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The Suburban Frontier

Townsville in the 1960s

Abstract: This article is an edited transcript of a keynote address delivered at the Australian Historical Association Conference held in Townsville from 30 June to 3 July 2025. It provides a social, cultural, and economic snapshot of Townsville during the 1960s. The paper also highlights the establishment of institutions which brought greater national attention to the unofficial capital of North Queensland, including the establishment of the Townsville University College (now James Cook University) and Lavarack Barracks.

The 1960s never really went away. Born just before tropical Cyclone Althea in 1971, you might think I was a child of the seventies but many of my cultural references growing up came from the 1960s. As a child, I had a TV diet of such sixties programmes as 'Get Smart', 'Skippy' and the 'Banana Splits'. Simon & Garfunkel was always on the stereo, and at school, we learned to sing the more earnest folk songs of Ralph McTell, Bob Dylan, and Peter, Paul & Mary in music class.

As I've grown older, I have watched as the 1960s has become simplified for public consumption as a nostalgic narrative of civil rights struggles, free love, bra burning, and Anti-Vietnam student protests. However, when historians (who should know better) try to define the 1960s in these terms alone, then you know that they've left out much of the real story of the sixties.

The history of Australia in the 1960s has largely been written by men and women in Melbourne and Sydney. And the history of Queensland in the 1960s has often been written by Brisbane academics whose main focus is Brisbane, not the state as a whole. Believe it or not, there's still a great deal to discover about the 1960s, especially when it comes to understanding the development of regional areas such as North Queensland. We are too defined in our history by our great and glorious capital cities. Places like Townsville have a history of their own.

Today I'd like to share with you a short snapshot of Townsville in the 1960s, probably the most important decade in terms of its transition from being a big country town to being the big city that it is today.

Townsville before the 1960s

When I say that Townsville was a big country town before the 1960s, I am not implying that it was not an important centre before this time. In fact, from the 1880s onwards, Townsville was unofficially the economic capital of North Queensland. With its fine port and railway facilities, Townsville was where the North's sugar, cattle, and minerals were exported to Australia and the world. As

a regional hub, it attracted labourers, merchants, teachers, bankers, and families in larger numbers than its civic competitors such as Mackay and Cairns.[1]

Townsville's civic development was nevertheless held back before the 1960s by a number of factors. First, the wet season could cause Townsville to be isolated. Second, it was easy to feel cut off from the rest of Australia because of the poor roads heading down south and the fact that the important political centres were in distant Brisbane and Canberra. Finally, for many ambitious young people, it was difficult to see the advantage of staying in Townsville.[2]

There were no opportunities to do tertiary training unless you moved away or had the option of undertaking external studies. Some talent was wasted because parents could either not afford to send their children away to Brisbane or did not see the point. Many students who moved away were lost to Townsville forever as they developed new friendships and interests down south.[3]

Townsville in the 1960s: A Less Isolated Community

During the 1960s, however, the idea of Townsville as isolated, cut off from the rest of Australia and not of much national importance rapidly changed, at least among locals and the more informed government and business elites in Brisbane and elsewhere. Many Australians remained indifferent to Townsville's existence, but there is no doubt that the 1960s saw an explosion of commercial, civic and government activity which made Townsville people more forward looking, outward looking and confident within themselves.

Between 1959 and 1964, several long-term Townsville-related projects were initiated and had mostly come to fruition. The Mount Isa Mines copper refinery near the suburbs of Stuart and Wulguru, the reconstruction of the Mt Isa to Townsville railway, and the creation of the University College of Townsville in 1961 were among the most celebrated.[4]

Perhaps most crucial of all was the sealing of the Bruce Highway between Brisbane and Cairns, which from 1964 onwards was all bitumen surface. As Townsville politician Harry Hopkins proudly declared: "In most weathers, our isolation is a thing of the past. The effect of this will be profound".[5] Better roads meant greater commercial trade and traffic to Townsville and vice versa, but the better roads also encouraged Townsville people to travel for holidays and experience other places as well.

1 See Geoff Hansen: How Goldfields Made Townsville, pp. 6-11; Lyndon Megarrity: Northern Dreams, p. 20; G. C. Bolton: A Thousand Miles Away, p. 330.
2 See Lyndon Megarrity: Northern Dreams, pp. 94 f.
3 See Peter Bell: Our Place in the Sun, p. 15.
4 G. C. Bolton: A Thousand Miles Away, p. 330; Ian N. Moles: Townsville South, 1963, p. 305.
5 North Queensland Register, 2 June 1962, p. 1 (Pulling Together to 'People the North').

