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CHAPTER FIVE

287 - 366

*MACKAY : FARMERS AND CO-OPERATIVE CENTRAL MILLS**1864 - 1927*

1. Introduction	
Mackay : 1885 and 1925	288
2. European labourers and small farm cultivators	296
A. 1864 - 1878	300
B. 1879 - 1884	307
C. 1885 - 1890	317
D. 1891 - 1906	325
E. 1907 - 1927	335
3. Conclusion	354

## 1. Introduction

### Mackay: 1885 and 1925

Sugar cane was first planted at Mackay in 1865. For its first two decades the industry was the domain of plantation owners. The plantation regime was characterized by large farming units, vertical integration of the farming and milling process, and extensive human capital investment using indentured Melanesian labour, the whole process personally supervised by the entrepreneur-owner or his manager. The industry boomed in the early 1880s: speculation was rife; the acreage under cane increased dramatically, as did the amount of sugar produced; and Melanesian circular-migration reached its peak. Then calamity struck. Queensland's sugar industry was profitable only because the high price of sugar on the world market covered its inefficiency, low productivity and rising labour costs. But the world sugar price, declining since 1881, fell by a third in 1884, and continued to fall until a slight recovery in 1888-9.<sup>1</sup> It was another three decades before the 1883 price was again equalled; by that time the Queensland sugar industry had been completely restructured.

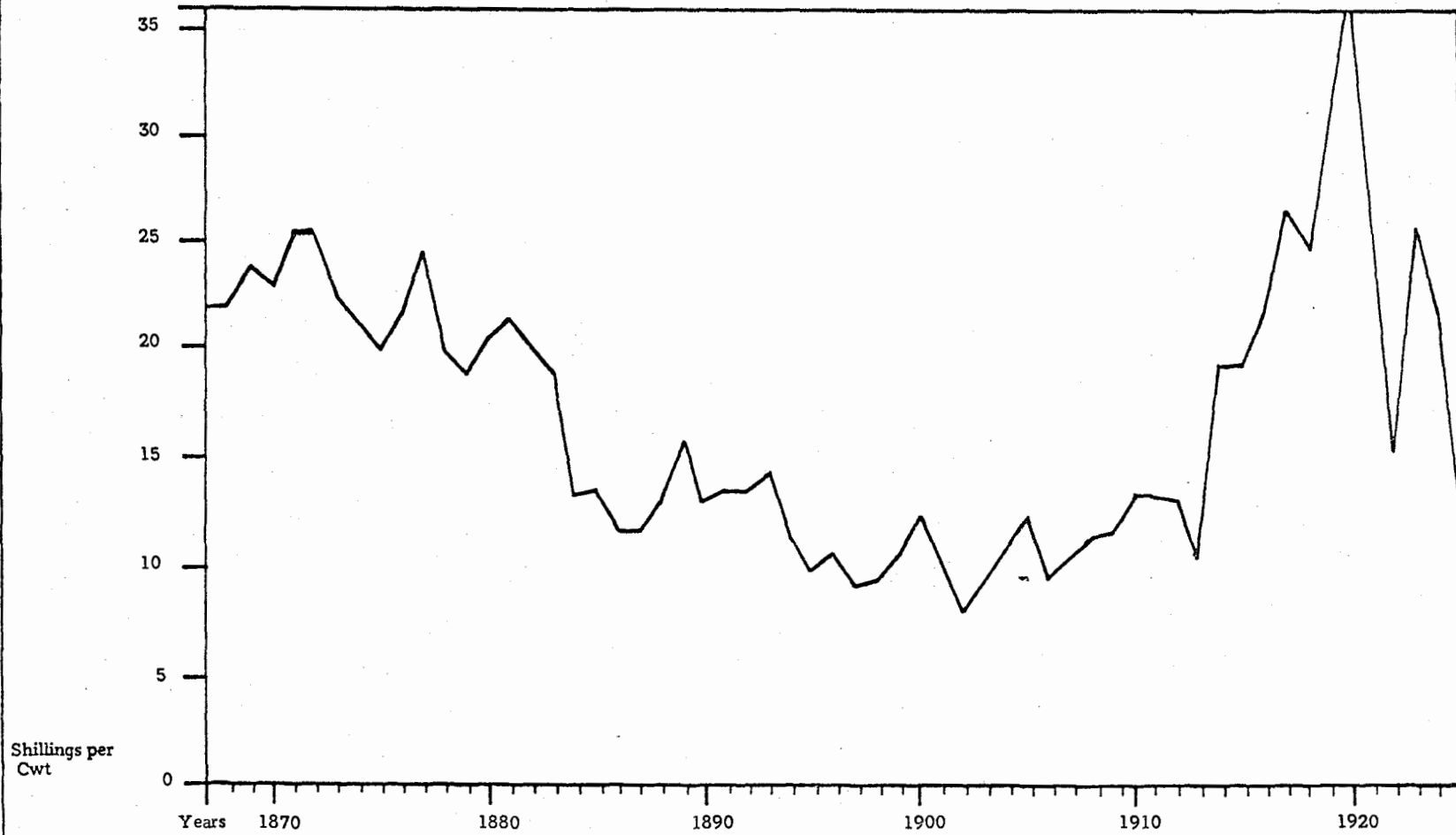
In 1885 there were thirty plantation mills operating at Mackay: twenty-eight growing most of their own cane but also accepting cane from surrounding small farm cultivators, and two growing very little cane of their own, operating primarily as central mills supplied by surrounding small farm cultivators. That year the district produced 21,604 tons of raw sugar. During the following decades the industry was transformed, from the plantation regime to the pattern which remains today: large central mills co-operatively owned by small farm operators. The first farmer-controlled central mills in Queensland were completed at Mackay in 1888, under government sponsorship. By 1900 five farmers' mills had been built in the district and in that year for the first time the farmer-controlled mills out-produced the

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1. Refer to Graph One. The falling price was primarily due to the expanded output of European beet sugar.

Graph One

World Raw Sugar Prices: 1867-1925



Source: Lowndes, *South Pacific Enterprise*, pp.442-3

remaining seven plantation mills.<sup>2</sup> In 1905 there were only ten mills operating; half were plantation mills and half farmer-owned mills, together manufacturing 32,380 tons of sugar. Two decades later in 1925 only seven mills remained: six were farmers' central mills; one, *Farleigh*, the sole surviving mill on the north side of the river, was grower-supplied but privately owned.<sup>3</sup> In 1925 the seven mills produced three times as much sugar as had been produced by thirty mills in 1885.<sup>4</sup> All seven are still functioning in 1981. 1925, therefore, can be taken as marking the end of the transformation which had begun fifty years earlier. Innovations continued, of course, but without changing the broad features of the system that had emerged by 1925.

The modern Australian sugar industry is unique in the world<sup>5</sup> because of a combination of features, all but one of which date from the 1885-1925 period.

1. The cane is processed in large central mills:  
in 1980 thirty-three mills produced over 3,000,000 tonnes of raw sugar.

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2. 1900 sugar production at Mackay

<u>Plantation mills</u>	Tons	<u>Farmers' mills</u>	Tons
Farleigh	1000	Racecourse	2000
Habana	1000	North Eton	1700
Homebush	4300	Marian	2250
Meadowlands	550	Pleystowe	1800
Nindaroo	800	Plane Creek	2350
Palms	1650		
Palmyra	400		
	9700		10100

Note: These figures are slightly lower than the 1900 total in Table One because they were collected at the end of the year rather than at the end of the 1900 season.

Source: *SJ&TC*, v. 10 (1901), 167.

3. *Farleigh*, sub-divided and leased to small farm cultivators since 1903, was sold to its growers in 1927.
4. Refer to Table One and Graphs Two and Three for an overview of the Mackay sugar industry during the period under discussion.
5. This discussion is limited to cane sugar production, leaving beet sugar aside altogether.

TABLE ONE: Mackay District Statistics for Sugar and other major agricultural Crops : 1885-1927.

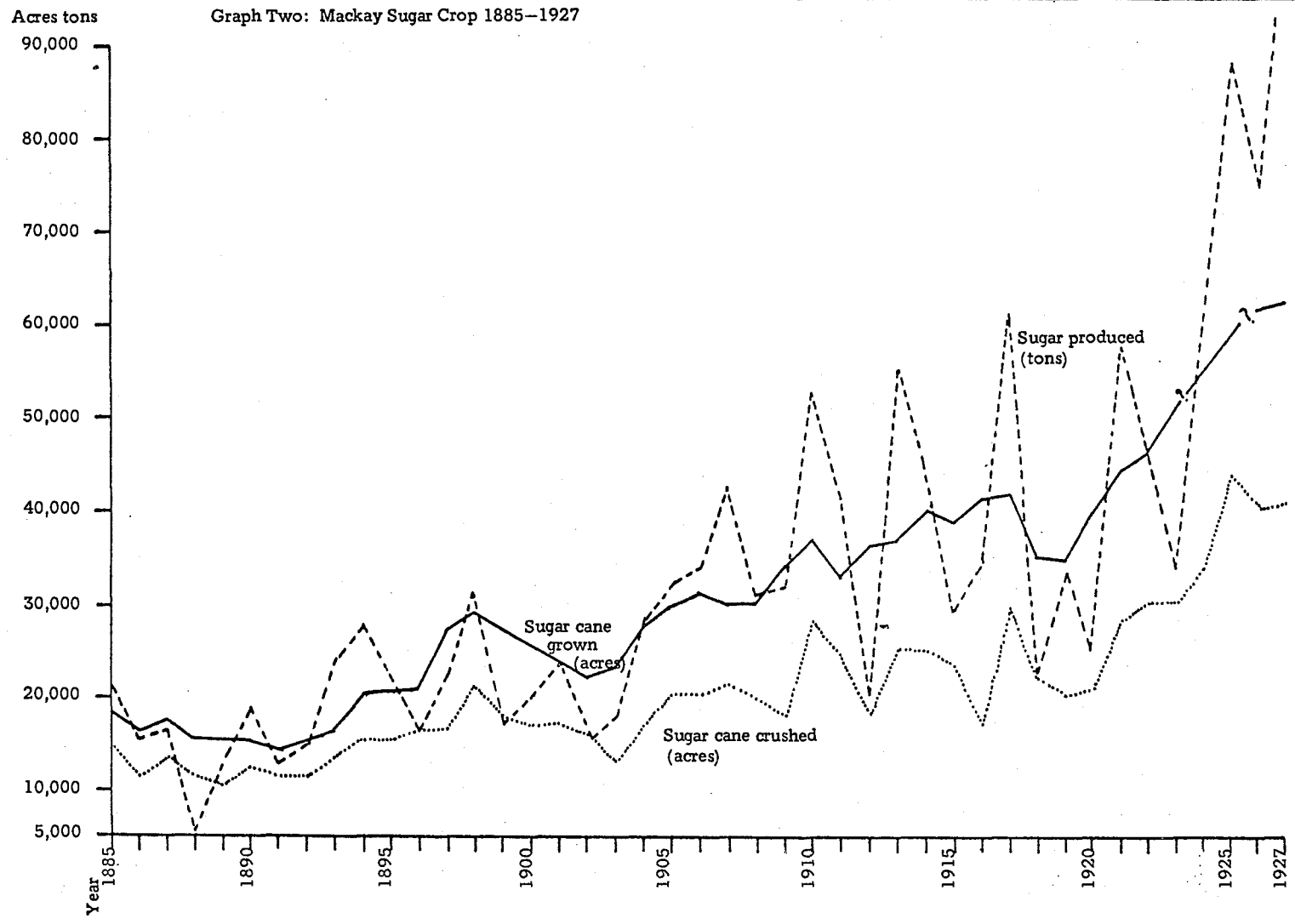
Year	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	Sugar cane grown (acres)	Sugar cane crushed (acres)	Sugar produced (tons)	Sugar mills (number)	Fodder and grain (acres)	Potatoes (acres)	Gardens and fruit (acres)	TOTAL land under crop (acres)	Cane as % of total crop
1885	18532	14604	21604	23	629	380	129	19616	94.4
1886	16165	11466	15511	19	579	343	129	17237	93.7
1887	17422	13497	16588	14	482	352	208	18518	94.0
1888	15861	11539	5464	14	582	312	263	17033	93.1
1889	15729	10592	13003	15	972	451	265	17435	90.2
1890	15791	12815	19478	15	805	336	260	17307	91.2
1891	14397	11818	13473	13	526	387	323	15702	91.6
1892	15853	11778	15156	12	310	299	305	16806	94.3
1893	16560	13924	24872	12	386	283	204	17458	94.8
1894	20290	15514	27913	12	290	164	189	20952	96.8
1895	20556	15566	22839	12	293	110	109	21036	97.7
1896	21076	16428	16515	12	343	168	159	21765	96.8
1897	27264	16794	22604	12	520	203	156	28235	96.5
1898	29891	21350	31780	12	121	130	135	30584	97.7
1899	27317	18343	17521	12	350	263	166	28492	95.8
1900	26094	17126	20194	12	551	351	177	27614	94.4
1901	24284	17769	24093	10	484	297	185	25583	94.9
1902	22379	16369	16676	9	571	315	145	23888	93.6
1903	23473	13245	18329	9	1281	324	171	25608	91.6
1904	28182	17622	28305	9	47	204	185	28952	97.3
1905	30328	20762	32380	10	109	118	172	30915	98.1
1906	31472	20529	34338	11	47	95	313	32127	97.9
1907	30386	21779	43022	11	48	83	273	30949	98.1
1908	30483	20378	31743	10	78	43	181	30951	98.4
1909	34203	18721	32697	10	181	78	217	34909	97.9
1910	37142	28872	53171	10	78	124	262	37777	98.3
1911	33637	25063	41975	10	28	18	269	34257	98.1
1912	36834	18850	20731	10	191	135	276	37720	97.6
1913	37021	25320	55221	10	124	151	263	37741	98.0
1914	40540	25834	43462	10	40	66	241	41130	98.5
1915	39050	24104	29909	9	943	36	142	40224	97.1
1916	41611	17677	35143	9	419	86	173	42339	98.2
1917	42053	25959	61463	9	195	46	139	42448	99.0
1918	35426	22838	22587	9	330	77	138	35984	98.4
1919	35072	20787	34855	9	562	31	168	35982	97.4
1920	40089	21390	25947	9	604	98	204	40979	97.8
1921	44583	28500	57698	9	224	27	164	44999	99.0
1922	46864	30980	46115	8	5	33	162	47363	98.9
1923	51110	30541	34637	8	1	45	123	51920	98.4
1924*	n.a.	34865	62337	8	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1925*	n.a.	44332	89106	7	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1926	62229	40692	70199	7	262	49	213	62845	99.0
1927	62971	41157	103685	7	175	49	186	63471	99.2

Note\*: These statistics are not available at the James Cook University or the John Oxley Libraries.

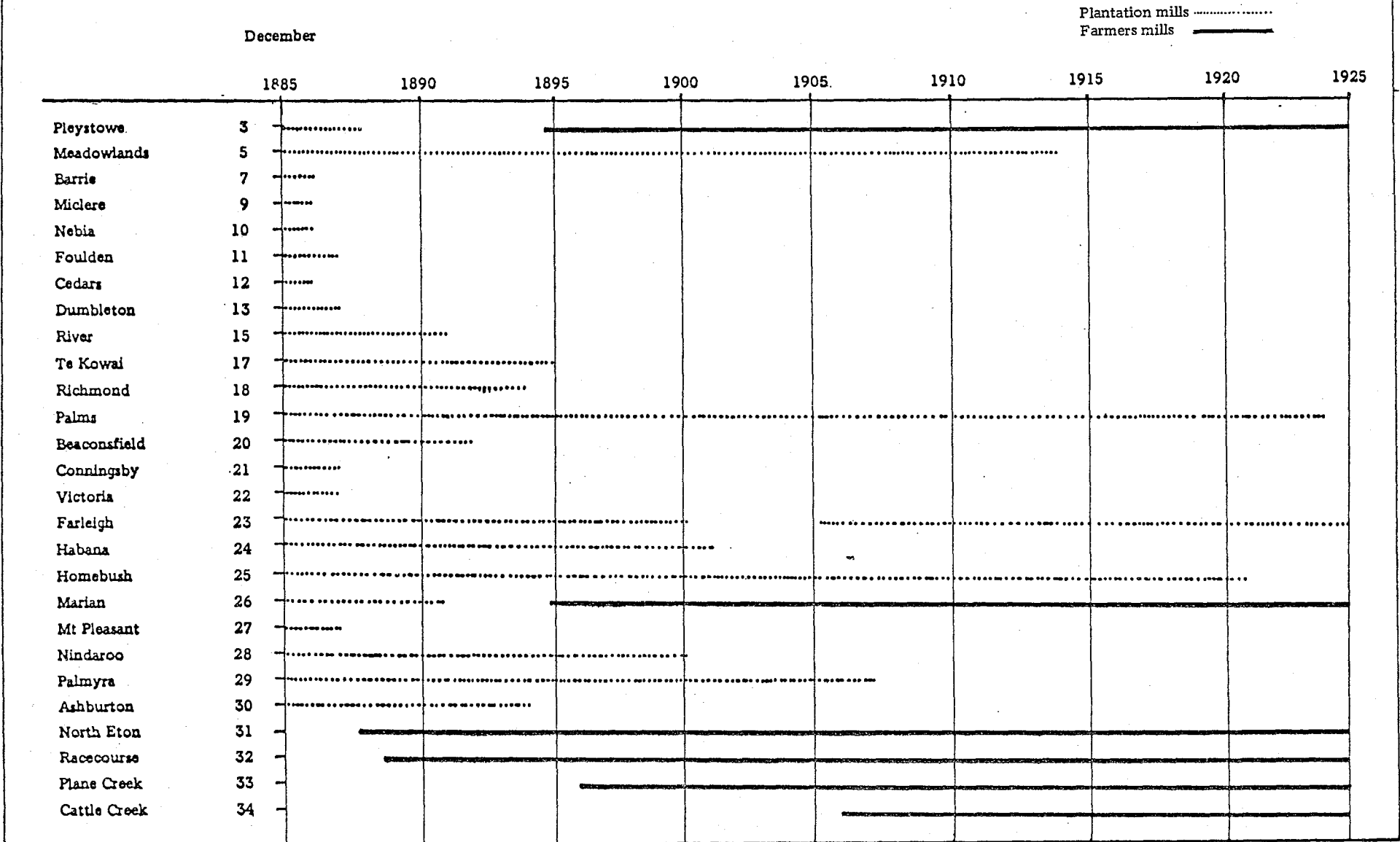
Source: *Statistics of Queensland 1885-1927*

: \* *Mackay Chamber of Commerce Annual Report, 1947*

Graph Two: Mackay Sugar Crop 1885-1927



Graph Three: Plantation and farmers' mills in the Mackay Region, 1885-1925



2. The cane is grown on family-sized units by farmers who own and control the mills wholly or substantially.<sup>6</sup>
3. The industry is the domain almost exclusively of white labour and white land-owners.
4. There is government control, almost complete over production levels, marketing and pricing, substantial over wages and working conditions.
5. The industry is one of the most highly mechanised sugar industries in the world.

Of these five characteristics only the first, the change to large central mills from small plantation mills, was part of a world wide trend. The development of small farming units and a "white" sugar industry was consequent on a unique combination of economic, political and racial circumstances present in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Australia. Government funding for mills and government control of markets and prices marked a change from free enterprise to State regulation in all aspects of the industry; a change carried out piecemeal as necessity demanded between 1885 and the years during and directly following the First World War. The sixth characteristic, advances in farming and milling technology, in part was forced on the industry by rising labour costs, but it was also the product of cane farming in a technologically advanced society. Farmers began large-scale use of tractors in the mid-1920s, which cut labour and livestock costs and left harvesting the only part in the production cycle that needed a large labour force. Labour for harvesting was provided by itinerant European cane-cutters until mechanical harvesting was

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6. In the 1970s there has been a tendency to amalgamate several farms into one, usually still controlled by a single family, but taking advantage of economies of scale to survive in the modern mechanised industry. Milling companies have shareholders who are not cane growers, and companies have diversified their interests beyond the sugar industry. As an example, Pioneer Sugar Mills Limited, which owns *Plane Creek* mill at Mackay and *Pioneer* and *Inkerman* mills on the Burdekin, also own several cattle properties as well as producing chemicals and pipelines. Pioneer Sugar Mills Limited, *1980 Annual Report to Stockholders and Employees, and Notice of Meeting* (Brisbane, 1980).

introduced in the 1960s. Australia was in the vanguard in developing mechanical cane harvesters, today exporting harvesting equipment to several overseas sugar cane growing countries.

The remainder of this chapter is a history of the European labourers and small farm cultivators<sup>7</sup> at Mackay from the 1860s until the 1920s, and the gradual transformation of the industry from its initial plantation base to the present pattern of small farm cultivators and large central mills.

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7. The masculine gender has been used in all general references to farmers, as the land was almost always registered in a man's name, and men were always spoken of as the farmers. But small-scale farming was a family affair: women and children assisted in the fields, domestically, and in keeping farm accounts. Women were just as much farmers as their husbands. In Munro's *Sugar Fields of Mackay* four women are listed as owning farms: Mesdames Turner, Pogson, Anderson and Kennedy. Probably all four (certainly Turner and Pogson) were widows. The case of Margaret Coalter is cited in the 1879-1884 section of this chapter: while an adolescent she was left to run an isolated farm almost single-handed for five years. There must have been many other women like her, particularly on new selections where the men were away for months at a time working as labourers in other areas of the valley. Munro, *Sugar Fields*, 31, 51, 55.

## 2. European labourers and small farm cultivators

Chapter Four emphasised the large business interests operative during the first two decades of the sugar industry. But it would be wrong to view the 1860s, 1870s and 1880s at Mackay as solely the domain of a small number of planters and their families, served only by Melanesian labourers. Other Europeans settled in the region at the same time as the planters: labourers on plantations, in auxiliary rural enterprises, in the towns, and small land holders. There was a steady increase in the number of Europeans in the Mackay district during the nineteenth century: just over 500 at the end of the 1860s; around 2,000 in the 1870s; 3,600 to 7,500 in the 1880s; and 9,000 by 1901. Graph Four charts the increase in population from 1868 to 1901. While the Melanesian sector of the population remained relatively constant all through the nineteenth century, the European sector increased dramatically, particularly during the 1880s.<sup>8</sup>

In the 1860s virtually the entire white population was British or Australian-born.<sup>9</sup> Diversification of the white population occurred in the 1870s and 1880s as a result of direct migration from Europe to North Queensland, a process actively fostered by the Queensland government. More important statistically is the steady rise in the proportion of the population which was Australian-born: among this group, Queenslanders predominated heavily. Table Two lists the birthplaces of Mackay's immigrant population in the census years 1881, 1891, 1901. Several hundred migrants from Continental Europe arrived at Port Mackay during the 1870s and 1880s - mainly from Germany,<sup>10</sup> Austria, Denmark, and Sweden. No Continental immigrants ever became plantation owners. Initially they worked in town or as plantation labourers; but within a decade most had selected small farms, married within the Continental European sector of the community, and begun to plant small areas of

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8. Refer to Graph Four, the sources for which are: *Queensland Census Reports* for 1868, 1876, 1891, 1901; *Qlder* 3 June 1876; *MM* 26 August 1876; *QSA* COL/A477, In letter 6373 of 1886, Return showing the total population of the Northern District of the colony; Chapter Six, Table Three.
9. *Census of Queensland*, 1864, 72-3 and 1868, 35-7.
10. Borrie, *Italians and Germans in Australia*, 167-72.

