the Daily Mercury, and were located within the much larger Dairy Cattle Results section. Although the numbers of beef cattle entries were indeed small in these years it should be remembered that there were still problems with transport. While the dairy and cane industries occupied most of the land east of the ranges, and thereby had better access to the Show, the fledgling beef industry had far greater distances to travel to display its product. The beef cattle that did make it to the Show displayed the effects of the unpredictable tropical weather. While beef cattle at the 1930 Show were described by judge Dan Jones as "a magnificent lot fit to be exhibited in any part of Australia", within two years the same judge lamented at the 1932 Show that the beef cattle "were hardly up to show ring standard." Harsh words for the struggling graziers who had supported the exhibit. To smooth down any ruffled feathers his remarks may have caused he quickly added, "that the falling off in standard was no doubt due to the unfavourable weather conditions". This attempt by Jones to reconcile the exhibitors appears to have failed, because the following year there was only a single entry in most beef cattle classes. The judge's remarks do indicate,

83 Daily Mercury, June 25 & 27 1927.
84 Daily Mercury, July 4 1928, p 2.
85 Daily Mercury, July 2 1930, p 5.
86 Daily Mercury, June 29 1932, p 9.
87 Daily Mercury, June 28 1933, p 3.
however, the constant struggle that the beef producers had in those early years against weather, and the climatically unsuitable breeds available.

The number of beef cattle exhibited at the Mackay Show remained small during most of the 1930’s. In these years the future of the beef cattle classes at the Show must have been in doubt. With only eight beasts entered for all classes in 1937 the town’s population and the local media could be excused for overlooking the beef cattle exhibit altogether. However the ‘bush telegraph’ must have been working overtime amongst the district’s graziers following this poor representation. The next Show in 1938 saw a record entry of 36 beasts and all were judged to be in “remarkably good condition” by W. T. H Carr junior. This determination to not only sustain, but also expand the showing of beef cattle at Mackay, illustrates a growing confidence in the district’s beef industry.

The late 1930s brought on a new generation of youngsters who would have a lasting impact on both the district’s beef industry and the beef section at the Show. Among these were Keith Flohr and Don Wall. Keith came to Nebo in 1929, as a toddler, when his father drew the Wotonga property in a land ballot. Leaving school at thirteen Keith started droving cattle to Mackay. In those times it took ten days to drive the cattle down Stockroute Road to the Michelmore slaughterhouse. Don Wall also started droving cattle throughout the district. Working with his grandfather, Don recalls these years with affection. This period, the late 1930’s, introduced him to local graziers and was the start of many longstanding relationships. While these were tough times across Australia, Don recalls that most graziers showed the two drovers great kindness and gratitude for performing this difficult task. There are always exceptions, of course, and even after the passing of many years Don remembers

vividly an instance of pettiness that still leaves him shaking his head in disappointment. Don and his grandfather had spent six days droving a mob of cattle to a property. It had been raining constantly throughout the journey and Don remembers arriving at the property wet and cold. While his grandfather went up to the homestead to ask about overnight accommodation and to get a billy of tea, Don yarded the stock and took shelter under the closest tree. After a short while Don’s grandfather returned through the driving rain looking rather forlorn. He placed the empty billy can under the tree and recounted his conversation with the grazier and his wife to his grandson. “As for accommodation we’re under it right now,” he said pointing up into the sparsely foliaged tree, “and as for the billy of tea, the lady of the house couldn’t spare any tea leaves and said to come back with our own tea and she could boil some water for us.” Having no dry tea leaves and sighting no better tree to camp under Don and his grandfather settled in for an uncomfortable night. Over sixty years later Don still cannot account for this meanness of spirit. But he knows why he remembers it so clearly. Such disregard for others was the exception in an otherwise considerate rural community.91

**Proud Dick**

For show cattle, being inspected closely is part and parcel of their existence, however the most scrutinised beasts at the pre-war shows were not entered in any beef section class. This honour went to the beasts selected to be the starring attraction in the popular ‘guess the bullock weight’ competitions. In 1939 a bullock affectionately named ‘Dick’ assumed this celebrated position in the competition. His rise to prominence was all the more noteworthy given ‘Dick’s’ lack of recorded lineage. At a tender age ‘Dick’ was found orphaned and distressed on Crowther William’s property. Of his mother there was no sign.

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91 Interview with Don Wall, May 17 2001.
Brought to the homestead on the front of Henry Williams’s saddle, ‘Dick’ found himself adopted by the family as a pet. Nurtured on a steady supply of cow’s milk and meal it was not long before ‘Dick’ was enjoying the playfulness and vigour of his youth. These were glory days indeed with a neverending stream of youngsters just busting to develop their bullock riding skills on young ‘Dick’. He was adored by all and in return never showed anything other than an even temperament to his handlers.

On maturity ‘Dick’ was indeed a fine specimen of bovine bulk and it was decided he would be a perfect candidate for the Show’s ‘guess the bullock weight’ competition. ‘Dick’ because of his favoured treatment on the William’s property had no trouble adapting to being the centre of attention at the Show. He never gave a moment’s worry to the competition’s spruiker, Jack Mahony, and enjoyed the keen interest the patrons took in every facet of his appearance. Unfortunately, for ‘Dick’, this starring role was ‘for one show only’. His fate may be summed up in one phrase: ‘sold for ‘25/ per hundred pounds’.92 However, ‘Dick’ would be remembered by many for rising to the occasion and standing proud while on display to the public.

Lack of accommodation during the 1939 Mackay Show saw many visitors to the town inquiring about the possibility of lodging in private homes. A greater number of Show visitors and the refurbishing of three hotels that year led to this shortage of available rooms. The visitors comprised not only Show patrons from the Mackay district but also competitors, sideshow workers, and members of the touring theatrical companies that followed the Show circuit.93 For one district cattle worker the experience of coming to town proved to be a costly affair, although it has to be said he did not have any difficulties with his

93 *Daily Mercury*, June 8 1939, p 8.
lodgings. But he did find himself the subject of a rather unflattering *Daily Mercury* article. It was reported that this fellow celebrated his visit to town with what turned out to be an "over-consumption of a certain amber fluid". As a result he found himself, as eloquently put by the reporter, "in durance vile", and had to lighten his pocket by five shillings before being allowed to leave the hospitality of the Mackay Watchhouse. Police Magistrate, T .R. Kennedy’s advice to him was uncomplicated and direct: "You behave yourself while you are in town." 94 While the influx of visitors for the Show usually strained Mackay’s infrastructure, the annual celebration was fundamental in maintaining a sense of community for the people of the district. This community spirit would be sorely needed as the dark clouds of war again appeared on the horizon.

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A NEW CHAPTER, 1940-1980

This period saw sustained growth and innovation in the beef section of the Mackay Show and in the district’s beef industry. By the end of the 1970s the district’s herd would be unrecognisable from that of only forty years previously. New breeds that were better adapted to the tropical climate quickly became dominant in the industry and at the Show. At the forefront of these changes was a new generation of cattlemen who embraced innovation and technology with a view to seeing their industry prosper.

Don Wall continued his association with the district’s beef industry when in 1942 he started his butchering apprenticeship under Chas Kemp. The war years were a different experience, recalls Mr. Wall, "In those days no one had any paper, so customers would arrive carrying their own dishes and saucepans. These were the years when food coupons were required for the purchase of beef." Mr. Wall commented that before the establishment of the service abattoir at Bakers Creek, local butchers conducted their own slaughterhouses.¹ The three main yards were Wallis and Company at Paget, G.H. Robertson on Broadsound Road, and Camilleri and Deguara at Beaconsfield. The Beaconsfield yards were taken over by John Hodder who, at one stage, owned half of the butcher shops in Mackay. The remainder were owned by Wallis and Company, a subsidiary of J. Michelmore and Company Pty Ltd.²

The beef cattle section started to gain some momentum as an industry exhibition following World War Two. It was as Alan Shannon later stated “The start of a new chapter for the section.”³ Only a few years from the end of the

¹ Interview with Don Wall, May 17 2001.
³ Interview with Alan Shannon, June 20 2001.
War, short haul trucks and contractors began to have an impact on the longstanding problem of transporting stock to the Show. With a surplus of ex-army vehicles on the market, many returned servicemen viewed motorised produce haulage as a niche where a living could be made. This transport revolution had not filtered through to the Mackay district by 1946 and the beef section of that year again lacked numbers. Beef producers also had to contend with the long dry spell that had again gripped the district. Although "lacking the bloom of finished cattle" according to the section's judge, W. Beck, there was some quality stock on display. He was particularly impressed with a bullock exhibited by J. A. Michelmore jnr. Other winners that year included Messrs. F. Ross and E. McEvoy.4

At the 1947 Show entries increased dramatically, with the predominant beef cattle breeds being Hereford and Shorthorn. W. L. Pownall, the beef cattle judge that year, spoke very highly of these breeds and their value to the grazing industry in the district. He also emphasized the usefulness of the Mackay Show as a marketing site for the district's beef industry. Commenting on the excellent display of cattle the judge stated, "it would appear that graziers were realising the value of the fine opportunity, which was provided by the Show, for demonstrating the value of their stock." 5 As cattle numbers at the Show improved in the late 1940's, it became obvious that larger holding facilities for the cattle would be needed. The situation reached crisis point in 1947 when seven beasts were sent home from the Show due to a lack of space. The judge of the beef cattle section, W. L. Pownall, was disappointed to learn of this turn of events and called on the Mackay Show Association to rectify the matter.6 While the situation was unfortunate for all involved it does signal the beginning of a robust beef cattle section at the Mackay Show.

A new generation of graziers, aided by motorised transport, heeded the advice of Mr. Pownall and began to show a commendable commitment to the beef section. One of these was Alan Shannon, who has now been involved in the Mackay Show beef cattle exhibit for over 50 years. In 1948, Mr. Shannon was managing the Saltbush Park property and it was decided to transport their trade cattle to the Show by road. This was the first time that trade cattle had been trucked to the Show. The transport contractor was Arthur Rasmussen who provided an International truck with a wooden crate on the back for the task. The driver, Peter Christianson, took four and a half-hours to make the 90 miles from Saltbush Park to the Mackay showgrounds. A skilful driver was required for this difficult journey of 40 miles of dirt, 30 miles of gravel and only 20 miles of bitumen road.

This unaccustomed mode of transport apparently did not impress the bovine passengers. When unloading the cattle at the showgrounds most of the beasts attempted to bolt in a westerly direction, presumably back to Saltbush Park, but were eventually rounded up and placed in the yards. One bullock however struck out on its own and wandered through Sideshow Alley, as seems to be the custom with escaped beasts at the Show, before, with its appetite sated for the fun fair, returning with minimal guidance to the rest of the mob in the yards. Two other cattle exhibitors that year walked their entries to the showgrounds. In this respect, among others, Tom Cook from Greenmount Station, who had Black Angus stock, and Eddie McEvoy from Eungella Station, with his Shorthorn cross Hereford cattle, showed great commitment to attend the exhibit.⁷

⁷ Interview with Alan Shannon, June 20 2001.
In 1948 there was no auction of trade cattle at the Show and so arrangements had to be made to transport the show stock by railway wagon to Lakes Creek meatworks in Rockhampton. To move the 20 cattle that were to make the trip involved getting them to cross a six-foot drain outside the showgrounds. This task did not pass without incident. One beast toppled into the drain and panicked. It should be remembered that these were bush cattle with no experience of how to behave on their first and last visit to town. A visit to the Magistrate with a warning to behave and a 5/- fine just does not make an impression on cattle for some reason. So Mr. Shannon and others took charge and struggled to manhandle the beast, thrashing about on its back in the slippery drain, into an upright position in order to drag it back on to the road. When this was accomplished all concerned were covered in mud from head to toe, or in the beast's case, head to hoof. Given that the men still had to walk the cattle to the Paget railyards, it was generally conceded it was going to be a long day. 8

Almost as the last event had finished at the 1948 Show plans were under way for the next Mackay Show. President of the Show Association, G. E. Muller, contended that this early planning for 1949, while the Show was still fresh in committee members' minds, would assist in gauging what new highlights were necessary and how to make any improvements. 9 Their efforts were rewarded with a record Show in 1949. This enabled many more patrons to view the impressive stock on display. The quality of the Herefords was outstanding, according to the judge Mr. W. L. Cox. He was particularly pleased with two Hereford bullocks shown by Alan Shannon. Cox commented that they "were fit to compete in any Show in the State". Other award-winning exhibitors that year were Messrs. D. Comerford, A. Simpson, A. Turner, F. Single, J. Michelmore,

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8 Ibid.
9 Daily Mercury, June 28 1948, p 2.
A. Williams, G. Richards, E. McEvoy and T. Cook. An important point was raised in 1949 by the President of the Mackay branch of the Central Coast Graziers Association, F. A. Atherton, that "the high prices for show stock is not indicative of beef industry prices." Indeed the cattle on display at the Show are usually the best of the herd and as such command a much higher price than those left behind in the paddock. Nevertheless, show stock represent the cutting-edge of the district's herd, and in many cases they offer a glimpse of the stock that in a few years will become the standard in the industry. It was a proud moment for Mackay Show beef exhibitors in 1949 when for the first time in Show history a substantial section of beef cattle lined up with the other prize winners in the Grand Parade. With this quantity of representation in the most prestigious display at the Mackay Show, the beef cattle section had finally come of age.

The 1950 Show saw the positive outcome of a better range and quality of herd bulls. A stock improvement program had been implemented in the district a few years prior, and the outcome had finally manifested itself. Also the weather for once was on the side of exhibitors, and the good season assisted both the quantity and quality of beef cattle exhibited. These factors saw more than 70 entries in the section that year. Cattlemen, show officials and auctioneers were ecstatic with the Daily Mercury headline which read "Striking Growth In Show's Beef Cattle Exhibition", and the statement in the same issue that "Mackay is rapidly gaining strength as a beef cattle exhibition." The excellence of the display moved the Show secretary, J. M. Griffin, to state that the cattle on display "were the finest ever seen in Mackay.

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10 Daily Mercury, June 30 1949, p 5.
11 Daily Mercury, July 1 1949, p 2.
12 Daily Mercury, June 30 1949, p 5.
14 Daily Mercury, June 30 1950, p 5.
15 Ibid.
1950 was reflected in the Show fat stock sales. The auctioneers reported a record sale of 59 head. This compared favourably with only 28 sold at the 1949 Show. Buyers came from Rockhampton and Bowen meatworks. The Lakes Creek meatworks bought a bullock donated by Messrs. Wallis and Company for £42, the proceeds going to the ambulance fund.  

The beef cattle section judge in 1950, R. S. Wilson, not only critiqued the stock on display but also had a few well intentioned words regarding the organisation of the exhibit. Wilson advocated a reduction in the number of classes to increase competition among exhibitors. In this matter Wilson, who also had judged at the Brisbane and Sydney Shows, may very well have had a valid argument. With only 70 entries competing in over 40 classes the intensity of keen competition may have been missing. He gave the example of the Gladstone Show, where over 140 entries vied for distinction in only six classes. With participants keen to offer suggestions in a bid to improve the exhibit, the section was evolving into one of the most progressive at the Mackay Show.

The two young drovers, Keith Flohr and Don Wall, meanwhile were striking out in different directions. In 1948 Keith and his older brother Charlie purchased Mt Lebanon station from S. Jabore. Eight years later Keith wed Margaret Jenson and two years on they, and their daughter Donna, moved back to Wotonga to assist in running the property after the death of his father. Keith subsequently bought Wotonga from the estate and sold his share of Mt Lebanon to brother Charlie. Two sons, Ross and Keith, followed and with his wife by his side Keith started on an extensive development program at Wotonga. In Don Wall's case, after finishing his apprenticeship he took over the Fourways

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16 Ibid.
17 Daily Mercury, June 29 1950, p 5.
butcher shop from Sam and Bill McBride. That first year, 1952, he boasted a staff of two, himself and his new bride Gloria. The business grew to such an extent that by 1959 he had won a contract for one of the biggest meat orders in Australian history. This was for an Army exercise at Colston Gap near Sarina. Wall sourced all the 200,000 lbs of meat needed to feed the 5000 troops from local graziers.

When Wall started his butchering business in the early 1950's there was only aged meat available at the wholesale level in Mackay. Not content with this arrangement he approached the district’s beef producers to access a younger and better quality product. “My early days as a drover in the area helped me identify where these better cattle were,” recollects Mr. Wall. The herds in the district were comprised mostly of Shorthorn, Hereford and Angus. Alan Shannon recalled that one of the negative aspects of the Shorthorn and Hereford breeds were that they had to be mature to gain fat content. This is why there was usually only old beef on sale to the consumer in the district. In an effort to give the customer a better product Don Wall entered the yearling trade, the first butcher to do so in Mackay, offering Angus/Herefords from Lloyd Pownall’s Blue Mountain property, at Barnganal. Wall underwent another ‘apprenticeship’ in 1954-55 with Sid Sharkey of Bayersville. Sharkey was well respected for his accurate judgement of beast weight and quality, and from him Wall learned to select the cattle he wanted to slaughter for his business. He expanded his source of quality product with cattle from Jack Windsor of Hamilton Park, Nebo, and J. E. Jeppeson and Sons, at Bloomsbury. Wall firmly

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21 Interview with Alan Shannon, June 20 2001.
believed that this care in the selection of animals contributed greatly towards the success of his business.23

However, cattle still had to be transported to town and while droving was still popular some beef producers were keen to explore the advantages of motorised haulage. One of the first district properties to road transport cattle was Barmount Station in 1954. In that year the Conaghan family began trucking fat cows to John Hodder’s slaughter yards in Mackay. The old truck used could only carry five cows on the 200-kilometre journey, which took over 10 hours to complete. The journey was over rough corrugations as the gravel and sandy Bruce Highway wound its way through the iron bark and brigalow trees and across the narrow low-level bridges to the notorious Marlborough- Sarina strip. In the 1950’s the only bitumen on the trip from Barmount was between Mackay and Swayneville, on the coastal side of the Sarina Range.24 While a speed of 20 kilometres an hour is a tad slow by today’s standards, it was still a remarkable improvement, time wise, over the traditional droving method.