CSIRO

There were yet more changes to the Townsville landscape. In 1962, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), opened a branch of its Division of Tropical Pastures in Townsville, followed by the establishment of the Davies Laboratory in 1965. As I have noted elsewhere, the "CSIRO's work on tropical pastures" in Townsville "proved important to the beef cattle industry for the development of improved pastures appropriate to the tropical soils and variable climate".[6]

Lavarack Barracks

The Commonwealth's decision to open an army base in Townsville was also pivotal in transforming the town and widening its sense of national importance. Opened in 1966 by Prime Minister Harold Holt, Lavarack Barracks subsequently became Australia's largest army base, "providing a training centre for soldiers during the Vietnam War".[7] It would go on to make a major contribution to Townsville's economy through the sheer number of soldiers and their families transferring to the city to live and work.

It should also be noted that a Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) base had been established in Townsville during the early stages of World War II.[8] Combined, Lavarack Barracks and the RAAF base cemented Townsville's reputation as a garrison city. It has remained a garrison city. A wise local politician must therefore be conscious of the views of both current and former members of the armed services.

Given the renewed strategic importance of Townsville following the opening of Lavarack Barracks, it is not surprising that US President Lyndon Johnson put Townsville on his itinerary when he toured Australia in 1966. Johnson, who as a US Naval Officer had visited Townsville in 1942, paid a nostalgic visit to his former home away from home, Buchanan's Hotel.[9]

Education Institutions

Aside from the new army base, the city saw the establishment of other key institutions. In 1969, for example, the Townsville Teachers College opened. The college was adjacent to the new Douglas campus of University College of Townsville, which became a fully-fledged University in its own right in 1970. It was now

6 Lyndon Megarrity: Northern Dreams, p. 100.
7 Ibid., p. 100.
8 See Keith Richmond: The Edge of the Storm, pp. 4-13.
9 See Lyndon Johnson: Remarks at Townsville upon Departing from Australia.

the James Cook University of North Queensland, and it was the first university in Northern Australia.[10]

Townsville's Growth

All these new regional and national projects brought many newcomers to the city, all needing accommodation, services and entertainment. Between 1961 and 1971 Townsville's urban population grew from 51 143 to 95 464.[11] With most families wanting their own homes, former fringe suburbs like Mundingburra were now in the middle of town. Relatively new suburbs like Gulliver, Pimlico and Aitkenvale were expanding, putting pressure on the local council for more facilities and infrastructure.[12]

So there was an unprecedented explosion of new projects, new ideas, new capital and new sense of civic purpose in Townsville during the 1960s. In many ways, Townsville was in the right place at the right time, but the city was fortunate enough to have many forward-looking citizens who were able to fully capitalise on the town's good fortune.

Townsville = Northern Australia?

It is fair to say that Townsville was the chief beneficiary of the post-war pressure on the Commonwealth Government to develop Northern Australia. During the 1950s and 1960s, politicians from all parties accused the Liberal-Country Party Coalition Government of neglecting the North. Furthermore, it was argued that the Commonwealth was failing to provide the dams and other infrastructure that would fulfil the potential of Northern Australia's mineral and agricultural resources. Indeed, the federal Labor Party in the 1960s campaigned heavily in North Queensland on a platform of developing the North and creating a new Snowy Mountains Scheme in the tropics.[13]

It was also a time when military and political unrest in Indonesia and Vietnam encouraged many Australians to believe that Northern Australia needed a huge injection of European settlers and industry to protect its vulnerable borders. This was the last gasp of the racially-based fear that the so-called Empty North would succumb to Asian invasion if northern development was not accelerated.[14]

10 See Peter Bell: Our Place in the Sun, p. 27. It was not until 1980 that all university departments were transferred from the original Pimlico campus to the new Douglas campus. See ibid., p. 43.

11 See Commonwealth Statistician: Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30th June, 1961 Vol. III. – Queensland, Part V. – Population and Dwellings in Localities, p. 35; Commonwealth Statistician: Census of Population and Housing, 30 June 1971, Bulletin 6. Population and Dwellings in Local Government Areas and Urban Centres Part 3. Queensland, p. 2.