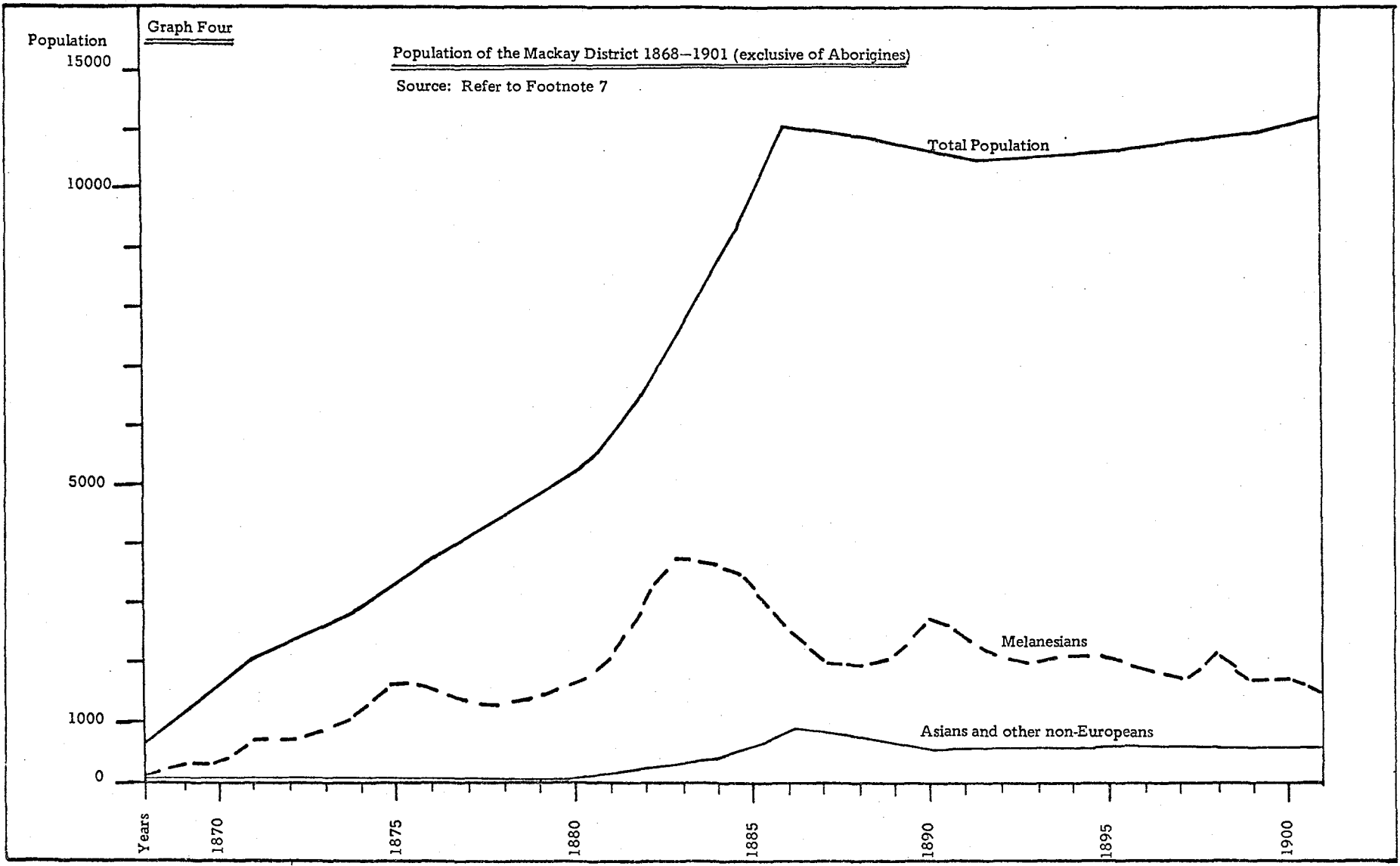


Table Two

Birthplaces of individuals in the Mackay Census District  
1881, 1891, 1901.

Birthplace	1881	%	1891	%	1901	%
Australia	1644	28	3885	36	5904	52
(Queensland) <sup>1</sup>	(1447)	(25)	(3560)	(33)	(5554)	(49)
Britain	1462	25	3124	29	2702	24
Europe	479	8.2	504	4.7	477	4.8
Asia	60	1.0	526	4.9	555	4.9
Melanesia	2091	36	2442	33	1395	12.5
Other	51	.8	57	.5	66	.9
Aboriginal	(500) <sup>2</sup>		n.a.		45	.4
TOTAL	5787	100	10538	100		100

Source: Census of Queensland : 1881, 1891, 1901.

1. Included in the Australian total
2. Not included in the 1881 total (Source: *Qlder* 5 June 1880)

cane. Their children were a substantial proportion of the first generation of Europeans born in the valley and the second generation of small farmers. The major demographic change to the European sector of the population is an ever-increasing percentage of Australian-born residents: twenty-eight percent in 1881; thirty-six percent in 1891; and fifty-two percent in 1901. The majority were born in Queensland, mostly at Mackay. Official statistics from the early twentieth century are not broken down into census districts, but from other sources we know that migration continued from Britain, other Australian states, and from Malta and (to a lesser extent) Italy.<sup>11</sup> The farming community in the Pioneer valley today is ethnically diverse, but present-day surnames show particular evidence of the two periods of migration from the Continent: specifically, Germans and Scandinavians in the 1870s and Maltese from the First World War period.<sup>12</sup>

Among these early European settlers it was usual for the women to work as domestic servants and the men as plantation labourers for a few years until they had saved enough money to acquire small farms of their own. Usually starting with 30 to 200 acre patches of scrub or lightly timbered country, they would build huts and begin clearing the land, in the meantime, grazing a few beef or dairy cattle and planting vegetable gardens. Their first agricultural ventures were cash crops such as corn and other vegetables which were easy to sell locally. If a mill was operating in their vicinity they would put in an acre of plant cane, and from it plant out five to fifteen acres the following year, thereafter working up their cane acreage over a number of years. At the same time many continued working as labourers on plantations and established farms in the district. Thousands of acres were taken up this way by small cultivators in five major periods: the 1860s through to the end of the 1870s; 1879 until 1884; 1885 until 1890; 1891 until 1906; and 1907 on into the 1920s.

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11. *Ibid.*, 65-96, particularly 71; *QPP*, v. 3, 27-52: Royal Commission on the social and economic effect of aliens in North Queensland; Menghetti, *The Red North*; *MM* 10, 28 January 1980.
  12. Some of the main surnames from Germany and Scandinavia are: Rasmussen, Matsen, Sievers, Mau, Froyland, Petersen; Hansen, and Neilson. Some of the main Maltese names are: Formosa, Deguara, Camilleri, Grima, Refelo, Buttigieg, Bartolo, Frendo, Vella, and Busuttin.

2.A. 1864-1878

The first cane land at Mackay was selected in 1865 under the 1864 Sugar and Coffee Regulations - later incorporated into the terms of the 1868 *Crown Lands Alienation Act*<sup>13</sup> - which encouraged the selection of large blocks of sugar land of 320 to 1,280 acres; from these developed the plantations. The only small farming units available were twenty and thirty acre blocks in the Parishes of Howard and Greenmount on the outer edge of suburban Mackay. But these small farms disappeared during the 1870s, amalgamated with and absorbed into plantations.<sup>14</sup> *Meadowlands*, *Balmoral* and Peri (a plantation with a mill which never crushed) were all established on land intended for small farms. The Peri land was first selected by a number of small-scale cultivators under the 1868 Act, but in the course of a few years R.J. Jeffray of Sloan & Co. and Davidson and Fitzgerald from neighbouring *Alexandra* had purchased all their land.<sup>15</sup> Nearby, *Cassada*, a 400 acre plantation, comprised six blocks of land originally controlled by four different interests. The first partners in *Cassada* initially owned only ninety-one acres, the area of a moderate farm; but they erected a steam-powered mill in 1872 and through a series of land purchases in the 1870s eventually acquired over 300 acres.<sup>16</sup> The same pattern of plantations expanding at the expense of adjacent small farms occurred all through the plantation belt along the lower reaches of the river.

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13. Vic. 31 No. 46. For a list of the 1865-6 applications refer to *QPD* 1864, v. 1, 301-3; *QVP* 1865, 1219; *QVP* 1866, 1461. Under the 1868 Act (Clauses 43, 71-2) agricultural and Homestead land could be selected in blocks of 40 to 640 acres.
  14. Refer to Maps Four and Five of Chapter Four, the text of the chapter describing the development of the plantations, and to Appendix Three of this thesis. Also refer to *QSA* LAN/P61: Register for the Mackay Land Agent's District, under the 1868 Land Act and to LAN/215: Files for sugar selections.
  15. Appendix Three: *Meadowlands*, *Balmoral* and *Peri*; *QSA* LAN/P61 (note in particular register entries nos. 6, 7, 8, 18-9); *MUBA*: Blake & Riggall, Memo of transfer of leases to R.J. Jeffray, 4 October 1872; letter to the author from Mr John Cook, Mackay, 8 June 1979, including a map survey by T.H. Fitzgerald of portions 38 to 91 of the Parish of Greenmount, 17 July 1865.
  16. Appendix Three: *Cassada* (and throughout); *QSA* J5/7 1908, blocks 102-4, 107-9 of the Parish of Greenmount; *MM* 29 April 1871, 3, 31 July 1875.

During the same period, the owners of the farms were endeavouring to establish mills of their own. The movement away from integration of the farming and milling process is generally reckoned to have begun in Queensland during the 1880s.<sup>17</sup> This is not correct. At Mackay the first moves away from the plantation system came in late 1868 when there was still only one steam-powered plantation mill in the district. At least five attempts were made to build farmers' mills in the Mackay district before the Griffith government allocated funds for that purpose in 1885. The first public sugar milling company, The Mackay Sugar Crushing Co. Ltd., was floated in February 1869 with a £5,000 capital.<sup>18</sup> The mill was to have been sited near the racecourse in the middle of the Parish of Howard small farms. Two of the company's directors were connected with later milling ventures: William McBryde was a partner in *Inverness* and *Richmond*; Thomas Pearce helped draft the 1885 central mill petition.<sup>19</sup> The local paper's comment on the company's failure was that it was under-capitalised, that it wanted too large a share of the milling profits, and that many of the small farm cultivators involved had ambitions to erect their own mills and would not guarantee their support.

The 1869 co-operative company was one of at least thirty-five failed attempts to found mills in the Mackay district: fourteen were plantations; seven were privately owned mills to crush farmers' cane; and fourteen were co-operative mills. Table Three lists these failures, from 1869 to 1922.\* Some of the mills were actually built, but were either primitive horse-driven contraptions, or for one reason or another failed to last for more than a year or two. Four of them, those

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\* Table Three is at the end of the chapter.

17. S. Adamson, *The Queensland Sugar Industry, 1860 to 1917* (B.A. Hons. thesis, University of Queensland, 1953), 46; H.N. Lund, 'The Origin and Development of Co-operative Sugar Mills in Queensland', *HAofQJ*, v. 5:3 (1955), 1106; G. Lewis, *The Crisis Years: economic development in Queensland, 1885-95* (B. Ec. Hons. thesis, University of Queensland, 1964), 103; Parnaby, *Britain and the Labour Trade*, 135-6; Bolton, *Thousand Miles Away*, 147.
18. *MM* 3 February, 30 October, 11, 25 November 1869.
19. Appendix Three: *Inverness and Richmond*. Also refer to the 1885-90 section of this chapter.

of Shiels, Russell Robb and Fleming were built in the Parishes of Howard and Greenmount to mill the owner's cane together with that of their neighbours, some of whom were probably the farmers unwilling to support the 1869 co-operative company. After the proposed 1869 company and the next mooted farmers' milling company nine successful plantation mills were established and four plantation companies failed, three of which had erected primitive mills.<sup>20</sup> In January and February 1873 the *Mackay Mercury* mentioned the failure of an attempt to float the district's second co-operative sugar company, commenting that the failure:

has been a source of great discouragement to our smaller sugar growers, and has, we believe, operated more adversely to the sugar industry here than any other event. 21

Two years later another co-operative mill was planned, as in 1869, by farmers on small blocks close to the west side of the Mackay township. Several individuals involved in these attempts to set up new mills lost heavily when the mills failed to eventuate.<sup>22</sup>

The plantation system established in Queensland in the 1860s was already outmoded by several decades. In the Caribbean smaller plantations had been amalgamated and the remaining mills enlarged much earlier in the century. Rising labour costs after slave manumission and the expense involved in upgrading mill technology caused mill owners to opt for larger outputs to keep their operations profitable. By the 1860s and 1870s the Caribbean central milling system was well advanced, so it was natural that Queensland's cane growers should look to the British and French West Indies for a model for their proposed co-operative central mills. In 1876 the Logan Cane Growers' Association asked a Sydney engineer Angus Mackay to report to them after a visit he made to inspect central mills in the French West Indies. The *Mackay Mercury* commented favourably on his visit as part of its long held advocacy of

20. Chapter Four, Graph Two; Appendix Three.

21. *MM* 4 January, 15 February 1873.

22. *MM* 24 May 1875.

the need for farmers' central mills at Mackay.<sup>23</sup> In 1878 another co-operative milling company was floated at Mackay: the Mackay Central Sugar Manufacturing Company with £10,000 in capital divided into 1,000 shares. Amongst the company's directors were many small farm cultivators, town businessmen, C.R. Dutailis who was mayor in 1879, and an experienced plantation manager J.W. Cran. The company foundered in early 1879 through opposition from Spiller of *Pioneer* and Hyne of *Balmoral-Meadowlands* who enticed growers away with promises of more lucrative profits if they supplied their plantation mills.<sup>24</sup>

It comes as no surprise to find that only five cane farms established in the 1864-1878 period survived until the end of the century. All five were large freehold properties, more properly called estates than small farms.<sup>25</sup> Two were on the north side of the river: Denman's "Etowrie", a 597 acre property just north of *Cédars*; and Jane's "Glen-darrah", 410 acres adjoining *Cedar's* southern boundary. Three were on the south side of the river around Eton: Antoney's 856 acre "Etonvale"; Rick's 480 acre "Louis Farm"; and Pogson's 465 acre "Red and White Rose Farm".<sup>26</sup> Only one of these properties, "Etowrie" has remained in the hands of the same family until today. "Etowrie" was established by Edward Denman who farmed it himself for fifty-eight years, from 1872 to 1930. Denman's story shows clearly that cane growing, even on a

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23. Fraginals, *The Sugarmill*, 65-127; P. Foster and P. Creyke, *The Structure of Plantation Agriculture in Jamaica* (Baltimore, 1968), 1-6; A. Burns, *History of the British West Indies* (London, 1965), 660; Munro, *Sugar Fields*, 11; *Qlder* 21 October 1876; *MM* 1 May 1878.

In 1883 Angus Mackay, returning from his post as Queensland Commissioner at the Philadelphia Exhibition, was instructed by the government to visit the West Indies and prepare an official report on the central milling system. Bolton, *Thousand Miles Away*, 147-8.

24. *MM* 20, 27 July 1878, 8 March 1879.

25. Refer to the introduction to Appendix Three for definitions of the various farming units. Appendix Four lists 419 cane farming units (8 plantations and 395 farms) operating in the valley in 1894. The approximate dates at which 302 of the 395 small cane farm cultivators took up their land are summarized in Table Five of this chapter.

26. Appendix Four: Nos. 10, 95, 294, 352, 309. Antoney later increased the size of his land holdings. Refer to Nos. 293, 295-6.

substantial scale, was no automatic guarantee of wealth, even for a man with very substantial experience and valuable family connections. As indicated in Chapter Four, even the most substantial cane growers did not necessarily concentrate exclusively on cane: Denman never did. Thwarted by the recession of the late 1880s and the lack of cheap labour during the 1890s, Denman diversified his interests away from cane, but never really made a successful transition to other forms of farming.

Denman was born in Nottinghamshire in 1844. The son of a miller he spent a few years of adolescence in the British army, before migrating to British Guiana in 1864. There he gained experience in cane cultivation and milling, spending more than two years as head overseer on a sugar plantation. Denman arrived in Australia in 1872 at the age of twenty-eight. The next year he made his way north to Mackay and purchased "Etowrie", hill land on the north side of the Pioneer river where several plantations were in the process of formation.<sup>27</sup> For the first few years Denman concentrated on clearing his land, working concurrently as manager at *Inverness* and *Miclere*. His previous cane growing experience stood him in good stead. Denman himself said:

I brought little or no capital in the shape of cash, but I brought some in the shape of experience in tropical agriculture and it has given me a very fair return. 28

In 1878 he borrowed money from E.M. Long, ex-partner in *Branscombe* and *River*, and at that time in the process of establishing *Habana*, near "Etowrie". Denman's first crop was maize; no cane was planted on "Etowrie" until 1879. In the same year he married Helen Jane Cumming, daughter of a partner in nearby *Richmond*.<sup>29</sup>

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27. *MM* 30 July 1975; *HTM Reg* 29 January 1879; *CRM* 5a:2 (A&RD); Appendix Three: Cedars, Inverness, Richmond.

28. *MM* 14 March 1893.

29. E.M. Long to E. Denman, 18 April, 19 October 1878 (in the possession of Mr E.C. Denman, "Richmond"); *MM* 29 January 1893; *HTM Reg* 29 January 1879.

"Etowrie" was usually called an estate rather than a farm: it was as large in area as many of the plantations and differed only in not possessing a mill. Denman chose to supply cane to the neighbouring mills; he does not appear to have seriously considered erecting his own mill, possibly because his father-in-law owned nearby *Richmond*, which Denman himself managed for some time in the 1880s.<sup>30</sup> Entering the sugar industry in a peak period he did well during the early 1880s but through the second half of the decade the very low prices paid by the millers, combined with mishaps (such as having 3,000 tons of cane burnt by accident in 1885<sup>31</sup>), led "Etowrie" into decline. In 1884 Denman attempted to sell "Etowrie", but with the boom passed he had missed his chance.<sup>32</sup> The recession of the late 1880s hit hard; Denman left off growing cane to concentrate on maize and twenty-five acres of fruit trees.<sup>33</sup> Like his planter neighbours, during the 1890s he began leasing parts of "Etowrie" to tenant farmers. By 1894 225 acres were leased out to four farmers: three Europeans, one with thirty acres and two with fifty acres each; and one Chinese leasing ninety-five acres. Denman himself grew only a few acres of cane, concentrating instead on his fruit trees, producing "Dahru" rum liqueur, running 350 head of cattle and operating a small store for the neighbouring settlers and their Melanesian employees.<sup>34</sup>

During the 1890s and 1900s he concentrated on rearing dairy cattle and pigs, and was involved in the Pioneer River Farmers' Association<sup>35</sup>, the farmers' version of the earlier Planters' Association.

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30. This was probably after Andrew Cumming died in 1881. *MM* 16 March 1881, 17 February 1883; *QVP* 1889, v.4, 259; *CRM* 5a:2 (A&RD).
31. *QVP* 1889, v.4, 259-60; *MM* 30 September 1885.
32. Letters to E. Denman from : Thomas Stewart & Co., 29 January 1884; Brown Bros., (Sydney), 15 July 1884; Paget Bros. (*Nindaroo*), 12, 20 August 1884 (in the possession of Mr E.C. Denman, "Richmond").
33. *QVP* 1889, v.4, 259-60. The fruit was sold locally and in the south, but its primary use was in his most famous product: "Dahru", a rum-based liqueur, the recipe of which he brought with him from Demerara.
34. Munro, *Sugar Fields*, 14.
35. Refer to Section 2.E. of this chapter for further information about the Association.

Edward Denman always strongly advocated retaining Melanesian labour, which he saw as essential to the future prosperity of the sugar industry.<sup>36</sup> Ironically, in the early twentieth century after most Melanesians had been deported and those still in the district were banned from working in the sugar industry, Denman encouraged many of the old Islander men to make their home at "Etowrie". By the time of his death in 1930, he had gathered together a group of about twenty Islanders and given them the use of a section of "Etowrie" on which to spend their declining years.<sup>37</sup>

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36. *MM* 14, 21 March 1893, 20 April 1895, 25 February 1897, 17 March, 21 July 1898, 7 March 1899, 8 November 1900, 16, 29 February 1901, 26 January 1905, 18 January 1906.

37. *CRM* 5a (A&RD); *BOHC* 29Ba:1 (NS); *BOHC* 33Bb:2 (HSQ); *BOHC* 37Ba:2 (S&FB).

2.B. 1879-1884

The 1868 Land Act, amended in 1872 and 1875, was replaced in 1876 by a new Act which increased the upper limit of the size of land selected for cane growing to 5,120 acres. Once more it was large-scale agriculture - at Mackay the sugar plantations - which was encouraged. By the late 1870s the best land surrounding Port Mackay and along the lower reaches of the river had become one interlocking block of plantations and estates.<sup>38</sup> New selectors in search of small farms, mainly plantation labourers and townspeople, had to look to areas beyond the plantations. Table Four and Graph Five show the yearly rate of land selection in the Mackay Land Agent's District, 1877 to 1906. After a short recession from 1874 to 1876 the industry recovered and began to move toward the boom of the mid-1880s. In 1879 with the world price of sugar riding high, with additional mills planned and under construction, a sugar boom began. While the boom brought a large influx of capital, most of it was invested in the purchase of existing plantations: the greater part of the new land selected during the boom was taken up by local residents.

Over the next few years applications for new land selections soared; from 8,399 acres newly selected during 1878, to 125,836 acres of agricultural land selected during 1882. By 1885 the boom was over, but 300,000 acres of new land selections had been approved since 1879. Much of this land was selected purely in expectation of quick sales and large profits, which never came. Within a year or two most of the new land had been forfeited: selectors de-faulted on their payments, and the land reverted to the Crown. In the midst of the unprecedented optimism for the future of the district in 1882 W.R. Goodall, Acting Land Commissioner at Mackay reported that:

On the smaller conditional selections most are thoroughly *bonâ fide*, many being made by residents of long standing in the district, and townspeople

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38. Vic. 40 No. 15 (The 5120 acre blocks were conditional purchase selections). There were always some smaller blocks available but the early Land Acts were designed to encourage the planter class. Refer to Maps Five and Six of Chapter Four, showing the pattern of land settlement in the Pioneer valley in 1877 and 1883.

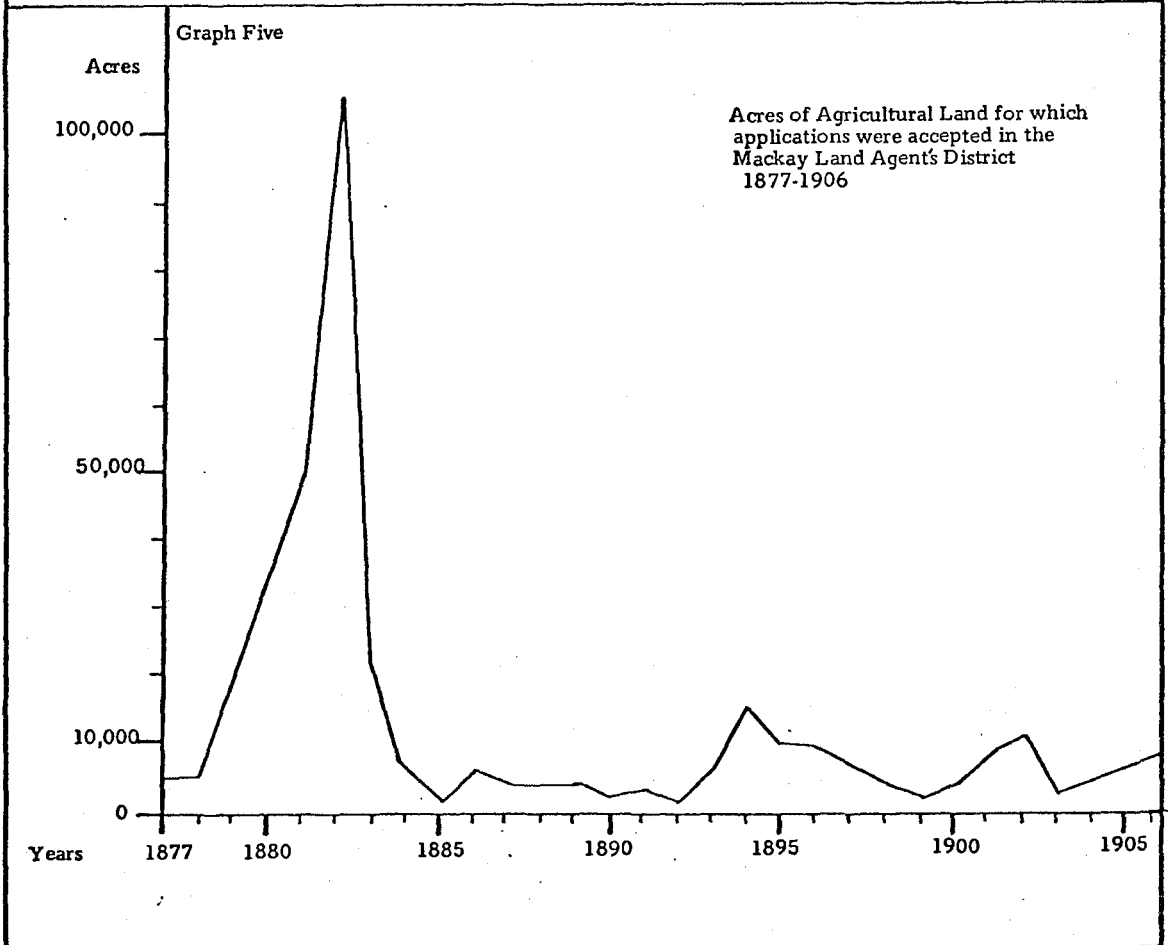
**Table Four**

Agricultural land selections in the Mackay Land Agent's District : 1877 - 1906.  
(including the Nebo area)

Year	Acres	Year	Acres
1877	7852	1892	31611
1878	8399	1893	10227
1879	21542	1894	34009
1880	36876	1895	17467
1881	59825	1896	9077
1882	125836	1897	7391
1883	36306	1898	4361
1884	16558	1899	1981
1885	3017	1900	7934
1886	6069	1901	101016
1887	4707	1902	18030
1888	4174	1903	14935
1889	18764	1904	7686
1890	9562	1905	14921
1891	14749	1906	30742

Note: The figures indicate the amount of land applied for and accepted as selected. The figures do not take into account land which passed back to the Crown when selectors were unable to pay the rent. This accounts for discrepancies between this Table, Table One and Appendix Four.