Rampage

The 1954 Show saw two of the most dangerous incidents of beef cattle escaping into the crowd. The same bullock, belonging to Pinnacle Station grazier Neil McKay, was involved in both rampages. The bullock’s first escape saw it leave the show ring, flatten a sideshow stall, gallop through a machinery display, and disperse a section of the crowd before finally being recaptured and penned. Only a short time later the beast again escaped. In a highly agitated state it fled out of the stalls, brushing past a woman on its way into the crowd. The frightened animal scattered the surprised patrons on its way to the enclosure of the Child Minding Association. Crashing and stumbling through the netting of

the enclosure the bullock was now thrashing about in a disoriented state amongst a throng of toddlers. An eyewitness later told of how "at one stage a child was under the bullock and escaped being struck." Fortunately for the toddlers, the bullock raced from the child minding enclosure towards the rear of the grandstand. Here it careened into two men, knocking them to the ground. As the bullock galloped on through the parting crowd it now had a posse of concerned stockmen on its tail. To the astonishment and dismay of Show patrons it powered into two young sisters who were making their way to the grandstand. Ruth and Nerida Gilbert, five and twelve years old respectively, of Hucker Street, Mackay, were both knocked to the ground and Nerida found herself pinned underneath the stumbling beast. As the bullock regained its feet it was grabbed around the head by Nebo grazier Ted Simmonds and brought under control. Fortunately, there were no serious injuries to patrons. However it did highlight the need for a more secure enclosure for the stock on display.

Softly Softly

Zebu cattle were exhibited for the first time by F. J. Simonsen of Sarina, at the 1953 Mackay Show. Their cross bred cousin's primary use at the Show in the early 1950s however, was for bullock riding and camp drafting events. At the 1955 Show some of these Zebu cross cattle staged a mass escape under the cover of darkness that saw the last day's riding and drafting events all but cancelled. Just prior to sunset 70 bullocks were bedded down in a wire-rail enclosure at the showgrounds. When the ground caretaker went to check on them just after sunrise, he was alarmed to see only 17 of the original herd in the pen and 16 feet of fencing flattened. More than 50 bullocks had escaped during the night and yet no alarm had been raised concerning the whereabouts of the cattle. A search of the showgrounds and the surrounding area revealed not a

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26 Ibid.
sign of the beasts. The police had received no reports of over 50 Zebu cattle wandering the streets of Mackay. The sideshow people camped at the showgrounds also were unable to assist: they had heard nothing unusual during the night.

As the day wore on and still no reports of stray Zebu sightings were forthcoming from the Mackay public, it was decided that the owner of the bullocks would have to be informed. It appeared beyond the comprehension of Show officials that over 50 head of cattle could stampede out of their enclosure and then simply disappear. The Show officials organised a scratch camp-drafting event with the remaining bullocks and then notified the stockowner Fred Bussey. His quiet acceptance of the stampede and mass escape of his cattle dumbfounded the show officials. Bussey, after a suitable amount of time listening to their explanations, finally notified the amazed officials that the escaped cattle were grazing quietly on his property ‘The Boomerang’. It appears that they walked the ten miles back to their home range during the night and early morning without being seen or heard by anybody. The Zebus had apparently decided that their Show was over and it was time to go home. 28 And this 40 years before Larson’s The Far Side cartoon made stars of all things bovine.

The newer breeds of cattle introduced to the district were transforming both the industry and the beef section at the Show. At the 1955 Show, one of the few Santa Gertrudis bulls in Queensland was exhibited non-competitively by N. Mackay of Eton. The beef cattle section judge, L. Priddle, commented that the bull was “a good style of beast”. He was also impressed with the quantity and

quality of the young fat cattle entries that year.\textsuperscript{29} Local charities were also impressed when at the 1956 Show they received £551 from the auctioning of donated beef cattle.\textsuperscript{30} The same local graziers who so graciously supported district charities were leading the charge in seeking suitable cattle for their properties. One of these was Noel Perry who, with his sister Mrs. R. J. Maddern, purchased Mt Hillalong in 1956. There he began adapting the property’s Poll Hereford herd to better suit the conditions. He chose 200 head from the property’s herd as foundation females and introduced a son of the 1932 imported Red Zebu bull, Quo Vadis, to begin breeding red crossbred animals. Mr. Perry’s interest in Brahmans had been sparked years earlier when he had seen a number of this breed at Bob Beak’s property at Wilangi, north of Rockhampton. In the initial crossbreeding Perry was looking for a type of animal with good conformation and colour, with a skin type which would offer tick resistance and constitution.

During these early years of crossbreeding, Noel Perry became aware of similar work being done by Rob Rea of ‘Kirknie’, Home Hill, and R.L. (Monty) Atkinson of ‘Mungalla’, Ingham. In 1944, Atkinson had bought Mungalla for breeding a second herd, the first at ‘Cashmere’ in the Mt. Garnett district, of red Brahman cross cattle. The Droughtmaster had begun. Noel Perry continued with his breeding program by buying bulls from these other properties. He soon found himself to be prominent among Zebu cross cattle breeders. “At that stage I had no intention of becoming a bull breeder,” Mr. Perry said later. “All I wanted was an animal suitable for this environment, with tick resistance and survival and mothering ability, for my own use, and to provide store steers for

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{30} Daily Mercury, June 22 1956, p 3.
marketing.” Innovations such as these in the breeding of stock would have many long-term benefits for the district’s beef industry.

At the 1957 Mackay Show a new system of carcase appraisal was introduced in the beef section, the first instance of its use in Queensland. The new process involved measurement of the carcase as well as a visual appraisal by the judge. J. Arbuckle, Senior Adviser in Cattle Husbandry for the Department of Agriculture and Stock (Rockhampton), credited J. Riley and A. Shannon with the introduction of the new system. It “cut down human error in that 70 per cent of points were allotted by measurement, and 30 per cent by appraisal.” Innovations were occurring also in the social life of the beef exhibitors, with the inaugural Beef Dinner in 1957. Its chairman, John Riley, announced at the dinner that the sum of £183 had been raised for construction of additional yards for the beef cattle section at the Mackay Showgrounds. The money was raised by conducting a ‘snowball’ auction of a beast donated by W. Geddes. “This very fine gesture” said Mr. Riley “would enable extensive additions to be made to the yards for the 1958 Show.”

The livestock manager for the Central Queensland Meat Export Company at Lakes Creek, J. Clough, announced at the beef dinner that his company was prepared to donate an annual trophy to the Mackay Agricultural Society for chiller steers. The steers would have to be killed at Lakes Creek, and then the carcases exhibited at Smithfield in England to be judged for quality against chiller steers from other countries. Mr. Clough stated that the pen of three steers would be judged on the hoof at the Show, on the hooks at Lakes Creek, and again in England. Mr. J. Arbuckle, the Senior Adviser in Cattle Husbandry for

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33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
the Department of Agriculture and Stock (Rockhampton), stated that “there is a big future in the chilled beef trade for Mackay district and hinterland cattlemen, if they concentrate on the husbandry of younger cattle.” Mr. Clough was in agreement with Arbuckle’s statement and added that “the Company had bought 54 head of cattle at the Show to go as chillers to the United Kingdom.” Clough praised the quality of beef being exported from the district and told the dinner guests that in the previous month 130 head from Peter Michelmore’s station near Nebo had been a part of “the finest shipment of chilled beef ever to leave Australia.” There were 180 guests at the inaugural Beef Dinner which was held at the R.S.L Hall. Miss Australia 1956, Miss June Finlayson, made a brief appearance and was thanked by the conveners, Mr. and Mrs. John Riley of Barnganal Station and Mr. and Mrs. Alan Shannon of Cardowan Station.

The dinner was held in conjunction with Show week activities and its success saw it become an annual event. Also at the dinner was S. T. Wallace, who speaking on behalf of all stock agents connected with the Show, said, “the beef cattle section has been a tribute to the beef growers of the district.” Wallace also praised the efforts of Messrs. Riley and Shannon in altering the beef cattle classes at the Show to conform to those required by cattle buyers. These changes had “substantially contributed to the success of the beef cattle section”. President of the Mackay Show Society, A. B. Clarke, presented the Borthwicks Trophy to A. G. Skene and the Roy Neilson Memorial Trophy to W. Geddes at the dinner. This annual event became an important site in building on the producers’ sense of community and as a place where new innovations in the industry could be discussed.

35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
38 Daily Mercury, June 29 1957, p 10.
40 Ibid.
Change was certainly in the air for the Petersen family of Bolingbroke, on the Koumala Range, when they bought three Santa Gertrudis bulls from King Ranch in 1957. This enabled the family to embark on a dramatic herd improvement program. Since moving onto the property in 1931, the Petersens had run Herefords before the introduction of Brahman crossbreds into their herd. Both these types of cattle were used with the Santa Gertrudis bulls. The Petersens, Albert with his sons Allan and John, were among the first producers in Australia to swing to the Santa Gertrudis breed. John Petersen commented that the Santa Gertrudis had performed well on country that had been mostly regarded as too coastal for that breed.41

The 1958 Show heralded the arrival of the Santa Gertrudis and Brahman breeds as entries in the beef section. Five specimens of each breed were entered by the Tropical Cattle Company, of Ingham. Its managing director, John Murray, stated that the company had a commercial herd of 2000 at its Ingham property. The two breeds were used to produce a type of beast particularly suited to North Queensland conditions. The crossbreeding resulted in stock that was both tick resistant and able to tolerate the heat of the tropical climate. Whilst this was the first occasion the company had exhibited at the Mackay Show, it had achieved considerable success at the 1958 Rockhampton Show, winning all five classes with these same cattle.42

There were a record 270 entries in the beef cattle section in 1958. This reflected the growing importance of the beef industry to the district’s economy.43 The winners of the 1958 carcase competition were P. Hughes in the heifer section

43 Ibid.
and W. G. Geddes in the steer competition. At the fat cattle auction, the sale of 146 head realised a total of £4887. All these cattle had competed at the Show and were sourced from coastal and inland areas, and from stations as far south as Marlborough. The sale was watched by up to 250 people. Local buyers included Don Wall, J. E. Hodder, and L. R. Camm. The champion Show bullock, exhibited by Joan Riley and Beth Pownall, sold for £65. The selling agents reported that the prices were quite satisfactory and compared favourably with those of previous Show sales.

At the sales, W. G. Geddes, of Couti-Outi, donated two bullocks, the beneficiaries being the Show Society’s Yard Improvement Fund and the Legacy charity, with each fetching £62. In that year 17 bullocks in total were donated to various community charities. The largest donor, Messrs. F. A. Ross and Company of Kemmis Creek, sold eight beasts to aid: the Mackay Ambulance, the Spastics Appeal, Legacy, the Returned Services League, the Child Minding Centre, the Church of England, and the Red Cross. P. M. Michelmore, of Nebo, and Messrs. Roberts and Company, of Bundarra, each donated a bullock that raised £38 and £30 respectively for the Nebo Ambulance. A. Shannon and Company, of Saltbush Park, donated a bullock to both the West Mackay Church of England and the Spastics Appeal, which raised £25 each. A. G. Skene, of St. Albans, donated a bullock that realised £29 for the Mackay Ambulance. The district’s beef community’s involvement in the funding of charities, which continues today, has helped many organisations to deliver much needed support to the wider community of the region.

45 Ibid.
On the Royal Menu

As the 1950s drew to a close there was an air of confidence within both the beef section and the industry. There was such a large increase in numbers at the 1959 stud beef cattle display that there was not enough accommodation for all the bulls. These classes at the Mackay Show had increased from one breed in 1956 to five breeds in 1959. The judge for the class, Graham McCamley of Tartrus station, had seen the class grow from just Polled Herefords, to where they had been joined by Santa Gertrudis, Shorthorns, Devons, and Aberdeen Angus cattle at the 1959 Mackay Show.47 Local Aberdeen Angus was on a royal menu in 1959 when Don Wall was asked to supply the beef for Princess Alexandra’s entourage on Lindeman Island. Six of the breed, considered to be the best in the district, were put straight on to improved pastures on J. Riley’s ‘Kelvin’ property, near Koumala, to satisfy the appetites of the Royal party.48

On the Kitchen Table

Don Wall recalled the buying pattern of the more common folk of the 1950’s, when nearly all beef was ordered in advance. He remembered when it was usual for families to have at least three ‘joint’ meals a week. This generally comprised a piece of corned beef early in the week, a leg of mutton midweek, and a roast at the weekend. According to Mr. Wall, the biggest single impact on the retail meat trade in Mackay since the end of World War Two was refrigeration. Until the early 1950’s few butcher shops had refrigerators or cold rooms and all meat was handled hot, with turnover of stock being completed almost daily. As the weekend approached excess beef was reduced in price to because it could not be kept in the shop. This meant an early start the following Monday, to ensure supplies for early shoppers.49 Beef was a food staple in those

46 Ibid.
48 Interview with Don Wall, May 17 2001.
49 Ibid.
years and the local butcher was visited regularly by consumers. As such the local butchers were an important point of contact between the beef industry and the consumer. Its service with a smile, often accompanied by a saucy witticisms or innuendo, has seen the butcher shop survive even today’s supermarket culture.

**Handling a Large One**

During the 1959 Grand Parade there was conjecture among the crowd whether a rather slightly built fellow could lead the largest, most cumbersome bull of the Show around the arena without mishap. While this fellow achieved his task with aplomb, another exhibitor was not so fortunate. This generously proportioned exhibitor was dragged along the grass for several yards by the smallest example of beef livestock seen in the parade. Neither the crowd nor the press missed this unfortunate occurrence, and the large framed handler was red faced as he continued on his circuit, slapping the grass off his clothes.50

**Exhibitionism**

There was great anticipation among the district’s population as Mackay’s centenary year Show of 1962 approached. In those 100 years Mackay had grown “from a riverside settlement pushed into the tropical scrub” to a bustling modern community.51 But that’s not to say that a bit of tropical scrub could not be found in an ‘emergency’ in 1962.

There were surprises galore for the beef cattle exhibit volunteers at the 1962 Show and it was not only a matter of escaping cattle. However, whenever there was an escape it never failed to attract the interest of the people and the press. This is partly to do with the curiosity of seeing the cattle out of context, as these

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51 *Daily Mercury*, June 20 1962, p 2.
rural animals run amok in an urban environment. Of course, there are aspects of our lives that we like to keep to ourselves, but when they become entangled with escaped beasts from the Show, the resulting publicity can be both embarrassing and entertaining. As is still the case all cattle must be at the showground’s cattle yards the day before the Show commences. This allows the volunteer workers at the yards to weigh and brand the cattle for the next day’s judging. The cattlemen all chip in to ensure that the operation runs smoothly. It should be remembered that for most beasts this is the first and last time that they will be in an urban area, with its unusual noises and smells. When a beast does get spooked at the yards during this prejudging process there are always plenty of willing workers to assist in restraining the animal.

Such was the case in 1962 when a black poll steer broke loose from the yards. A quick recapture was important because while the Show was still a day away the showgrounds were a hive of activity, with people setting up exhibits and sideshow stalls. As seemed to be usual in these situations, the steer charged straight for Sideshow Alley. The ‘showies’, having seen runaway cattle at Shows all over Australia, simply retreated to a safe distance. They knew that the best people to handle the situation were the cattlemen who were hard on the beast’s trail. The posse managed to round the animal, and were roping it in when the steer again took fright and made a dash for the showground’s fence. At this point the ‘showies’ again started to take an interest in proceedings. They were a lot more impressed than the cattlemen, when the steer, instead of stopping at the fence, amazingly hurdled the barrier and trotted into the surrounding guinea grass. As the cattlemen climbed over the fence in pursuit they were aware of the cheers coming from the ‘showies’, who were advancing to get a better view. More cattlemen arrived, with a docile animal that they hoped would calm the runaway and assist in leading it back to the yards. Everyone, including the black steer, stopped in their tracks, however, when two
people jumped to their feet out of the grass and into the sight of the astonished throng.

The couple's private canoodling had turned into the proverbial three-ring circus. What they saw, when upright, was a gallery of blue singleted 'showies', a mob of cowboys, and a rather disinterested looking cow. Not five yards from them was a very interested and agitated black steer. The red-faced couple, not surprisingly, wasted no time in bolting from their uninvited audience. The docile cow made the steer a bit more manageable, and it was led back to the yards. That afternoon 'showies' and cattlemen had a new story to swap over a few amber refreshments. As for the couple, well, their interrupted moment of passion made page two of Saturday's *Daily Mercury*. It is said that one may witness all sorts of displays at the Show, however this exhibition certainly was not meant for public edification.  