12 See Ian N. Moles: Townsville South, 1963, p. 306.

13 This section draws on Lyndon Megarrity: The Neglected North, pp. 318-321; Lyndon Megarrity: Northern Dreams, p. 95 ff.; Russell McGregor: Environment, Race, and Nationhood in Australia, pp. 212-216.

14 The concept of the 'Empty North' is explored in David Walker: Anxious Nation, pp. 113-126.

Closer to home, the North Queensland Local Government Association formed the People the North Committee, which aimed to massively increase the North's population to maximise the region's prosperity and make it more strategically important to the Commonwealth. Under the leadership of Townsville alderman Harry Hopkins, People the North engaged in a skilful publicity campaign through TV, newspapers and political lobbying. It tried to convince sceptical southerners that the suburban lifestyles of Sydney and Melbourne could be replicated in the North, from cutting the grass to cleaning the car on Sunday. The People the North campaign attracted national attention in the first half of the 1960s.

While the Commonwealth governments of Robert Menzies, Harold Holt and John Gorton knew they had to respond in some way to the strong political and media interest in the North's potential, they were also understandably concerned that spending money on large-scale dams and agricultural subsidies might lead to a circus full of White Elephants. It was far easier to spend money in Southern Australia where markets were well developed and good infrastructure was in place.

So what could the Commonwealth do about the North? It was a tough question. They needed to be seen to be doing something, while avoiding projects that might come to nothing. A big part of the Federal solution was to invest in projects that encouraged the social and economic growth of Townsville, the unofficial capital of Northern Australia.

Townsville to Mount Isa Railway Reconstruction

The Commonwealth's £20 million loan to the Queensland Government to reconstruct the Mount Isa to Townsville railway during the 1960s is a case in point. It benefited not only leading base metal producer Mount Isa Mines but also contributed substantially to the continued prosperity of Townsville's copper refinery and port, the latter being a major exporter of North Queensland's mineral resources. Indeed, Prime Minister Robert Menzies privately told Queensland Premier Frank Nicklin that the reconstructed Mount Isa to Townsville line "will make its largest appeal to all our people if it is seen as something which will open up a new era of development, not only for one Company but for the whole of the North".[15]

In addition to the reconstructed rail link to Mt Isa, Townsville benefited from Australian Government funding of a branch of the CSIRO, the partial federal subsidisation of the University College, and the Commonwealth's creation of a large army base. The Federal government could point to all of these projects and say that they were supporting the development of Northern Australia.

15 Menzies cited in Lyndon Megarrity: Northern Dreams, p. 88. See also Lyndon Megarrity: Menzies's Close Shave, pp. 211 f.

Townsville: The North's Most Developed City

There were a number of compelling reasons why the Commonwealth made Townsville its northern showcase. The most obvious reason was that Townsville was the most developed city in the tropical north during the 1960s. It had reasonable, if not perfect, infrastructure such as sealed roads and water supply. Its long-term status as a regional hub had ensured that it had many of the facilities that newly arriving families wanted, including parks, supermarkets, hospitals, a good choice of schools and cinemas. Further, it made sense to concentrate major regional resources in a specific location, and Townsville was the northern city with the largest population.

But while Townsville had a strong case for Commonwealth funding, so did Mackay and Cairns. It was not a foregone conclusion that Townsville would lead the north in terms of its educational, government, military and commercial facilities in the 1960s. In fact, one of the major reasons why Townsville developed so rapidly in this era was due to the foresight of its local council.

A Visionary Local Council and Townsville's Growth

Between 1949 and 1967, the Townsville City Council was run by a group of businessmen and professionals called the Townsville Citizens' Association. The Mayor for most of this period was the owner of Angus Smith's sports store, book store and newsagency, that is, Mr. Angus Smith himself.[16] Smith was a former Royal Australian Air Force pilot who served with distinction in World War II. He was well known as a tennis player, and when Dr Rex Patterson was running for the federal seat of Dawson in 1966, he thought it worth mentioning that he had beaten Angus Smith in the 1946 North Queensland tennis championship.[17]