Source: Selections under the Land Acts of 1876, 1884 and 1897, Mackay Land Agent's District, 1877-1906, printed annually in QVP.



who have moved on to the land. Of course many conditional selections are taken up on speculation, and the difficulty at present experienced - getting a sufficient supply of coloured labour - will probably put a check to this...There is still plenty of good land to be had in the district, now lying principally to the north of St Helens.... 39

A year later, in 1883, as Goodall expected many selectors had lost their leases:

There is at present some depression in the sugar industry, owing partly to a short crop and a long drought (now thoroughly broken up), but mainly owing to the uncertainty as to the future supply of coloured labour. Planters are contracting their operations and paying off numerous men... I anticipate a considerable falling-off in the payment of the March rents, and forfeiture of small selections, as very many of the smaller selectors are employees on the plantations. 40

Of the hundreds of small agricultural selections taken up between 1879 and 1884 only about fifty were being used for growing cane in 1894. Two-thirds of these were in the Eton-Brightly-Homebush area; one-third were scattered along the north side of the river from Balnagowan to Mirani; and three or four were between Habana and the Leap. Most of these farms were initially leased from the Crown and converted to freehold within a few years. In size they ranged from fifteen to 2,700 acres, but the majority were between 160 and 300 acres.<sup>41</sup> As was seen earlier<sup>42</sup> cane farms developed at Mackay by progressively clearing the natural cover of scrub and forest over many years, while sowing cash crops and grazing cattle to supplement the income derived from the expanding area of sugar cane. In 1894 settlers who had taken up land in the boom years of 1879-1884 were growing on average only thirty acres of cane a piece. Alongside them were others who had selected land at the same time but who continued to rely wholly or

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39. *QVP* 1883 Session, 487.

40. *QVP* 1884, v.2, 1170 (Report by Land Commissioner T. Mowbray).

41. Table Four of this chapter and Appendix Four to the thesis.

42. Refer to the introduction to Section Two of this chapter.

principally on cattle and cash crops. Whether or not they grew cane, virtually all farmers supplemented their incomes by working as labourers. One of the major complaints received by the 1897 Royal Commission on Land Settlement when it sat at Mackay was over the continuous residence clause in the Land Act. Particularly at crushing time many farmers worked away from their selections for up to three months at a time, which meant that single men in particular could not comply with the residence conditions of their leases.<sup>43</sup> It was often women who were left to establish the new selections while the men were away.<sup>44</sup>

Twenty-six mills were operating in 1884, twelve of them erected between 1879 and 1884. All were established as plantation mills, but probably all crushed cane supplied by farmers in order to supplement their own production.<sup>45</sup> Two of them, *Victoria* and *Marian* drew the greater part of their cane from farmers, thus functioning virtually

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43. Munro, *Sugar Fields, passim*; Royal Commission on Land Settlement in Queensland in 1897, 157-62 (Contained in the Reports and Evidence of Royal Commissions and Select Committees related to land alienation in the colonies of Australia. Collected in 8 microfilm reels, University of Queensland, 1969. JCUNQ:library MF Q6).
44. Margaret Coalter, while an adolescent was left to run an isolated farm almost single-handed for five years in the late 1880s and early 1890s; there must have been hundreds like her whose stories have gone unrecorded. Born in Scotland in 1874 she arrived at Mackay in 1882 with her father, step-mother and family. William Coalter, her father, worked on *Homebush*, but in 1886 took up a selection on newly-opened land at Kelvin Grove (Koumala) where his family settled while he continued to work thirty kilometers away on *Homebush*. For two years his wife, sister-in-law, Margaret, and her two sisters, cleared the land, established gardens and ran cattle and sheep. Then in 1888 Mrs Coalter and the younger children moved to *Homebush*. Fourteen year old Margaret and her elderly step-Aunt stayed on the selection which Margaret ran until she was nineteen; they then joined the rest of the family. In 1895 Margaret met and married Samuel Arbuthnot; together they started "Ardtree" farm at Sandiford, where she lived until her death in 1959.
- Koumala Presbyterian Women's Guild (comp.), *Historical Review of Koumala and District, 1859-1974* (Mackay, 1974), 35-6; State Centenary of Education Project (comp.), *History of the Sandiford State School and District, 1908-1975* (Mackay, 1975), 14.
45. Appendix Three: Marian, Victoria (also refer to Richmond which was similar).

as privately-owned farmers' mills. All farmers were in a weak position, not able to ensure that their cane was crushed when its sugar content was at its highest - or indeed was crushed at all - and in no position to bargain for a satisfactory price. Those even a few kilometers from the nearest mill had in addition serious transport problems. The solution - a group of farmers banding together to establish their own mill - was so obvious that it is surprising that only one proposal is known to have been made between 1879 and 1884, and that by a planter.<sup>46</sup> Part of the explanation for this lack of initiative probably lies in the boom conditions prevailing at that time - on the one hand the future would have looked quite bright to the small farmers, on the other the owners of plantation mills would have felt little need to drive hard bargains with farmers whose cane they crushed.

In spite of these inherent conflicts of interest a number of small farmers maintained good relations with plantation millers. This is clear from the life of Ole Matsen whose career illustrates a great deal about the small farmer class at Mackay, even though he took up his own farm as late as 1887, after wider experience of the sugar industry than most others of this group. Matsen was born in Denmark in 1850.<sup>47</sup> His father was a clerk for the parish Minister of their village, and Ole was given a good education. At nine he was sent to work on a small farm near his village. For the next few years he combined work with study, going to school three days a week most of the time, but resuming full-time study each winter when farm work was impossible. At twenty he read a Queensland government prospectus calling for migrants and decided to go to Queensland. In April 1872 Matsen boarded the *Humboldt* in Hamburg for a seventeen week voyage to

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46. Donald Macdonald, one of the partners in *Inverness* announced in March 1879 that a new company was to be floated: the Queensland Co-operative Sugar Mill Company, with £250,000 capital divided into 50,000 shares. Macdonald hoped to erect mills at Mackay and in other sugar districts, but nothing came of his plan. *MM* 8 March 1879.

47. *JCUNQ* (History) Ole Matsen, Diary One. Matsen's diaries, written between 1897 and 1926, trace his entire life, 1850 to 1926. Unless otherwise noted, Matsen's Diary One is the source of the following information. The pages of Diary One are not numbered.

Bowen. With him were 500 Germans and Scandinavians, 200 of whom continued on to Mackay. Over the next fifty years he was associated with five plantation mills (*Nebia*, *Pioneer*, *Cassada*, *Homebush* and *Farleigh*) as labourer, overseer and farmer. His life at Mackay is far more typical than that of Edward Denman (mentioned earlier) and far more successful.

Matsen's first job was on *Nebia* plantation, where he and four of his shipmates engaged on twelve month contracts. Their journey to *Nebia* was by punt up-river from Mackay:

about a dozen of us had to go in a punt, to get to our destinations, and we started with the tide about eight O'clock in the evening a few of them got of the punt, at what is called the "Devils Elbow", and they had to walk several miles to the Inverness plantation, a boy had been sent there to show them the Road the rest of us kept on the punt, past River Estate, Foulden and Pioneer, and when we reached Dumbleton we made it fast to a tree, and went to sleep, waiting for Daylight. It was a splendid view of the river on both sides, the banks were covered with heavy scrub which in some places nearly met overhead, forming a beautiful avenue over the river small Islands were dotted here and there.

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Matsen tried his first sugar cane at *Dumbleton*. Never having seen cane before he cut it into slices and put them into a pannikin of water, hoping for a sweet drink. Perplexed, next he tried chewing it, with more success.

Matsen's employer was Charles Fitzsimmons, who had selected *Nebia* in 1868, taken up residence in 1870, and got the mill operating by May 1872.<sup>49</sup> Fitzsimmons employed thirty Europeans and fifty Islanders. Matsen worked there from August 1872 until the end of the 1873 crushing season, getting his first experience in tropical cultivation and mill work. He had intended to try his luck on the Ravenswood gold

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48. Matsen Diary Ten, 92.

49. Appendix Three: *Nebia*.

fields, and was about to join there a friend from the *Humboldt* when he heard that his friend had died. Remaining at Mackay, Matsen engaged on John Spiller's *Pioneer* plantation, where he worked through the 1874 sugar season until February 1875. Spiller put him in charge of the conveyor belt which carried cane to the rollers, and found him to be a competent employee. Matsen left Mackay in early 1874, spending the next two years travelling and working in California and in Australia. In early 1876 he was working for Mrs Charles Wentworth<sup>50</sup> at Vaucluse house, Sydney, and considering returning to Mackay, but on learning of the depressed conditions in the district after the rust outbreak, he delayed a few months and returned later in the year. Most of the passengers on the ship on which he returned north were travelling steerage to Cooktown, and thence to the Palmer river gold fields. Despite their urgings to join them on the gold fields, he left the ship at Mackay. Looking back from 1922, aged seventy-two, Matsen described Mackay in 1876:

The effect of the rust in the sugar cane, had nearly depopulated the town, so on my second arrival in Mackay, things were none to (*Sic*) lively; also the district in general, had suffered a setback. Some of the former planters had gone to the wall, and there was a general depression all over.... 51

On arrival he went out to *Pioneer* where Spiller immediately re-employed him. Matsen stayed at *Pioneer* until 1879, then left to go to *Cassada*, a small plantation on the other side of the river managed by James Donaldson in partnership with his brother and P.F. Smith. The mill, erected in 1872, was small and usually produced only 200 or 300 tons of sugar in a season; Matsen was appointed field overseer.<sup>52</sup> In 1882 he married and left *Cassada* to manage "Sandiford", the Donaldson's new estate a few kilometers to the south. When he arrived there in October 1882 with six Islander labourers, twenty acres were already planted with cane but the remaining 980 acres were virgin forest.

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50. *ADB* 1788-1850, v.2, 582-9.

51. Matsen Diary Fourteen, 2 April 1923.

52. Appendix Three: *Cassada*; *ASJ* 7 March 1924 (R.D. Dunne).

Cane from "Sandiford" went to CSR's newly established *Homebush* mill. At the end of 1885 when the sugar boom had run its course inefficient *Cassada* was in financial difficulties; the following year the Donaldsons' bankers foreclosed. James Donaldson tried to re-establish the mill as a farmers' mill; failing, he decided to shift to "Sandiford"<sup>53</sup> which led Matsen to leave:

I was not satisfied to play second fiddle to Mr. James Daondlson as I knew what sort of a manager he was. 54

In April 1887 Matsen and his wife moved to "Springfield", a farm still owned by their descendants today. For the next five years he rented the land from Andrew Diehm<sup>55</sup> and grew cane for *Homebush*. In 1891 CSR advanced Matsen £881 to purchase the 898 acre farm.<sup>56</sup>

A naturalised citizen with a wife and young family, he worked hard building up his farm. For most of the 1890s he made slow progress, clearing his heavily timbered land, his cane crops retarded by poor seasons. During the first decade of its operations *Homebush* functioned primarily as a plantation mill, with only about a dozen farmers like Matsen supplying extra cane. During the 1890s *Homebush* was progressively

53. *QVP* 1886, v.2, 11; *CSR* 142/1252 (IN), Stuart to Knox, 26 June 1882. In 1883 Donaldson supplied fifty acres of cane to *Homebush*.

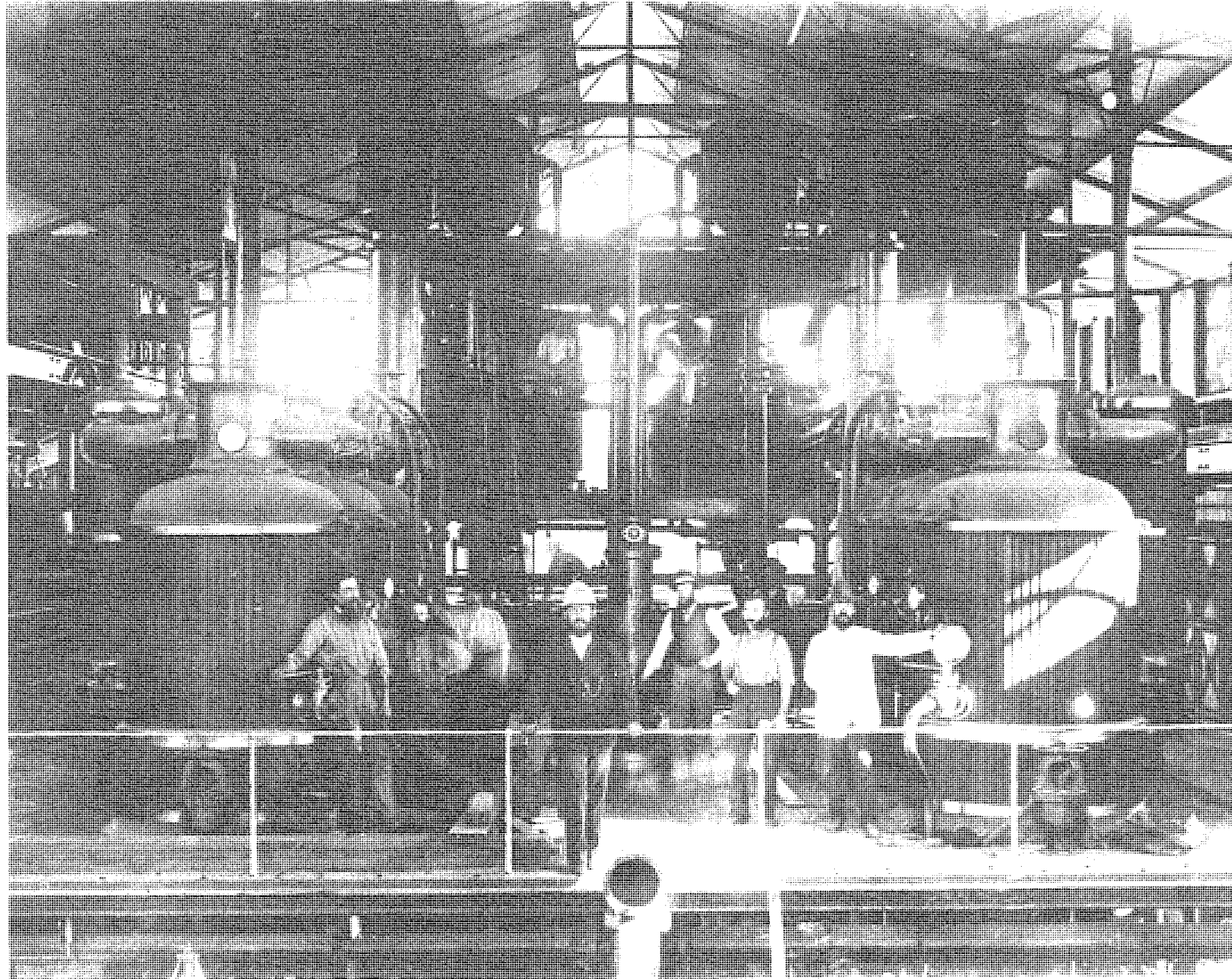
54. Matsen Diary One.

55. Andrew Diehm was born in Germany in 1838, arriving in Brisbane in 1854. He accompanied William Landsborough on two of his expeditions: in 1858 to the Comet and Isaac rivers; and in 1859 via Peak Downs to the Belyando river. In 1860 Diehm made another exploratory trip into the west of Queensland, but by 1862 was working on Fort Cooper station at Nebo. The same year he visited the small settlement at the mouth of the Pioneer river with a dray load of wool from Fort Cooper. Diehm tried his hand at mining at Charters Towers in the early 1870s, returning to set up a store at Mackay later in the decade. "Springfield" was selected during the land boom of the early 1880s.

*MM Jubilee* 1912, 11; *MM* 10 December 1907; Matsen Diary One.

56. *CRS* 142/3190, Parbury, Lamb & Co., to Hart & Fowler, 26 January 1891, and Hart & Fowler to Parbury, Lamb & Co., 29, 30 June 1891; Munro, *Sugar Fields*, 34.

PLATE 19



*Homebush* mill, erected in 1883 by CSR. (Photo by courtesy of CSR)

sub-divided and the land sold on easy terms to farmers, many of whom had been ploughmen for CSR on the same land. In 1894 Matsen had ninety acres under cane, another twenty acres cleared and broken-up but unused, twenty acres fallow, and twenty being cleared. About half of "Springfield" was suitable for cane. Eighty-five acres were sub-let, forty to Jans Petersen and forty-five acres to two Chinese, Ah Foo and Ah Shoo. That year he harvested sixty-six acres of cane, which returned 1,517 tons of stick cane averaging twenty-three tons to the acre. The Matsens lived in a comfortable double-storied weather-board house with an iron roof and a detached kitchen. Surrounding the house were fruit and vegetable gardens, stables, a blacksmith's shop and quarters for the Islander employees. Two kilometers of the *Homebush* tramway ran through the property. There were twenty-five head of cattle and sixteen horses. Matsen operated the farm assisted by his wife and sons, two European and two Islander labourers.<sup>57</sup>

Matsen's farm, purchased from the first selector, was relatively large; most of the surrounding farms, sub-divided from *Homebush*, were smaller, ranging from fifty to 150 acres. Even Matsen's acreage under cane was fairly large for a farm in that period. In 1898 his crop was damaged by a cyclone, and in July 1899 severe frost nearly ruined the entire crop. Because of repeated setbacks like these Matsen made little progress before the early years of the new century. Not until 1913 was he able to clear his debt with CSR and make a few hundred pounds profit. It took Matsen twenty-two years of hard work to make the transition from plantation labourer to indebted landowner and on to independence as a prosperous farmer. His steady progress is typical of many other early plantation labourers who through perseverance became prosperous farmers, without any large financial backing. While many small farm cultivators spoke harshly of the treatment they received from the millers, Matsen never complained about CSR and credited his success to the company and its managers at *Homebush*.

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57. Munro, *Sugar Fields*, 34.

2.c. 1885-1890

The 1884 Land Act, effective from April 1885, was by far the most radical of the nineteenth century Queensland Land Acts. In place of the multiple categories of land selection available under the 1876 Act, the 1884 Act divided selections into two classes: agricultural farms and grazing farms. Agricultural selections could be leased for fifty years, with the right to convert to freehold after ten. Agricultural farms of less than 160 acres could be converted to freehold for two and six pence an acre after continuous residence for five years.<sup>58</sup> The upper limit of the area allowed as an agricultural farm was 1,280 acres. The Griffith Liberal government's 1884 Act was part of a wider package of legislation aimed at re-directing the development of the sugar industry. First, the Melanesian labour trade, previously progressively controlled and restricted was ordered to cease by 1890. Also in 1885 Griffith allocated government funds to establish central mills co-operatively owned by small farm cultivators. The agricultural clauses of the 1884 Land Act were aimed at encouraging small-scale cultivators to enter the sugar industry. Griffith wanted yeoman farmers to replace the planters:

[a] system of small farms owned and cultivated by Europeans in place of the system of large estates worked by gangs of coloured labour. 59

Progress towards this ideal was slow: by 1894 there were only sixty-three farms in the Mackay district which had been established since 1884. The best land for cane, that close to existing mills, had all been selected over the previous decade. Low prices for sugar on the world market and uncertainty about future labour supplies did not attract new cane growers into the industry. The only improvement in prospects for small farming at Mackay came from the government's decision to erect two central mills, offering small land holders a means of disposing of their cane independently of planters. Over half of the

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58. Vic, 48 No. 28; Bernays, *Queensland Politics*, 321-2.

59. S.W. Griffith, 'The Coloured Labour Question in Australia', *The Antipodean*, no. 1 (1892), 16.

new cane farmers of 1885-1890 were in the Eton-Sunnyside-Homebush area, adjacent to the farmer-owned *North Eton* mill.<sup>60</sup> Most of their farms were Crown land, selected in 160 acre blocks under the terms of the 1884 Land Act.

The same conditions which retarded the growth of small-scale farms were affecting the plantations: ten of the district's thirty closed during the last half of the 1880s.<sup>61</sup> A drought in 1888, together with low sugar prices and the threatened closure of the Melanesian labour market, sent the entire industry into deep depression. Despite slight improvements in 1889-90 - the drought ended and world sugar prices rose slightly - the plantation boom vanished and Australia with the rest of the world was suffering from a much wider economic depression. Previously prosperous large landowners in the district (pastoralists, ex-planters, estate owners and owners of current plantations) all were suffering the effects of the recession. Many disposed of sections of their largest but now unproductive asset - their land. Ex-planters and ex-estate operators who had entered the industry in the 1870s and early 1880s began selling and leasing land: A.H. Lloyd on "Dumbleton"; the Kable brothers on "Brightly"; the Donaldson brothers on "Sandiford"; and Diehm on "Springfield".<sup>62</sup> Well-established pastoralists also leased and sold freehold blocks alienated from within their pastoral leases: Cook on Balnagowan, and Dalrymple on Hamilton.<sup>63</sup> As well, one current plantation had begun to sub-divide its land: Long and Robertson at *Habana* leased over 500 acres to tenant farmers between 1888 and 1890.<sup>64</sup>

One partial offset to the decline in the district's prosperity was an improvement in transport facilities from the second half of the

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60. Appendix Four and Table Four. CRS's *Homebush* mill was also close by.

61. Graph Three. Refer to the second half of Chapter Four for an outline of some of the reasons why they closed.

62. Appendix Four: Nos. 83, 320, 249, 117.

63. Appendix Four: Nos. 64-5, 386.

64. Appendix Four: Nos. 26, 29, 30, 32, 47.

1880s: the advent of steam locomotives and government and private railways. In 1885 the government completed the district's first railway, from Mackay to Eton with a branch up the valley to Mirani. Some years before this plantation mills had begun to build their own tramways,<sup>65</sup> linking the extremities of their land and that of surrounding estates and farms to ever larger central sugar factories. The first two co-operative mills, *North Eton* and *Racecourse* were on the government line, as were many of the plantation mills.<sup>66</sup> As the sugar content in cut cane deteriorates if not milled quickly, the spread of sugar fields away from mills is constrained by the speed at which cane can be carried to a mill. Steam railways meant that small farm cultivators at some distance from mills had a means of quickly ferrying their crops to the rollers. The government line was also useful in transporting bagged sugar to the wharves and supplies from the port to the plantations and farms.

Small farm cultivators at Mackay and in other Queensland regions had always been dissatisfied with their dependence upon plantation mills, but moves to control their own milling processes came to nothing; until in 1885 a small group of farmers from around Eton petitioned Premier Griffith, asking that his government sponsor the establishment of farmer-controlled central mills. Drafted by Mackay's Town Clerk W.G. Hodges, the petition was presented to Griffith in June 1885. The farmers saw six main points at issue:

1. The mill owners had large areas of cane of their own to be crushed; consequently farmers wishing to use plantation mills had to wait until the end of each crushing season, with detrimental results for their cane.
2. In 1885, because of the enormous increase in the amount of land under crop on plantations in the previous few years, many farmers would not be able to have their cane milled at all.

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65. Refer to Chapter Four: Frontier entrepreneurs.

66. As John Kerr notes, the Mackay line was the Railway Department's first experience of the sugar industry. Initially there were no sidings into the mills, but these were added late in the 1880s. Kerr, *Pioneer Pageant*, 71, 76-7, 90-100.

3. The planters had a monopoly over milling and paid the farmers whatever price they chose.
4. The millers also made a larger profit on cane bought from suppliers than they did on their own cane.
5. If more mills were built in the district, extra land could be opened up, enabling settlers farther away from existing mills to cultivate cane, but unfortunately financiers were no longer willing to build new plantation mills.
6. Small-scale cultivators could successfully grow cane using their own labour, and would not need coloured labour.<sup>67</sup>

The growers wanted the government to lend money to joint stock limited liability companies whose shareholders would be farmers, to erect their own mills. Growers would surrender the title deeds to their land to the government as security until the loans were repaid. The experiences of overseas sugar producers testified to the probable success of co-operative central mills. In 1883 Angus Mackay, returning from his post as Queensland Commissioner at the Philadelphia Exhibition, had been instructed to return via the West Indies and prepare an official report on the central milling system in use there. He reported favourably, but at that time the government had been content to agree that such a scheme was possible for the future and let the matter rest.<sup>68</sup> Two years later when the farmers presented their petition to Griffith that future time had arrived. Co-operative central mills were a logical corollary to Griffith's desire to further smaller-scale agricultural settlement in the colony, and his government's firm resolve to end dependence on coloured labour. Griffith approved the

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67. *QVP* 1885, v. 1, 1155-6; Central Mill Petition and papers respecting the establishment of Central Mills. The original signatories to the petition were J. Rolleston, W. Anderson, J. Antoney and G. Ironside; they were later supported by 243 other landholders in the district. Also refer to Munro, *Sugar Fields*, 11-2.