*All Chuck Steak and No T-Bones*

In the early 1960's resistance to the introduction of the Brahman by some beef producers prompted Professor Rex Butterfield to conduct research into the meat distribution of the breed. Some cattle growers were concerned, because of the Brahman's unusual shape, that they would be 'all chuck steak and no T-bones', and that therefore they were not a viable economic proposition. At the time Brahman cattle, which suited Queensland breeders because they were resistant to ticks, had just started to become a major influence in the industry. Professor Butterfield was able to show that not only did the Brahman have the same proportions within the red meat as the British breeds, but that all normal cattle of the same sex had uniform muscle-weight distribution at the same stage of maturity. The Brahmans are a good example of easy-care cattle because, needing little or no dipping for ticks, they require much less labour. Rex
Butterfield was Professor of Veterinary Anatomy at the University of Sydney between 1966 and 1986. He completed his PhD on meat animals at the University of Queensland in 1963.53

**Backdoor Brahmans**

For those producers who were not convinced by the scientific explanation of the Brahman’s suitability for the district’s beef industry, there is a rather less academic theory about what eventually did change their minds. Some producers were not interested in transferring their British breed stock to the more resilient Brahman crosses, no matter what hardships had to be endured. Reasons for their reluctance varied: some say they didn’t like the appearance, that Brahmans were too difficult to handle, their beef was low quality, and then there were the politics of the British breed societies at the time. Many producers only changed their minds when they witnessed the results of unauthorised cross breeding. This was achieved by Brahman bulls entering unannounced onto neighbouring properties and mating with the more traditional breeds of cows. The progeny of these clandestine matings were irrefutable evidence to producers that the shorter haired, tick resistant Brahman crosses were better adapted to the district’s environment.54

**A Tropical Breed?**

While the debate regarding the suitability of British breeds in the tropical environment raged on, there was also a rather interesting variation on this theme relating to the people of Mackay. The 1960s certainly was a strange decade. Sir Raphael Cilento, at the time president of the Royal Queensland Historical Society, at an address to the Mackay Rotary Club during Show week 1962.

52 Daily Mercury, June 20 & 23 1962.
54 Interview with Don Wall, May 17 2001.
claimed that, “Mackay proved whites could live in the tropics.” During the years 1890 to 1930 Sir Raphael proposed that Mackay had been the key point in demonstrating that white people could live in and develop a tropical environment. The idea previously had been treated with scorn by colonial policy makers who believed that if a white man did live in the tropics his wife could not bear or rear healthy children. Cilento went on to say that Mackay’s European population growth had proved this long held assumption wrong. The evidence from Mackay, Sir Raphael concluded, indicated “in fact that white men could live in the tropics and work hard there without any lessening of longevity, mentality, health or fertility, and that those who worked most did best.”

**Innovation**

In the pre-abattoir era, when the Mackay Show Society was faced with the withdrawal of support for the local carcase competition, Don Wall seized the opportunity and developed a scheme that led to valuable research work regarding the meat product. In a bid to make judging more objective, with less reliance on the whims of judges, a retail dissection method of assessing carcases was instigated in 1962. This method, known as the ‘bone out’, was a national first for the Mackay Show. Researchers, including Professor R. M. Butterfield of Sydney University and Dr. N. O. May of Queensland University, made numerous trips to Mackay to investigate Wall’s dissection method and help make improvements. That same year also saw the introduction of lot feeding to the Mackay district. This was on the property of J. O. Windsor of Hamilton Park, Nebo. It proved to be a profitable venture, and Wall contracted Windsor

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to supply 200 head for his butcher shop in 1963. The public’s response to lot fed meat in Mackay was tremendous.\(^5\)

The 1962 Beef Dinner, organised by Messrs. J. Riley and J. Bedford, attracted about 200 guests. Trophies and awards on the night were presented by Mrs. F. A. Ross, of Kemmis Creek, who was the wife of one of the district’s leading graziers. The Alan Shannon Memorial Carcase Competition was won by the Kelvin Pastoral Company. The judge for the competition was F. Pembroke of the Department of Agriculture and Stock, Rockhampton. Pembroke was pleased with the standard of the competition, which was judged both on the hoof and on the hook. J. Riley, of Kelvin, also won another major award, the bone out carcase competition. The competition in this event was so close that Riley made the magnanimous gesture of sharing the trophy, six silver goblets, with his two nearest rivals, G. McCamley of Tartarus, and W. J. Geddes of Couti-Outi. The young judge’s competition, which was based on the bone out carcase event, went to W. Geddes junior.\(^9\) The introduction of the bone out method created quite a stir within the beef industry. Its benefits were hotly contested in relation to the system that it had replaced at the Mackay Show.

One of the local graziers who defended the new method was John Riley. He commented in an article to a rural newspaper in 1962 that, “A comparison between Professor Yeates’s measurement system and saleable meat yield in the 1962 Mackay Show Association bone-out competition revealed two obvious faults in the Yeats fleshing index scale.” The first problem related to conformation, Mr. Riley explained. A short bodied animal with a deep brisket and heavy flat ribs will score well on Yeates's appraisal, but when this body was boned out it was soon obvious that too much of the carcase weight was

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either waste flank or cheap brisket cuts. The second point that became obvious was that fat measurement was unreliable. A steer may have the ideal covering over the loin, but when boned out will yield a pile of fat from the flank, brisket and kidney knobs.

Riley proceeded to make some observations regarding live steers. A long body was not a disadvantage if the brisket was shallow and the ribs well sprung and width through the hip joints was of paramount importance, as was development of the butt. Riley's article created great interest among cattle producers, and one, J. Stewart-Moore of Charraboon, Toogoolawah, was moved to respond in the next edition that, "His [Mr. Riley's] criticism of the Yeates method of carcase appraisal is well put and will have the support of many commercially-minded cattlemen who use scales. I feel, however, that Mr. Riley has become too involved with the theoretically perfect carcase and has lost sight of the fact that the cattleman has to produce meat economically." Changes in the industry, and with meat appraisal and grading systems in particular, have always generated great debate amongst producers. This is as it should be, if the industry is to progress and deliver to the consumer a better product.

The Mackay Show committee met with representatives of the beef and stud cattle industries prior to the 1964 Show to streamline the rapidly growing beef section. This forward planning paid dividends, as there were 311 fat cattle entries at the 1964 Show. In Queensland this was second only in numbers to the Royal National in Brisbane. The consultation process also led to arrangements for special accommodation and a separate judging ring for the 1964 stud cattle

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The year was a milestone for the wider beef industry also, with the Bakers Creek meatworks being opened by the Queensland Government as a service abattoir for the district. In 1965, a committee, comprising Messrs. I. Shannon, A. B. Clarke, B. G. Cole, M. Pullen, and T. Rudder of the Department of Primary Industries was given the responsibility for organising the fat and stud cattle sections. One of their innovations was a special trophy to be awarded for one of the major championships in the fat cattle section of the 1965 Show. The trophy, donated by S. H. Gorlick, to be known as the Shell Company Trophy, was awarded to the champion steer. Mr. I Shannon, a steward of the event, described the entries in the 1965 carcase competition as “excellent”. A new event where three carcases from each producer were appraised was introduced, and won by B. Hughes. In all, 48 carcases were judged by Commonwealth meat inspector A. R. McLachlan with the McCamley family being well represented in the awards presentation.

The ongoing concern about the lack of space at the showgrounds was given a lighter twist by 1965 Show Society president Clarrie Sergent, when he said, “Sometimes I think this ground must stretch.” And stretch it would have to, if the beef section continued its newfound popularity. To organise a trade cattle exhibit second only to the State’s capital was a remarkable achievement for local producers. Less than 30 years earlier the section was in danger of collapsing, when only eight beasts could be gathered for display. Yet in these intervening years, a new generation of industry identities had, by the mid 1960s, made the Mackay Show beef exhibit one of the most prestigious in the State.

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The new generation was fortunate to include John Onley. His venture into cattle producing began when he moved to the Hamilton Park property at Nebo in 1964 after serving nine years with the DPI. The last three years of this service was in the Mackay district as a cattle husbandry officer. With his business partner John McKay he decided to introduce Brahman bulls into the existing Hereford herd. From these initial crosses Onley selected the nucleus of his Braford herd. Commenting in 1981, he gave his criteria for cattle selection. “If you are going to improve your cattle you have to select individual superior males and females that will grow better under your conditions and reproduce these characteristics in their progeny. I don’t believe in any artificial assistance or correction of faults.” 69 Onley’s contribution to the district’s beef industry spanned many years, and for this, all those involved in securing a profitable future for the industry in the Mackay region were thankful.

**Lady in Red**

That old expression about the danger of waving a red rag at a bull was reinforced to one visitor to the stud cattle section at the 1965 Show. The Show has always been an opportunity for many people, especially the ladies, to parade in the new season’s fashions. Usually stud bulls have very little interest in the changing dress taste of the human population, however there are exceptions. A young woman dressed in a brilliant red frock was scrutinising the stud cattle, and in particular the ton-weight bull. She had not progressed far in her perusal when all hell broke loose amongst the assembled cattle. The stud section’s attendants worked franticly to calm the overexcited animals, while the young lady watched on in amazement. She was equally as flabbergasted when she was hurriedly escorted from the scene by an anxious attendant. When told that the source of the commotion was her fashionable bright red dress, she became visibly upset. Her mood was not helped when she was asked by the

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attendant not to return to the exhibit until she was dressed in a more sombre
dress. Whether she returned is unknown, but she was heard muttering on
leaving that while she had not seen a lot of bull, she certainly had heard
enough.\textsuperscript{70}

Outbreaks in the stalls and yards are reasonably uncommon and this is due to
the work done by the cattle handlers. In the 1960s Frank Venselaar performed
this duty while employed on Noel Perry’s property at Nebo as a general
stationhand. He came into the Show on quite a number of occasions with Mr.
Perry’s Braford cattle. Venselaar recalls that these annual trips into Mackay
were looked forward to by the stationhands, as the work was easier than out on
the property. Also there was the added bonus of a few nights on the town. Being
a young man at the time Frank enjoyed the hospitality of the town’s hoteliers,
and for the most part the townsfolk and the visiting cattle workers got along just
fine. He remembers the camaraderie among all beef industry workers, including
property managers and owners, with affection.\textsuperscript{71} This sense of belonging to a
community where, no matter what your station in life, everybody was expected
to pitch in to complete the regular duties associated with running a beef
property is particularly relevant to the Mackay district. Unlike many areas, the
majority of cattle properties in the district are still family owned and operated.\textsuperscript{72}
Stationhands knew that the owners had been performing the same tasks as them
from a young age, and as such respected them for their hands-on experience,
not because of their status or wealth.

In 1966 the Mackay Show Society president, C. A. Sergent, succinctly
encapsulated the meaning and purpose of the Show. He said it is a site “where
buyers and sellers gathered together for mutual benefit. Shows told the story of

\textsuperscript{70} \textit{Daily Mercury}, June 26 1965, p 2.
\textsuperscript{71} Interview with Frank Venselaar, May 8 2001.
the earth's assets, and the progress of the people who lived on the earth. They [Shows] gave people the opportunity of comparing their skill and products with others." A total of 140 head of fat cattle were entered at the 1966 Show. While the numbers were down on the previous year, the quality was excellent. The lack of numbers was attributed to the dry conditions throughout the district during the year. However, an Australian first was believed to have been set that year by awarding 'the champion steer of show' to a tropical breed. Until that year's Mackay Show, such awards usually went to the more traditional Hereford or Aberdeen Angus breeds. The winner was a Brangus, a cross between a Brahman and an Angus, and was owned by W. J. Geddes of Couti Outi, Kunwarara. Sergent commented, "It proves just what tropical breeds are doing for the industry." As previously stated the Show is often the site for viewing future trends in the beef industry. One of these trends was the marketing of younger beef. At the 1966 Show, the champion pen of steers was won by Droughtmaster yearlings entered by Wagner and Company of Marylands. Sergent was optimistic about the future of younger beef and commented, "It augurs well when we can breed them so young at marketable weight." 

A Flight to Catch

One steer at the 1966 Show appeared to have devised a daring plan to escape its fate of being sold at the fat cattle exhibit. Under the cover of darkness this optimistic steer left the yards through an open gate and proceeded unnoticed to the Mackay airport. Given the consequences of gates being inadvertently left open it's little wonder that beef producers have an affinity for the phrase "shut the gate". That nobody saw this lone animal making its way to the airport is not

72 Interview with Bill Delaney, November 15 2000.
75 Ibid.
surprising, considering that in 1955 over fifty bullocks escaped from the showgrounds and travelled ten miles to their home range without being seen or heard by a soul. How this prospective jet-setting steer, owned by Noel Head, was going to make good its escape to destinations unknown will remain a mystery as he was captured the following afternoon. By the time two men on horseback had led the steer back to the showgrounds the judging and auction had concluded. This escapade didn’t earn the steer any frequent flyer points, but he did receive a temporary reprieve from being sold.76

**Chariot of Fear**

Two local cattlemen, Messrs. S. Ross and A. Williams, had a thrilling ride at the 1967 Show, and they were nowhere near sideshow alley. In what must go down in the ‘it seemed like a good idea at the time’ file, the two gentlemen agreed to promote the cattle exhibit by being towed around the main ring in a bull drawn chariot. This novel idea was a first, and last, for the Mackay Show. As the promotion was announced to the crowd, the Zebu bull, with its chariot and passengers in tow, bolted from the eastern side chute of the ring and charged directly across the main ring. This was certainly not the leisurely ride the cattlemen had anticipated. Their hands, which they thought would be employed only to wave to the crowd, were gripping the handrail of the chariot for dear life. While these modern day gladiators were absorbed in their battle to stay within the confines of the chariot as it bounced and rocked its way across the muddy infield, it was becoming clear to both the crowd and the personnel in the broadcasting tent that a Ben Hur finish to this escapade was imminent. The crowd and the people in the broadcasting tent rose to their feet as one as the bull, and the chariot, and the cattlemen, continued their mad dash. While the crowd stood transfixed, the people in the broadcasting tent went one step further, actually a few very quick steps, and scrambled out of the tent as the

chariot bore down on the flimsy structure. With inches to spare the bull, as is its nature and because it could, stopped and swerved in the one motion and missed the still emptying tent. However the chariot, being man made and lacking the elasticity of its power source, continued on and sideswiped the tent. As is to be expected in such situations, the canvas of the tent became entangled in the chariot and the whole structure collapsed to the ground. The bull having seemingly achieved its objective of humiliating all those involved in this misguided promotion simply came to a standstill and started to chew the surrounding patches of grass. The cattlemen were pried from the chariot a little shaken but unhurt, the bull and chariot were uncoupled and both removed permanently from the main ring, the tent re-erected, and the Show carried on, as it must.\(^{77}\)

**The Industry**

Cattle numbers in Australia increased slowly during the 1960s. The export market to the United States dominated in the 1960s and 70s, while sales to the United Kingdom receded.\(^ {78}\) By 1970 the Mackay district herd had increased to 527,000 head. There were also more beef cattle on the Mackay coastal strip with their numbers increasing from 81,000 in 1966, to 191,000 in 1976.\(^ {79}\) This massive 140 percent rise was explained by Rick Beasley, a former Mackay DPI beef cattle officer. It was due to the ongoing effects of the introduction of tropical pastures on the coast in the late 1960's and the development of area 3 of the Brigalow Scheme. In 1969 hinterland cattle were agisted on the coast because of a severe drought in the west. Many of these cattle never returned to their properties, as coastal landholders began to recognise the potential of their properties, once land was cleared and sown to tropical pastures. Mr. Beasley

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\(^{77}\) *Daily Mercury*, June 22 1967, p 2.


also reasoned that low prices for sugar in the 1960’s stimulated the development of previous wasteland for beef pasture. This was a time when beef properties were undergoing radical changes to ride the upward cycle of beef production.  

One of the oldest cattle properties in the Mackay district is ‘Tierawoomba’. It was settled around the time that Captain John Mackay took up his selection at Greenmount. The first lease for this property was issued in 1867. Tierawoomba was bought by Brian Hughes in 1946 from his wife’s father, E.Y. Shannon, who had held the property since 1906. Hughes exhibited beef cattle at the Mackay Show over many years with great success, and is well qualified to comment on the industry, having been a member of both the Australian Meat Board and the consultative committee advising the Australian Meat and Livestock Corporation. He cited three reasons for the growth in the industry since the 1950’s. These were the introduction of Brahman cattle, changes in land tenure, and pasture development. He explained that in 1950 the cattle herd in the Mackay district was predominantly Hereford, with some Shorthorns, and a couple of Angus herds. Ticks took a heavy toll on these British breeds until DDT was introduced in 1948. By the early 1950’s many beef producers in the area had begun to introduce Brahman bulls into their herds to provide tick resistance. It was found that the Brahman crossbreed also had the advantages of increased weight-for-age, and early maturity. The success of the Brahman meant that by 1980 there were practically no straight Hereford herds left in the district, and Hughes was convinced that Brahman were the most suitable type for the Mackay area. “The pure-bred Brahman is the best to handle for temperament, if you are careful in your selection.” Nevertheless Hughes, speaking in 1981, regarded the Braford, Droughtmaster and Brangus breeds as still having an important role in the district. Commenting on land tenure, he said State Government approval for land holders to freehold their land, introduced in

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80 Ibid.
the 1960’s, provided a great incentive for property development. The change from leasehold enabled individuals to freehold a living area, giving security of tenure, which encouraged major improvements and the growing of crops. The change also meant that areas such as Nebo could be retained for balanced development of both grazing and cropping. On pasture development, Hughes believed the swing to tropical pastures had opened up large areas of otherwise useless coastal land. Thanks largely to the CSIRO and DPI in developing suitable grasses and legumes, the coastal area had seen a significant rise in animal production. Hughes regarded 1969 as a major turning point for the coastal cattle industry, a year when many cattle were brought to the coast on agistment because of a drought in the hinterland. As mentioned above, canefarmers then found that they could utilise unassigned land for profitable beef production.  