Under Smith's leadership, the Townsville City Council made vast improvements to essential services such as water, sewerage and roads. Such public works helped the town recover from the crippling infrastructure problems it suffered as a result of hosting tens of thousands of US and Australian troops during the Second World War. Smith's legacy included the centenary fountain at Anzac Park and the completion of the Tobruk Memorial Baths, at which iconic Olympic swimmers like Dawn Fraser trained. However, perhaps the biggest legacy of the Angus Smith years was the council's facilitation of big regional projects through the strategic gifting of council land.[18]

When the University of Queensland (UQ) took the initiative to establish a branch of UQ in the suburb of Pimlico in Townsville, they had initially seen it as a place where students would do one or two years' study, and then transfer

16 Information on Angus Smith and his legacy draws on Lyndon Megarrity: Smith, Angus James (1911-1997).

17 Patterson defeated Smith in the men's doubles, not the singles, although this was not specified in the Dawson campaign. See Lyndon Megarrity: Rex Patterson, p. 15.

18 This section on the gifting of council of land draws on Peter Bell: Our Place in the Sun, pp. 16-27.

to Brisbane. Deputy Mayor George Roberts was one of many local residents who had greater ambitions for the local university. He had a vision of a university in the countryside, a place where students and staff "could relax and think deeply".[19]

Roberts persuaded the Townsville City Council to purchase land from a farming family at what is now the site of the James Cook University in the suburb of Douglas. In 1962, the Council successfully transferred the Douglas land to the University of Queensland to be used for the Townsville University. This visionary decision by the council helped to give North Queensland its own independent university in a relatively brief period of time.

The Council also gifted council land near Douglas to the CSIRO, which enabled it to establish the Davies Laboratory in 1965. Still more council land near the Douglas campus was given free of charge to the Queensland Department of Education, which then built the Townsville Teachers College, opening in time for the 1969 teaching year.

The Townsville City Council's gifting of land to education and research institutions showed local government at its very best. People like Angus Smith and George Roberts helped Townsville to take advantage of its position as a regional centre and provide opportunities for cultural enrichment and economic growth.

Without a strong visionary council, Townsville in the 1960s would probably have been a different place. It would no doubt have continued to grow, but at a slower pace and more young people would have been lost to the north.

The People of Townsville

I have given you the history of Townsville in broad, big picture terms. But now I would like to zoom a little closer, if I may, and talk about what it was like to live in Townsville during the 1960s. The demographics of Townsville back then were fairly homogenous. People of British or Irish extraction predominated, and the social and spiritual role of the Protestant and Catholic churches remained a vital part of many people's lives. This was not dissimilar to many other places in Australia at that time. Despite the very White Australian atmosphere, one of Townsville's leading businessmen in the 1960s was the Chinese Australian Philip Leong, who was developing a mini-empire of supermarkets across Townsville's suburban landscape.[20]

First Nations People

As the 1960s progressed, the number of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islander people living in Townsville began to rise sharply. This was partly because official state policies began to encourage First Nations people to lead more independent lives. Accordingly, many Aboriginal people started to leave missions and

19 George Roberts, 2008, cited in ibid., p. 18.
20 See Townsville Bulletin, 20 March 2007, p. 27 (Pioneers: The Leong Family).

reserves for places like Townsville.[21] It should also be remembered that Torres Strait Islanders had had a history of working on the mainland since the post-war years, and Townsville's job opportunities encouraged many islanders to settle there.[22] One such Townsville resident of note was Eddie Mabo, whose successful land claim later changed Australian law forever.[23]

Another significant First Nations figure of the time was social activist and educator Evelyn Scott, who was involved with the Townsville Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advancement League. She campaigned for a YES Vote in the Commonwealth Constitutional Referendum of 1967, which symbolised the growing movement towards national inclusion for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people in the community. Between 1997 and 2000, she served as chair of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation.[24]

The significant presence of First Nations people in Townsville also inspired local historians such as Henry Reynolds and Noel Loos to conduct pioneering studies of the Indigenous side of North Queensland's frontier past.[25] There still remains, however, a lot of history to write about Townsville's First Nations communities from the 1960s onwards.

Women in Townsville

Like elsewhere in Australia at the time, the notion of the husband as the breadwinner and the wife as the home maker and family nurturer was still very strong. Living in the newer suburbs could be isolating for many housewives, as they often experienced poor public transport and lack of community centres.[26] Because women in the post-war years tended to marry and have children early, many older women felt a yearning to work outside the home as their children went to school and became independent. Such women were often held back by out of date qualifications.