68. Bolton, *Thousand Miles Away*, 147-8.

application and had £50,000 placed on the Estimates. Against the opposition of all Conservatives in the parliament except M.H. Black, Mackay's representative, the Premier forced the vote through the House. Asked to report on applications from all over the colony for a share of the £50,000, W.O. Hodgkinson decided to divide the money between two groups of farmers at Mackay. The resultant mills, *North Eton* and *Racecourse*, were built and first crushed cane in 1888.<sup>69</sup>

Government-sponsored central mills were to have been the answer to all of the farmers' problems, but for every problem solved, they created another. The 1889 Royal Commission into the depressed state of the sugar industry criticized *North Eton* in particular for the lack of business acumen amongst its farmer-directors. Both of the new milling companies had spent too much money on mill machinery, leaving none for mill tramways. The government railway passed by *Racecourse* and close to *North Eton*, but initially there were no sidings into the mills: even when sidings were constructed in 1889, the railway was only useful in transporting milled sugar to the port, not for bringing the bulky canes from the fields to the mills. Duncan McInnis, Secretary to *North Eton*, explained the problem to the Commission: *North Eton* had to operate at full capacity if it were to be profitable and repay the loan money. This required permanent tracks and rolling stock for use from the farms to the mill, and portable tracks for use in the fields. The company had no money to install the necessary tramway system. As well, several shareholders in the *North Eton* company had escaped having their properties encumbered to the government; one of these, Joseph Antoney, held nearly one-third of the shares. Moreover both companies, eager to make a profit and clear their debt, had used a legal loophole to purchase cane grown by coloured labour contrary to the government's main aims in allocating the money.<sup>70</sup>

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69. QVP 1886, v. 2, 3-28 (plus 6 maps and drawings): Central Sugar Mills Report.

W.O. Hodgkinson had been a journalist, explorer, gold fields Warden, Police Magistrate and parliamentarian. He was the founding editor of the *Mackay Mercury and South Kennedy Advertiser* in 1866. Hodgkinson was extremely competent and well suited to make the decision. Waterson, *Queensland Parliament*, 87.

70. QVP 1889, v. 4: Report of the 1889 Royal Commission, 69, 86-9.

In 1890 mismanagement and the growers' discontent came to a head; some of the *North Eton* growers refused to supply any more cane to their mill in protest against an agreement (which they had signed) to supply cane to the mill at ten shillings a ton for the next twenty years. Although *Racecourse* fared better than *North Eton*, it too had its troubles. In 1890 an inquiry was held into the affairs of both mills. Its conclusion is a fair summary of the first five years of government-sponsored central milling.

the two companies at Mackay were too hastily formed and the plant erected before there was sufficient cane grown to justify the erection of such expensive mills. 71

Nevertheless farmers' mills had at last been tried, and, with qualifications, were successful.

The 1889 Royal Commission was the most thorough investigation into the operation of the industry to that date. The Commissioners made four main recommendations: improving the quality of cane by importing new varieties and by breeding improved strains in experimental nurseries; seeking removal of tariffs imposed on Queensland sugar by other colonies; encouraging irrigation; and resuming the labour traffic with Melanesia. The last point was described (with one dissentient) as essential to avert extinction of the industry.<sup>72</sup> Persistence with farmers' central mills together with acceptance of the need to resume the Melanesian labour trade sustained the sugar industry through the 1890s, which saw the rise to domination of the small-scale farmers.

Among the four farmers who instigated the Central Mill Petition was John Rolleston whose descendants<sup>73</sup> are still farming at Mackay today. His progress from plantation labourer, to teamster, small-scale

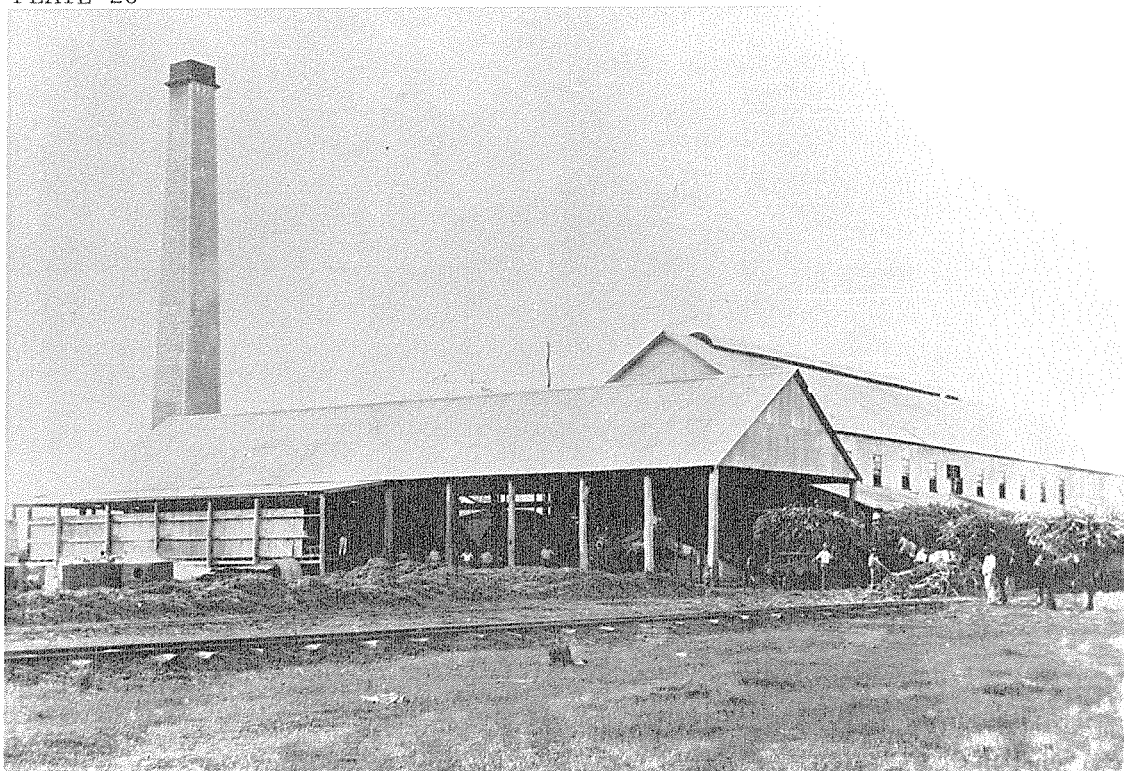
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71. *QVP* 1890, v. 3; Report of Inquiry into the working of the Central Sugar Mills at Mackay, and into a series of complaints contained in a petition asking for an inquiry, 848.

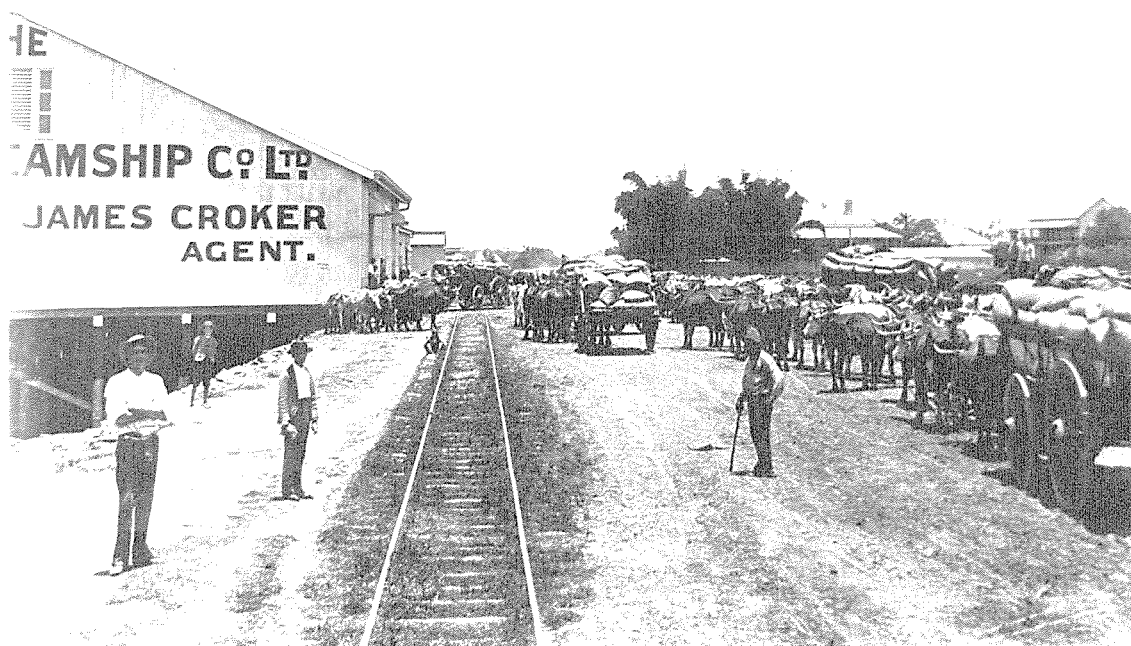
72. *QVP* 1889, v. 4, 72, 83-5, 89-90. W.H. Groom, in a minority report suggested that central mills, not Melanesian labour, were the best cure for the industry's ills.

73. *MM* 19 June 1972.

PLATE 20



a. The *North Eton* farmers' central mill, erected in 1888. (Photo: *JCUNQ: History*)



b. Dray loads of bagged sugar being transported down River street, Mackay, to the river-side wharves, in the 1890s. (Photo: *JCUNQ: History*)

grazier and cane farmer is typical of many others in this era.

John Rolleston was born in England in 1838, arriving at Rockhampton in 1864. By 1869 he was working south of Mackay on Grosvenor Downs station, managed by Andrew Florence. Florence had previously lived at Mackay and owned land there, an urban block of which he sold to Rolleston. Rolleston moved to Mackay with his wife and family in June 1872. Almost immediately he obtained work as a field overseer on Spiller's *Pioneer* plantation where he stayed until the end of the 1872 crushing season. For the next decade and a half, while his family lived at Mackay, Rolleston operated a carrying business carting supplies to and fro between the Mackay hinterland and the port; supplies for pastoral properties as far south as Grosvenor Downs; supplies for the Mount Orange and Mount Flora copper fields near Nebo; and return loads of wool and copper to Port Mackay.<sup>74</sup>

In 1881 he selected 500 acres of land at Brightly, near Eton, but continued to work mainly as a teamster until the late 1880s. With his sons and wife he fenced the property, built a four roomed slab and weatherboard house, and planted a few acres of cane which was milled at nearby *Victoria*. In 1885 the owners of *Victoria* reduced their price for cane supplied by Rolleston and his neighbours, leading them to seek another outlet. *North Eton* mill was the result. During the depression at the end of the 1880s and in the early 1890s Rolleston grew no cane, concentrating instead on raising cattle.<sup>75</sup> By the mid-1890s he was again planting cane: twenty acres were harvested in 1894 and another forty planted. During 1900, after thirty-six years in Queensland Rolleston returned to England for a holiday. Early in the twentieth century the running of the farm passed to his sons. He died in January 1920 at the age of eighty-two.<sup>76</sup>

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74. *MM Jubilee 1912*, 19, 23; *MM* 23 March 1900.

75. F. Rolleston, 'The Brightly Story', pages 1-29 of *Brightly State Primary School Golden Jubilee, 1925-1975* (Mackay, 1975). During 1888-90 Rolleston grew no cane and held no shares in the *North Eton* company. *QVP* 1890, v.4: Report of the Inquiry, 863, 866; *QVP* 1889, v.4: Report of the Royal Commission, 436-8.

76. Munro *Sugar Fields*, 53.

2.D. 1891-1906

The Liberals, headed by S.W. Griffith, governed Queensland from 1883 until 1888 and again from 1890 until 1893. In between were two Conservative governments: Thomas McIlwraith's short-lived ministry from June to November 1888; and B.D. Morehead's ministry which resigned in August 1890 when faced with lack of support for its financial policies. Griffith resumed control, but took the unusual step of including McIlwraith in his ministry as Treasurer. Until 1893 the two, previously political adversaries, combined forces through the most difficult economic period Queensland had faced. Two pieces of legislation, enacted in 1892 and 1893, successfully boosted the flagging sugar industry and moulded the pattern for its development over the remainder of the century. The "Griffith-McIlwraith" government enacted the *1892 Pacific Island Labourers (Extension) Act*, which authorised resumption of the Melanesian labour trade for another decade. And in 1893, McIlwraith again Premier in his own right, passed the *1893 Sugar Works Guarantee Act* to increase the number of farmer-owned mills. Like *North Eton* and *Racecourse*, which had become successful milling companies despite their early problems, the farmers' mills of the 1890s were limited liability joint stock companies, but there was no longer any requirement that sugar supplied to the mills be grown only by white labour.<sup>77</sup>

The control, size and ownership of the Mackay mills altered radically during the decade and a half after 1890. Most of the mills which had survived the slump at the end of the 1880s either closed, amalgamated or were taken over by farmer co-operatives. *Marian, River, Richmond* and *Beaconsfield* closed between 1891 and 1895; *Te Kowai* amalgamated with *Palms* and *Ashburton* with *Farleigh* in 1894-5; *Farleigh*

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77. Vic. 57 No. 18.

All the farmer-suppliers of the Mackay mills built under the 1893 Act had to pledge their deeds to the government in return for the loan to finance their mill. For later mills (*Babinda, South Johnstone* and *Tully*) the growers no longer had to do so; the government conducted these mills until some of the indebtedness was paid off, then allowed a degree of independent management. The growers acquired full control when the total debt had been discharged.

ceased operations for five years, 1900-05; *Nindaroo* closed in 1900 and *Habana* in 1901. *Pleystowe* (closed since 1888) and *Marian* (closed since 1891) were re-structured, and *Plane Creek* constructed, as government-sponsored mills under the 1893 *Sugar Works Guarantee Act*. *Cattle Creek* mill was built by growers in the Finch-Hatton area in 1906, independent of government finance.<sup>78</sup>

During 1891-1892 land selection was slow, but renewed confidence after the legislation of 1892-3 brought many new farmers into the industry. Approximately twenty-five percent of the cane farmers in the valley at the end of 1894 had planted their first cane in that year.<sup>79</sup> As no suitable new land was available within reasonable proximity of the mills, the new farms were located close to Mackay on land previously part of plantations.<sup>80</sup> *Habana* was the first plantation to subdivide its land for lease to tenant farmers in the late 1880s. CSR followed suit at *Homebush* in 1891, and most of the other plantations did the same through the 1890s. No farmer would settle at the periphery of the valley when prime cane land was available close to the mills.

Even though farmers now had better access to land and to mills than ever before there were other problems to contend with, not the least of which was the exigencies of the weather at the turn of the century. As Ole Matsen recalled in later life:

We happened to have several poor years during the last decade of the last century. I had to go in for clearing a lot of new land, which was very expensive as all the forrest land here was very heavily timbered and as we had several very dry years to contend with, the crops were not very heavy for several years. In 1898 we had a terrible Cyclone which caused a lot of damage, and in 1899 a severe frost in the month of July which nearly ruined all the sugar cane, so that we had a lot of trouble to get any sugar-cane fit for plants,

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78. Refer to Graph Three of this chapter and to Appendix Three.

79. *QVP* 1892, v.4, 44; *QVP* 1893, v.3, 518. See also Table Five and Appendix Four.

80. New land was opened when the railway was extended in the late 1890s.

Table Five

Approximate date at which small cane farm cultivators at  
Mackay in 1894 first took up their land.

Year	Freehold	Leasehold	Total
1872	2		2
1873			
1874	1		1
1875	.		
1876			
1877			
1878	2		2
1879	5		5
1880	5	1	7
1881	13	1	15
1882	7		9
1883	4		4
1884	10		10
1885	3		5
1886	4	1	5
1887	8		8
1888	10	5	15
1889	5	5	9
1890	5	6	11
1891	13	31	50
1892	6	33	40
1893	2	29	32
1894	7	60	72
	112	172	302

Source: A.E. Munro (comp.), *The Sugar Fields of Mackay, North Queensland*, abstracted as Appendix Four of this thesis.

Note: Discrepancies occur in the above table because of inadequate information in Munro's *The Sugar Fields of Mackay*, or because some land owners simultaneously held freehold and leasehold land.

and the year 1900 I had the smallest amount of sugar cane of all, only a little over 100 tons. I was at that time heavily indebted to the Company [CSR], but still I never lost heart but kept on. In 1901 I had a fair crop and pulled up a bit but the great drought of 1902 put things back again. After that year I made a slow but steady progress and by the year 1913, I was over all my troubles. I had paid off my debt to the Colonial Sugar Refining Coy. and had a few hundred pounds left over to carry on with. 81

A new land Act in 1897 further assisted small-scale settlement in the valley.<sup>82</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century the greater part of the vacant land in the district had been, or was open for, selection.<sup>83</sup> But so long as the railway only went as far west as Eton and Mirani, cane growers were bound within that area, extended slightly by mill tramways. (As noted earlier, the two 1880s farmers' mills had been built without tramways. *Racecourse* had no tramways of its own until 1927. *North Eton* formed the Double Peak Tramway Company in the 1890s, but the tramway ran at a loss for several years. The two companies were united in 1905 and the tramway extended to Septimus.<sup>84</sup> Further geographic extension of the sugar industry was not possible until after 1897 when a long-awaited high level rail-bridge was built across the Pioneer at Mirani and the line extended to Pinnacle. There were three further extensions during the early 1900s: to Cattle Creek

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81. Matsen Diary Ten.

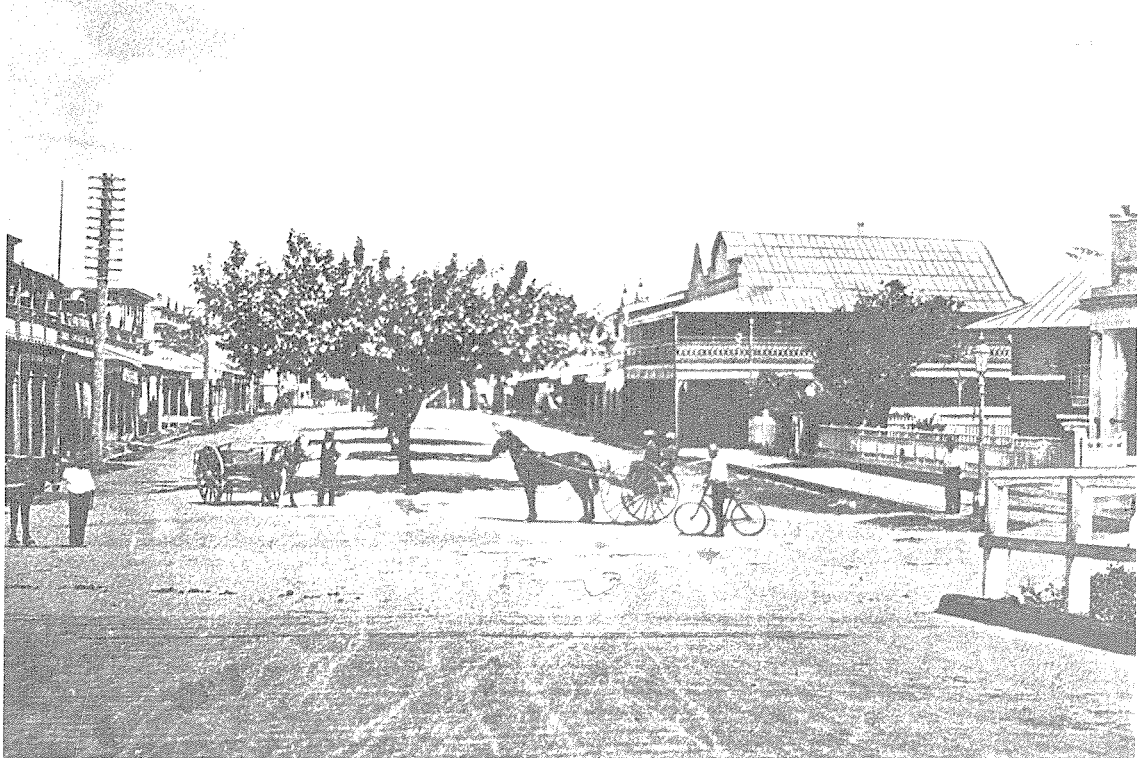
The sugar production figures in Table One show that Matsen's problems were part of a district-wide trend. In 1899 the sugar tonnage dropped by half, and in 1902 by almost one third. Also refer to H.T. Easterby, *The Queensland Sugar Industry: an historical review* (Brisbane, 1931), 35-7.

82. Under the 1897 Act the rent of an agricultural farm or agricultural homestead was one-fortieth of the purchasing price in the case of agricultural farms, and 3d. per acre for agricultural homesteads. The tenure of agricultural farms was altered: the fifty year period was cut back to twenty; and the annual payments of rent became, as a matter of course, installments of the purchase price. Bernays, *Queensland Politics*, 331.

83. *QVP* 1899, v.2, 857; *MM* 13 October 1998.

84. Appendix Three; North Eton, Racecourse. The Double Peak Tramway Company was formed under the *1893 Sugar Works Guarantee Act*.

## PLATE 21



a. Sydney street, Mackay in the 1880s, leading off the bridge into town. (Photo: *JCUNQ: History*)



b. Mirani township in the 1890s. (Photo: *JCUNQ: History*)

in 1902; across the creek to Finch-Hatton in 1904; and on to today's terminus, Netherdale, in 1911.<sup>85</sup> When Pinnacle became the terminus, farmers in that area began planting cane; similarly, cane farming later extended as far west as Finch-Hatton. Map One shows the main line, its branches, and mill tramways in 1925; rail transport had opened the entire valley for cane cultivation. As noted earlier, the optimum size of a mill is constrained by transport considerations. Before the extensive rail network was constructed cane had to be planted as close to the mills as possible, limiting its geographic spread and the size of the mills. By enabling cane to be transported long distances in a few hours, railways allowed mills to expand their outputs. Early in the twentieth century cane was being transported by rail over sixty kilometers from Finch-Hatton to *Racecourse* and *Pleystowe*. When *Homebush* closed in 1921, its growers sent their cane by rail to *Farleigh* on the north side of the river. Such arrangements were not ideal but they enabled mobility never possible with horse-drawn transport.

The 1893 *Sugar Works Guarantee Act* enabled construction of several new central mills throughout the colony, three of them at Mackay. *Marian*, a plantation mill worked mainly as a private central mill, had closed in 1891.<sup>86</sup> Under the terms of the 1893 Act its growers purchased one hundred acres of the 2,000 acre estate and the rest of the land was sub-divided into small farms. Surrounding Crown land was also thrown open for selection. A new mill was erected which first crushed in 1895. Farmers on both sides of the river supplied the mill and the old plantation tramways were extended into the surrounding district. *Marian* paid off its indebtedness to the government in 1909. By 1913 *Marian's* tramways had been extended as far as Mt Jukes, giving many new north side farmers access to the mill.<sup>87</sup>

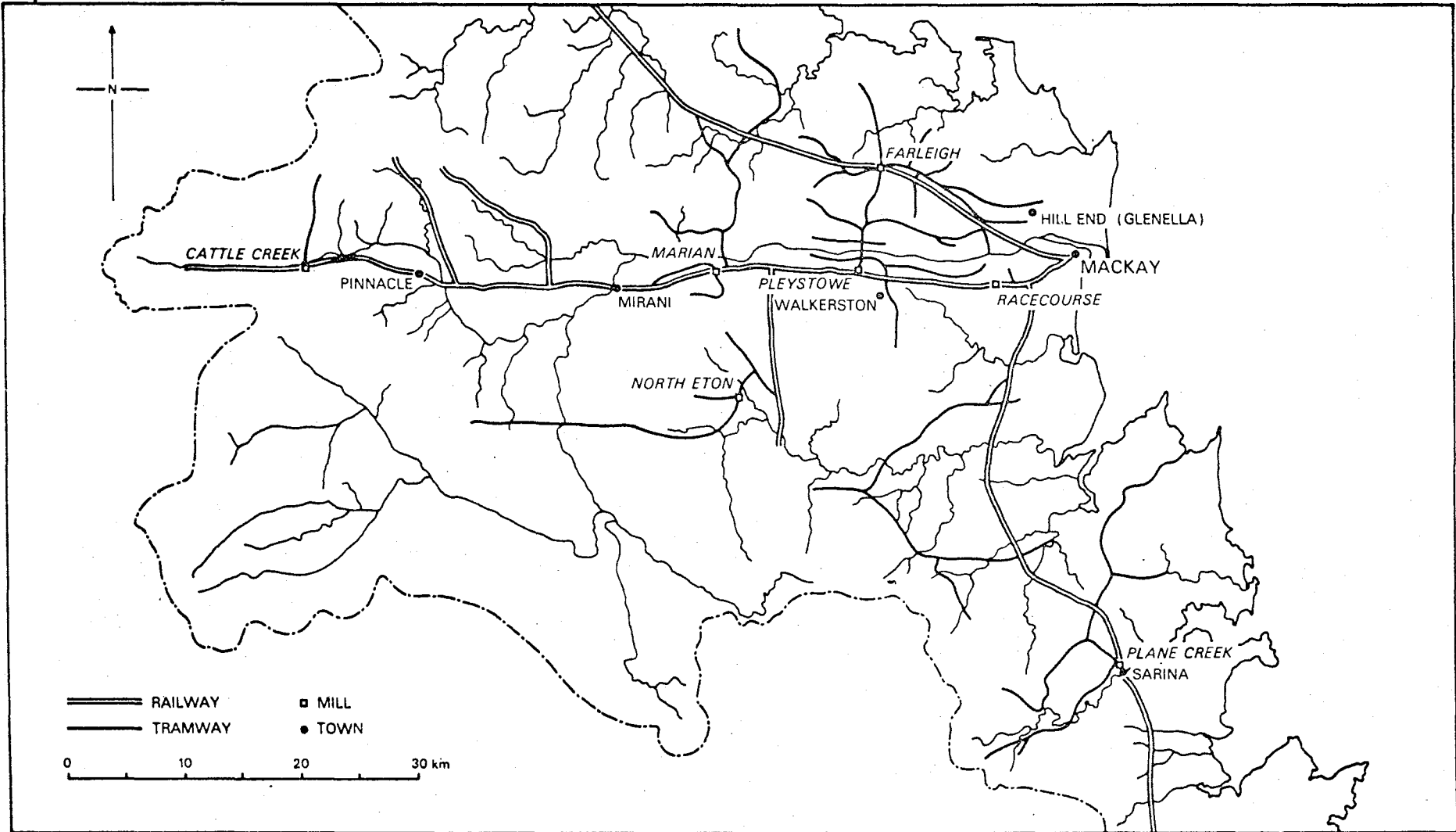
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85. Kerr, *Pioneer Pageant*, 120-4, 136-40, 165.