Former State Parliament Member for Mirani, Mr. Jim Randall, also had three main reasons why there had also been such an expansion of the district’s herd up to the mid-1970s. These were the introduction and development of tropical pastures, the success of the ‘Bos indicus’ cattle and the Brigalow Land Development Scheme. This scheme brought many new settlers into the Mackay hinterland during the 1970's who went on to establish themselves as beef producers.

Brigalow was described in 1971 by DPI pasture scientist Eric Anderson as a leguminous tree, which occurred mainly as a dominant species in forests. Individual trees may reach 18 metres, although 9 to 12 metres is more common. In their natural state dense brigalow forests have a stock carrying capacity of about one beast to 50 acres. If the trees are killed or the roots injured the

enormous quantity of starch stored in the roots is converted to sugar and used to produce large numbers of suckers at intervals along the roots. When a bragalow tree is attacked, that attack is not on one isolated individual tree, but on a whole colony of connected plants, furnished with substantial reserves of stored food. This is why bragalow control is a siege rather than a skirmish, a war of attrition rather than a battle. About 6 million acres of bragalow dominant communities occur in Central Queensland. Early methods of clearing bragalow were confined to felling the timber by axe, or ring barking, followed after by 4-5 years of burning. This often resulted in dense sucker regrowth which constituted a much greater problem in land utilisation than did the original forest. In the years following World War One, practically the whole of the bragalow belt was infested with prickly pear, and development was delayed pending the eradication of this pest in the early 1930’s. Although it was known that bragalow land had high natural fertility, it was not until after World War Two, when heavy machinery became more widely available, that this potential could be successfully tapped on a large scale. Since the 1950’s the accepted method of clearing bragalow has been to pull them down with a cable or chain dragged between two large bulldozers.83

A moratorium on loan repayments and interest was the difference between success and failure for the Bragalow Land Development Scheme, particularly in Area 3 to the west of Mackay. Settlers believed the scheme would have floundered during the beef industry slump of 1974-1978 if the moratorium had not been declared. These Area 3 ballot block holders began settling their blocks in 1971. Under the scheme, settlers were able to borrow up to $72,000 from the Lands Administration Commission for property development. However the 1974 beef price crash meant that interest and redemption could not be met because cattle values were too low. In the face of this crisis settlers in Area 3

formed the Brigalow Settlers Survival Committee. Settlers, Messrs. Lionel Hart, Peter Bambling, Peter Trout, Robert O’Rourke and Clive Johnson, met the then Minister for Lands, K. B. Tomkins, at Clarke Creek in 1976. The Minister took the settlers’ plight to Cabinet and the moratorium was declared. It remained in force for two years until beef prices improved. With prices down to $11 a head in the early 1970’s, the district’s beef producers were certainly doing it tough. It was perhaps fortunate that most of the producers had at this time already switched to the more cost efficient Brahman and its crosses.

Breeding up to high grade Brahmans on their Marylands property was seen as a cattle management investment for Charlie Day and his wife Judy. “The more pure bred the herd becomes, the more the temperament improves,” Mrs. Day explained. Her husband Charlie knew from experience that temperament was a vital consideration on a hill country property such as Marylands. Cattle that could not be controlled were of no value, because they would never be mustered once they were turned out after weaning. For this reason great emphasis was placed on handling and tailing-out at weaning. Weaners were handled in small mobs of 100 to 150 and fed and worked in the yards for 2-3 weeks before release. Mr. Day said the Marylands breeding program was based on three main factors — temperament, conformation and fertility. Charlie and Judy Day arrived at Marylands in 1974. Mrs. Day’s grandfather, Mr. Ben Wagner, had settled on the property in 1924. Her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Harold Wagner, took over in 1939. For many years the Wagners ran Herefords, but began to introduce Brahmans in the early 1950’s. Charlie and Judy continued to develop the Brahman content of the herd and by the 1980’s Marylands was considered to be one of the leading Brahman properties in the Mackay district.

85 Interview with Russ King, November 16 2000.
They also saw success with their commercial herd, winning two championships in the beef section of the Mackay Show.\textsuperscript{86}

Instability in the beef market in the mid 1970's saw many beef producers forced to diversify into grain cropping to make their properties viable. One such producer was Peter Trout of 'Bogandilla'. This diversification was made possible by his decision to change his beef herd from Hereford to Brahman cross cattle, thereby sharply reducing the time spent handling his stock due to cattle tick problems. This time was then able to be diverted to his grain-cropping venture.\textsuperscript{87}

The wide acceptance of the Brahman in the district did however necessitate some changes to the infrastructure of beef properties and the beef section at the Mackay Show. Bill Delaney recalls the problem that the swing to the Brahman caused to the beef section. Bill worked as a stock agent in the district and had a close working relationship with both beef producers and exhibitors. He took up this position, with Dalgetys, in 1968 after living and working previously in the Cloncurry area. At his first Mackay Show, Mr. Delaney couldn't get over the enthusiasm of the exhibitors and the many volunteers associated with the fat cattle section. It was not surprising then that when Clarrie Shaw, Chairman of Nebo Shire, asked Delaney to join the Mackay Show Association and sit on the Fat Cattle Committee he was more than happy to become a part of this willing band of volunteers.

An issue that needed urgent attention was the replacement of the cattle yards at the showgrounds. These had been erected many years previously when British breeds dominated the exhibit. They were totally unsuitable for the growing

\textsuperscript{86} Daily Mercury, Supplement, May 7 1981, p 16.
number of tropical cattle being entered in the section. The Brahman, and its popular cross breeds, is a taller animal than its British counterpart and there were too many instances of the tropical cattle finding little difficulty escaping over the low rails of the yards. On one occasion it took well known exhibitor Mr. Jim McGuire and an offsider a week to capture a mob that escaped into the mangroves near where Canelands Shopping Centre was later to be built. The committee put in train a series of fundraising events and also collected donations of $100 each from many of the district's beef exhibitors.88

Alan Shannon, of Cardowan property, officially opened the new cattle yards at the Mackay showgrounds on June 20th, 1973, with Mr. Bill Delaney making the introductions to the assembled crowd. Mr. Shannon said the yards were probably the best set of showground cattle yards on the Australian coast. The cost was $16,000, of which $6,400 was obtained by government grant. The remainder of the money was sourced through fundraising and donations from district beef producers. These new yards gave the grazing industry a site in the district where the product could be adequately displayed to other graziers and the public.89 These were tough years for the district's beef exhibitors with a worldwide slump in beef prices. For the Mackay beef community to make such expensive improvements to their facilities at this time underlines their commitment to the future of the Show.90

 Collapse and Confrontation

The industry suffered a devastating slump in the mid-1970's, triggered by the world oil crisis, world-wide recession, beef oversupply, the virtual closure of Australian markets in Japan and the UK, and the dumping of subsidised European beef on world markets. The Australian herd would be subsequently

88 Interview with Bill Delaney, November 15 2000.
reduced from 33 million in 1976 to 25 million in 1981, and further culled to 22
million by the end of the 1982/83 drought.91

The formation of the Cattlemen’s Union was sparked by the concern of three
Mackay cattlemen over the plight of their industry. These men, Messrs. Max
Pullen, Peter Davidson and John Onley were anguished by the collapse of the
beef market. The Mackay men believed that the industry needed a strong,
united voice, and better organisation at the marketing level to save producers
from bankruptcy. A committee of seven men was appointed to organise a forum
to discuss the issues. This committee comprised of Messrs. Pullen, Davidson
and Onley, and Ken Jeppesen, Bill Farquhar, Bill Carter from Charters Towers
and Bill Fordyce. The forum, held at the Mackay Sugar Research Institute on
January 25, 1975, was attended by 160 cattlemen and their wives and was
chaired by Graham McCamley. From the forum a resolution came that the
United Graziers’ Association (UGA) be asked to restructure its organisation to
include the formation of a Queensland Beef Cattle Producers’ Association on a
compulsory basis. This resolution brought the Mackay cattlemen into direct
confrontation with the UGA. A fighting fund was set up with 12 beef producers
each contributing $100 to enable speakers to address meetings throughout the
region and in the south. Within 18 months of the Mackay forum a meeting of
more than 800 cattlemen and women at Rockhampton voted unanimously to
form a Cattlemen’s Union. That meeting was held on May 11, 1976. However
the movement was conceived in Mackay in 1974 by three courageous cattlemen
who dared to confront the powerful UGA for the sake of their industry.92

During this difficult time, rural broadcaster Russ King was highly praised for
bringing the issues involved to the attention of the community. Local producer,
John Onley, commented that much of the wide and supportive reporting of the problems in the beef industry could be attributed to Mr. King.⁹³

At the start of the 1970s the Bakers Creek meatworks was purchased by Thomas Borthwick and Sons. At the time of the takeover the plant was rundown with the export-killing licence having been withdrawn in 1968. The company began to refurbish the works to a standard whereby this licence could be regained. The plant was granted its licence in September 1970 and in the next 12 months 44,000 cattle were slaughtered. By 1978 about 70,000 cattle a year were being processed by an average workforce of 300 men and women. A $4 million expansion project the following year saw the annual throughput capacity increased to 120,000 head.⁹⁴ Through the difficult years of the 1970s having a local meatworks at least gave producers a site to sell their stock, albeit at low prices, without also incurring overwhelming transport costs.

**Living in the Seventies**

Even in 1970 it was apparent to longstanding Show patrons that district Shows had to compete for customers. Mr. Andrew Fordyce, a leading district grazier at the time, reminisced about the changes he’d seen in his 55 years involvement with the Show, “The Show was a major district event, as it is now [1970]. But everybody in the district turned up then. There are counter attractions now. In earlier days, if we saw three horse drawn vehicles coming in at the one time we thought there was a bit of a rush on,” remembered Mr. Fordyce. “There was a very friendly picnic atmosphere about the Show in the earlier days. People brought their own lunch and ate it around the grounds. We did not have the catering available today”. Mr. Fordyce also said, “the Show now was more of a fair, than the agricultural show it used to be”. Fordyce also paid tribute for the

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growing success of the beef section to some other well-known district grazing families, the Shannons and the Gillhams. The Mackay Show Association’s vision to be relevant to succeeding generations of patrons has much to do with its longevity and success. While the beef section of the Show serves the function of allowing townsfolk to view the cream of the district’s industry it also must have relevance to the producers themselves.

The producers of beef stud cattle have found the regional Shows to be an extremely useful marketing site. Many producers exhibit along the show circuit in order to gain the most widespread coverage for their stock among others in the industry. Not only does this increase the likelihood of sales to other exhibitors, but if they should win events at these Shows it also adds prestige and marketability to their stock. In 1971 H. R. Gillham, of Suttor Creek near Nebo, exhibited his Brahman bull, Apollo Mariner, at numerous regional Queensland Shows with great success. The three year old bull added the grand champion bull of the Mackay Show to its other awards at the Gympie, Rockhampton, and Pioneer Valley Shows. The stud cattle judge, J. R. McCamley of Lancefield near Rockhampton, stated, “Apollo Mariner was an excellent bull, huge, and showed excellent breed characteristics”. At the conclusion of the 1971 Mackay Show, Gillham planned to build on Apollo Mariner’s already astonishing show record by exhibiting the bull at the Townsville Show. This commitment to marketing the stud beef cattle product through regional Shows has resulted in many exhibitors gaining state-wide exposure for their breeding stock and the district.

In 1971, the stud cattle judging facilities at the Mackay Show won praise from that event’s judge, J. R. McCamley. He described the whole stud cattle complex

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as excellent and added that “It is a very pleasant ring to judge in, and very good for viewing cattle”. McCamley predicted a good future for the Show’s stud cattle section. He also viewed highly the quality of the Droughtmaster breed on exhibit. “The Droughtmasters were well represented and the quality was good,” and the grand champion of the breed, exhibited by Brian Postlethwaite, so impressed the judge that he declared, “This would be hard to beat in any Show.” Mackay Show association committee member, C. G. Shaw, regarded the following year’s beef stud cattle section as the best exhibition Mackay had held, both in numbers and quality. This view was shared by the judge of the section, E. G. Kirk of Hazelton Stud, who commented, “the quality of the cattle he had seen was excellent.” There were four breeds on show in the 1972 Stud cattle section, Braford, Brahman, Charolais, and Droughtmaster. It was Kirk’s considered opinion that the top Brafords could have held their own against competition at any show. Both the grand champion and breeders’ group were won by Braford cattle. The grand champion, W. C and C. B Cole’s ‘Doonside Beverly Bells’, was a particularly good bull and an outstanding example of its breed, according to Kirk. He commented that in the Brahman cattle the females stood out and were very close to typical of the breed. The grand champion Brahman heifer, Caneland Girl, also calved the reserve champion in this class indicating to Kirk “that the cattle had maintained their quality through the generations.”

However, the perceived problems associated with handling Brahman cattle were still evident in 1972. Beef cattle section judge H. A. Rea commented that “although there was a whole yarding of Brahman cross cattle their temperament was particularly good.” The Charolais cattle exhibited by John Ahern of Ayr

97 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
created a good deal of interest amongst both other exhibitors and spectators. The number of Droughtmasters was up on previous years and their quality was good, according to the Kirk. Bringing on the next generation of beef exhibitors has, and remains, an important and sometimes difficult duty of the beef section. Prizewinners in the 1972 young farmers’ competition were Ian Pullen, Iain Day, and Peter Fordyce.  

In 1973 the stud section saw Brahman cattle entered by Mungalla, Avondale, Canelands, and Apollo studs. Droughtmasters were represented by strong teams from Kirknie, Mungalla, Noorlah and Telemon studs. The Brafords exhibited came from Beverly Hills and Hamilton Park studs. Graham McCamley, a well-known Brahman breeder and grazier, judged the fat cattle section in 1973. In the same year the stud cattle judge was Rob Innes of the Walla property. The 1973 fat (trade) cattle section was down about 100 head because of industrial disputes in the meat industry. These disputes had led to the abandonment for that year of the carcase competition. 

The Mackay showgrounds was “bursting at the seams” during the 1975 Show, said show secretary L. A. Dwyer. “We can’t handle too much more”, explained Mr. Dwyer, who was no doubt a Star Trek fan, referring to the number of exhibits and sideshow attractions on the showground site. The show committee believed it needed a minimum of 40 acres to stage the annual event. In 1975 the showgrounds totalled only 18.5 acres. The young judges’ event that year drew only one entrant, Lloyd Riley. While praising this young person’s work in the event, the beef cattle judge, W. Geddes, was disappointed that there was only one entrant. “More parents should encourage young lads to enter, and learn

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101 Ibid.
at the right age”, he said. Awards in the young farmers’ competition of 1975 went to Bill and Andrew Fordyce, J. L and D. M Riley, and D. S and M. Stuart. Brangus cattle performed strongly at the 1975 Show with H. Rowe’s Brangus exhibits winning the champion pen of steers award and also the prize for the male beast showing the best beef conformation. There were 20 exhibitors represented in the 1975 trade cattle exhibit with the grand champion steer award won by a Brahman owned by Lloyd Pownall. The beef cattle judge, W. Geddes of Doonside commented that this steer stood for conformation and weight for age and that the whole beef cattle exhibit was extremely good in the quality and presentation of the cattle. All visiting participants to the section were impressed with the sense of community involved in organising the exhibition and indeed this is true of the whole operation of the Mackay Show.

John Nash, long time ring announcer at the Mackay Show, described it as one of the most colourful and cheerful events he had witnessed. “After all the shows I’ve been involved with, I have never witnessed better spirit and co-operation between competitors, the public and show officials than what I’ve seen here” declared Nash. His comments should be highly valued, as he also has commentated at the Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, and Rockhampton Shows. Having a strong Show Association has been a tremendous advantage for the beef section. The beef section itself has always been fortunate to be supported by a community that is not afraid of change. Mr. Randall, the former Member for Mirani, was not overstating the case when he said that the cattlemen of the Mackay district reflected a progressive outlook that was more advanced than in many other parts of the state.

104 Ibid.
105 Ibid.
This innovative perspective was not only restricted to producers but was also visible in the retail sector of the beef industry. To ensure his butchery customers received a quality product Don Wall decided to indulged in some business vertical integration. He would grow the beef himself. In October 1976 Wall purchased Minette Downs, a cattle station offering 14,000 acres of fattening country. By the following year there were 1400 head on the property. Then there was Les (Snow) McGill, a Mackay district butcher, who was the one of the first in Queensland to introduce electrical stimulation to tenderise beef. The McGill name is well-known in the district with Snow’s father, John Sturgeon McGill, working in the same butcher shop at Kuttabul for nearly 70 years. Snow McGill bought the first commercial stimulator designed at the CSIRO’s Cannon Hill laboratory and made as a prototype by a Brisbane engineer. During a visit to Brisbane in 1979, McGill was so impressed by the unit that the CSIRO agreed to send it to Mackay for testing under commercial conditions. While the industry, in all its forms, demanded long hours, the people in the industry never failed to donate their time freely to the task of organising and running the Mackay Show beef section.