The historian reading 1967 issues of the 'Townsville Daily Bulletin' encounters many different perspectives on the lives of women. For example, there are ads for Sanatogen, the "only" protein nerve tonic. "A month ago, my nerves were in a dreadful state", the fictitious Mrs Burrows writes, "I was always in tears and felt everything was too much to cope with. I felt like running away from my family". Then she tried Sanatogen and everything turned out just fine.[27]

Elsewhere in the 'Bulletin', the members of the northern division of the Queensland Country Women's Association proudly pose next to their award winning

21 See Henry Reynolds: Why Weren't We Told?, p. 29.
22 See Ross Fitzgerald, Lyndon Megarrity, David Symons: Made in Queensland, p. 141.
23 See Noel Loos, Koiki Mabo: Eddie Koiki Mabo.
24 See Townsville Bulletin, 22 September 2017, p. 42 (Amos Aikman: Champion for her People).
25 See Trisha Fielding: A University for the North, p. 30.
26 See National Council of Women (Townsville Branch): Some Aspects of Development in Townsville, based on Branches of Study outlined by the Duke of Edinburgh's Study Conference and printed in 1968 for the Duke of Edinburgh's Third Commonwealth Study Conference. Item located in the National Council of Women (Townsville Branch) archive, held by James Cook University Library Special Collections.
27 Townsville Daily Bulletin, 24 April 1967, p. 7 (Advertisement).

shortbread, fruit and orange cake, chutney and jam.[28] By contrast, the Townsville branch of the Local Government Women's Association make passionate appeals for women to devote more time to public life, claiming in the 'Bulletin' that "Civic Management could be regarded as housekeeping for the city, and women could contribute if given a chance".[29]

Indeed, the sixties saw the political rise of Joan Innes Reid, a medical social worker. In 1967, Joan became the first female councillor on the Townsville City Council and later served as deputy mayor. Joan was subsequently employed by James Cook University as a senior tutor in Behavioural Sciences, and helped pave the way for the creation of the university's Bachelor of Social Work degree.[30]

Another significant Townsville woman who made a mark in public from the 1960s onwards was the teacher and activist Margaret Reynolds, who moved to the north with her husband Henry Reynolds when he took up a position at the University College. In 1966, Margaret initiated a local branch of the anti-conscriptionist Save Our Sons movement and was instrumental in the creation of the One People of Australia League Kindergarten for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, later known as Kindergarten Headstart. Among her many public achievements, she went on to become Queensland's first female Labor senator in 1983 and served as a Minister in the Hawke Government.[31]

Changing Times

As we've seen, cultural expectations often held back women during this time. At the same time, the sixties was also probably the last time that Townsville could be regarded as a working man's town. There were two meatworks, skilled and unskilled work was available on the railways or the copper refinery, and many local factories were thriving. A cement works, a brick works, a tin can factory, glass works, sawmilling, and paint manufacture were among the many local employment opportunities for blue collar workers during this era.[32]

However, to quote our friend Bob Dylan, the times they were a'changing. The port was handling more sugar, meat and mining concentrates than ever before, but increasing automation meant that fewer labourers were needed.[33]

On the other hand, white collar jobs in the professions, private industry and the public service were providing more opportunities to the younger generation. Realising this, parents and officials encouraged students to stay at school longer to gain more qualifications. This was assisted by the Queensland Government's

28 See Townsville Daily Bulletin, 24 April 1967, p. 7 (Q.C.W.A. Cooking Competition).
29 Townsville Daily Bulletin, 24 April 1967, p. 7 (Greater Public Role for Women is Urged).
30 See Heather Grant: Great Queensland Women, p. 20; Joan Innes Reid with Ros Thorpe: Tropical Odyssey, pp. 203-206.
31 See Rodney Sullivan: Reynolds, Margaret (1941-), pp. 204-209.
32 See Ian N. Moles: Townsville South, 1963, p. 305.
33 See National Council of Women (Townsville Branch), Some Aspects of Development in Townsville, based on Branches of Study outlined by the Duke of Edinburgh's Study Conference and printed in 1968 for the Duke of Edinburgh's Third Commonwealth Study Conference. Item located in the National Council of Women (Townsville Branch) archive, held by the James Cook University Library Special Collections.

decision to raise school leaving age from 14 to 15, which came into force in 1965.[34] Further, the existence of the Townsville University College encouraged a small but growing number of North Queenslanders to seek tertiary education.