86. QVP 1886, v.2: Hodgkinson's Central Mill Report, 12; Appendix Three: *Marian*.

87. MM 1, 31 May 1894; C.T. Wood, *Sugar Country: a short history of the raw sugar industry of Australia, 1864-1964* (Brisbane, 1965), 72; Kerr, *Pioneer Pageant*, 120-2; H.A. Moore, *The Marian Story* (Mackay, 1980).

Map One: The Pioneer valley in 1925



*Pleystowe*, now the oldest surviving sugar mill in Australia, was the second steam-powered mill built at Mackay. Having operated as a plantation mill from 1869 until 1888, it closed until 1895; meanwhile the plantation's cane was milled at *Racecourse*. In 1893 the Pleystowe Land Syndicate Ltd purchased the mill and surrounds, which the Syndicate used to form a company under the 1893 Act. The new mill commenced crushing in September 1895.<sup>88</sup> *Pleystowe*, like *Racecourse*, sought to increase its production by extending its tramways and utilizing the government railway. Farmers from as far west as Finch-Hatton supplied *Pleystowe* at the turn of the century. During the 1900s *Pleystowe* extended its tramway to Habana, the Leap, and from Gargett towards Owens creek. The Owens creek line was horse-drawn; never efficient, it was pulled up in the 1910s leaving Owens creek growers with the long haul by road to Gargett until a ten kilometer railway branch line opened in 1922. In 1902 *Pleystowe* was the subject of a government inquiry into allegations of mismanagement. Then in 1904, using powers available to it under the 1893 Act, the Queensland government foreclosed on the mill because it had fallen behind in its loan re-payments. Two years later the Queensland National Bank paid off all the mill's arrears, and having accepted liability for the rest of the loan, took over the mill. *Pleystowe* was not clear of debt until 1915, when control reverted to the growers. Nearby *Palms* mill, owned by the Australian Estates Co. Ltd, closed in 1924; the following year the *Pleystowe* company was joined to Australian Estates as Amalgamated Sugar Mills Ltd.<sup>89</sup>

Edmund and Richard Atherton and Henry Bell settled on Plane creek in the early 1860s. Parts of their pastoral leases were resumed for agricultural selections during the 1870s, but Bell and the Athertons kept control of the largest areas of this freehold land.<sup>90</sup> In the

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88. Munro, *Sugar Fields*, 61; Appendix Three: Pleystowe.

89. *MM* 28 January, 6, 11, 15, 22 February, 19 April, 5, 15, 17 July 1902, 17, 22 December 1904, 31 October 1905; *MM Sugar Centenary 1967*: *MM Jubilee 1912*, 28; Easterby, *Queensland Sugar Industry*, 38.

90. *MM Sugar Centenary 1967*, 21; J.H. Landells, *A History of Plane Creek Mill, Sarina: together with information and statistics regarding the mill's district* (Mackay, 1937); E.H. Atherton, *Plane Creek Central Company Limited, 1937-1974* (Mackay, 1980); *Qlder* 3 April 1880.

1880s there were plans to erect a plantation mill in the area, but nothing eventuated.<sup>91</sup> The Plane Creek Central Mill Co. Ltd was registered late in 1893 and brought under the *Sugar Works Guarantee Act* in 1894. The mill first crushed in 1896 but by 1897 was subject to an official government inquiry. The original pastoralists were the major shareholders, and as at *Pleystowe*, there was a great deal of friction between large and small shareholders. In the early twentieth century, particularly after the railway was extended south to Koumala in 1915, *Plane Creek* expanded its production. Disputes arose between "dry" (non-cane growing) shareholders and "wet" (cane growing) shareholders over the management of the company and the profit margin. Legal action in 1914 led to the Articles of the company being reorganised so that the Board consisted of six "wet" and three "dry" shareholders. The last payment to the Queensland government was made in 1920.<sup>92</sup>

*Plane Creek* played a prominent part in establishing the Australian National Power Alcohol Company at Sarina in 1926. The original shareholders were *Plane Creek*, The Distillers' Company Ltd, and Australian Estates, joined in 1927 by *Pioneer* mill, *Mulgrave Central* and *Babinda Central*. CSR bought a forty percent holding in the Power Alcohol Company in 1952, acquiring complete ownership in 1972. In 1973 *Plane Creek* amalgamated with Pioneer Sugar Mills Ltd, the owners of *Pioneer* and *Inkerman* mills on the Burdekin.<sup>93</sup>

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91. In 1880 it was rumoured that a mill for the Plane creek area was being purchased in England. In June 1882 a sugar company was said to have been forming to erect a mill near there. These two cases may refer to separate companies or to CSR who bought land in the Plane creek area in 1881 with the idea of erecting a mill. Instead they concentrated their efforts on land closer to Mackay and built *Homebush*.  
*Qlder* 2 October 1880; *Planter & Farmer*, 1882-3, v.1, 210; *CSR* 142/3182, Schedule of deeds transferred to CSR, 23 July 1888 and 142/3296, Knox to Forrest, 28 September 1881.
92. *MM* 16 March, 19, 24 August, 16 September, 23 October 1897; Easterby, *Queensland Sugar Industry*, 38; *Koumala and District*; Atherton, *Plane Creek*, 3-5.
93. Atherton, *Plane Creek*, 9-10.

Finch-Hatton cane continued to be milled at *Racecourse* and *Pley-stowe* until 1906. In 1904 and 1905 cane farmers around Finch-Hatton met to discuss building a local mill. The state government was adamant that it would not finance another farmers' milling company as several of the other 1893 Act companies had fallen behind with their loan repayments. The growers refused to be discouraged. After several of the closed mills in the district had been cannibalised for parts, *Cattle Creek* emerged in 1906.<sup>94</sup> *Cattle Creek* was built at the end of one era and at the beginning of another: it was the last mill constructed in the Pioneer valley and the first financed entirely by its growers without government or private aid.

1906 is doubly significant. In that year deportation began of the main strength of the sugar industry labour force over the previous forty years: the Melanesian indentured labourers. In the fervour for a "White Australia", one of the first Bills presented to the new federal parliament in 1901 became the *Pacific Island Labourers Act*, ordering an end to all recruiting by 1903 and the deportation of as many Melanesian as possible by 1907.<sup>95</sup>

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94. *MM* 15 November 1904, 22 August 1905, 11 September 1906; Kerr, *Pioneer Pageant*, 140-1.

95. Commonwealth Acts; No. 16 of 1901; P. Corris, 'White Australia' in action: the repatriation of Pacific Islanders from Queensland', *HS*, v. 15: 58 (1972), 237-50.

2.C. 1907-1927

Ralph Shlomowitz aptly described the sugar industry at the turn of the century as being in "a period of institutional disequilibrium".<sup>96</sup> Following the enormous changes in milling already seen to have occurred in the 1880s and 1890s, the labour force of the sugar industry was transformed in the early years of the twentieth century. The forces which dictated the construction of the larger sugar mills were technological, and had international significance: they affected Australia decades later than old-established producing countries. Government assistance was provided to hasten a process already underway. Reconstruction of the labour force was imposed from outside the industry, in the face of unanimous opposition from within it, and for reasons overwhelmingly political.

The first move to end the Melanesian labour trade was taken in 1885. The notice then given that importations would end after 1890 was one reason, admittedly among many, for the stagnation of the sugar industry in those years. The reversal of that decision in 1892, at a time of general economic crisis was avowedly no more than a temporary respite. Whether any government of an unfederated Queensland could have succeeded in enforcing that policy may be doubted, but the question was never put to the test. Within the ten year period of the respite granted in 1892 the Commonwealth of Australia came into being, and it was the new federal government which in 1901 ordained the end of the labour trade in 1903 and deportation of as many Melanesian immigrants as possible from 1906. Unlike Queensland, the Commonwealth had powers sufficient to ensure that the sugar industry survived during its painful adaptation to a wholly white labour force. It is one of the persistent myths of Queensland history that Melanesians were employed exclusively by plantation owners and that their removal, of itself, resulted in "the abandonment of the plantation system".<sup>97</sup> In reality small-scale farmers were as dependent as the

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96. R. Shlomowitz, 'Team Work and Incentives: the origins and development of the Butty Gang System in Queensland's sugar industry, 1891-1913', *Journal of Comparative Economics*, v.3 (1979), 50.

97. G.C. Bolton, 'Regional History in Australia', in J.A. Moses (ed.), *Historical Disciplines and Culture in Australia* (Brisbane, 1979), 222.

largest planter upon Melanesian labour in the nineteenth century: moreover, as has been seen, the crucial transition from plantations to small farms occurred in the 1890s, when the labour trade was still functioning.

Appendix Four, based on an 1894 census of farming units in the Mackay district demonstrates this point. In 1894 small-scale cane farmers employed more than 1,200<sup>98</sup> labourers: 500 Europeans; and more than 700 Melanesians. The planters employed just over 1,870 labourers: 500 Europeans; 1,070 Melanesians; and 260 Chinese, Malays, Javanese and Japanese. There is, of course, a wide gap between *Farleigh* with its 240 Melanesians, or even *Palms* with its thirty-eight and a typical farm employing two or five. The experiences of a Melanesian on a large plantation and those of a fellow Islander on a small farm may have differed by a corresponding margin, but there is insufficient evidence for firm conclusions about the nature of the differences and the ways in which Melanesians perceived them. It will be apparent from Appendix Four that a typical Islander was to be found on the plantation not on the small farm: on the other hand, for every plantation owner or manager in the 1890s, there were more than thirty farmers employing Melanesians. From Table Six it will be seen that the numbers of employers increased in every year before 1899, an increase accounted for entirely by farmers.

New imports ceased in early 1904 and repatriation began in late 1906 with the intention that it should be completed by early 1908. The federal government was not content to wait for these matters to bring about an all-white industry. In 1902, while imposing a tariff of £6 a ton on imported sugar (which amounted to a total embargo), the government offered a large bonus to Australian growers who employed only white labour.<sup>99</sup> After less than a decade the sought-after change

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98. About 12 of the 1,200 were Asians, mainly working for Asian farmers.

99. From 1902 an excise tax of £3 per ton was levied on all sugar manufactured in Australia; producers employing only white labour were granted a £2 per ton rebate. To hasten the change, in 1905 the excise tax was increased to £4 per ton and the bounty raised to £3 per ton.

Table Six

## Melanesians employed at Mackay : 1893 - 1904

Year	Melanesians at Mackay	Employers of Melanesians	Plantation Mills	Farmers' Mills
1893	2081	208	10	2
1894	2168	283	10	2
1895	2167	392	8	4
1896	1941	413	7	5
1897	1780	441	7	5
1898	2074	459	7	5
1899	1684	439	7	5
1900	1775	335	7	5
1901	1475	339	5	5
1902	1708	249	4	5
1903	1301	222	4	5
1904	1260	201	4	5

## Source:

Annual Report of the Department of Pacific Island Immigration,  
1895-1905; Graph Three.

had been accomplished. In 1910 92.7 percent of the Mackay cane crop was grown using exclusively white labour, and a few years on into the 1910s the transition was complete.<sup>100</sup>

Until the end of the nineteenth century small farmers had been tied to the proximity of existing mills by the exigencies of river, road and rail communication, but from early in the twentieth century the extension of tramways linked to the central mills freed them to take up land throughout the valley.<sup>101</sup> Plantation land was no longer the focus of the industry; almost all the resident plantation owners had died or left the district. When J.E. Davidson, founder of *Alexandra* the first plantation, left for England in January 1901,<sup>102</sup> the plantation era, in economic decline since the mid-1880s, was truly over. But a visitor would have noticed little difference between the field scene of 1900s and that of earlier years. Farming methods continued without great change for two decades after federation, except that the land was worked increasingly, and at length exclusively, by white labour - in the great majority of cases the farmer and his family.

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100. Easterby, *Queensland Sugar Industry*, 28; D.W. Hunt, A History of the Labour Movement in North Queensland: trade unionism, politics and industrial conflict, 1900-1920 (PhD. thesis, James Cook University of North Queensland, 1979), 32-3, and 'Exclusivism and Unionism: Europeans in the Queensland Sugar Industry, 1900-10', in A. Curthoys and A. Markus (eds.), *Who Are Our Enemies?: racism and the Australian working class* (Sydney, 1978), Table Two, 92.

101. Many of these new farms were taken up by the children of pioneer farmers from the nineteenth century. A great deal of information about them can be gleaned from obituary notices and short biographies published in the local newspaper, a few of which are listed below. After each reference is the family name and the district in which they lived.

*MM* 3 July 1976 (Stopper/Richmond); *MM* 8 October 1976 (Howard/Finch-Hatton); *MM* 20 November 1976 (Tickle/Chelona); *MM* 28 February 1978 (Kneipp/Carmila); *MM* 13 October 1978 (Comerford/Finch-Hatton); *MM* 15 December 1978 (McFarlane/Eton); *MM* 9 February 1979 (Neilsen/Mia Mia); *MM* 9 July 1979 (Pratt/Calen); *MM* 18 July 1979 (Hansen/Sandiford).

102. *MM* 23 December 1899.

Farmers continued using horse-drawn ploughs and wagons. In the mid-1920s iron-wheeled tractors (mainly Fordsons, McCormick-Deerings and Austins) came into general use, to be replaced by rubber-tired models a decade later.<sup>103</sup> A few farmers continued to use horse-drawn farm equipment until the 1950s, but most made the transition to tractors well before the Second World War. Tractors were expensive (£180 to £600 in 1925<sup>104</sup>) but the problems involved in using tractors went further than their price. These early tractors had to be hand-cranked, started on petrol, then changed over to power kerosene when the engine was hot, without mixing the two fuels. Farmers were unused to combustion engines. Accidents occurred during cranking, as the spark had to be retarded by hand; failure to do so could cause the crank handle to fly back suddenly and savagely. It sometimes took hours to get a tractor started. Early ignition systems had to be finely adjusted and few farmers knew how, as Frank Rolleston, 'grandson of John Rolleston'<sup>105</sup> relates:

Few of the farmers of those days were mechanically minded and even a simple spark plug was a mystery... On those early Fordson tractors the ignition system was complicated and liable to give trouble and no mechanics were readily available to rectify the trouble. [The] ignition system which was really a kind of magneto... 16 magnets and 16 coils mounted on the flywheel [plus] four trembler coils one for each cylinder, which instead of giving a single spark for each firing stroke [as was the case with McCormick-Deering tractors] poured out a stream of sparks.

Another reason which made all these tractors hard to start is that they had to be hand cranked which required a strong man, particularly with the oil used in those days which was very thick when cold ... some farmers resorted to the rather drastic measure of lighting a fire under the sump of the tractor in winter to warm the oil. 106

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103. Rolleston, 'The Brightly Story', 1-13; *Sandiford State School*, 10; Easterby, *Queensland Sugar Industry*, 52; CRM 36a:1-2 (JG).
104. Matsen Diary Ten, 167.
105. John Rolleston was the subject of the biographical sketch in the 1885-1890 section of this chapter.
106. Rolleston, 'The Brightly Story', 15.

Tractors gradually become easier to use and farmers became more used to machinery. The older generation of cane farmers never really got used to tractors, but by the 1920s and 1930s they had handed on their farms to their children.<sup>107</sup> Ole Matsen, the Danish farmer mentioned earlier, was 75 years old in 1925, retired and living in town, going out to the farm to help his sons when he felt up to it. Matsen left ploughing with tractors to his sons, but nevertheless appreciated the revolution which they brought to farming:

the tractor was at work last Saturday ploughing, with a double Disc plough, and it did splendid work, turning over three acres before dinner  
 .... the cost of oil per acre, ploughed, will be about 4 shillings, equal with two men's wages. It will come to less than 10 shillings per acre, which is a long way cheaper than it can possibly be done with horses. 108

Early twentieth century farmers taking up new land cleared the virgin scrub and forest themselves. Trees had to be felled, stacked and burnt, stumps and surface roots had to be grubbed. Until their land was clear enough to plough farmers just dug separate holes for each cane plant.<sup>109</sup> Work on farms in the longer-established areas was easier as the back-breaking work had been done by gangs of Islanders over past decades, but even so it was the first time that only European labour was available to perform the menial and often difficult tasks of cultivating, harvesting and crushing sugar cane. During the first two decades of the new century farmers and labourers experimented with, negotiated over, and came to agreements on the optimum labour system, wages, working and living conditions. Planting and cultivating the cane was done mainly by the farmer and his family with the occasional assistance of hired labour. Cane cutting on the other hand, required a concentration of labour over and above what the normal family could provide; and some form of contract labour had to be used.

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107. Most but not all! One Mackay farmer, Harry Schaefer, used a horse-drawn plough and dray until he retired in 1977. *Northern Magazine* September 1976, 16-9; *MM* 9 March 1981.

108. Matsen Diary Ten, 167-9.

109. *Koumala and District, 1859-1974*, 32.

A variety of labour schemes were tried before, by general agreement, the butty gang system was adopted. The term "butty gang" was used to refer to a team of cane cutters, usually including a full-time cook, each member of which shared equally in their joint earnings according to the number of days each man worked during the season. Butty gangs were paid on a collective piece-rate basis (shillings per ton of cane cut). Shlomowitz in his article on the Queensland butty gang system lists the following variations on payment schemes as operating for cane cutters in the 1900s: piece-rate (ie. the butty gang scheme); contractors paid on a piece-rate basis, employing teams of cane cutters on stipulated wages or stipulated wages plus a bonus; stipulated wages; stipulated wages plus a bonus if and when the season was completed; stipulated wages plus a bonus per ton of cane; and stipulated wages plus a bonus per ton of cane over a minimum daily quota with a penalty if the minimum daily quota was not achieved.<sup>110</sup>

Butty gangs varied in size, usually including ten to twenty members in the 1910s and 1920s, but a 1950s report gives them an average membership of four to eight cutters. Teams were formed in a variety of ways: by the farmer, the "ganger" (team leader), or by some factor uniting the group.<sup>111</sup> Gangs were paid monthly, but as a crop might be cut in several stages, the farmer retained ten to twenty-five percent of the group's earnings to give some incentive for the men to stay together for the season. Butty gangs, "essentially nonhierarchical self-regulating, and self-selecting worker peer gangs"<sup>112</sup> were similar to other worker peer groups operating in primary and secondary industries elsewhere in Australia. Their adoption by European labourers in the Australian sugar industry was an important element in the overall transformation of the industry at the turn of the century. Gangs of itinerant cane-cutters were amongst the most characteristic features of the industry until mechanisation of the harvesting process in the

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110. Shlomowitz, 'Team work and Incentives', 47-50.

111. *Ibid.*, 48, 52.

Australian-born Melanesians who were allowed to work in the sugar industry (although their immigrant parents were not) formed family gangs. The same is true of European families (particularly Italians and Maltese) who formed gangs including fathers, sons and cousins etc.

112. *Ibid.*, 48.

1960s. Structurally, while trade unions gave overall unity and political-industrial power to the sugar workers, it was the butty gang system which grouped individuals on the job.

There was a belief current in nineteenth century North Queensland that white men could not do manual labour in the tropics; vestigial remnants of the belief survived into the 1930s.<sup>113</sup> The belief was false, but this is not to say that Europeans did not have problems acclimatising, or that their working conditions were pleasant. European workers in the sugar industry at the start of this century were often expected by their employers to accept poor accommodation and conditions. But in the early twentieth century as black labour was phased out of the industry, white labour was in an increasingly powerful position to bargain for improved conditions.

Farmers complained about the standard of work done by European labourers: labourers complained about the standard of accommodation offered by the farmers, about wages and the type of work they were expected to do.<sup>114</sup> Living conditions improved with the passing of *The Shearers' and Sugar Workers' Accommodation Act of 1905* which prescribed minimum standards of food and accommodation for white workers. Paralleling government moves to improve conditions for labourers was the growth of trade unions in the sugar industry. The first Sugar Workers' Unions were formed in Mackay and Cairns during the 1904 crushing season. From the initial 162 members in 1905 the Mackay Sugar Workers' Union increased in size to 460 members in 1908.<sup>115</sup> Douglas Hunt in his Doctoral thesis on the labour movement in North Queensland, 1900 to 1920, summed up the sugar industry of 1910:

gradually, an acclimatised, experienced and homogeneous workforce emerged, and withit the quality of labour also improved. By 1910, the federal legislation had largely achieved its dual purpose - "removal of the Kanaka" and

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113. Courtenay, 'White Man and the Australian Tropics'.

114. Hunt, *Labour Movement in North Queensland*, 32-3.

115. *Ibid.*, 37.

"causing the sugar industry to be carried on by white labour". Initial difficulties in securing sufficient labour had been overcome. For five or six months each year the sugar districts were regularly inundated by thousands of itinerant workers both from southern states and from pastoral and mining areas of Queensland. 116

The formation of sugar workers' unions was part of the general movement towards unionisation and the formation of the Labour<sup>117</sup> party during the 1890s: their bargaining strength increased as the industry became the preserve of white labour. Formal associations of cane growers date from a much earlier period, beginning with the powerful Planters' Association which functioned during the 1870s and 1880s. The first associations for small-scale cultivators were the co-operative milling companies begun in the 1880s, which united farmers at *Eton* and *Racecourse* into interest groups with a single purpose - the operation of their mills. At the same time other growers felt the need for a district-wide organisation to give them a united voice. The Pioneer River Farmers' Association (PRFA) was formed for this purpose in 1888 by cane growers on CSR's "Six-Mile" (Rosella) estate near *Homebush*. The PRFA was the first association exclusively for cane growers.<sup>118</sup> Branches formed amongst small farm cultivators around *Nindaroo* and *Conningsby* and in other areas in the valley. The PRFA lapsed for a few years in the early 1890s but had re-formed by 1892 concerning itself with a wide range of problems confronting farmers in relation to the mills and the labour supply. One aim was to bring together all members at least once a year, an aim first accomplished when a district ploughing match was organised in 1894, the forerunner of the annual Mackay Agricultural Show.<sup>119</sup> Most significantly the

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116. *Ibid.*, 33.

117. The "Labour" spelling was changed to "Labor" in 1918.

118. An earlier Association had been formed by selectors in the district, but its members were chiefly maize growers and dairy farmers. *Mackay the Sugaropolis of Australia, 1862-1937: an illustrated and historical record of the progress and development of the city and district of Mackay, North Queensland, during its first 75 years* (Mackay, 1937), 29.

119. The Mackay Agricultural, Pastoral and Mining Association, begun in 1872, organised the first Mackay Shows in 1878 and 1879, after which they lapsed until re-organised by the PRFA. The PRFA ran the Show until 1914 when a separate Show Association was formed. *MM Show Centenary 1979*.

PFRA backed the election of two farmers' representatives to Queensland parliament.<sup>120</sup> J.V. Chataway, editor of the locally produced *Sugar Journal and Tropical Cultivator* was the farmers' watchdog in parliament from 1893 until 1901. When Chataway died the PRFA (by then the Pioneer River Farmers' and Graziers' Association) (PRF&GA) nominated their President E.B. Swayne to take the seat. After several attempts Swayne was elected in 1907, representing Mackay (1907-1912) and Mirani (1912-1935) electors for the next twenty-eight years.<sup>121</sup> Growers' Associations had formed in other sugar districts at about the same time. In 1905 a number of sugar producers met in Townsville, the first time the widely scattered growers and millers had gathered together to discuss the future of the industry. At a second conference in 1906 every sugar district in the state was represented; a resolution was adopted which led in 1907 to the formation of the Australian Sugar Producers' Association (ASPA), still operating today.

The ASPA included both farmers and millers; their conflicting interests eventually leading to a split in the organisation. The PRF & GA was a branch of the ASPA, but increasingly its farmer-members felt their interests to be different from those of pastoralists, and that the PRF&GA could no longer suitably represent sugar growers' political interests. The growers remained within the PRF&GA but in 1906 formed themselves into a limited liability company. Then in 1912, completely dissatisfied with the miller-dominated ASPA the PRF&GA withdrew, and the farmers went on between 1915 and 1919 to organise their own state-wide United Cane Growers' Association. The UCGA (growers) and ASPA (millers and growers) division continued until in 1926 the Queensland government created the Queensland Cane Growers' Council, (QCGC) a compulsory growers' organisation with local Executives in each sugar district. Today the QCGC and the ASPA represent growing and milling

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120. *Ibid.*, 27-9; *MM* 7 February 1895.