**Lookout Below**

One of the many volunteers at the Show was Mrs. Lola Dwyer, wife of Les Dwyer who was secretary/manager of the Show from 1962 till 1976. She recalled one incident of many that she had witnessed during her long association with the Show. Mrs. Dwyer and Mr. Jim Connolly, a *Daily Mercury* journalist, were on an inspection of the stud cattle when they saw showmen running in all directions. The next minute they were both scampering to a light tower to get out of the path of a charging bull. John Fahey, a champion

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horseman of the day, asked them what the hurry was: before a reply could be
given all three were shinning up the sides of the tower.  

During Mr. Wall’s association with the beef section of the Show he has seen his
fair share of temperamental cattle, although not from the height of a light tower
it must be said. In recent years, however, he believes there has been a marked
improvement in the tractability of the cattle on display. He attributes this
change to the increased contact with people that cattle have these days. Most of
the show cattle are now separated from larger herds at an early age and are quite
accustomed to human contact by the time they are entered into competition.
Assisting the safety of both people and cattle at the Mackay Show is the
regulation that all trade cattle must be dehorned before being allowed into the
showgrounds. Wall recalls that in the early years many producers found the
practice of removing the horns difficult to accept. While they could see the
safety and product bruising issues involved at the show yards, they preferred to
keep their cattle horned on the range as it acted as a defence in guarding their
young against predators such as dingoes and wild dogs.  

A record 344 head of fat cattle were exhibited in the beef section at the 1976
Show. The cattle were regarded by the judge, K. Jeppesen, as the best seen in
Mackay for many years. The high standard of the stock was due to excellent
weather conditions that provided plentiful feed in the district. While the fat
cattle section attracted record entries in 1976, this was not the case in the stud
cattle section. There were only 40 head entered, a drop of about 30 per cent on
previous years. The judge, W. Rea of Marlborough, said the slump in the beef
industry was the main cause for the drop, as cattlemen could not afford to
exhibit their stock. Mr. Rea commented that the standard was very good, and

111 Interview with Don Wall, May 17 2001.
was comparable to stock exhibited at other shows. The breeders group award was won by a Droughtmaster team of three, exhibited by R. Rea of Home Hill. Among the prominent exhibitors at the 1976 fat cattle section was the Hughes Grazing Company, of Tierawoomba, S. A. Ross, of Lake Elphinstone, Pullen Pastoral Company, of Wyoming and Lloyd Pownall, of Crediton. Mr. Pownall again won the champion steer award in 1976 with a Brangus that tipped the scales at 1062 lbs. The beef cattle judge, K. Jeppesen of Bloomsbury, said that the beast was magnificently presented on the day, although he would have liked to see more size.

For over twenty years Lloyd Pownall, of Crediton, had exhibited his beef cattle at the Mackay Show. Pownall first exhibited at the 1954 Show. Regrettably for all involved in the section he decided that the 1976 Show would be his last as an exhibitor. Pownall cited age, coupled with the strain and pressure of exhibiting as the reasons for his retirement. He enjoyed great success at the Mackay Show, winning the grand champion award for his cattle on three successive occasions. Pownall and his son-in-law, John Riley, made a huge contribution to lifting the standard of the beef cattle section to its high level in 1976. Another of Pownall’s son-in-laws, J. D. McDonald, was asked to take over his 100 head of Brangus stud cattle. McDonald has also exhibited with success at the Mackay Show winning several classes with cattle sired by Mr. Pownall’s Brangus bulls. Because of the commitment of people such as Mr. Lloyd Pownall, the beef section had not only thrived in the post war years, but had also laid a solid foundation for the years to come.
CONTINUING THE SUCCESS, 1980-2001

An important factor in the section’s continued success in these years was the formation of a Beef Cattle sub-Committee of the Mackay Show Association on the July 18th 1980. Through this committee it was envisaged that all participants in the beef section could have their thoughts heard and passed on to the Mackay Show Association about how to improve their exhibit. The inaugural committee was comprised of three nominees from the Show Association and nine elected non-Show Association members with an interest in the beef section. The first nine people elected were Messrs. D. McDonald, R. Denman, T. Parker, P. Fordyce, R. Beasley, P. Hughes, D. Munroe, W. Watt and W. [Bill] Fordyce who was elected Chairman.¹ While many of the faces have changed on the committee over the years, the driving mission to continually improve the section has remained constant.

By the 1980s the swing to tropical breeds was all but complete. While beef prices were still low because of weak markets and poor weather conditions, most producers at least had a climate-adapted herd at their disposal. Bill Fordyce began breeding Brangus cattle in 1968 when he bought 60 Angus heifers from the Rowe family at Mirani. At that time he was running crossbred cattle on his family’s property ‘Forest Hills’ of 3300 acres at Seaforth. Later that year the family bought ‘Royston Park’, Kuttabul, which was to become the home of his well-known Brangus stud. In 1976 he bought another cattle property, ‘Glencouie’ at Koumala, and in 1980 added a western property, ‘Wyena’ near Moranbah. Bill Fordyce considers the Brangus an ideal breed. They are well suited to the coastal environment, early maturing, polled, and have good mothering ability. In 1980 Royston Park Brangus cattle appeared on the show circuit of Brisbane, Rockhampton and Mackay for the first time, with

¹ Beef Cattle sub-Committee, minutes of meeting, July 18 1980.
outstanding success. They won senior and grand champion at all three shows, junior champion at Rockhampton and Mackay, and reserve junior champion at Brisbane. They also won champion heifer at Rockhampton and Mackay. In a memorable year for Royston Park cattle they also won the sire of the year award presented by a leading rural newspaper. Bill Fordyce had a firm commitment to the Brangus Cattle Association of Australia, being President for a number of years.²

In 1981 the Mayor of Mackay, Sir Albert F. Abbott, expressed his appreciation of the value of the cattle industry to Mackay. "The average urban dweller knows very little about the cattle industry and generally fails to appreciate its value as a revenue producer and directly and indirectly as an employer of labour." ³ That year nearly 10 percent of Queensland's 10.3 million beef herd was located in the Mackay district. This total of 895,000 head was a dramatic rise from the 1970 district herd of over half a million head.⁴ While the newly formed beef cattle sub-committee of the Show put plans in motion to attract the urban dweller to the beef section, the district's graziers were continuing with their own innovative marketing strategies.

The historic Cardowan beef property, situated 140 kilometres south of Mackay, displayed its wares to all participants in the beef industry at a field day that was officially opened by the then Queensland Minister for Primary Industries, Mike Ahern. The property owned by Alan and Jean Shannon was given its name in 1860, and in 1981 was well known for its outstanding Braford cattle.⁵ Meanwhile Noel Perry of Nebo was continuing with his own export initiative. From 1975 to 1981 Perry had sold over 2,500 Droughtmaster cattle to Malaysia.

and Brunei in an effort to improve the quality of the herds in these countries. It was not only producers but also wholesalers who were being innovative in the marketing of beef. The introduction of beef classification, which was tested at Borthwicks freezing works, was a move to determine the most suitable product for the consumer. This innovation proved to be very successful and gave great impetus to the beef industry in the region. At a beef classification field day at Borthwicks in 1982 Jan Taylor, of the Consumers Affair Bureau, Brisbane, stated that the Australian Meat and Livestock Corporation was not doing a good enough job in promoting beef. She said the public lacked knowledge of meat. The consumer wanted tender meat, but did not understand or have much understanding of different types of meat. Beef classification would go some way in rectifying this situation.

Despite beef producers having to contend with low prices for their stock there was an excellent turnout in both the stud and fat cattle exhibits at the 1982 Show. The top price at the fat cattle sale was for the grand champion steer, which sold for 90 cents a kilogram. This Brangus bullock had a live weight of 757 kilograms. It was exhibited by the Amaroo Partnership and was purchased by Don Wall. The reserve champion bullock exhibited by the Rutherford family of the Redbank Cattle Company, Morinish, sold for $535 to Thomas Borthwicks. An 878 kilogram bullock exhibited by Rasmussen Properties was sold for $505 to Thomas Borthwicks. Other buyers at the sale included Ross Meat Market, Camilleri Butchers, J. Danastas, Lakes Creek, David Horwell, Whitsunday Butchery, L. Butterworth and P. Regan. The total offering of 247 head was cleared at the sale. Auctioneers were Messrs. Alan Nagle, Jack Stevens, and Richard Thomson. The Good Shepherd Lodge received some much-needed funds that year from the sale of two bullocks donated by Stuart

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and Sons of Oxford Downs, Nebo, and the Shaw family of Burton Pastoral Company, Nebo. The two bullocks raised $750 when sold to Thomas Borthwicks Meatworks.⁹

At the 1982 stud exhibit over $250,000 worth of cattle was on display. Graham McCamley was judge and considered the standard very high and the competition keen. One exhibitor, Ken Cole of Kenrol Stud at Gracemere, commented that stud cattle breeding had become very competitive, particularly with the Brahman breed. This was because of the increasing number of breeders raising Brahman cattle. Cole added that breeders were constantly forced to improve the standard of their product so it would sell in the marketplace. There were about 90 head from 14 studs entered in the exhibit. The largest breed in number was the Brahman, followed by Braford, Droughtmaster, Brangus and finally the Chianina which is of European origin.¹⁰

The prestige and marketing benefits of exhibiting stud beef cattle at Agricultural Shows does not come cheap. Mr. Cole explained that in 1982 the larger and longer city shows, such as the Brisbane ‘Ekka’ cost breeders up to $1000 a week to feed and accommodate staff alone. He added that there was also the cost of paying staff on the stud while owners themselves were away exhibiting. When the cost of accommodating the cattle was also taken into account the expense of exhibiting at city shows was, and still is, considerable. However both Cole and Tim Garle, owner of Warragun Brahman Stud at Bajool, were optimistic that breeders would continue to support country shows despite the expense. Garle estimated that it cost him $1000 an animal to exhibit at country shows like Mackay’s.¹¹ The expense involved was a good investment according to another exhibitor at the 1982 Show, Miss Kathy Banks from Atkinson’s Wairuna Stud.

¹⁰ Ibid.
¹¹ Ibid.
She suggested that local shows were the best advertising medium for breeders, and that "Mackay would be one of the best shows as far as selling is concerned." 12

**Best in Queensland**

The venue for the stud exhibit is also highly regarded. Jeff McCamley, judge at the 1984 stud cattle section, regards the facilities at the Mackay Show as a money saver because exhibitors did not need as many staff to show their cattle. The judging ring was in close proximity to the cattle accommodation, which meant fewer cattle handlers were required. McCamley noted that at other shows cattle had to be walked considerable distances through crowds to a judging area in the main ring. The set-up was practical and convenient and showed the practicability of the beef cattle committee. The location also allowed the many spectators to get a close-up view of the cattle. When these issues were taken into consideration, it was McCamley’s opinion that the facilities were the best of any major show in Queensland. 13

There are many beef exhibitors who would continue to patronise Agricultural Shows, such as Mackay’s, no matter what the cost. It becomes a lifestyle that is hard to resist. Ken Cole explained at the 1982 Mackay Show how some stud beef cattle exhibitors viewed regional shows. "We’re like gypsies – you get the show in your blood and you really think you’ve missed something if you don’t go. It’s like a working holiday. You get up at 4am to clean up the cattle, spend all day in the ring showing them and then you’re expected to party all night." 14

In Mackay the biggest social event for exhibitors is the annual beef dinner which in 1982 had Mrs. Flo Bjelke Peterson as a very special guest. 15 For the younger brigade in the late 1970s and early 1980s there was an alternative to the

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12 Ibid.
beef dinner. They would hold theme parties annually at local venues. These ‘Show Stampedes’ were very popular and adopted themes, such as Hollywood in 1982 and Punk in 1984, to get the parties swinging. The social aspect of exhibiting is an important element in strengthening and maintaining the bond between members of the beef industry community.

The 1980s were important and successful years for Keith Flohr and Don Wall. Keith and Margaret Flohr had expanded their beef operations by buying other properties in the district and in the mid-1980's established one of the first feedlots in the region. Keith continued to exhibit his cattle at the Clermont and Mackay Shows with a good deal of success. He was adaptable to changing trends in the industry and introduced softer European cattle to his herd, mostly Charolais and Romagnola, to obtain a younger finished bullock. During this time Don Wall was the proud recipient of an Order of the British Empire MBE award for services to the beef industry and the community in the New Years Honours list of 1988. “It’s absolutely tremendous. I’m tickled pink. To get it for my contribution to the beef industry makes it all the better. I’m very proud that the industry has given me recognition for the work I’ve done,” said Wall. Mr. Wall has spoken at seminars, including the World Brahman Conference in Rockhampton in 1985, and has judged cattle shows from Brisbane to Cairns. He also served as an alderman on Mackay City Council from 1976-79.

When an event such as the Mackay Show has such a long history it is not uncommon to see the judging duties being accepted by various members of the same family. This is the case with the McCamleys. Jeff McCamley, of Lancefield Brahman Stud, Dululu, judged three stud cattle sections at the 1984 Show. He did not judge the other section, for Brahmans, because he was a major

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Producers make excellent judges because of the range and quantity of stock they see everyday. Most beef producers can tell a beast’s particulars, such as its feed and range, from a quick inspection. This can come in quite handy at times.

**Trick or Treat**

There are many classes to enter at the Mackay Show. This allows all the district's beef producers an opportunity to participate irrespective of breed, age or feed. On the day before the show the cattle are separated into each class's particular yard. It was on a day such as this in the not too distant past that the volunteer workers were busy classifying the cattle when yet another truckload arrived. These took their place in the holding yard and were eventually moved through to the weighing scales. As the first beast stood quietly on the scales its particulars, such as owners, class entered and weight, were recorded by one of the volunteer workers. This gentleman was a retired grazier who had performed the duty over many years and his eye for cattle was unsurpassed in the district. After noting the class these beasts were to enter, and their fine condition, he raised his eyes knowingly to the men sitting on top of the railing next to the scales.

The classification process continued without pause until all cattle had been yarded. As the men headed off for a few well-deserved brown lemonades the main topic of conversation was the weather; after all they were mainly rural folk, and the past year had been pretty unsatisfactory for growing cattle. This was reflected in the appearance of many of the cattle in the yards, especially those in the grass-fed class. The beers went down well after such a busy day, and though the men would have liked to stay on awhile, they knew that there would be time to catch up with old friends tomorrow. One of them, however,

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took a slight detour before heading out of the showgrounds. He walked around to the stud cattle section, and after a few pleasantries with the handlers camped there, emerged from the shed carrying a quarter bucket of grain feed. Walking through the trade cattle yards he began shaking the bucket of grain to gauge the reaction of the cattle. All those in the grain-fed pens rose and huddled up close to the rails to partake in a second helping of dinner. He wasn’t surprised, having noted the checker’s sceptical glance earlier in the day, to see a pen of supposedly pasture-fed steers bellowing for the tucker they somehow knew was in the bucket. Our local Sherlock Holmes had a few quiet words with the owners of the cattle before the competition commenced, and lo and behold there was a late addition to the grain-fed class.²⁰

By 1984 the beef cattle section of the Mackay Show had achieved such recognition that a Daily Mercury editorial was devoted solely to the strength of the exhibit. It stated that the section was regarded as one of the most significant in Queensland. It compared the 198 carcase entries of the Mackay Show with the 93 entries at the Rockhampton Show. Another indication of the growth of the beef industry in the district was the presentation of 23 head of cattle by local producers at the All Stars imported invitation sale at Rockhampton. This number was more than one-third of the total exhibited, and reflected the interest of district producers in improving bloodlines.²¹ Considering that in 1984 the industry was facing a severe drought and prices were low, the turnout at the Mackay Show cattle section was exceptional. Don Wall was the top bidder, for the third year in succession, for the winning steers in the led steer section. He instigated this section in 1982 to improve the recognition and quality of the district’s beef product.²² Jim McGuire of Bingegang, McKenzie River, won the individual championship carcase in the Borthwicks Japanese chiller class that

²⁰ Interview with Russ King, November 16 2000.
Alan Shannon's dedication to the development of the overall carcase competition was crucial in reminding the district's graziers that they were "in the beef game not the cattle game." It is the desirability of the end product for consumers that is important in the industry. In this respect, "the Mackay Show beef cattle exhibit drove a lot of changes and were the educators in the industry, especially concerning carcase."

There were not only record entries in the trade cattle section in 1984, that year also saw a record overall Show with over 51,000 patrons through the gate. The 1984 beef dinner was also well attended with more than 200 people enjoying the function. At the dinner Mrs. Vera Fordyce presented the J. S. McGill trophy for the most successful beef cattle exhibitor at the Show to Gordon Kime, of Amaroo Partnership, Nebo. The Amaroo Partnership, which was comprised of the Kime family and L. Geddes of Couti Outi, won a ribbon with all of their entries in the trade, export and carcase competitions. Guests and officials at the dinner included Kevin Anderson, Wally Pask and his wife Margaret, Jim McGuire and his wife Mabel, Bill Fordyce, Ken Coombes, Bill Creber, Wally Jacobsen, Rick Beasley, Robert Denman, and Don Wall and his wife Gloria.