The University College: Culture Shock

Fig. 1. Professor Brian Dalton, circa 1970

The university lecturers who taught Townsville students in the 1960s were often undergoing culture shock at the same time. Many had travelled from southern areas to take up a position in the tropics, and it took a bit of getting used to. History Professor Brian Dalton (Fig. 1) echoed the comments of many University appointees who travelled to isolated North Queensland in the 1960s: he thought it was dreadful! Dalton's reaction was made worse by the fact that he arrived in January, the hottest part of the year. He especially remembered the discomfort of travelling up the coastal roads in Queensland. Most of the roads were sealed, but were frequently not wide enough to permit two cars to travel in opposite directions without swerving to the side of the road on approach of traffic.[35]

However, many academics grew to enjoy life in Townsville. Because it was a small campus, they had more chance of standing out and more opportunities to take on leadership roles than if they had stayed in Brisbane or Sydney.[36] There was also a bit of time for rest, relaxation and collegiality. For example, historian Peter Bell has told the story of a 1960s event held in the student refectory at Pimlico, where they had a procession with everyone dressed in academic gowns. Because the refectory didn't have a liquor licence, "each member of the academic procession carried a plastic esky full of ice and drinks".[37]

34 See Greg Logan, Eddie Clarke: State Education in Queensland, p. 24.
35 Brian Dalton, interviewed by Barbara Erskine, 19 August 1992. Located in North Queensland Oral History Collection, held by James Cook University Library Special Collections.
36 For details of staff and student experiences in the 1960s, see Anne Deane [et al.] (editorial committee): Year of 1967. There are several other booklets in this retrospective series of staff and student reminiscences, ranging from 1961 to 1970.
37 Peter Bell: Our Place in the Sun, p. 27.

Townsville Cinema and Musical Offerings

Apart from BYO academic parades,[38] what else was there to do in Townsville during the 1960s? Well one cheap option was the cinema. There were many cinemas in Townsville, including the Astor in Currajong, the Esquire in North Ward, the Regent Theatre in Hermit Park, and, of course, the Wintergarden in the city, which also hosted live performances.[39] But if you were going on a date in 1964, you might consider going to one of Townsville's fine drive-in movie theatres, such as the Norline, where you could watch the delightful Helen Shapiro and Chubby Checker in their brand new movie 'It's Trad, Dad!'.[40]

For the musically inclined, Townsville had a lot to offer. For the younger set, there were bands like the Squares. In 1968, they advertised one of their gigs in the 'Townsville Daily Bulletin' with the following phrase: "Flower Power!! At the 'Scene'. Music by the Squares. A prize to the swingingest love child".[41] Where did this groovy band play for these wild Townsville scenesters? Where else but the Young Women's Christian Association Hall in Denham Street?

For those of a more mature vintage, there was old time dancing at the Oonoonba Youth Club, the Hotel Allen Dinner Dance, or perhaps a tête a tête at the Vale Hotel's "spacious lounge" and "beautiful tropical garden setting".[42] In 1964, the Great Northern Hotel was offering piano entertainment on Saturday morning for wives patiently waiting for their husbands to finish their beer. "LADIES", the advertisement read: "While waiting for Dad, why not rest in comfort in our well-conducted Lounge at the Great Northern?".[43]

Townsville on the Weekend

On the weekend, Townsville people had a good range of options for family outings. You could enjoy a picnic at the Queen's Gardens or the Strand (the latter being a popular beachfront location). You could go for a swim at the beach, drive to the Town Common or perhaps take a ferry ride over to Magnetic Island. By the end of sixties, Magnetic Island had many attractions. You could pat Koalas and "buy a locally made palm leaf hat" from Jim Moore, the "hatter of Horseshoe Bay".[44] You could also take in the Nelly Bay aquarium with its sharks, turtles and giant clams.

Apart from family outings, many Townsvilleans spent their weekends playing sport. Tennis, cricket, basketball, squash, the various codes of football and lawn bowls were all very popular.