121. Waterson, *Queensland Parliament*, 32, 176. Refer to Chapter Four, Table Nine.

interests in the industry.<sup>122</sup>

The emergence of organisations of sugar growers and millers on the one hand and one of sugar workers on the other, all with diverging interests, was bound to bring a clash sooner or later. The first major clash came in 1911 at a time and over issues deliberately chosen by trade union organisers. Queensland's European sugar workers went on strike: the first major industrial dispute in the half-century old industry removed the last vestiges of the master-servant relationship surviving from the planter-kanaka days. During the intervening years since the first Sugar Workers' Unions formed in 1904, the union movement had grown steadily stronger. In April 1911 William McCormack, Secretary of the Far Northern District of the Amalgamated Workers' Association (AWA) outlined the aims and strategy of the strike to southern unions:

... We are asking the Millers for an 8 hour day in the mills and also for a minimum wage of 30/- per week and food. We think that the sugar industry should be able to run an eight hour day as it receives a bonus from the consumers for the express purpose of making the industry a white man's industry.

In connection with the cane cutting we have asked for a different agreement so that the men will have equal rights with the employers, and we think this is only fair. If you have been in the sugar fields you will know now much the men suffer through these legal obligations which they are compelled to sign, and we ask that the reprehensible system of bonus be abolished and a percentage system adopted. ...We intend making the fight general from Mossman right down to Bundaberg...

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122. There were many other ephemeral sugar interest groups. One, the Australian Cane Growers' Union began in 1909 as a rival to the ASPA, but was short-lived. Further research is needed into these early sugar industry organisations.

*Mackay the Sugaropolis*, 31; *The Pioneer*, 1,7,15 January 1910; D.W. Hunt, *Federal Politics in the Herbert Electorate, 1915-1925* (B.A. Hons. thesis, James Cook University of North Queensland, 1974), 19; J.M. Bertei, *Non-labour Politics in North Queensland, 1907-1929* (B.A. Hons. thesis, University of Queensland, 1960), 39-48; *MM Mackay Centenary 1962*, 21.

We will make every effort to stop men coming, and will ask the Waterside Workers not to handle sugar in which scabs are employed in the manufacture. 123

The strike began in the Lower Burdekin district in June and within a month had extended among field labourers in all major sugar producing areas except Maryborough.<sup>124</sup> Hundreds of men lived in strike camps in the Pioneer valley while farmers and their families attempted to both cut the cane and operate the mills. Strikers at Mackay went back to work in mid-August, accepting a thirty shilling, forty-eight hour week with "time and a quarter" for overtime.<sup>125</sup>

In September-October 1911 a Federal Royal Commission was appointed to investigate wide-ranging issues in the sugar industry: the problems of workers, growers and millers; the future of protective measures (such as the sugar excise and bounty); the possibility of establishing more mills; and the need for further legislation. The Commissioners' Report acknowledged that the AWA demands on pay, hours, conditions of employment and bonuses were justifiable. As a result of the Commission the excise and bounty were abolished in July 1913. At Mackay the Commissioners investigated applications requesting funding for new central mills from groups of farmers at Silent Grove (St Helens), Hamilton (Gargett) and Kelvin Grove (Koumala), but did not recommend that any be established.<sup>126</sup>

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123. W. McCormack to A. Nation, 14 April 1911, "General Secretary of Amalgamated Workers' Association of Queensland's letterbook, 24 March 1911 to 8 June 1912" (Archives of Business and Labour, RSSS, Australian National University: M44 30/104), quoted in K. H. Kennedy, *The Public Life of William McCormack, 1907-32* (PhD. thesis, James Cook University of North Queensland, 1973), 37-8.
124. In the Maryborough area employers and employees maintained what Kay Saunders described as "a formal if strained and mutually resentful relationship". K. Saunders, 'Masters and Servants: the Queensland sugar workers' strike 1911', in Curthoys and Markus, *Who are Our Enemies?*, 96.
125. *Ibid.*, 110; *The Pioneer* 8, 22, 29 July 1911.
126. *CPP* 1912, v.3: Report of Royal Commission on the Sugar Industry together with minutes of evidence and appendices, particularly the Report, 1035-1125 and Plates 14 and 15.

During the following decade further legislative moves were made to safeguard the "white" sugar industry and to control marketing of the product. Under Queensland's *1912 Leases to Aliens Acts* and the *1913 Sugar Acts* island-born Melanesians were effectively banned from sugar cultivation. Next, in 1919, a Queensland Industrial Court Award made cane cutting an exclusively European occupation.<sup>127</sup> On the marketing side, legislation was introduced in 1915, tightening government control over the industry and beginning a period of bitter disputes between sugar workers, growers, millers and refiners. In 1915 price-fixing boards in New South Wales and Victoria set a price for refined sugar far below that of the previous three years. The Queensland and federal governments assisted the industry by purchasing the entire Queensland crop, then negotiated a better price on the southern market. The *Sugar Acquisition Act of 1915* was passed to ratify the governments' action. In the same year the Australian government protected the industry from war-time inflation by prohibiting all sugar exports, importing only enough sugar to fulfil domestic demands. And as a third string around the marketing package Queensland passed the *Regulation of Sugar Cane Prices Act*, fixing the price paid by the refiners to the millers for raw sugar.<sup>128</sup>

Queensland now had its first Labour government, headed by T.J. Ryan. When he took office in June 1915, Ryan had more problems to contend with than disputes in the sugar industry. Australia was at war, the conscription issue was under debate and Queensland had industrial problems on a much wider front, but the sugar industry was to occupy a good deal of his time over the next few years. CSR, Australia's major sugar refiners served three writs against the Queensland government over the operation of the *1915 Cane Prices Act*, making it clear that they might refuse to refine the 1916 crop.<sup>129</sup> They also circumvented the Cane Prices

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127. Refer to Appendix One and to Chapter Six.

128. D.J. Murphy, *T.J. Ryan: a political biography* (Brisbane, 1975), 169-71. Assumption by governments of full responsibility for marketing was not uncommon as a war measure, but whereas in most cases such arrangements terminated with, or shortly after, the war, the arrangements made for sugar became permanent and continued down to the present.

129. Murphy, *Ryan*, 169, 178, and more generally Chapters Eight to Twelve.

Boards by what became known as the Foster Agreement, their growers signing individual agreements with CSR, each at a price determined by the company not the local board. Farmers supplying CSR's *Homebush* mill at Mackay were divided in their opinion of the Foster Agreement. Ole Matsen, a *Homebush* supplier since 1887, always supported CSR:

Our trouble started in 1916 when the Cane Prices Board, came in to existence. The Company refused to be dictated to by the board and what came to be known as the Foster Agreement was the terms the Company bought our cane under. A lot of the farmers, led by Mr. F.J. Stevens demanded the terms set by the Cane Prices Board which the Company refused to comply with, and every year the starting of the crushing was delayed. The majority of the farmers were in favor of the Company's terms but the Cane Prices Board was so constituted, that 20 farmers, in favor of the Cane Prices Board, had the ruling Power, over a hundred farmers in favor of the Company's offer. 130

By the time CSR's cases came to Court in 1916 the industry was in still worse trouble. In 1916 Acting-Judge<sup>131</sup> Dickson of the Industrial Court granted wage increases of between forty and fifty percent to all sugar industry workers and set a higher standard for their accommodation. The Award also abolished the "retention money" clause, by which employers had retained a percentage of each worker's wage until the end of the season as insurance against employees failing to complete contracts. Dickson also altered the zoning of the Mackay region, including it in the northern zone where award wages were now up to ten percent higher than in the south. Although the Award seems to have been quite justified<sup>132</sup>, growers at the time felt that Dickson had greatly over-estimated the capacity of the industry to pay. The result was the reverse of the 1911 strike; this time the growers went on strike and the mills closed.

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130. Matsen Diary Ten, 56-7.

131. The Industrial Court had only one permanent Judge; when he was occupied Acting-Judges were appointed.

132. This is D.W. Hunt's well researched assessment of the Award. Hunt, *Labour Movement in North Queensland*, 275-83.

Premier Ryan, returning from England, found the entire sugar industry in disarray. Of the two issues, the confrontation with CSR was the lesser problem: it was for the Court to decide whether the *Regulation of Sugar Prices Act* was binding or not. (In the event CSR won one challenge and the government two.) The disputed Dickson Award was a more serious conundrum. The Award had been made under the *Industrial Peace Act*, which specifically ruled out any appeal except to the Judge who made the Award. The Labour party, and the trade unions (particularly the Australian Workers' Union <sup>133</sup>) which controlled Labour's Caucus, had fought to have arbitration established and would not overturn the Award. And the federal government refused Queensland's request that the sugar price be raised to cover the wage increase. ASPA challenges before the Full Supreme Court and the High Court failed: the Supreme Court ruled that the principal clauses of the Dickson Award could not be altered; and the ageing Chief Justice Sir Samuel W. Griffith, formerly Premier of Queensland, ruled that the High Court could not give any opinion at all.<sup>134</sup> Prime Minister Hughes arranged in December 1916 for CSR to refine the Queensland crop for £18 per ton of raw sugar. Early in 1917 conferences were held between all parties in the dispute to try to arrive at a new wage agreement, without result. The Queensland Arbitration Court was then asked to review the whole Dickson Award, and on 28 May 1917 reduced the wages award but maintained most of the other conditions. Hughes, after further protracted negotiations, agreed on 18 June to increase the sugar price to £21 per ton, ending two years of dispute over the cost of field and mill labour.<sup>135</sup> One major labour dispute was, for the moment, solved, but another continued, at the other end of the sugar cycle: shipping and wharf labour.

Early twentieth century North Queensland was isolated from the rest of Australia. Before 1921 when the rail link between Mackay and

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133. The Amalgamated Workers' Association (AWA) had been replaced by the Australian Workers' Union (AWU). K.H. Kennedy, 'The rise of the Amalgamated Workers' Association', in Dalton, *Lectures on North Queensland History: Second Series*, 189-210.

134. Murphy, *Ryan*, 178-81, 203, 232,

135. *Ibid.*, 222-3, 251-5, 261-3.

Rockhampton was completed, coastal shipping carried all goods and passengers in and out of the town. Port Mackay was the largest sugar town on the coast, but until an artificial harbour was completed in 1939 all but the smallest vessels had to anchor at Flattop island near the mouth of the Pioneer, while goods and passengers were ferried to and from the river bank wharves by lighters or small craft. During 1915 and 1916 waterside workers throughout Australia agitated for increased wages and against the use of seaman and other non-union labour in unloading ships. Mackay waterside workers struck in May 1915, May to June and July to August 1916. As the crushing progressed the shipping situation worsened, bagged sugar piled up, overflowing from mill and wharf storage sheds. Another strike, on the Sydney wharves, stopped sugar sacks and lime from being sent north to Mackay, preventing bagging and storage of sugar. Waterside workers in other ports refused to handle cargo for either of the strike-bound ports. By mid-August two of Mackay's mills had ceased crushing, their storage facilities filled to capacity. At a compulsory conference called by the Federal Arbitration Court on 31 August, the Shipowners capitulated, agreeing to most of the Union claims.<sup>136</sup>

Waterside strikes continued into 1917. Mackay waterside workers at first refused to unload any ship during the southern strike, then relented to the extent of handling cargo loaded by union labour. The shippers refused to allow them to do any work at all. Premier Ryan was besieged with pleas from northern sugar growers to get supplies of sugar sacks to them. As an immediate solution he sent one State-owned ship and two smaller vessels north with food supplies and what sacks there were in Brisbane. CSR sent sacks from Sydney to Brisbane, principally for Mackay, but because the shipping companies insisted that lighters used between Flattop and the river wharves be manned by non-unionists, the waterside workers would not unload the cargo. Since 1898 the Queensland Labor party had been committed to a policy of state enterprise to counter monopolies and lower consumer prices.<sup>137</sup> In late September, Ryan's government, never shy of battling with the

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136. Hunt, *Labour Movement in North Queensland*, 255-60.

137. Kennedy, *Public Life of William McCormack*, 99-106.

big business interests in the state, decided to set up a state-owned shipping line. With full union support the government issued a proclamation under the *Sugar Acquisition Act* to acquire all ships idle in the state. Furore broke out as the media, the shippers and big business interests decried the evils of socialism, but the unions and many of the cane growers were delighted.<sup>138</sup>

CSR and other shippers were no longer willing to risk taking sugar bags north in case Queensland confiscated their ships. And although the government had the power to confiscate ships, there was no way of forcing crews to sail on them. The federal government refused to support Ryan's audacious move, issuing a proclamation under the *War Precautions Act*, prohibiting the acquisition of any vessels trading inter-state. The dispute ended on 6 October 1917; the strike was called off and Ryan's government quietly dropped their Requisition of Ships Bill, knowing it would not have passed the conservative Queensland Legislative Council.<sup>139</sup>

After the bitter disputes of 1915, 1916 and 1917, the industrial climate in the sugar industry improved. (It could scarcely have got worse.) Between the 1911 strike and the 1915-1917 war-time years an obvious change had occurred to relationships between growers, millers, refiners, and the general labour force. The sugar and waterside unions had proved themselves a power to be reckoned with, irreparably breaking any last vestiges of the master-servant relationship from the nineteenth century industry. Also gone forever was the old free market for sugar: control had passed into the hands of the Australian and Queensland governments. In the introduction to this chapter, five features were outlined which made the modern Australian sugar industry unique in the world. The fourth of these, government control of wages and conditions, marketing and pricing, was largely accomplished during the turbulent years just described.

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138. Murphy, *Ryan*, 285-91.

139. *Ibid.*, 288-94.

At the end of 1917 Mackay was back to normal, or as normal as any community could be with the pick of its youth away fighting in a war overseas. The lull lasted only a few months. On 21 January 1918 one of the worst cyclones ever recorded in Australia, Eline, struck Mackay causing loss of life and immense damage: twenty-two people died and almost 150 were injured; 6,000 tons of sugar were lost in storage; and the 1918 cane crop was reduced by one-third. Drought followed flood. 1919 was a dry year, which meant a light crop for Mackay and every other sugar region. Six of the state's mills did not crush and cane farmers in the southern areas sold much of their crops for fodder.<sup>140</sup>

The world sugar price, which had been low all through the early twentieth century, rose during the First World War. The 1914 price was as high as at any date since the 1883 boom. Although erratic, the price remained high until 1924, then fell by half in the second part of the 1920s, and by half again in the depression years of the 1930s.<sup>141</sup> Although the growers were relatively prosperous during the 1920s, federal government control of pricing meant that they did not receive the full benefit of the high world price. In 1920 the growers received a price rise - £30.6.8. per ton of raw sugar, guaranteed for the next three years. In 1924 the re-negotiated price was eight shillings a ton lower, and in 1925, lower still.<sup>142</sup>

In 1920 there were nine mills operating in the Pioneer valley. *Palms*, *Farleigh* and *Homebush*, originally plantation mills built before 1884, had become central mills dependent on cane from farmers as well as from their own land.<sup>143</sup> *Pleystowe*, *Marian*, *North Eton*, *Racecourse*, *Plane Creek* and *Cattle Creek* were farmer-controlled central mills. Another plantation mill, *Meadowlands*, had operated until the end of 1914 when both mill and land were purchased by neighbouring *Racecourse*. *Farleigh* was the sole remaining mill on the north side of the river. All the mills were large-scale concerns - central mills accepting cane grown on small farming units all over the Pioneer valley, the cane

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140. *MM Centenary 1962*, 57-8; Easterby, *Queensland Sugar Industry*, 58.

141. Refer to Graph One and to Lowndes, *South Pacific Enterprise*, 442-3.

142. Matsen Diary Ten, 125-6, 252.

143. CRM 7 (BS).

transported to the mills by extensive rail and tramway network. The final changes to the milling structure occurred between 1921 and 1927 when the last three private mills were closed or sold.

During the last days of December 1920 news reached the *Homebush* farmers that CSR's directors had decided to close the mill after the 1921 crushing season. *Homebush* farmers were divided in their opinions on the closure. F.J. Stevens and the anti-Foster Agreement farmers wished the company good riddance: others, Ole Matsen among them, lamented its end. All faced the problem of where to send their cane. *Plane Creek* and *North Eton* were both considered by final negotiations were with *Racecourse* and *Farleigh*. Eventually *Farleigh's* offer was accepted: *Homebush* farmers pledged to supply *Farleigh* with cane for the next ten years, while in return the *Farleigh* company bought fifty kilometres of the *Homebush* tramway and its rolling stock.<sup>144</sup> Next, in 1924, Australian Estates closed *Palms* and bought into the *Pleystowe* company, which from 1925 became Amalgamated Sugar Mills Ltd. Finally, in 1927 the Bundaberg syndicate which owned *Farleigh* mill sold out to its growers. The transformation was then complete.<sup>145</sup>

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144. Matsen Diary Ten, 1-39.

145. Refer to Graph Two and Appendix Three for further details about the mills.

### 3. Conclusion

#### Historians assessments of the transformation:

##### G.C. Bolton and Ralph Shlomowitz

Recent studies attempting to explain the 1885-1925 transformation in the Queensland sugar industry have mainly argued in terms of the rationale behind the planters' decisions to sub-divide their land. G.C. Bolton in *A Thousand Miles Away* suggested a four point rationale. Firstly, technical advances in the milling process increased the optimum size of a mill, demanding an ever increasing amount of entrepreneurial and managerial skill, which led to the separation of farming and milling. Secondly, the risks were halved with separation of farming and milling. Thirdly, by selling their land, planters reduced their capitalization, and hence their need to borrow funds or take out mortgages. Fourthly, sub-division induced more European small-scale cultivators to enter the industry, increasing production at a time when labour was becoming difficult to procure.<sup>146</sup> The first attempt to question Bolton's assessment was made by Ralph Shlomowitz in his 'Search for Institutional Equilibrium in Queensland's Sugar Industry 1888-1913'. Shlomowitz cast doubt on Bolton's first three points, but accepted the fourth as probably the primary rationale for the adoption of the farmer - supplied central milling system.

Shlomowitz doubts whether the benefits of entrepreneurial and managerial specialization outweighed the cost of planters of writing off their human capital investments, and whether these human capital investments could be as cheaply acquired by small farm cultivators. On the second point he suggests that separating farming from milling could not have materially reduced the risks borne by the planters. Milling has high fixed costs: millers depend on receiving constant and full supplies of cane for their mills, to get maximum utilization from their capital investment. Plantations in other major sugar producing areas - Fiji, Hawaii, U.S.A., Cuba and Guyana - persisted as vertically integrated concerns. Why should the situation be different in Queens-

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146. Bolton, *Thousand Miles Away*, 156, 199, 202.

land? On Bolton's third point Shlomowitz doubts that reducing capitalization was a significant short term motive, given the long and easy terms which planters allowed their tenant farmers. Shlomowitz prefers to place primary emphasis on the fourth hypothesis - reducing the cost of labour:

Although some of the first three factors may have been important in motivating some planters, none of them appear to be compelling reasons for the change. On the other hand, it does appear to be the case that by offering white farm operators a non-pecuniary amenity in the form of an opportunity to own land and/or to work under their own direction and control, the effective cost of white labour to the industry could be reduced. The effect of providing the opportunity to acquire or rent land to prospective white farm operators on the supply of labour thus suggests itself as a powerful reason for the adoption of the central [farmers'] mill system.... 147

Shlomowitz has put all students of the Australian sugar industry in his debt by the theoretical sophistication and statistical rigour he has brought to the subject. In this instance, however, his argument pays too little attention to the concrete details of the plantation regime in Queensland. His comparison between plantations in other sugar producing areas and Queensland brushes aside differences that are very significant indeed. Shlomowitz seems to assume that plantations in Queensland were much more highly developed and sophisticated than this and the previous chapter show them to have been.

The Queensland plantation era lasted only two decades at the beginning of the industry. There were no wealthy planter-dynasties, merely one generation of quite small-time frontier entrepreneurs. The area of land they owned was commonly enormously greater than the area of cane cultivated, and until the 1880s most mills were small and prim-

itive.<sup>148</sup> When the need to increase efficiency became imperative with the collapse of sugar prices in the 1880s few had the capital to upgrade their mills and to increase the amount of cane produced simultaneously. Mills had to be made more efficient in order to produce more sugar from a given tonnage of cane and also to ensure uniform high standards of sugar produced: this meant a large injection of capital, a mill much larger than the older type, and the need to employ highly skilled supervisors. Capital invested in mills offered, at a time of low and uncertain prices, greater certainty of increased profits than investment in planting cane. Selling land which was not already being cultivated had two advantages: it would raise capital which could be invested in improving the mill and at the same time it offered the prospect of higher cane production to feed the larger mill. The first land disposed of was the uncleared areas, returning high profits. Selling developed land, given that it had mainly been cleared by first-indenture labourers on the basic wage, should also have given a good return on their investment. And when plantations began sub-dividing their land, those that continued to operate mills had little reason to fear for their cane supplies: the exigencies of transport meant that most growers had little or no real choice between mills.

Shlomowitz does not explain satisfactorily why he doubts that planters had anything to gain "in writing off their human capital investment".<sup>149</sup> If plantation owners disposed of their land and still had Melanesian labourers under contract, they would have had no difficulty transferring the indentures to other employers. Graph One of

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148. Technically, sugar milling in Queensland in the 1860s and 1870s was three decades behind the process used in the Caribbean. Introduction of vacuum pans to milling was the major advance in the nineteenth century sugar industry. Cuban plantations began installing vacuum pans in the 1840s, but none were installed in Mackay mills until the 1870s. Early Mackay mill owners were gentleman-amateurs with limited capital. They knew little about the technicalities of milling cane, and seem to have installed the cheapest, not the latest machinery. Fragnals, *The Sugarmill*, 107-27; see also Graph Four, Chapter Four of this thesis.

149. Shlomowitz, 'Search for Institutional Equilibrium', 112.

Chapter Six illustrates the transfer of first-indenture agreements between 1888 and 1904. Over these years most of the transfers occurred in two periods, 1888 to 1892 and 1901 to 1904. As shown by Graph Three of the present chapter these are the two periods when most of the plantations closed. Rather than "writing off" their investment they should have realised it in full.

Shlomowitz also seems to give insufficient weight to the effects of government intervention - the Queensland government was of vital importance in funding central mills, and later the federal government in guaranteeing markets and prices. Economic and political circumstances were then running against the owners of large, relatively unproductive areas of cane land. Plantations often included considerably more land than ever was used to produce cane. Faced with looming bankruptcy many planters had no option but to sell all or most of their land, but they approached the problem in a variety of ways. Some closed their mills, sold their land and retired to Britain or to southern Australian cities, or began new business ventures elsewhere.<sup>150</sup> Several plantations operated until their owners died, after which beneficiaries disposed of both land and mill.<sup>151</sup> Other planters, having sold the bulk of their land, lived quietly and obscurely on a portion of their old plantation.<sup>152</sup> But by far the most interesting are the planters who, while participating in the wider move toward sub-division, kept their mills operating to crush cane for their tenant farmers or earned a significant income from renting and leasing land to small farm cultivators.

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150. J.E. Davidson retired to England in 1900. J. McBryde left the district in 1894 to become manager of Rous mill on the Richmond river in northern New South Wales. M.H. Black left the district in 1894, shifting to the Coolgardie gold field. *MM* 23 December 1899, 14 October 1902, Waterson, *Queensland Parliament*, 15; *CRM* 1a:1 (EMB).

151. This was the case with W. Hyne of *Meadowlands* and A. Henderson of *Beaconsfield*. Refer to Appendix Three: *Meadowlands*, *Beaconsfield*.

152. e.g.: D. Jack at *Barrie* and A. Lloyd at *Dumbleton*. Refer to Appendix Three: *Barrie*, *Dumbleton*.

Shlomowitz in commenting on the sub-division of the plantations gives the impression that the planters provided easy terms for the farmers to acquire the land:

Most subdivisions on plantations were either leased or sold on long and easy terms to farm operators. Thus farm operators were not constrained by a significant capital constraint in acquiring a portion of a sub-divided plantation for rental or purchase. 153

Reality was often far from this. Although many small farm cultivators were well-treated by the owners of the sub-divided plantations (Ole Matsen's relationship with CSR is a good example), in other cases the relationship was akin to the peonage system binding poor whites and blacks to ex-planters in the southern United States of America into the early decades of this century.<sup>154</sup> Through their hold over the best cane land, Mackay's ruling class (planters and pastoralists) continued to exert significant influence over farmers for many years after plantations closed, with discernable consequences for the structure of society.

In 1894, of the 395 cane farms listed by A.E. Munro, 162 (41 percent) were leased from planters or former planters, or from pastoralists: the other 243 were either freehold or leased from other farmers, farmers' milling companies, individuals, or banks. (Refer to Table Seven). The first plantation to be sub-divided was *Habana* in 1888, earning its owner, E.M. Long, the nickname "the farmers' friend". Long, who had owned plantations in the district since 1870, operated *Habana* until 1901. In 1894 Long had twenty tenant farmers on *Habana* producing 1,280 acres of cane, while he farmed another 1,600 acres plantation-style.<sup>155</sup> The situation was similar on other plantations but there is little evidence available to analyse the relationship

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153. Shlomowitz, 'Search for Institutional Equilibrium', 113.