The judge of the Brahman cattle stud section at the 1984 Show described the animals on display as better than those shown at last year's Brisbane Exhibition. Bruce Clarke, of Allawah Brahman Stud, Biloela, said the cattle quality was exceptional with no tail [no falling off in quality]. He gave high praise to the grand champion of the show, Lancefield Trumby 2nd who was exhibited by Jeff and Ann McCamley of Lancefield Stud, Dululu. Clarke and his associate judge, Lloyd Riley, spent a considerable time in the ring due to the record entries in the

23 Ibid.
24 Interview with Alan Shannon, June 20 2001.
Brahman section. Other winners in the Brahman section included K. Cole, of Kenrol Stud, Gracemere, and R. J. and J.E. Bauer, of Boam Downs, Theodore. The quality of the Droughtmaster, Braford, and Charbray sections at the Show were described as "very good" by judge Jeff McCamley. The winner of the Charbray section was R. J. and D. M. Lang, of St Clair Stud, Princhester. He described the prize winners in all sections as having good growth and weight for age. Also the cattle showed the major requirements of what was needed for the beef industry in Australia.27

*Poet's Corner*

What the Mackay Show means to local people is as different as the people themselves. Jack Egan of West Mackay put his thoughts on the Show to verse in 1985:

I really look forward to Show Week,  
for Mackay never does things by halves...  
The farmers exhibit fine horses and bulls,  
and their wives show magnificent calves!28

*Are You Good Enough to Compete in Mackay?*

Entries for the beef section at the 1985 Show exceeded the record entries of the previous year.29 Mrs. Vera Fordyce was gracious enough to again present the J. S. McGill trophy at the 1985 Beef Dinner. Messrs. George and Ken Rutherford, from The Redbank Cattle Company, Morinish, were the proud recipients of the award. The Rutherfords collected more than 60 points in the beef cattle section with five championships, Two reserves, eight firsts, one second, plus one second

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in the carcase competition. Long-time grazier, Brian Hughes of Eversleigh, near Sarina, was guest speaker at the dinner held at Farleigh. Hughes's remarks regarding the quality of the Mackay Show's beef cattle section drew an appreciative response from the 240 grazing industry members present. He stated "At one time, if you won the beef cattle section at the Mackay Show you were good enough to compete in Brisbane. Now, if you win in Brisbane or Rockhampton you might be good enough to win in Mackay". Hughes had been exhibiting at the Mackay Show for 38 years and in each of those years he collected a prize for his cattle. He stressed the importance of the Mackay Show to the beef industry in the region and urged producers to be positive in their outlook. "I believe it [the beef industry] has a tremendous future. There's a great opening for young people with the flairs, not only those with their own property, to have a career in the beef cattle industry."

The Mackay Beef Cattle Committee treasurer, Rick Beasley, stated that in both quality and quantity of entries the 1985 Show had been the local producers' most successful.

Many of the people who made the 1985 Show such a success were present at the Beef Dinner. They included: Bill Fordyce and his wife Vera (Kuttabul), Brian and Sybil Hughes (Eversleigh), Rob Denman (Habana), John Hawkins (Mackay), Hec and Ruth Maynard (Jambin), Wally and Del Jacobson with daughter Julie (Brisbane), Ross and Gail Dodt, Rick and June Beasley, Gerry and Mary Muller, Jean Shannon (Nebo), Doug and Frances Cameron (Valkyrie), Peter and Jane Hughes (Tierawoomba), John and Clover Angus (Nebo), Bruce and Kerri Howlett, Don and Gloria Wall, Bill and Dawn Nicholas (Collroy), Mr. and Mrs. Noel Perry (Nebo), Bill and Jill Hasker, Mr. and Mrs. Richie Goldup, Mrs. Joan Riley and her son Lloyd, John and Mary Stuart (Oxford Downs), Lance and Robyn Smith (Walkerston), Ross and Robyn Shannon (Clermont), Bill and Joyce Bradley, Barbara Nicholson and family (Clermont), Val and

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30 Ibid.
Diane Cormack with family (Wavering Downs), Mick and Beryl Symonds (Mt Flora) and Charlie and Jean Borg (Clarke Creek).  

By the late 1980s the beef section was gaining nationwide prominence. When opening the 1987 Mackay Show, Alex Nason MBE, president of the Queensland and Australian chambers of agriculture and chairman of Primac Australia, gave special mention to the section when he said, "Your prime beef and carcase competitions would be difficult to surpass." It was not only to the beef industry that the section’s committee was promoting the exhibit. It also wanted to raise the profile of the section to the public of Mackay. The promotional exercise of having a Texas Longhorn on display at the previous Show was an outstanding success. This exhibit created great interest among both the media and patrons who seemed fixated by this ‘Wild West’ icon. However, patrons got a close view of how handling cattle is not always as depicted by the Hollywood Western when one steward received a trouserful of cow saliva from one beast while fulfilling his duties in the showring. Copping it on the chin, or on the trousers, is all part of being involved in a rural industry and country children are taught this lesson early. This pragmatic and self-reliant attitude has its own rewards for youth in the industry.

For the Kinnon brothers, Brett, 21, Richard, 18, and Troy, 16, taking responsibility for stud cattle worth over $60,000 at the 1987 Mackay Show was all part of growing up for the lads from Bungoona Brahman Stud near Clermont. The brothers are the sons of Merv and Rosemary Kinnon and all worked on the family property. In 1987 they were following the central and western show circuit and had a team of nine stud Brahmans and one calf at Mackay. This was

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31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
34 *Daily Mercury*, June 16 1987, p 22.
the first time the family had competed at the Mackay Show stud beef section, the rain preventing last year’s planned visit, and they achieved instant success by winning the grand champion Brahman bull award. Brett explained the process for selecting stud cattle for exhibiting. “Selection for show teams occurred just before weaning when the calves were at their best. They were chosen on appearance, potential and temperament. These cattle would then have to be trained to lead, be tied up in a shed and parade.” Brett emphasised that the cattle selected must have a good temperament to become worthwhile show beasts. On a typical show day the brothers would start work at 5.30 am with the feeding of their stock. Cattle would then be taken out to be sponged and washed clean. They were then watered and prepared for parading if it was a judging day. Brett was happy with the cattle accommodation available on the show circuit and made the comment that show associations were anxious to assist exhibitors as “they are keen for you to come back.” The three brothers were not deterred by the heavy rain during the judging of the 1987 Stud section, and after the event they were already looking forward to continuing their odyssey to Townsville and Charters Towers.36

1988 The Brahman Spectacular

The most successful promotion staged by local beef producers was the 1988 Bicentennial Brahman Spectacular. Mackay district people from all walks of life were involved in the preparation and staging of this event. A special subcommittee comprising Rob Denman, Bill Fordyce, Don Wall, Tom Parker and David McDonald was formed to oversee the many aspects involved in holding such an event. To understand the magnitude of their task it should be noted that over 300 Brahmans were expected to attend and about $150,000 would need to be raised for prize money and upgrading of facilities.37 A major project was the construction of the new cattle-housing pavilion for about 250 head. The new

pavilion was further expanded by attaching an undercover area. With the old cattle sheds holding 200 head and tie up facilities for a further 100, accommodation was now adequate. The main cattle judging ring was enlarged and a smaller judging ring nearby was levelled, grassed and fenced. Other work undertaken was the concreting of a 10-pen section of the fat cattle yards to hold the prize winners in all weather conditions. The remainder of the fat cattle yards were filled with over 200 tonnes of crusher dust to prevent the bogged conditions of previous years. These yards were also upgraded by the installation of a self-watering system to replace the time consuming drums and hoses method. The $100,000 required to complete these tasks was raised by Mackay district cattle people, businesses and local authorities. The fundraising task was assisted to a considerable degree by donations from stock agents, Bill Delaney and Company, Primac, Elders Pastoral and Dalgetys.

$50,000 prize money for the Brahman Spectacular was donated by the district’s graziers: fourteen prominent Brahman studs each contributed $3000 and eight other graziers put up $1000 each.\(^38\) Bill Fordyce, chairman of the Brahman Spectacular sub-committee, applauded the efforts of the many people involved in making the event a reality. “The committee members have done a great job raising the money to stage the show and a huge effort was put in by a volunteer work-force in construction work to establish the facilities for the show.”\(^39\) The Mackay Show Association beef cattle committee chairman, Rob Denman, paid a special tribute to the principal, teachers and students of the Mackay TAFE College for their valuable assistance with the constructions and improvements.\(^40\)

\(^{37}\) *Daily Mercury*, June 20 & June 25 1988, pp 22 & 12 respectively.
\(^{38}\) *Daily Mercury*, June 20 1988, p 22.
\(^{39}\) Ibid.
\(^{40}\) Ibid.
Branding Irons at the Ready

The district’s graziers were asked to bring their branding irons to one of the most memorable fundraising activities associated with the Spectacular. The subcommittee for the Spectacular was the driving force behind the idea to install a ‘brands board’ in the 500 Pavilion at the showground. It was envisaged that each grazier would bid for a place on the board and if successful would be required to heat their iron in the hot coals provided and brand a piece of silky oak timber that would be mounted in their spot on the board. Lance Smith of Borthwicks, one of the many dedicated volunteers associated with the beef section, was charged with notifying the graziers of this fundraising activity and it appears that he completed his task above and beyond the call of duty. On the night of the branding the Pavilion was packed to overflowing with cattlemen and women brandishing their branding irons.

Bidding was fierce for the more coveted positions on the board, only matched by the fierce smoke drifting throughout the complex from so many brandings. Phone calls were hastily made to the relevant authorities to ease their fears that there was some sort of conflagration at the showgrounds, and the branding continued until 82 were on the board. Whether it was the smoke that led to terrible thirsts, which then led to the excitable bidding, is open to conjecture. However this fundraising venture certainly paid handsome dividends for the Spectacular organising committee. The $54,520 raised, with a top bid of $4,700 for the prime position, was evidence of the local grazier’s commitment to ensuring that the 1988 Brahman Spectacular would be a roaring success, and that it would benefit future exhibits with improved facilities.\footnote{Comments from Ross Dodt, July 29 2002.}
And the Winner is...

The 1988 Mackay Show saw the unique situation of the Show Association presenting and parading a stud beef cattle entry on its own behalf. Show Association secretary Jim Stuart commented that it was quite possible that the association could win a prize at its own show. The Brahman bull was donated to the association by the Cherokee/Woodlea group and was raffled to raise money for the capital improvements involved with staging the Brahman Spectacular. The bull, Cherokee W Ole Bicentennial, was calved in July 1987 and bred by Lionel Delandells at Tanby, near Rockhampton. Mr. Delandells, a well-respected Brahman exhibitor, also prepared the bull for its Mackay showing.42 Mackay Show Association president, Cec Etwell, drew the raffle for the bull during the stud beef cattle judging. For the winner, Harold Rowe of ‘The Hollow’, Mirani, bringing home a stud Brahman bull certainly put a whole new slant on winning a meat tray.43

A top-class judge from the United States of America was brought to the 1988 Mackay Show to participate at the Brahman Spectacular. The judge, Max Watts of the Tic Tac Toe Range, Frost, Texas, was well qualified to judge Brahmans as he and his wife Shirley bred and exhibited the number one bull in the American Brahman Breeders Association Register of Renown. Max and Shirley operate a 5,000-acre ranch near Dallas, Texas. As well as running a pure Brahman herd they also crossbreed Brahmans with Hereford and Angus cattle. Watts is recognised as a judge of most breeds and has judged at most major shows in the USA as well as in Central and South America.44 Australian breeders at the 1988 Brahman Spectacular were heartened to hear Watts’s high praise for the cattle on show.

42 Daily Mercury, June 20 1988, p 22.
44 Daily Mercury, June 20 1988, p 22.
The event's announcer, Primac Stud stock manager Alan Ferguson, travelled up from Rockhampton to provide expert commentary and to keep the mammoth number of entries moving through the judging ring. While the prizes were well distributed among the exhibitors there was an overall winner, and Jeff and David McCamley of Lancefield Stud, Dululu, certainly deserved that honour. Their Lancefield Brahman won the breeder's group, the sire progeny group and the senior champion bull, which also went on to win the champion bull of the show award. Other winning exhibitors included R. and S. Slaughter of Eskwood Stud, Mr. Jackson of Jaffra Stud, the Parker family from Barcoo Cattle Company, Peter Fordyce of Bengal Brahman Stud and Bruce and Val Childs of Valuce Brahman Stud. Max Watts considered himself a winner also by being left with so many fond memories. He was presented with a memento of his visit to Mackay by show president Cec Etwell at the Beef Dinner.

The $50,000 prize money on offer at the Brahman Spectacular attracted 289 Brahmans from 66 exhibitors. Secretary of the Australian Brahman Breeders' Association, John Croaker, said that some Brahman classes had as many as 36 entries. The prestige of winning a first place award at such a competitive event was more important to exhibitors than any amount of prize money. Mrs. Anne McCamley, of Lancefield Brahman Stud, Dululu, certainly was of this opinion after that stud had won a multitude of prizes in the event. At the time Lancefield Stud was a regular exhibitor at the Mackay Show, and Mrs. McCamley said it was an achievement for the stud's breeding program. Peter Fordyce, of Bengal Brahman Stud, Glencouie, was thrilled when his exhibit won the grand champion Brahman female at the Spectacular. All his prize winning entries at the Brahman Spectacular, grand champion cow, champion led steer and class placed bull, were sired by Jaffra 795. This bull was also being used in his stud.

herd which he had been building up for five years prior to the Spectacular. Four generations of the Fordyce family were at the event to witness the successful debut of the Bengal Stud stock at a Mackay Show. Watching Peter's exhibits were his children, his father Mr. Bill Fordyce, and his grandparents Andrew and Mary Fordyce. The Fordyce family has had a long and continuing association with the Mackay Show.

The new accommodation facilities for stock, and the interest created by the Spectacular, were beneficial not only to Brahman breeders but to the whole stud exhibit. The event attracted thousands of Mackay Show patrons to view the beef cattle exhibit for the first time. Visitors started arriving early on the first day, much to the amazement of breeders. Many people inspecting the cattle admitted that they had never done so before. The pre-show promotion and the world record prize money created great public interest, so much so that the feeding of stock had to be delayed on the second day due to the crowds in the cattle sheds. Ken Rutherford of Redbank Droughtmaster Stud, Morinish, said he was amazed at the number of people, and that breeders were thrilled at the public attention. Crowds not only flocked to the Brahman event, but were also keen viewers at judging of the other eight breeds held in the second show ring. Mrs. Pam Spann, a Droughtmaster exhibitor from Minlacowie, commented that the interest exceeded any she had seen at any other Queensland show.

A 1262-kilogram Santa Gertrudis bull attracted a constant stream of onlookers to its stall. The bull was believed to be the heaviest ever exhibited at the Mackay Show up to that time. The owner, Mr. Wightman of Innisplain Santa Gertrudis Stud, Rolleston, exhibited six beasts on what was his first visit to the Mackay

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49 Ibid.
Show. The Spectacular had many successes and legacies, not the least of which were new exhibitors and spectators to the beef section exhibit.

The Brahman Spectacular saw increased entries and crowds at all exhibits of the beef cattle section. There were a record 409 head entered in the trade cattle section. Of these, 197 were judged at the showgrounds while the remainder were sent to Borthwicks Meatworks for the carcase competition. This event was judged by Wally Jacobsen, the Production Description Officer with the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service, who started judging the carcase competition in 1968. His efforts assisted this competition to become possibly the largest objectively measured carcase competition in Australia. The supreme grand champion of the trade show was a steer exhibited by Allen Matsen of Clearacre, Sarina. Matsen intended the steer, a Charolais of 652 kilograms, for the carcase competition, but his decision to exhibit the beast at the showgrounds paid off handsomely with the steer also winning the single steer, grain fed steer and grand champion steer events. Other winners in the section included R.A. and V.R. Camm of Mount Bullock, the Fordyce family of Wyena, Atkinson and Co. of Yaamba and the Kime family of Amaroo.

The judge of the 1988 trade section, Don Wall, reflected that a judge’s role was to improve the knowledge base of beef cattle production. In all his years of judging Wall has always given good commentary to the exhibitors, explaining why a particular beast was more favourably viewed than others in its class. His readiness to impart the reasons behind his judgements saw Wall in steady demand as a judge throughout the state. In 1988 he backed his words up by buying the grand champion steer for $1010 or 155 cents a kilogram. At the Beef Dinner, Miss Showgirl Deidre Jacklin and Beef Cattle Committee entrant

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52 Mackay Show Beef Cattle Program of Events, June 1988.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
Natalie Head presented the trophies to the winners of the trade and carcase section.\textsuperscript{55}

\textit{Thank-you}

The overwhelming success of the 1988 Brahman Spectacular saw the Mackay Beef Cattle Committee lauded as one of the most progressive and efficient in the country. Committee chairman Rob Denman praised the efforts of all involved. He said the support had been fantastic, with as many as 27 people turning up at working bees. The committee was pleased to hand over, debt free, the new $75,000 cattle shed to the Mackay Show Association. Denman thanked the valuable assistance of show president Cec Etwell and show secretary Jim Stuart for their assistance in the organisation of the event.\textsuperscript{56}

\textit{Break a Leg}

An event like the Mackay Show needs commitment from many people. Long time secretary of the Mackay Show, Jim Stuart, certainly showed true grit as he not only completed all his duties at the 1989 Show but did so with a broken leg. In true showman style Jim declared, "the Show must go on." \textsuperscript{57} This determination regarding the future of the Show is evident in all the people involved, and is an important element in its continued popularity. As the Show moved into the 1990s the beef section was determined to have greater youth involvement, to secure the continuation of the exhibit. By the end of the decade the section was well on the way to fulfilling that aspiration.