38 BYO is Australian slang for 'Bring your own alcohol'. BYO is often used in the context of parties and other social functions.
39 See Townsville Daily Bulletin, 1 April 1967, p. 11 (Advertisement).
40 See Townsville Daily Bulletin, 17 October 1964, p. 11 (Advertisement).
41 Townsville Daily Bulletin, 22 November 1968, p. 19 (Advertisement).
42 Townsville Daily Bulletin, 1 April 1967, p. 11 (Advertisement).
43 Townsville Daily Bulletin, 17 October 1964, p. 11 (Advertisement).
44 George Farwell: Sun Country, p. 42.

Being almost totally a sports-free zone, I'm not really the best person to talk about Townsville's sporting history, but I can't discuss the sixties without mentioning the annual Magnetic Island to Townsville swim. Chaired by local jeweller Pat Molloy, the Magnetic Island to Townsville swim was the central attraction of a larger festival called the Magnetikhana, held over three weekends.[45]

It was a big deal in the sixties. There were woodchopping contests, fashion parades, fireworks at the Strand, merry-go-rounds for the kids, a tagged fishing competition, a town procession led by Father Neptune, and last but not least, the judging of that year's Magnetikhana Queen. The winning Queen in 1964 received a gold wristlet watch, a trip for two to Brisbane flying Ansett-ANA airways and the chance to see her face on the 1965 published programme. Such beauty and personality contests for women started to go out of fashion as the sixties turned into the seventies.

The Creative Arts

In terms of artistic culture, the 1960s saw quiet but positive growth. By 1968 an art society had been running for five years in North Ward with a membership of 100. Classes were held two to three times a week, and travelling exhibitions such as those organised by the Queensland Art Gallery and Esso found a ready Townsville audience.[46]

There was also a lively local theatre scene. At the tail end of the decade, three amateur dramatic societies amalgamated to form the Townsville Little Theatre. It is still going strong in 2025.[47]

In addition, there were ambitious locals who sought to foster a strong literary culture in the region. With the strong initial involvement of English teachers at Pimlico high school, an enthusiastic group self-published what they claimed was North Queensland's first literary magazine. They called it, appropriately enough, the 'North'. Published through most of the 1960s, the journal offered a chance for locals to express their views on life and literature in the North.

I don't feel qualified to judge the merits of the North's poetic contributions, but I do like the verse of one anonymous poet, which reads:

> Drought brings inertia
> To all my nasturtia![48]

Townsville in the sixties also boasted a successful songwriter and performer named John Ashe, whose songs were recorded by Slim Dusty and Chad Morgan. Ashe's better known songs tended to be topical and country-flavoured, such as his immortal comic ditty 'The Juvenile Delinquent' (1961), which, among other

45 See Magnetikhana Programme for 1964, held in James University Library Special Collections. See also Geoff Hansen, Diane Menghetti: Caged, p. 20.
46 See Barbara Douglas: The Art Society, pp. 25 f.
47 For more details of the formation of the Townsville Little Theatre, see Performing Arts Historical Society, Townsville Inc. (PAHST).
48 Anonymous, included in North, No. 6, 1968, p. 28.