154. P. Daniel, *The Shadow of Slavery: peonage in the south* (Urbana (Illinois), 1972).

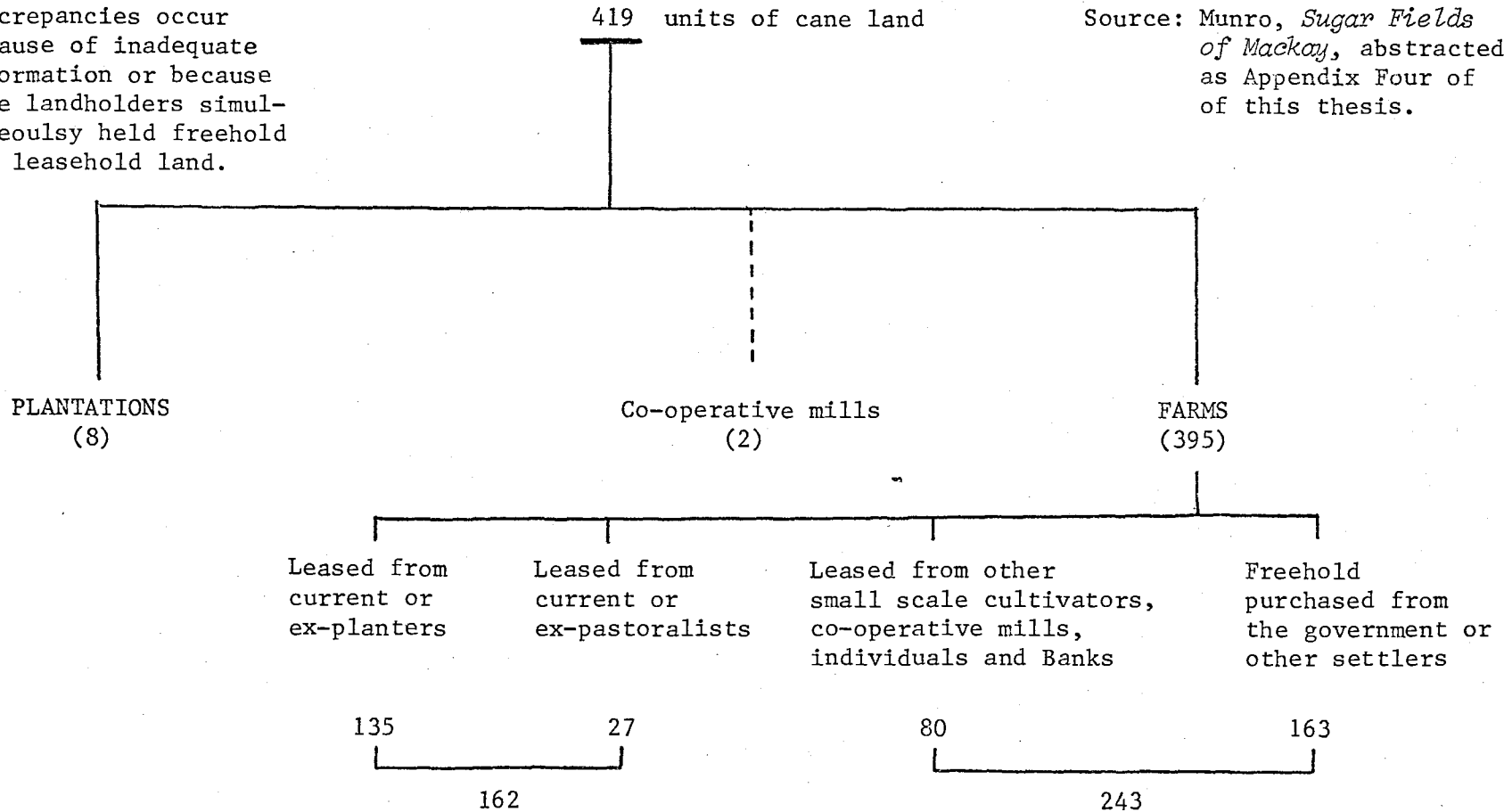
155. Appendix Four, Nos. 15-34, 38.

Table Seven

MACKAY SUGAR INDUSTRY IN 1894

Note: Discrepancies occur because of inadequate information or because some landholders simultaneously held freehold and leasehold land.

Source: Munro, *Sugar Fields of Mackay*, abstracted as Appendix Four of this thesis.



between the planters and their tenants, except from an unexpected source - the operation of the farmers' central mills. There was no clear division between plantation land and land used to supply the government-sponsored mills. Closer scrutiny reveals that two of these mills, *Pleystowe* and *Plane Creek*, in reality belonged to, and were initially controlled by, several of the earliest pastoralists and planters in the district, E.M. Long among them. When the *Pleystowe* plantation company was re-structured under the provisions of the 1893 *Sugar Works Guarantee Act* ninety-one percent of the shares were in the hands of three men: John Cook (pastoralist of Balnagowan), E.M. Long, and W. Steedman (manager of *Pleystowe* plantation and of the new *Pleystowe* farmers' mill).<sup>156</sup> Long was managing director, living at *Habana*, visiting *Pleystowe* only every few weeks. He held personal liens over many of the *Pleystowe* farmers' crops as well as Bills of Sale over their houses, farm implements, stock and belongings. Long deducted interest and repayments from money due to the farmers from the *Pleystowe* company. By 1902 thirty *Pleystowe* farmers had been forced to surrender their land to Long "the farmers' friend".<sup>157</sup> For the first decade of its operation as a farmers' mill *Pleystowe* was not controlled by its farmers but by their "friends", E.M. Long, W. Steedman and John Cook. A similar situation developed at *Plane Creek* where the Atherton brothers and Henry Bell, the original European settlers of the area, dominated the smaller shareholders in the company.<sup>158</sup>

#### A.A. Graves

A.A. Graves is the only other recent scholar to attempt an analysis of the rationale behind the reconstruction of the Queensland sugar industry. Graves suggests that

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156. Kerr, *Pioneer Pageant*, 119; *MM* 15 July 1902. In December 1901 *Pleystowe's* shares were divided between the *Pleystowe* Land Syndicate (54588) and the farmers (2033). 3379 shares were unissued.

157. *MM* 28 January, 6 February, 5, 15, 17 July 1902.

158. Appendix Three: *Plane Creek*.

reconstruction was forced on the...industry because of the structural weakness of plantation production, its inability to cope with rising costs in the face of falling sugar prices and to a lesser extent, the success of cane farmers in mobilizing the state to obtain their objective of a cane market less controlled by big mill owners. 159

This movement toward small-scale farming being assisted by the increase in the number of European labourers available at the end of the nineteenth century. Graves sees the end of the labour trade as

connected intimately with the change in the basis of production in the sugar industry from plantations to farmer-based central milling. 160

The actual ban on Melanesian labour imposed by the federal government, Graves suggests was provoked by the type of employment followed by Melanesians in the 1890s - as time-expired labourers working on short term contracts for farmers, rather than as first-indenture labourers working on plantations. This provoked working class opposition expressed in racial terms.

Much of what Graves suggests is supported by the findings of this thesis. Graph Four of this chapter shows the sharp rise in the number of Europeans in the Mackay district in the 1880s, which would have increased the number of agricultural labourers available. The argument presented in Chapters Six and Seven also lends support to Graves: by the 1880s time-expired and ticket-holding Melanesians were coming into more direct competition with the European working class than in earlier decades. While this might be expected to intensify opposition to the

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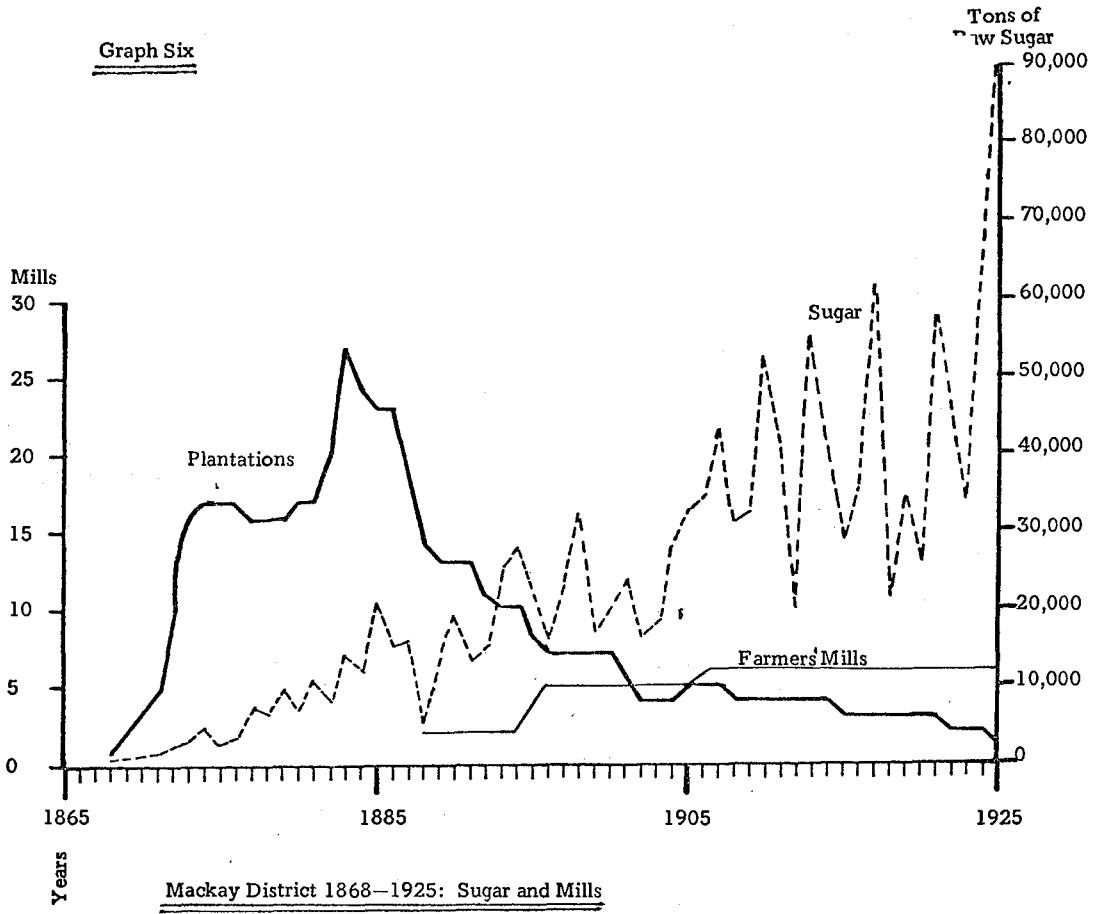
159. A.A. Graves, *Pacific Island Labour in the Queensland Sugar Industry, 1862-1906* (DPhil. thesis, Oxford University, 1979), 27.

160. *Ibid.*, 65; see also Graves, 'The Abolition of the Queensland Labour Trade: politics or profits.' In E.L. Wheelwright and K. Buckley (eds.), *Essays in the Political Economy of Australian Capitalism*, v. 4 (Sydney, 1980), 41-57, and *Pacific Island Labour and the Reconstruction of the Queensland Sugar Industry, 1862 to 1906*. (Paper given at the Conference of the Economic History Society of Australia and New Zealand, University of New South Wales, 30 August to 1 September 1978.)

Islander labour traffic, it is not enough to treat assumption as reality without examining the evidence. Even if it had been demonstrated that this increased hostility did occur, it would be highly arbitrary to conclude that this was the determining factor without detailed investigation of a kind which Graves does not attempt. This thesis does not support Graves' argument that it was reconstruction of the industry that altered the status of Melanesians in Queensland. The changes in the structure of the Melanesian community were well under way by the 1880s, quite independent of reconstruction. They were exacerbated, not caused, by the decline of the plantations. Neither Shlomowitz nor Graves then, gives any sufficient reason for setting aside Bolton's explanations, always granted - as Bolton would surely grant - that not all his factors would operate with equal force on all the people who had to make decisions.

Historians studying the nineteenth century Queensland sugar industry have always been fascinated by the extremely visible and vocal plantation owners. Unfortunately this fixation had led them to neglect other aspects of the industry, particularly the Melanesian work force and the increasingly important small farm cultivators. To understand the transformation historians in the future would be well to concentrate on the growth of small farming units rather than on the decline of the plantations. Graph Six depicts the Mackay sugar crop and the number of plantation and farmers' mills operating between 1868 and 1925. The acreage grown on plantations does not increase after the mid-1880s; increasingly plantation land is being farmed by tenants, not by the planters. But the amount of cane grown steadily increased as more and more land was being cultivated throughout the Pioneer valley by small-scale farmers. The plantations are remembered because of their size and the influence of their owners on the districts' economy, politics and society. A few planters survived until the turn of the century, and as we have seen in the case of E.M. Long, with much wider influence and control than has previously been supposed. However they were remnants of the previous landed ruling class, not a ruling class *per se*.

Graph Six



Plantation society was discussed in the previous chapter in terms of class analysis and the relationship between class, race, land and power in Australian society. The increasing number of farmers did not necessarily mean any concomitant increase in their political influence or social standing. A few small farm cultivators were vocal in local politics, but usually those with the largest and longest established farms. New farmers were usually too preoccupied with financial survival to participate in local politics and society. Planters, plantations managers, pastoralists and town business people continued to be the main influences on the district well into the twentieth century, suggesting perhaps that the social and political control of the plantation era's ruling class outlasted its economic dominance. During the first two decades of the new century the labour movement and farmers' associations developed as politically powerful forces. The bitter struggles which began with the 1911 Sugar Workers' Strike and the following years of disputes over wages, working conditions, and control over milling and pricing, forever altered the balance of power in the Pioneer valley. Of the three cultural dynamics (race, class and sex) only class changed radically, and even class changes lagged up to two decades behind economic and institutional changes. Racial prejudice remained strong and the sexual hierarchy was unaltered.

Table Three

Unsuccessful Attempts to Establish Mills  
in the Mackay Region 1868-1922

No.	Years	Mill or intended mill	Erected Yes/No	Information available
1	1868-9	Mackay Sugar Crushing Co. Ltd.	No	private co-operative mill
2	1871	Shiels	No	private company planned
3	1871-2	Springfield	Yes	primitive private mill
4	1871-2	Robb	Yes	primitive private mill
5	1872	Fleming	Yes	primitive private mill
6	1873	Central Sugar Co.	No	private central mill planned
7	1874	Mt Blackwood	No	plantation mill planned
8	1874 & 1884	Peri	Yes Yes	two plantation mills were constructed
9	1875	Name unknown	No	co-operative mill planned
10	1878-9	Mackay Central Sugar Manufacturing Co.	No	co-operative company planned
11	1879	Queensland Co-operative Central Sugar Mill Co.	No	co-operative company planned
12	1880-2	Plane Creek	No	private mill planned
13	1881	(Name unknown)	No	private central mill planned
14	1881-2	West Hill Creek	No	plantation mill planned
15	1881-5	Seaforth	No	plantation mill planned
16	1882	Sandy Creek	No	plantation mill planned
17	1882	Mackay Sugar Co.	Yes	Plantation mill; location uncertain
18	1882-5	Oakenden Sugar Co.	No	plantation mill planned
19	1884-5 & 1892	North Queensland Sugar Estate Co. Ltd.	No	private central mill planned

Table Three cont.

No	Years	Mill or intended mill	erected Yes/No	Information available
20	1882	Greenmount Sugar Estate	No	plantation mill planned
21	1884	St Helens	No	plantation mill planned
22	1886 & 1894	Hampden	No	government central mill planned
23	1886	Boomerang	No	government central mill planned
24	1886	Walkerston Central Milling Co.	No	government central mill planned (based on <i>Cassada</i> )
25	1886	Marian	No	government central mill planned (based on <i>Marian</i> ) Successful in 1895.
26	1886	Abington	No	government central mill planned
27	1886 1884-5 1911	Hamilton	No	government central mill planned
28	1895	Leap	No	government central mill planned
29	1905	Behholm	No	private central mill planned
30	1911	Kelvin Grove	No	government central mill planned
31	1911 1916 1922	Silent Grove	No	government central mill planned

Source: Appendix Three.

CHAPTER SIX

367 - 432

*MELANESIAN WORKING LIVES*

1. Melanesians at Mackay :	
1867 - 1868	368
2. Melanesian demography :	
1867 - 1981	374
3. Legislation and adminis-	
tration : 1868 - 1919	379
4. Melanesian work in Queensland	390
A. Occupational restrictions	392
B. Transfers and hiring	401
C. First-indenture labourers	412
D. Time-expired labourers	418
E. Ticket-holders	425
5. Conclusion	428

1. Melanesians at Mackay : 1867 - 68

Melanesians have utilised simple horticulture and domesticated animals for upward of 5,000 years. In the main they used classic swidden techniques:<sup>1</sup> patches of secondary forest were cleared using fire and stone and wooden implements, and crops planted and harvested for a season or two, then allowed to revert to forest for a number of years while neighbouring patches went through the same cycle. Melanesians produced mainly root crops, for subsistence and a small trading surplus. Coastal people supplemented agricultural produce with the harvest of the ocean; some, like the Malaitan *wane asi* depended almost entirely on marine produce which they traded with the land-dwellers for tubers, vegetables and fruits. Varieties of *Colocasia* taros, *Discorea* yams and sago in swampy lowlands, were the basic diet all through Melanesia. These were supplemented with marine products, pigs and fowls, sweet potatoes, pandanus, sugar cane, bananas, bread-fruit, forest vegetables and nuts in amounts varying seasonally and regionally.

Plantation agriculture was altogether different in its techniques and labour demands from those of traditional Melanesia. On Maliata, and in many other areas of Melanesia, gardening is a private activity. Hidden away in isolated forest clearings, men and women work unobserved, at their own pace; but large, productive gardens are part of the strength of any Bigman or powerful descent group. When extra labour is needed, as when clearing land for new gardens, reciprocal obligations are called into play. Young people without gardens are obliged to help their kin and the surrounding community.<sup>2</sup> In Queensland, Melanesians found themselves working under supervision in open fields for twelve hours a day, six and a half days a week. The change was greatest for coastal Melanesians brought up to glean their livelihoods from the lagoons and the ocean, but agriculturalist Melanesians, used to hill-side cultivation with a dibble stick, also found it difficult to adapt to extensive cane fields, hoes, picks and ploughs. Horses and bullocks seemed

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1. There is also some evidence of more intensive agriculture in the form of water control and terracing. Brookfield and Hart, *Melanesia*, 109-14.
  2. Refer to Chapter Eight: First-indenture labourers: acclimatization.

strange monstrous creatures; drays, carts, carriages, steam locomotives and mill machinery were unfathomable sometimes terrifying devices. And most significant, Melanesian land belonged to the people who lived and farmed on it; Melanesian gardens had ritual significance with first fruit offerings going to their ancestors, gardens acting as part of the physical focus of cosmological cycles. The cane fields and their produce belonged to the Europeans.

In September 1861 a small coastal trading ship, the *Presto*, arrived at the mouth of the Pioneer river with European settlers who set up the first camp on the site of what is now the city of Mackay.<sup>3</sup> On a Wednesday in the middle of May 1867 the first Pacific Islanders arrived: seventy Melanesian males from the Loyalty and New Hebridean islands of Mare, Epi, Mai, Efate, Tana and Tongoa. The *Prima Dona*, on which they arrived, had been chartered by south Kennedy settlers to bring one hundred Islanders, but because of competition from Fijian recruiters had been unable to fill its quota. The *Mackay Mercury*, established just over a year before, commented that they all looked fit, unused to wearing trousers and enormously glad to be on dry land; and that they were a god-send for the district's labour problems:

the men have been very quiet and well behaved during the passage, and they appear to have been well cared for, The introduction of these Islanders into the district may be looked upon as an event fraught with the highest importance, and now that the first step toward acquiring hands for cotton and sugar plantations had been taken, planters and others will no doubt be enabled to combat with the difficulties which have stood in the way of more extensive cultivation. 4

The Mackay township as viewed by these first Islanders boasted all the trappings necessary to maintain a European community: several hotels and a boarding house, a church, general stores and commission agents, real estate agents, auctioneers and a surveyor, a bank, a newspaper, a pharmacist; and supporting business ventures such as butchers,

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3. *MM Jubilee 1912*, 21 (J. Robb).

4. *MM* 15 May 1867.

a baker, builder, tailor, blacksmith, saddler and bootmaker.<sup>5</sup> To avoid distorting the picture it must be added that the Australian Joint Stock bank was a bark and slab hut; and the newspaper was produced in the back room of "a store impartially shared between the staff, sundry noisy fowls and a collection of miscellaneous goods".<sup>6</sup> The *Mackay Mercury and South Kennedy Advertiser* appeared weekly when, as its founding editor later recalled, "the resident alligators did not create consternation in the composing-room, or the cockroaches fly away with the sub-editorial paste-pot and roller",<sup>7</sup>

The town site had been surveyed by T.H. Fitzgerald in 1864, but when the first Islanders arrived in 1867 all they could have discerned was the river bank anchorage and a block or so of Sydney and Wood streets: a few primitive shanties along muddy tracks leading from the riverside mangroves out to the scrub. Thirty of the Islanders walked the track to Davidson and Fitzgerald's *Alexandra* plantation; twenty crossed the river to Spiller and Crees's *Pioneer* plantation. The remainder were indentured to various settlers, some going father up river than *Pioneer*, to Cook and Ross's Balnagowan pastoral property.<sup>8</sup> The *Prima Dona* returned almost immediately to the New Hebrides, arriving back at Mackay in January 1868 with seventy-seven men and one woman. Forty-four were sent to up-country stations while the remainder stayed in the valley, working for planters, graziers and farmers.<sup>9</sup>

Little is known about these early Melanesians. It is possible that they had had contact with Europeans, as beachcombers, traders and missionaries had been living on various of the New Hebridean and Loyalty

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5. MM 4 April 1866 (in MM 4 April 1966), 29 May 1867; *St Patrick's Parish, Mackay, Queensland: building fund plus budget canvass* (Mackay, 1958). Refer to Map One.

6. MM 4 April 1866.

7. MM 24 December 1891 (W.O. Hodgkinson to Ed.).

8. MM 7, 14 September 1867.

9. MM 18 January 1868; *QVP* 1868-9, 553.

Map One



Source: *Mackay and District on the Threshold of its Second Century* (Brisbane, 1962).

islands for several decades.<sup>10</sup> There is no indication whether they were kidnapped or had enlisted voluntarily. The islands from which they came were part of a southern Melanesian trading and raiding community similar to the Solomon islands. Communication amongst the recruits on the voyage to Mackay, and subsequently on the plantations, would have been difficult but not impossible, given structural links among most of their languages and dialects.<sup>11</sup> It is clear that the general reaction to the first Islanders at Mackay was favourable. In each of the next seven years Islander numbers grew absolutely and as a proportion of the total population in the district, reaching 1,700 in 1875, about forty-five percent of the population. Although this proportion was never again reached, the Islanders remained the core of the field labour force in the sugar industry until 1906.<sup>12</sup>

Within a few months they had settled down to become a most satisfactory addition to the district's work force. John Spiller was effusive in his praise of his first Melanesian labourers:

It required all the patience I could muster at first, but they gradually got acquainted with the use of different tools, before unknown to them, and now I am reaping the benefit, and proud to see every morning turning out for the field four good plough-men with their six bullocks each and drivers; others with their horse teams that can mark out a drill as straight as I can. 13

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10. Fox, *Lord of the Southern Isles*, Chapters nine to twelve; J.G. Miller, *Live: a history of church planting in the New Hebrides to 1800: book one* (Sydney, n.d. (1970s)); J.W. Burton, *Missionary Survey of the Pacific Islands* (London, 1930); Maude, *Of Islands and Men*, 145-6.

It was quite certain in the case of the Loyalty Islanders. Howe, *Loyalty Islanders*.

11. Capell, *Linguistic Survey*, Section Three: the New Hebrides, 204-40; D.T. Tyron, *New Hebrides Languages: an internal classification* (Canberra, 1976), 55 (Map Two), 80 (Chart One).
12. Refer to Table One of this chapter, and Graph Four of Chapter Five.
13. Kennedy, *Four Years in Queensland*, 174.

Spiller also used Islanders as boat pilots, guiding his produce-barges down river to Mackay. On other properties in the district the men were ginning cotton, processing arrowroot and building fences. After three days of instruction in the art of building a three-rail fence, one settler was able to leave his Melanesian labourers to split and mortice the timber and erect fences by themselves.<sup>14</sup> Spiller took the trouble to learn the language of the men working for him, and claimed to have established a friendly relationship with them.<sup>15</sup> At *Pioneer* their food was not rationed; they ate their fill of beef, sweet potatoes, yams, corn meal, green corn, arrowroot and sugar. Tea and plug tobacco were also provided.