\textit{The Industry}

Between 1989 and 1998, cattle numbers gradually increased in Australia despite unfavourable weather conditions continuing in many parts of the country. By

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Daily Mercury}, June 22 1988, p 15.
\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Daily Mercury}, June 25 1988, p 12.
\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Ibid.}
the end of the 1990s beef cattle numbers had increased to nearly 26 million.\textsuperscript{58} In the first half of the 1990's, successive tightening of restrictions under the USA Meat Import Law prior to its repeal in 1994, imposition for the first time of quota restraints to Canada, and in 1994/95, the substantial slump in the USA beef market brought an end to the dominant position of the North American trade. Export of beef for manufacturing purposes to North America gave way to a firm focus on the rapidly growing trade in quality steer beef to Japan, Korea, Taiwan and South East Asia. These Asian markets accounted for 60 per cent of Australia's beef exports in the 1990's compared to 25 per cent in the late 1980's.\textsuperscript{59}

International rather than domestic market forces shape conditions in the Australian industry. The international beef industry is subject to a high level of political influence in major markets. In many other exporting countries, highly inefficient domestic beef producers are protected and quotas and tariffs are imposed. Monitoring overseas import trends is critical to the State's industry as around 80% of Queensland beef is exported.\textsuperscript{60} Queensland's agricultural sector at the end of the decade was dominated by beef cattle, with 35% of farms undertaking beef production. The Queensland beef cattle herd, with 10.4 million head, represented 45% of the total Australian herd and had grown by 1.8 million since 1989, an increase of 20%.\textsuperscript{61} Locally, Thomas Borthwicks continued operating the meatworks until 1995 when joint partners Nippon Meat Packers and Mackay Sugar purchased the business. Nippon Meat Packers later bought out Mackay Sugar's part-ownership and now runs the abattoir as a purely beef operation. By the turn of the millennium the company was exporting to 23

\textsuperscript{57} Daily Mercury, June 20 1989, p 2.
\textsuperscript{58} Australian Bureau of Statistics, Livestock, Agstats (7117.0), online at www.abs.gov.au
\textsuperscript{59} Cattle Council of Australia, History of Beef in Australia, 2002, online at www.farmwide.com.au
\textsuperscript{60} Department of Primary Industries, Beef, 5498, online at www.dpi.gov.au
\textsuperscript{61} Australian Bureau of Statistics, Agriculture Industry in Australia – Qld State Profile, online at www.abs.gov.au
countries including Japan, the USA, Korea, Indonesia, South Africa and the Philippines.62

The beef cattle section at the 1992 Mackay Show had total prize money of $32,000. In that year's carcase competition there were 55 entries from all over Queensland with a total of 165 head on display. A highlight of the competition was the popular Nippon Meat Packers Jap ox class event. In terms of prize money this class was the most valued with $10,000 on offer. The previous year's placegetters, the Travers Grazing Company, from Springsure, The Overflow, from Marlborough, and C. Morawitz, from Gindie, nominated again for the rich event. The carcase competition had $12,100 in total prize money with special breed society prizes that boosted champion carcase winnings by as much as $500 if the winners were 75 percent Brahman. There were no shortage of Brahman either in the stud cattle exhibit, with over 200 head nominated. These exhibits were supported by 86 other animals from 10 different breeds: Braford, Droughtmaster, Charbray, Santa Gertrudis, Charolais, Limousin, Gelbvich, Simmental and Brahmosun. Rick Beasley, research officer with the Queensland Meat Authority, said the Mackay Show had achieved tremendous status with exhibitors, noting in 1992 that Mackay had become known as the prestigious show to win.63

**Grin and Bear It**

When patrons of the Show visit the cattle pavilion they are entering a small slice of rural living. The senses come alive to these sensations. In 1992 a heavily pregnant cow elicited many emotions among onlookers. Many parents were asked by their curious youngsters that age-old question regarding the birds and the bees, or if you like, the bulls and the cows. However, when the cow gave birth during the Show and the youngsters were able to see a soft newborn calf

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beside its mother the following day, the curiosity was replaced by adoration. For the older patrons, the sight may have reawakened the wonder of the cycle of life. As for the cow and calf, they were excused from any further competitive exhibiting activity and instead became the subject of hundreds of photographs from enchanted patrons.  

A total of 232 head of prime cattle were auctioned at the 1995 Mackay Show. Alistair Stewart, manager of Primac Mackay, said the sale was a reasonable result for exhibitors. The grand champion of the section was a 742-kg Charolais bullock shown by Ashleigh Flohr of Wotonga. The reserve champion grainfeed steer award went to John and Donna Finger of Lake Lofty with their 722 kg Romagnola. The best-conformed steer of the show went to a 804 kg Brangus from the Beeblee Partnership. The judge of the section, John Donovan, Livestock manager for Australia Meat Holdings, Rockhampton, was impressed with the quality of cattle presented after years of difficult seasons. A total of 45 exhibitors supported the section. Tay-Glen Pastoral Company, Dysart, was the most successful exhibitor winning a prize for each of their 20 entries including the prestigious International Motors Toyota Mackay feature class. Tay-Glen’s principal, Ted Murphy, was delighted to see the property’s name be the first recorded on the Memorial Board donated by Mrs. Vera Fordyce and family in memory of the late Mr. Bill Fordyce. Peter Davidson travelled from Tamworth to judge the Romagnola feature event, assisted by James Pullen of Nebo. The event attracted 39 entries while there were 71 Brahman on show. In the Brahman breed John Atkinson, of Yaamba, had the support of Joseph Borg of Blue Mountain in his deliberations. The judge for all other breeds was Colin Kime, of Amaroo, who was assisted by Penny O’Laughlin of Nebo.

Judges at the 1996 stud cattle section, Brett Coombe, Don Wild and Alan Maddern, were unanimous in awarding the Supreme Champion Female to Brahman heifer Kenrol Money Penny. This outstanding beast from the Cole family's Kenrol Brahman Stud at Gracemere drew high praise from the section's co-judge Coombe. “She was a beautiful soft heifer and a very practical animal. We would all like to have a paddock full of animals like her because qualities like that make money.” 66 The heifer's owner, Wendy Cole, said the 14 month-old was the best female the stud had produced since its breeding program began in 1963. “She will be one of our primary breeders once she finishes her show commitments. She will be mated for the first time in a couple of months, but we have not decided who we will put her with,” Mrs. Cole said. Kenrol Money Penny came from successful bull Savannah Mr. Manso 007, who had a distinguished show career as a junior bull.67

The cyclical nature of the beef industry was reflected in the prices at the 1996 Mackay Show trade cattle sale. At the Show beef exhibitors could have been forgiven for harking back to better days when a grand champion beast would usually fetch more than $1200. Unfortunately in 1996 the grand champion, weighing 692 kg, sold for only $670. Despite the financial burden of exhibiting their stock in lean years the district's beef producers continued to support the Mackay Show beef cattle section.68 Russ King, the former ABC Rural Reporte, observed that many city people assumed that graziers led rich and pampered lives, however in his experience this was a misconception. “The district’s graziers are just hardworking people in a tough industry.” The comparative isolation of the graziers from Mackay meant that many city dwellers had little contact with these people. In this regard the Mackay Show was a useful site to break down these misconceptions. However the Show meant much more than

67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
this to the district's beef producers. "Show time is a once a year blow out for cattle producers and workers," said Mr. King. This richly deserved annual break from the rigours of working a cattle property is keenly anticipated and allows those involved to catch up with friends and acquaintances. Boundless reserves of energy are needed to get through this annual 'break' as there is much socialising to do, especially at the Beef Dinner. That attendance is always strong at functions such as this, even when the beef industry is doing it tough, is evidence of the importance of the social aspect of being involved in the Mackay Show beef section.

An excellent line-up of stud cattle kept judges busy at the Mackay show in 1998. Bram McLennan, of Orana stud, Bell, made the decisions in the Romagnola and Brahman studs and John Burnett, of Bendemeer, Clermont judged all other breeds. Senior champion Romagnola bull and grand champion was Lancefield Bruno 298 and the McCamleys, of Lancefield, also exhibited the reserve senior champion. McLennan said the Romagnola exhibits were a quality representation of the breed and a credit to the exhibitors. They showed growth potential and the ability to pass on breed characteristic to future generations. Scott and Andrew Angel's Glengarry stud exhibited the grand champion Brahman bull of the show, Glengarry Waco, who had earlier won the senior champion bull. Kevin and Jenny Geddes' Balmoral Dinosaur was reserve champion senior bull. Judge for the breeds other than Brahmans, John Burnett said there had been very strong classes in the Brafords and Droughtmasters. He commented that the grand champion Droughtmaster bull was a long smooth beef-efficient beast and would produce high carcase yielding progeny. The grand champion Braford bull, the young male calf winner, exhibited tremendous sire potential. "I am enthusiastic about the potential of this bull as one of the leaders in the breed with extra length and conformation and the ability to be a

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Interview with Russ King, November 16 2000.
top Braford sire," Mr. Burnett said. Associate judges were Kim Hunter, Danielle Kay and Katrina Stower, all from the Mackay State High School Cattle Show Team. Mackay Permanent Building Society representative Joanne Hansen presented the championship ribbons and Penny O'Loughlin presented other ribbons. Mr. and Mrs. Alan and Jean Shannon, who were foundation members of the Braford Society, were among the crowd watching the stud judging. Mrs. Shannon decorated many of the Braford winners at the invitation of the beef committee. 71

**Educate and Encourage**

The future of beef cattle exhibiting appears assured if the interest and dedication of a group of Mackay teenagers in the practice is continued into their adult life. The Mackay State High School Cattle Show Team is an extra-curricular program set up where students can learn about looking after cattle, preparing them for shows, and parading the cattle in the show ring. The program allows students to gain experience in teamwork and develop public relations skills. The cattle are kept in a series of paddocks at the agriculture sheds, near the school, in Kenilworth Street. The main breed of cattle at Mackay High is the Sahiwal. These originated in the Punjab region of Pakistan and were introduced to Australia in the 1950's. The Sahiwal breed was chosen because of their small size, good temperament and their ability to adapt to the region's climate. The school's original full-blood Sahiwal animals were purchased from Brian Clancy, at his Theodore stud. 72

The Cattle Team's initial major success came at the 1998 Mackay Show when it won the grand champion led steer award. The students were also recognised for their overall presentation and commitment to their work by winning the

72 Mackay State High School, *Cattleteam*, online at www.angelfire.com/ct/cattleteam
Herdsman Award for best presented show team. Members of the Cattle Team over the years, some of whom had never handled cattle until a few months previous to the event, never fail to impress visitors to the section with their exuberance and dedication.

Mr. Grech, Agriculture Assistant at the time, conveyed some of his thoughts on the Cattle Show Team in 1998.

Until I started work at Mackay SHS, I had never worked with students. I had always worked with adults. I don't know what I expected, but it certainly wasn't what I experienced with this committed group of young people. I am impressed with several aspects of their work: - how they turn up every morning before school to work with the cattle and prepare them for show; how they work together as a team and help one another out with their cattle; how they tame and handle mature beasts; how the older students train the younger students to show cattle; the pride that the show team have in exhibiting their cattle and their handling skills. I enjoy working with these students and helping to supervise them. They deserve all the success and credit that they receive. I am sure that the team will continue to be proud ambassadors of the school in years to come.

The Cattle Team certainly made their school and the wider Mackay community proud in 1999. They won the grand champion led steer of the show for the second year running, their stud stock received prizes, and some of the students won ribbons in Junior Paraders and also Junior Judges competitions. Some of the students also gained valuable experience by assisting the section's judges in

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73 Daily Mercury, August 6 1998.
their deliberations. Majella Cummings was in the ring helping judge breeds other than Brahman with Brett Nobbs from Springsure, while Rebecca Dwyer, Geoff Brahma and Aaron Avenell were associate judges for the carcase competition. An honour for the students was the Mackay Show Grand Parade, which was being viewed by the Premier, Peter Beattie. The students, with their cattle, were called out of the parade by the ring announcer, Angus Lane, and personally introduced to the Premier. Another highlight was when one cattle team member, Katrina Stower, was invited to travel to the 'Ekka' to be the associate judge for the Sahiwal class. This was the first time the school had been asked to send a student for associate judging duties in the State's capital.

The Cattle Team would not be possible without a solid community support network. Among those who have contributed to the many requirements of the venture are: the beef producers who donate cattle, Graham Stabler from Stabler Howlett and Lemmon for veterinary work, Lance Smith at Borthwicks, John Curran for transporting the cattle, and the Beef Cattle Sub-committee. 75

At the start of the 1999 Show Paul Fordyce, chairman of the Beef Cattle sub-Committee, praised the contribution of sponsors to the success of the beef section. "We could not hold a show without sponsors, and big and small, they are greatly valued." New sponsor Southern Cross Water Services joined other local businesses such as Thomas Borthwick, Col Meng, Primac and Toyota in supporting that year's exhibit. 76 Mother Nature was also supportive in 1999 and with the end of the drought and good growing conditions in the district there was record interest among beef producers to exhibit. This air of optimism in the district's beef industry encouraged new exhibitors to gauge the quality of their

74 Mackay State High School, op.cit.
75 Ibid.
cattle against that of the more established Mackay Show exhibitors.\textsuperscript{77} In this way the beef section performs a valuable function as a site for the comparison of the beef product, from stud genes to carcase.

It was pleasing for the organisers of the carcase competition to see new exhibitors Peter and Anne David of Carmila Glen win two classes in the 1999 event.\textsuperscript{78} In all there were 247 entries, with noted local butcher Snow McGill performing the judging duties at Thomas Borthwick and Sons.\textsuperscript{79} The most successful exhibitor was Ted and Jenny Murphy of Tay-Glen, Dysart, who also won the highly prized champion carcase award. Other winners were Andrew Fordyce of Pretoria Pty Ltd., the Maddern family of Hillalong Pastoral Company and Andrew Fernie's Riverview Cattle Company.\textsuperscript{80} The most valuable event of the competition, the $10,000 Nippon Meat Packers feature carcase class for a pen of three grain fed bullocks, was won by Wally and Susan Rea of The Overflow. Mr. Rea said there was a top market available for cattle with a marbling score of three and up on the scale of zero to five. To achieve this marbling it was necessary to have the right balance of genes in the cattle. Mr. Rea remarked, "We cross our Wagyu with Brahman, Angus and Murray Grey and the one for which we get the most money is the one to produce." \textsuperscript{81}

\textit{It's In My Genes}

The desirability of marbling in beef, so important in carcase competitions, has for many years been a focus of research at the CSIRO. Its scientists now believe that their research may provide the answer to that age-old question of why some people put on more weight than others. They have located four genes involved in fat deposition in cattle, which could lead to a new understanding of human

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid.
obesity. Dr Bill Barendse of CSIRO Livestock Industries believes there may be a link between humans and cattle, as they share almost all the same genes. The scientists have located four genes important in determining why some animals become fatter than others when given essentially the same food. Dr. Barendse commented, "We see the same things in humans. A rich diet will lead to obesity in some and leave others as skinny as rakes." Marbling is the development of small flecks of fat throughout the muscle of cattle and is highly desirable in beef markets like Japan and the USA, because consumers associate marbling with high quality, flavour and tenderness. Dr Barendse's team of researchers has been using DNA markers to predict the tendency of different animals to marble, or put on fat within their muscle.⁸²

To All Men and Women of Merit

Ten 'Men of Merit' were recognised for their contribution to the beef cattle section at a presentation during the 1999 Mackay Show. They were Messrs. Vic Camm, Gordon Kime, Rick Beasley, Tom Parker, Don Wall, Robert Denman, Jim Denman, Gerry Muller, the late Bill Fordyce and the late David McDonald. The district's beef producers have a long and fine tradition of showing their appreciation for services voluntarily rendered to the industry.⁸³ The presentation was held before a capacity crowd at the showground's 500 Pavilion. Photographs of the group were presented to each of the seven members attending, and to family members representing the late Bill Fordyce and late David McDonald. Rick Beasley was unable to attend. Beef committee chairman Paul Fordyce said the presentation was to recognise 10 men who were members of the present committee since the mid-1970s and some for years before that time. Fordyce commented that the younger brigade felt indebted to those men who contributed so much to the Mackay Show, and while this honour roll did not cover all those who had been stalwart members of the committee over the

years, the 'Men of Merit' were certainly worthy of that title. Robert Denman, on behalf of the recipients, responded by saying that all the men had stood together and worked as a team whenever something had needed to be done.\textsuperscript{84} At the ceremony, Committee secretary Ross Dodt also praised the efforts of the many women who had supported the committee through the years.\textsuperscript{85} This view was echoed at a later Show by Kerry Woodman, stud cattle exhibitor, who noted the vital role women played in the industry and in the successful organisation and running of the beef cattle section of the Mackay Show.\textsuperscript{86}

The cycle of life was again in evidence at the 2000 Show. Even though the Cattle Team, under the guidance of Sharon Ruhle, achieved many successes that year, including first place in the junior judging competition thanks to Yvonne Clarke, the focus was on a non-participating member of the team. The centre of attention was on Mahogany, who gave birth on the first day of the Show. This new arrival created a farm nursery atmosphere in the shed, even more so because another of the Team's cows, Cinnamon, had her three-week old calf with her.\textsuperscript{87} Such was the delight of patrons that there was a seemingly never ending queue to photograph the calves with children and grandchildren.