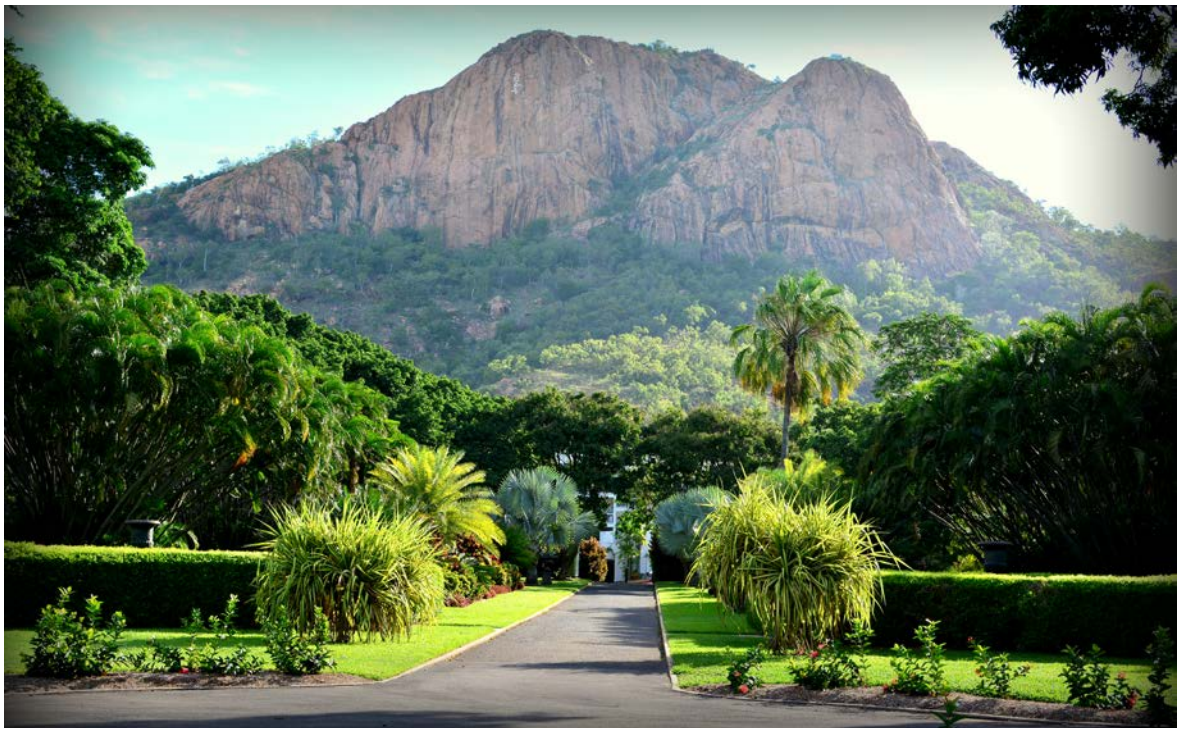

Fig. 2. View of Castle Hill and Queen's Gardens, Townsville

things, attributed delinquency to sex and violence in motion pictures.[49] As local author Suzy Dickson wrote of Ashe's versifying skills in 1964: "While the Civic Fathers might hesitate to use these songs in a publicity drive, residents of the Townsville district cannot fail to respond to their authenticity".[50]

Recreational Reading

Aside from poetry and song, one of the most popular cultural activities of Townsvilleans in this era was recreational reading. Between 1965 and 1966, library membership rose from 2700 to 4260. Alderman Harry Hopkins suggested that this was "indicative of the end of the television infatuation period".[51] Perhaps not, but suddenly the resources and facilities of Townsville's CBD library seemed insufficient and distant to residents of Townsville's newer suburbs like Wulguru and Aitkenvale.

The Council committed funds in 1969 to build the Aitkenvale Library, which opened in 1971.[52] This was one example of the growth of Townsville: while then, as now, Townsvilleans had a sentimental attachment to the traditional city shopping precinct, the real centre of the city was moving from Flinders Street to the suburbs which were expanding inland along Ross River.

49 Recordings of Chad Morgan singing 'The Juvenile Delinquent' are available in many analogue and digital formats.
50 Suzy Dickson: Culture in North Queensland, p. 5.
51 Townsville Daily Bulletin, 21 May 1966, p. 2 (Big Upsurge in Use of Library).
52 See Richard Sayers: The History of Townsville Library Service, pp. 26-29.

Reflections

In 1970, Paul Wherry of Charters Towers said that he was "convinced […] that in another twenty years Townsville will be so overgrown, so cramped for living space" that people will "commute by air to Townsville, and live in the perfect climate of Charters Towers".[53] Well, it didn't quite work out like that. Townsville has continued to grow and attract new industries, new opportunities and new people. And I believe that the town that so many of us enjoy living in today, with all its promise and potential, owes much to the 1960s, which was a great catalyst to the long-term development of Townsville and its citizens. As a result, it has community, education and economic facilities that many regional towns can only dream of, and it is still a great place to live (Fig. 2).

At the same time, it has a built and natural heritage worth preserving. The challenge for historians and Townsville residents is to build an awareness among politicians, urban planners and developers that retaining and remembering the unique aspects of Townsville's past can only enhance the city's appeal to visitors and new residents alike.

And places like the Strand – where so many family memories have been made – need to be treated with care and respect so that families in the future can make their own memories there too.

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List of Illustrations

Fig. 1: Professor Brian Dalton, circa 1970, © James Cook University, JCU Records.
Fig. 2: View of Castle Hill and Queen's Gardens, Townsville. Photograph by R.G. Megarrity, 2014.

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53 Wherry, cited in George Farwell: Sun Country, p. 44.

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