Youth shone that year, when 11-year old Lachlan Fordyce exhibited the grand champion steer. Lachlan is a fifth generation family supporter of the Show. His great-great-grandfather, William Begg Fordyce, was inaugural president of the society, which became the forerunner of the Mackay Regional Show Association. Great-grandfather Andrew Fordyce was a Show Association president and patron for several decades. Grandfather Bill Fordyce was a Vice-President and Beef Cattle Committee president before being patron for about a

\textsuperscript{83} Daily Mercury, June 21 1999, p 10.
\textsuperscript{84} Daily Mercury, June 25 1999, p 9.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{86} Comment from Kerry Woodman, June 21 2001.
\textsuperscript{87} Mackay State High School, \textit{op.cit.}
decade. His father, Paul Fordyce, is the current president of the Beef Cattle Committee and encourages all his children to participate in all aspects of the beef industry. Lachlan, his twin sister Laura and younger brother Mitchell, help both Paul and his wife Leanne to muster and work the cattle on their Wyena property. For his win Lachlan was presented with the valuable Ed Hackman Bronze trophy. On the other hand, it was sad to see the departure of Keith Flohr that year, aged 73 years. From the late 1930's, when he was droving cattle to Mackay, right through to his death on the September 20th, his commitment to the district's beef industry remained strong. A member of many community organisations in the district Keith Flohr will be well remembered. He was buried on his beloved Wotonga property.

**The Industry**

A $7 million expansion to Thomas Borthwick and Son's Bakers Creek meatworks in 2001 gave the company the capacity to export its beef from Mackay harbour. General manager Roy van Nesch explained that previously the company had been unable to ship produce, as it did not have the facilities to hold enough product. This capacity came to reality on the June 20th 2001, when it shipped more than 460 tonnes of chilled beef to the USA. This was the first direct shipment from Mackay in almost 10 years. Bror Bjurstrom of C&S Shipping commented that instead of loading Mackay beef product out of Townsville and Rockhampton it could be loaded in Mackay thereby keeping jobs for local people. The extensions at Borthwicks have increased the company's operating slaughter capacity from 111,000 head a year to 230,000 head a year and enabled it to better service its major markets in Japan, the USA.

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and Korea. The expansion has also allowed the company to employ an extra 150 people providing a much-needed boost to the local economy.91

Beef producers in the district were enjoying good prices for their stock in mid-2001. Department of Primary Industries project leader Ross Dodt said that prices had more than doubled from what was on offer 18 months previously. He explained the main reasons for the rise was the increased foreign demand for Australian beef and a shortage in high-quality animals ready for production. In 2001 America, which sold up to 96 per cent of its cattle domestically, faced a shortfall and in turn was looking to Australian beef, as was Japan which was targeting Australia’s prime animals. Lack of rain in the Mackay district in 2001 led to a decline in the number of animals in production, and when all these factors aligned graziers in the district with quality stock ready for sale were rewarded with good profits.92

This lack of substantial rain in 2001 saw many district graziers attempting to access the increasingly limited stock of protein supplements to feed their cattle. Traditional sources such as molasses, Copra meal, and cottonseed were scarce according to Ross Dodt. Queensland’s molasses stocks were under pressure from drought-stricken farmers in the state’s south who were looking to the northern sugar mills to obtain their supplies, thus leading to a shortfall in stocks available for northern beef producers. Copra meal was almost impossible to purchase because of production problems in New Guinea, and the restriction of the movement of cottonseed north of Carmila had exacerbated the supplement scarcity. Dodt noted that experienced graziers accepted the dry conditions as part of the industry and would continue to seek out supplements for their stock while hoping for rain.93

93 Ibid.
Support Central Queensland Rescue

Also a part of the industry, unfortunately, is the issue of injury to workers. Being in close proximity with cattle, even those considered pets, will always carry an element of danger. With bulls the risk is more pronounced due to their size and the natural inclination to use their horns when startled or threatened. When incidents and accidents occur with bulls the consequences can be quite serious. Nebo cattleman Phil Willett survived a deep goring to the stomach from a pet bull on the Five Acre property 55 km south of Nebo in February 2001. When an event like that occurs in such a remote hinterland area adequate first-aid and communication procedures are vital. Willett, who by good management practice was not working alone, received his injuries when the pet bull at the property's sawmill became startled and charged. The response from the Central Queensland Rescue helicopter team was outstanding. In a little over one hour from the time of the incident they were on the scene administering high-level pain control, antibiotics and fluid replacement before transporting the victim to Mackay Base Hospital for surgery. Incidents such as this remind us of how difficult it must have been for previous generations of graziers, who lacked rapid transportation and modern medicine when an emergency arose on isolated properties.94 It is heartening that district graziers, such as Bill and Margo Fordyce who donated $770 for Central Queensland Rescue at the 2001 Mackay Show trade cattle sale, support the emergency services so essential to people who live on the land.95

Safety First

Ron Meng, a 'retired' engineer, has done much to improve the safety of cattle workers with two of his patented designs. These are the 'Mengie Latch' and the "Mengie Wire Strainer'. The calf cradle latch was developed after Meng visited

a friend, Mr. G. Clements of St Lawrence, and observed him narrowly miss serious injury when a large calf sprung the latch on a branding cradle. Clements, after regaining his composure, remarked to Ron “You’re a retired engineer, see if you can make something better and a lot safer than this animal.” Ron knew he wasn’t referring to the calf trotting freely around the yard, and so had a closer look at the latch and made some preliminary notes. Fourteen months later, after trialing eleven prototypes, Ron had a product that was described by former DPI stock inspector Alan Childs as a device that “…sets a new standard in calf branding safety.” The improved safety of the latch led to Ron being nominated in the 1999 DPI Research and Development Awards. Mr. Meng praised the assistance given to him by Mackay district beef producers in the testing of the latch.

The idea for the ‘Mengie Wire Strainer’ came from a request from Charlie Day of ‘Marylands Station’, St Lawrence. Day required a user-friendly strainer that did not damage the wire. It also had to be able to be applied and removed from the wire safely with very little effort. After twelve months of testing prototypes on properties throughout Queensland, Ron considered the advice given to him by graziers and fencing contractors and then designed and produced the definitive version of the ‘Mengie Wire Strainer’. With orders flooding in for both products, Ron’s ‘retired’ status appears to be in serious jeopardy. In an industry that has been around since Noah was a lad, it is reassuring that there are still people who can identify and develop the innovations and refinements needed to keep it progressing.

96 Interview with Ron Meng, February 20 2001.
97 Mackay Bush Telegraph, February 1 2000, p 1.
98 Interview with Ron Meng, February 20 2001.
Champion Bison Bull of the 2016 Mackay Show is...

An innovative breed in its infancy in Australia is the Beefalo. At Proserpine Beefalo Stud, Christina della Valle and Peter Deicke held a field day in 2001 to acquaint beef cattle producers to the benefits of introducing Bison, the North American native buffalo, to their herds. Beefalo is the name given to any cattle that carry 37.5 percent Bison genes. With higher Bison content they are called Bison hybrids and with less, Beefalo cross. The advantages for the Northern Australian producer are claimed to be the ability to perform better on poor pasture and provide a superior beef product. The sire at Proserpine Beefalo Stud carries 42 percent Bison genes, with the remainder a combination of Angus, Charolais and Braunvieh bloodlines. At 25 months the bull, Xtra Thunder, weighed 605 kilograms. Those at the field day were impressed with the taste and texture of the grassfed Beefalo x Droughtmaster beast that was cooked in a variety of styles for a better comparison with the usual beef product. Given the progressive nature of the Mackay Show Beef Cattle sub-Committee it may not be too long until the Beefalo breed is on display at the Show.99

Let the Show Begin

On the Monday prior to the start of the show all trade cattle need to be classified. Although it's early in the morning, a tick after 8 o'clock city time, there are 18 volunteers already at the cattle yards. They work methodically and with good humour in weighing, marking, classifying and penning the lots of cattle that arrive constantly at the yards. All help is encouraged, from the keen young fellow prodding the cattle through the network of gates, to the distinguished gentleman faultlessly listing the stock's owners. If anyone leaves the yards to attend to other duties, he is replaced by another willing helper. Work only stops for a series of smokos that are provided by the hardworking women volunteers of the beef cattle section. It is apparent during smoko that

many of the men have not seen each other for some time and are relishing the opportunity to catch up on any news. The work continues long into the afternoon and references to a couple of cold beers to quench the thirst become more frequent. Then when the last beast is penned and the men head for the bar, conversations resume and the wide smiles seem to say, “let the show begin.”

**Judge Julie**

The 2001 Show saw a female judge, Mrs. Julie McCamley of Lancefield Brahman stud, appraising the Brahman section of the stud exhibit. While this is a somewhat unusual sight in the cattle-judging ring, Mrs. McCamley has judged at other shows in previous years. However this was her, or any woman’s, first chief judging appearance at the Mackay Show. “The men usually get the job”, said Mrs. McCamley. The beef cattle section committee was thrilled to engage Mrs. McCamley for the exhibit, with committee president Paul Fordyce describing her as a “highly accomplished cattle woman”. She judged 21 bulls and 21 female entries for their structure, muscle and temperament and was impressed with the standard on display. With Julie’s sons William, Edward and Tim among the large crowd watching the section, she and associate judge Sam Hughes performed their duties admirably.100

That year saw Graham Greenup travel up from his Santa Gertrudis stud at Jandowie to judge both the prime cattle section and the breeds other than Brahmans in the stud cattle section. In the stud event he had the difficult task of picking the prize winners from about 45 entries in the Romagnola and Braford classes.101 Judging at the Show carries a large degree of responsibility, as it has offered the largest and richest paying trade cattle and carcase competitions on the Australian circuit of agricultural and pastoral shows for ten consecutive

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years. Greenup said the prime cattle section was the largest gathering of stock he had ever judged. He commended all the breeders on the presentation of their cattle and declared that 'the top cattle here would compete well anywhere in the country'. He also congratulated the beef committee on their organisation of the event. The yarding of more than 250 head realised good prices for beef producers, with an average price of $1054 a head reflected the quality and condition of stock on display. The grand champion steer, exhibited by the Maddern family of Hillalong, sold for $1520 at $2.15 a kilogram. Good promotion saw one of the largest crowd turnouts in recent years. The annual event drew exhibitors, many of them new to Mackay, from around the district and the Central Highlands. Paul Fordyce commented that the interest was encouraging for the organisers, as a great deal of effort had gone into making the prime cattle section the largest and richest of any show in Australia.

The renowned, and profitable, carcase competition in 2001 was judged by Wayne Davis of Mackay. When deciding on the winner Davis took into consideration the carcase's weight, age, fat and meat colour, the amount of fat on the beast, the quality and texture of the meat, the length of the beast and the area of eye muscle. The quality of the entries was extremely good according to the general manager of Thomas Borthwicks and Sons, Roy Van Nescht. He addressed the more than 100 people who attended the public inspection of the carcases at the meatworks: "The quality was what we have been seeing all year and is a reflection of a good season. There was a little bit of product bordering on getting to over fat brought on by the good season. It is a time when both processors and producers are making reasonable margins and not battling each other." The prestigious $10,000 Nippon Meat Packers feature class was won.

103 Daily Mercury, June 20 2001, p 23.  
106 Daily Mercury, June 22 2001, p 42.
again by Wally and Susan Rae’s entries. The most successful exhibitor, winning the champion carcase and two other classes, was Ted Murphy’s Tay-Glen Pastoral Company. 107

Good preparation was one of the reasons for Tay Glen’s success. The company won the most successful hoof exhibitor in the prime cattle section again in 2001, making it five wins from six starts in the competition. The Murphy family has 4000 head, on the company’s three properties, from which to choose their exhibiting stock of around 45 animals. Ted Murphy explained, “We start putting them away in a separate pen from Christmas on, we end up with around 60 or 70 head in the pen, so a lot don’t make it.” On their success at the Mackay Show, Murphy was modest, “We’re just lucky I guess; we get the rain when we need it ... and I take showing a little more seriously than some.” 108

The Mackay State High School Cattle Team were certainly serious when they received first and second place in the up to 560kg live weight section at the 2001 Mackay Show. School agricultural assistant Kim Lawrence said the show gave the 14 students great hands-on experience. “If they want to learn to groom cattle after they leave school, this certainly gives them the experience,” Ms. Lawrence commented. The school had nine head of cattle that year, comprising four steers, two cows, two heifers and one seven-week calf. Three of the steers were sold in the auction and were replaced by stock from a pool of breeders whose names were drawn out of a hat to make the donation. 109 For newer members of the show team, Thursday afternoon of the Mackay Show can be a little overpowering and emotional. This is the time when their trade cattle entries depart the showgrounds to meet their destiny. The cattle have become part of the students’ lives and while they are under no illusions regarding the

fate of their animals, the empty pen is a sharp reminder of the reality of the beef industry.110

"Makes You Feel Proud"

With the added positive dimension that the students from Mackay High School have given to the beef section it seems only right that they should have their say on this extra-curricular activity. For the many patrons who saw Kyle Law’s smiling face while parading, it comes as no surprise when he enthusiastically states “I enjoy leading the cattle around the show ring.” When at school Kyle spends “Just about every day with the cattle,” and considers his involvement as “A good education for a future career in the beef industry.” The 2001 Show was Erin Bowman’s third year of being a member of the Cattle Team. Her first contact with cattle was at the school and decided to join because she likes “being involved with animals and wanted to get to know the cattle.” Erin’s pleasure is evident as she positions one of the calves for yet another patron’s photograph and shyly concedes that, “Yes, the attention is good as people consider us the exhibitors of the future.”111

Hayden Shepherd, at his first Show, made the astute observation that “A lot of the tough kids at school would run a mile if they came near any of the cattle at school let alone train them to be led.” Discipline and patience were attributes that Hayden learnt from his involvement in the Team. He commented that preparing and exhibiting cattle for the Show, “Makes you feel proud.”112 A favourite with the many onlookers crowded around the show ring was Yvonne Clarke, who was associate judge in the breeds other than Brahman stud cattle classes at the Show. With the experience, Yvonne has learned what cattle judges look for in an animal. She started with the Team in 1999 because it “Looked

111 Comments from Cattle Team members, June 21 2001.
112 Comment from Hayden Shepherd, June 21 2001.
like fun and I like animals.” When she finishes school Yvonne hopes to attend the Agricultural College in Emerald. With young men and women such as these, a new generation building on a proud tradition, the progress of both the beef exhibit and the industry is assured.

“Educate and Encourage”

Alan Shannon’s vision for the future of exhibiting beef cattle in Mackay is dependent on the involvement of youth in the practice. “The door should be open to the future” explained Mr. Shannon. “There is a need for youth to be encouraged to be involved in the beef industry, especially those outside the district’s cattle producing families.”

In this respect Mackay State High’s involvement in beef cattle exhibiting is a positive sign for the continued success of the section. If the industry generally adopted Mr. Shannon’s motto of “educate and encourage”, there is a every chance that even more youth will become involved in the beef industry in the future.

“We Protect Our Future By Honouring Our Past”

These words were spoken by Jim Stuart, secretary of the Mackay Show, when commenting on the many photographs and memorial boards dealing with the beef section that line the walls of the 500 Pavilion at the showgrounds. It is hoped that this history has accorded some recognition to the many people, not just those named, who are part of the district’s beef industry community, and who have given their time voluntarily over many years to show their stock in Mackay. In the early years of the Show, the beef section faced many difficulties as producers moved further away from the town. The conditions these early graziers experienced on the land were harsh, primitive and dangerous. However a small number continued to support the section even though it meant personal

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113 Interview with Alan Shannon, June 20 2001.
114 Comment from Jim Stuart, March 15 2001.
hardship and monetary loss. These producers saw a future for the exhibit that they knew would extend beyond their lifetimes. As the town of Mackay prospered and grew leading up to the end of the Second World War, beef exhibitors still faced the toil of walking their stock to the Show to be a part of this premiere community event. Even with breeds of beef cattle that were unsuited for Mackay’s tropical climate they made a living in the industry that they loved. These producers were proud of their stock and wanted the whole Mackay district to have the opportunity to view the finest cattle they could breed.

This tradition continued after the War, with a new generation ensuring the survival, and then prosperity of the section. With the help of motorised transport, they were able to encourage outlying property owners into their Show community. The district’s beef industry saw many changes and innovations in these years, with the introduction of the Brahman and new systems of carcase appraisal. All those involved in the section, not just exhibitors, played an important role in instigating and promoting these changes, thereby delivering a better beef product to the consumer. The latter years of the Mackay Show beef section saw the fruition of all the previous generations’ dedication and hard work when it gained national prominence for the excellence of its exhibit.

Today the cry of “shut the gate” rings out no longer at the Show, because stringent security measures for both workers and patrons have not allowed a beast to escape for over twenty years. This is as it should be, but there is still a twinkle in the eye of the older generation when they recount those escapades of years gone by. Times change, but the beef section’s commitment to its community, to the district, and to the industry means that the gate will always be open to future generations of Mackay district beef cattle producers to show off their very best at that special time once every year.
*HONOUR ROLL

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Jim Stuart
Frank Venselaar
Don Wall
Kerry Woodman
Appendix: Sample of photographs submitted to the Committee for inclusion in Shut the Gate!

Welcome to the Cattleman's Bar, Mackay showgrounds (Maybanks 2001)
Sydney St., circa 1870s (John Oxley)

Shipping in the Pioneer River, circa 1870s (John Oxley)

Mackay in the 1870s (John Oxley)
The verandah at The Hollow, circa 1870s (John Oxley)

Visitors to The Hollow, circa 1870s (John Oxley)

Crocodile near The Hollow, Circa 1870s (John Oxley)
Champions are remembered (Maybanks 2001)

Early carcase judging (Maybanks 2001)
Judging has always been a serious business (Photo from Don Wall)
Mr. Don Wall was well respected as a cattle judge (Photo from Don Wall)
Honouring John Riley (Maybanks 2001)

The Men of Merit (Maybanks 2001)