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14. *MM* 7 September 1867, 13 September 1922 (R.D. Dunne).

15. Spiller did not always have such amicable relations with his Melanesian employees. One day in 1872, Spiller, a little drunk, decided to interfere and personally direct a gang of labourers. He drive them to such distraction that with a combined yell, they attacked him. Spiller vaulted onto his horse and galloped home, his labourers in pursuit.

*MM Jubilee* 1912, 23 (J. Rolleston).

## 2. Melanesian demography : 1867 - 1980

There is no exact way of calculating the annual Melanesian population of the Mackay district. The only years for which official figures are available are the census years (1868, 1871, 1876, 1881 and 1886) and 1887 to 1906. After 1906 no official statistics were kept. All through the early decades of the twentieth century the remaining Melanesians were of little official concern, living on the fringe of European society, excluded from the sugar industry. Consequently population estimates for the period are unreliable. The rise of self-conscious identification as Melanesians in the past ten years makes possible reasonably accurate estimates, but still not on the basis of official statistics.<sup>16</sup> Today, 1981, there are more than 2,000 people living in the Pioneer valley who identify as descendants of the Pacific island indentured labourers, but because census questionnaires do not allow them to clearly specify their Melanesian origin, no exact figure can be given.<sup>17</sup>

The first seventy Melanesians arrived in 1867. The next year Queensland parliament passed the *Polynesian Labourers Act*, the initial attempt to control recruiting and conditions of employment for Melanesians in the colony. The Act received assent on 24 March 1868: by that date 148 Melanesians had travelled directly to Mackay. Others, perhaps thirty or forty, had arrived at southern ports, principally

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16. Refer to Queensland census reports, and the annual reports of the Pacific Island Branch of the Immigration Department. Table One of this chapter is an attempt to show the annual Melanesian population of the district, compared to the total population. Also refer to Graph Four of Chapter Five.
17. In 1975 the Commonwealth government established an Inter-Departmental Committee to inquire into the living conditions of the descendants of Islanders brought to Australia during the labour trade. Its report was completed in July 1977 but was never published. The report concluded "with some confidence" that in 1977 there were between 3,000 and 3,500 Australian-born descendants of the original Islanders. A more accurate estimate, based on my own observations over nine years in concurrence with estimates by Islander community leaders, would be between 10,000 and 15,000. For further comments on the inaccurate findings of the Inter-Departmental Committee refer to P.M. Mercer and C.R. Moore 'Australia's Pacific Islanders, 1906-1977', *JPH*, v. 13:1-2 (1978), 99.

Table One

Comparison of total district population & Islander population  
(the early figures are exclusive of the Aboriginal population)

YEAR	TOTAL DISTRICT POPULATION	TOTAL ISLANDER POPULATION	YEAR	TOTAL DISTRICT POPULATION	TOTAL ISLANDER POPULATION
1861		0	1900		1,775
1862		0	1901	11,144	1,475
1863		0	1902		1,708
1864		0	1903		1,301
1865		0	1904		1,260
1866		0	1905		
1867		70	1906		1,079+
1868	658	109	1907		400+ -
1869		(250+)	1908		350
1870		(300)	1909		
1871	1,440	700	1910		
1872		(700)	1911		
1873		(900)	1912		
1874		(1,200)	1913		
1875		(1,700)	1914		
1876	3,766	1,600	1915		
1877		1,400	1916		
1878			1917		
1879			1918		200+ -
1880			1919		200+ -
1881	5,787	2,087	1920		200+ -
1882			1921	17,094	323
1883			1922		
1884			1923		
1885			1924		
1886	11,082	2,686	1925		
1887		2,077	1926		
1888		1,911	1927		
1889		2,121	1928		
1890		2,816	1929		
1891	10,538	2,450	1930		
1892		2,102	1931		
1893		2,081	1932		
1894		2,168	1933	28,874	246 Full blood.
1895		2,167			
1896		1,941			
1897		1,780			
1898		2,074			
1899		1,684	1981		2,000 +

Note: Brackets indicate estimate only.

Table One : Sources

The Melanesian population totals in Table One for the years 1869 to 1877 are my own calculations based on : *QSA* IPI 3-1 (1868-76); checked and adjusted against the Immigration Agent's reports in the *Statistics of Queensland*, and Graph Two of Chapter Two of this thesis; allowing for some Melanesians being employed farther inland than the Pioneer valley and others who were transshipped up the coast to Mackay. The figures calculated in this way seem reasonably accurate. The calculation of 1,400 Melanesians in 1877 is supported by the same figure quoted by Police Magistrate Goodall. *QSA* CPS 10B/G1, Goodall to CS, 18 May 1877.

Other figures come from a variety of sources. Where possible government estimates have been used: the regular census of the colony of Queensland, 1868, 1871, 1876, 1881 and 1886, 1891, 1901, the Commonwealth census for 1921, 1933; and the annual reports of the Pacific Island Branch of the Queensland Immigration Department 1888 to 1904. Other sources are: 1868:- *QSA* IPI 3-1; *MM* 29 February, 23 September 1868; *BPP* Col.: Aust. v.26, Enclosure 6, No. 3, 50, H.S.D. Hay to CS, 10 July 1869.

1871:- *MM* 1 April 1905.

1876:- *Qlder* 3 June 1876.

1877:- *MM* 26 May 1877.

1886:- *QSA* COL/A477, In letter 6373 of 1886.

1887:- *MM* 24 November, 3 December 1887.

1891:- *QVP* 1892, v. 3, 899, 1328-9; *MM* 30 January 1892.

1918-20:- *MM* 15 April 1920.

Rockhampton, and had been transshipped onto coastal steamers bound for Mackay.<sup>18</sup> In 1868 they were at least one-sixth of the district's total population, exclusive of Aborigines. Over the next decade their numbers increased by a few hundred every year, numbers ebbing and flowing with changes in the mortality rate<sup>19</sup> and the numbers of arrivals and departures. By 1877 they were one-third of the total immigrant population: Europeans, Asians and Melanesians.

In 1881 the proportion is similar: there are 2,087 Melanesians, over 500 Aborigines,<sup>20</sup> fifty-seven mainly Asiatic non-Europeans, and 3,643 Europeans. During the 1880s the European population of the district increased rapidly, while the Melanesian population remained fairly static around 2,000. By 1891 Melanesians were only twenty-three percent of the total. There was a slow decline in the number of Melanesians in the district in the 1890s, though without the large increase in the European population exhibited in the 1880s. Even in these decades when the statistics are at their most reliable, the figures are still only estimates. In 1891 the Immigration Agent estimated that there were 8,627 immigrant Melanesians in the colony but that it was

impossible to give the exact number of Islanders within the colony, some of them being of a roving disposition, and travelling beyond the range of the inspectors. 21

In 1897 the editor of the *Mackay Mercury* was more explicit:

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18. *QSA* IPI 3-1; *MM* 21 September 1867, 23 September 1868; Jones, *Cardwell*, 129.

19. The mortality rate is discussed in Chapter Eight. Over the years 1875-1904 the average Queensland Melanesian mortality rate was 54.64 per 1,000. This average was fairly constant except for the years 1882-1884 when the Melanesian death rate in Queensland was 101.89 per 1,000. Refer to Table Six of Chapter Eight.

20. *Qlder* 5 June 1880; *MM* 4 May 1914.

21. *QVP* 1892, v.2, 820.

there are a few islanders, half cripples, of half idiots, who wander about the country without let or hindrance, getting work where and how they can..., the government being unable to deport them, carefully loses sight of their movements....<sup>22</sup>

At the date of the 1901 census there were 1,475 Melanesians in the Mackay district in a total population of 11,144: 9,006 were of European origin, 618 were Asians and other non-Europeans. The Aborigines, included in the census for the first time, had dwindled to a pathetic forty-five individuals. In 1906 a Royal Commission report on Melanesian repatriation listed 959 Melanesians at Mackay. The majority of these were deported leaving approximately 350 when the forced exodus ended in 1908. This number declined further over the next decade, deaths outnumbering births by two to one.<sup>23</sup> At the beginning of the 1920s just over 200 Melanesians remained in a total Pioneer district population of 17,000. Immigration of Melanesians from other Queensland districts (particularly Rockhampton) in the first three decades of the new century, and the extremely large families of the first and proceeding generations of Australian-born Melanesians gradually increased the number of Islanders at Mackay. Families of ten and twelve children were quite common. These children usually stayed in the district, married to other Melanesians, and people of Asian or Aboriginal descent. Today the Melanesian community in the Mackay district, the largest group of Melanesians born and living outside Melanesia, number approximately 2,000.<sup>24</sup>

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22. *MM* 21 August 1897.

23. *JCUNQ* (History): *Printout A: BapDat and DeathDat, 1907-1920*; Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on South Sea Islanders in Australia, Canberra, 1977: Table One: South Sea Islanders in Australian 1911 to 1966, and section four of the report.

24. Refer to Chapter Nine which describes the twentieth century Melanesian community in the Pioneer valley.

### 3. Legislation and administration : 1868-1919

The men who arrived at Mackay in 1867 were not the first Melanesian labourers in the colony. The recruiting trade between the Pacific islands and Queensland had begun in 1863, bringing 526 recruits before the *Prima Dona's* first voyage, the majority to work on pastoral properties in southern Queensland.<sup>25</sup> Before 1868 there were no laws designed specifically to control employment of Pacific Islanders in Queensland, the *Masters and Servants Act of 1861*<sup>26</sup> providing the legal basis for all indentures. Contract periods, conditions and remunerations varied. When Robert Towns sent the *Don Juan*, the first ship in the trade, to the New Hebrides in 1863, he offered the recruits employment for twelve months for six pounds. Towns envisaged being able to replace his Melanesian labourers with new recruits every six or twelve months, eventually allowing them to bring their wives and children with them to the colony.<sup>27</sup>

Rapid growth in the number of Islanders brought to Queensland over the next few years and the horrific abuses which occurred when unscrupulous recruiters brutally kidnapped some of the recruits, led to the introduction of the *1868 Polynesian Labourers Act*.<sup>28</sup> The Act

25. *QVP* 1868-9, 555.

26. 25 Vic. No. 11.

27. Towns, *South Sea Island Immigration*.

28. During the nineteenth century it was a common mistake to refer to the Pacific Island immigrants to Queensland as Polynesians. Geographically they were almost all from Melanesian islands; only a small number were Polynesians and Micronesians.

For a list of all of the major Acts, Select Committees and Royal Commissions pertinent to the lives of Melanesians in Queensland refer to Appendix One to this thesis.

Often the modifications made in the Acts had been pre-empted by regulations passed separately. No attempt has been made to list these regulations in Appendix Three. More detailed discussion of the Acts and regulations can be found in P.M. Mercer's thesis and C. Edmondson's manuscript: P.M. Mercer, *An Analysis of Racial Attitudes towards Melanesians Expressed in the Queensland Legislative Assembly and Newspapers, 1877-92* (B.A. Hons. thesis, James Cook University of North Queensland, 1972); C. Edmondson, *Introduction to and annotations on the diaries of Government Agent S.M. Smith.* (Manuscript, *JCUNQ.*)

attempted to regulate recruiting in the islands as well as employment in Queensland. The conditions of employment laid down in the Act remained standard until the end of the recruiting trade in 1904. The indenture agreement was for three years, after which the labourer had the option of returning home or re-engaging. The wage was set at not less than six pounds per annum; payments in kind, of food, shelter, clothing, tobacco and medical care were provided in addition. The employer was responsible for arranging and paying for transport to and from the islands, and entered into a bond with the Queensland government to ensure that all contractual conditions were adhered to. Both parties to the indenture were liable to prosecution for default.

During the remainder of the century further Acts, amendments, and regulations modified or clarified the terms of the 1868 Act. In 1869 a Select Committee was appointed to enquire into the operation of the 1868 Act: specifically into allegations that the Islanders were taken from their homes by violence or fraud, and that employers' treatment left much to be desired. Although the Committee found the allegations unproved, it recommended that in future recruiting ships should carry Government Agents and that efficient interpreters be obtained when engaging labour in the islands.<sup>29</sup> The next legislation aimed at the recruiting trade came from the Imperial government: the *1872 Kidnapping Act* and its *1875 Amending Act* were the British government's answer to the outrages which had dogged the 1860s and early 1870s of the trade. In Queensland in 1876 another Select Committee was appointed to enquire into all aspects of the recruiting trade and conditions under which indentured Melanesians lived on the plantations. R.B. Sheridan, Inspector of Pacific island labour at Maryborough had made serious allegations about the whole trade, but the Committee found no wrong, and felt that Sheridan had acted with impropriety in making his complaints public. The labour trade, said the Committee, was essential for the progress of the colony; the abuses Sheridan reported were unsubstantiated. Sheridan may have exaggerated but he was not wholly in error. The *Mackay Mercury* defended his stand, commenting that the Committee's conclusion was pre-ordained, "intensely amusing" and refreshingly simplistic in approach.<sup>30</sup>

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29. QVP 1869, v.2, 23-4: Progress Report of the Select Committee.

30. MM 2, 9 December 1876.

The 1880s abounded with Acts and regulations, attempting first to control abuses then to put an end to the use of Melanesian labourers in Queensland. In 1880 the 1868 Act was completely redrawn, followed in 1884 by an amending Act placing occupational restrictions on the Islanders, and tightening government supervision of the island and plantation ends of the labour trade.

By 1883-84 recruiters had moved north of the Solomons to the Bismarck and Louisiade archipelagos off eastern New Guinea, kidnapping labour in a manner not seen since the 1860s in the New Hebrides and the early 1870s in the Solomons. The already high mortality rates amongst the Islander labourers increased alarmingly in 1884-85, primarily because of the inability of the New Britain and New Ireland recruits to adapt to life on the plantations. Cultural dislocation, the change in climate, work regime and epidemiological environment, caused the deaths of many first-indentured Melanesians; but men and women from New Britain and New Ireland fared worst of all.<sup>31</sup> The increased mortality, coupled with blatant kidnapping was too much for the exasperated government of Premier Griffith. A Royal Commission was appointed to enquire into recruiting in New Guinea waters, and several legislative moves followed in quick succession. The unfortunate Islanders were repatriated at government expense. Indigenous black Australians and New Guineans were no longer to be employed on ships in Queensland waters. As a *coup de grâce* Griffith gave notice in 1885 that recruiting of Melanesian labour for the Queensland sugar industry was to cease in 1890. In part compensation, the land Acts were liberalised to encourage small-scale farmers to enter the industry, and a new type of milling operation was introduced: government-sponsored central mills controlled by farmers.

The planters and recruiters protested loudly, proved to their own satisfaction that Europeans were not fit to labour in the tropics, and lamented the approaching ruin of the sugar industry and *ipso facto*, the colony of Queensland. By the early 1890s they were almost proved

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31. Chapter Eight contains detailed discussion of Melanesian health and mortality in Queensland. Refer particularly to the sections entitled 'Melanesian mortality: 1867-1907' and 'First-indenture labourers: acclimatization'.

correct. Bad growing seasons for the cane, poor sugar prices, a shrinking labour supply, and the wider economic depression of the late 1880s, had brought the sugar industry and the colony into a depressed condition. Griffith, ever practical, reversed his 1885 decision announcing in his famous 1892 Manifesto that "for a definite but limited period of, say ten years"<sup>32</sup> Melanesian labourers could again be imported for use in strictly defined occupations in the sugar industry. The 1893 *Sugar Works Guarantee Act* allowed the creation of more grower-owned and operated mills; but mills just as dependent on Melanesian field labour as the plantation mills they replaced. Slowly the depression lifted and prosperity returned, certainly in part because the labour supply was assured to the end of the century.

The 1884-85 legislation was a harbinger of the White Australia policy implemented by the federated Australian states in 1901. One of the first Bills placed before the new federal parliament became the *Pacific Island Labourers Act*, which ordered all recruiting to cease as of 1904, and the repatriation of as many as possible of the Islanders by 1907.

The deportation order was fiercely contested by humanitarian groups and the Melanesians themselves, as a heartless blow to the men and women whose labour had built the sugar industry over four decades. As a result of a Queensland Royal Commission in 1906 the terms of the deportation were liberalised, but most Islanders still had to go. When the offices of the Pacific Island Branch of the Queensland Immigration Department closed on 31 July 1908 between 1,500 and 2,000 Melanesians remained in Australia.<sup>33</sup> They fell into three categories: old men living alone or in groups; old childless couples; and younger men and women married to other Melanesians, Asians and Aborigines, some with young families. Through the first two decades of the twentieth century restrictions were placed on those who stayed. They

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32. *QPD* 1892, v. 67, 88-91.

33. Corris, 'White Australia' in action'.

were classified as aliens with restricted rights in Australia.<sup>34</sup> In 1902 the Federal government began providing a bonus for farmers who produced white sugar – sugar grown and milled unsullied by black hands. Next, under Queensland's *1912 Leases to Aliens Acts* and the *1913 Sugar Acts* island-born Melanesians were effectively banned from cultivating land for cane growing. Finally, in 1919, a Queensland Industrial Court Award made cane-cutting and field work the preserve of white labour, banning aliens from the industry.<sup>35</sup>

Ill-equipped to enter other fields of employment the ageing Melanesians lived at bare subsistence level, assisted by their Australian-born Melanesian friends and relations, squatting in grass huts along river and creek banks, or on areas provided by understanding white farmers. In the 1930s these Islanders received a special 'indigence allowance' of £1.1.8 a month as a pension, but not until Labor came into power in 1942 did they receive the same old age pension as other elderly Australians.<sup>36</sup> Few survived past the 1940s. The last two to die in the Mackay district were Robert Talonga and Alex Daniels Solomon. Robert Talonga, from Pentecost in the New Hebrides, died in August 1959, his age estimated at one hundred years.<sup>37</sup> Alex Solomon from Guadalcanal in the Solomons worked in Fiji before enlisting on the Queensland recruiting ship *Lavinia*, arriving at Mackay

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34. Their Australian-born children had full citizenship. It is not possible to indicate exactly when Melanesian children first began to be born in Australia. Melanesian females participated in the labour trade from its inception so children may have been born in the colony as early as the 1860s. The oldest Australian-born Melanesian met during field research for this thesis was Lisa Labanca Lampton from Ayr. Labanca died on 25 November 1975 aged approximately ninety-nine. Her father was from Epi island and her mother was an Aborigine.  
*BOHC 20B (LL).*
35. For further detail on this period refer to Chapter Five: European labourers and small farm cultivators, 1891–1906 and 1907–1927.
36. Mercer and Moore, 'Australia's Pacific Islanders', 90–101; *QSA COL/71*, Home Office Correspondence and Papers re South Sea Islanders in receipt of Indigence Allowance, c. 1932–7; *ABC 9a:1 (SO)*.
37. *Printout A: DeathDat (387)*; *BOHC 7Ba:1 (TA)*; *BOHC 32Ba:2 (PD)*.

in 1885. He spent the rest of his life in the Mackay district, marrying an Aborigine in 1910, living on Pratt's farm at Calen until his death in 1962, his age estimated at between ninety and ninety-five years.<sup>38</sup> Although the Australian-born Melanesians were growing in numbers, the Kanakas - the original indentured labourers - had gone.<sup>39</sup>

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The problems facing the colony of Queensland in the nineteenth century and the federation of Australian states in the twentieth century, in administering legislation intended to control and protect Melanesian immigrants were enormous. They included supervision of more than 800 recruiting voyages, 62,000 initial indenture agreements, unnumbered transfers of agreements, as well as tens of thousands of renewed contracts; and interpretation of a mass of special Acts and regulations. The major task fell to the Brisbane office of the Queensland Immigration Department, to its officers in each region, and to other colonial civil servants.

The main staff members of the Pacific Island Branch of the Queensland Immigration Department were the Immigration Agent in Brisbane, and his subordinates, the Government Agents on the recruiting ships and Assistant Immigration Agents in branch offices along the coast. In each region the Assistant Immigration Agent doubled as Inspector of Pacific Islanders, supervising the arrival of all immigrants coming to the district, reporting to Brisbane on the general labour market, and administering the complex of Acts and regulations relating to Melanesian labour. Where there was no original Immigration Department official

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38. *MM* 2 July 1960; information from Noel Fatnowa, Mackay 7 July 1980.

39. A few survived in other areas of Queensland until later in the 1960s; at least two lived until 1965, the year in which the Acts discriminating against 'aliens' were repealed. Tom Lammon from Epi in the New Hebrides died at Ayr on 11 August 1965 aged about 96. Peter Santo from Santo in the New Hebrides died at Ayr on 27 March 1966 aged about 100.

T. Dutton, *Queensland Canefields English of the Late Nineteenth Century: a record of interview with two of the last surviving Kanakas in North Queensland, 1964* (Canberra, 1980).

the nearest Police Magistrate acted in that capacity.<sup>40</sup> Few records have survived from the Pacific Island Immigration Office at Mackay, except a register of recruiting vessels for the years 1868 to 1877 and a letter book written by W.R. Goodall as Police Magistrate between September 1873 and May 1881.<sup>41</sup> Over these years an increasing amount of Goodall's time was taken up by correspondence with the Immigration Agent in Brisbane on matters concerning Melanesian immigration, and with the local employers of these labourers. By the 1880s the major part of the job of the Mackay Assistant Immigration Agent was his work as Inspector of Pacific Islanders. The medical inspections of recruits required when they first arrived were completed by the local government medical officer. In the 1880s special hospitals for the Islanders were established, with resident and consultant medical officers and wardsmen, under the control of the Inspector.<sup>42</sup>

Mackay's first Police Magistrate was J.T. Baker, Sub-collector of Customs and Harbour Master from 1863, and Police Magistrate from January 1864. When the first Melanesians arrived in 1867 it was Baker who supervised their contracts. Baker was replaced in 1868 by H.S.D. Hay, Magistrate until 1870. W.R. Goodall arrived at Mackay in February 1868 as Sub-collector of Customs, replacing Hay as Police Magistrate in 1870. Goodall remained the local Magistrate until 1884, like his predecessors acting simultaneously in a variety of adminis-

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40. Refer to Table Two: Queensland government officials in charge of Melanesians at Mackay 1867-1907. (At the end of the chapter)

41. *QSA* IPI 3/1: Register of the arrival of vessels bringing Pacific Islanders to various ports, 2 June 1868 to 23 December 1881; *QSA* CPS 10B/G1 Police Magistrate's letter book of Mackay: Memoranda as to the subjects of letters forwarded, in some cases including the full text of such letters, 2 September 1873 to 2 May 1881.

A complete register of recruiting vessels entering and leaving the port is contained in the Immigration Reports in the *Statistics of Queensland* 1869 to 1904 and in the 1868-9 volume of the *Votes and Proceedings of the Queensland Legislative Assembly* for the years 1867 and 1868. The annual reports of the Department of Pacific Island Immigration, published in *Votes and Proceedings*, provide further material on Mackay over the years 1888 to 1904.

42. K.E. Saunders, 'The Pacific Islander hospitals in colonial Queensland: the failure of liberal principles.', *JHP* v.11:1 (1976), 28-50. Also refer to Chapter Eight: European medical care of Melanesians.

trative positions, amongst them local Assistant Immigration Agent and Inspector in charge of Pacific Islanders. From 1873 he was granted a sixty pound supplement to his £350 Police Magistrate's salary,<sup>43</sup> for his extra work as Inspector of Pacific Islanders. From 1876 onward Goodall pleaded for the appointment of a separate Inspector of Pacific Islanders. In March 1878 his wife died, and with his own health ruined through protracted illness and overwork, Goodall took four months sick leave; but he stayed within the district. During this time George Smith, ex-mayor of Mackay, agent-auctioneer and Justice of the Peace, supervised the arrival of two recruiting ships, while other Justices of the Peace attended to the business of the Magistrate's Court.<sup>44</sup>

In June 1878 the government acquiesced in Goodall's pleas and confirmed the appointment of W.H. Ryder as Inspector of Pacific Islanders, but soon after reversed its decision, leaving Goodall still in charge. In December Goodall tried again to rid himself of the Inspector's job, attempting to have it combined with that of a clerk within the local Customs Department<sup>45</sup> Relief did not come until 1881 when A.R. Macdonald became Mackay's first Assistant Immigrant Agent and Inspector of Pacific Islanders, independent of the job of Police Magistrate. Macdonald stayed at this post until 1888, replaced by F.C. Hornbrook who served at Mackay for the remainder of the period in which the Pacific Island Branch of the Immigration Department operated at Mackay. Melanesian migration to Queensland was at its peak between 1882 and 1884. Whereas Goodall struggled along single-handed from 1870 to 1881, Macdonald had an Assistant Inspector working for him by 1884, the post occupied consecutively by seven men from 1884 until 1906: C.A. Forster, A. Ranger, C.B. Williams, A. Nixon, D. Rannie, W.F. Rankin and A. Philips; with Rannie returning again after Philips.

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43. *Queensland Blue Book*, 1873.

44. *MM* 11 March 1876, 3 April 1878; *QSA* CPS 10B/G1, Goodall to IA, 25 March, 3 August 1878; *QS'tic* 1878.

45. *MM* 13 June, 17 July 1878; *QSA* CPS 10B/G1, Goodall to A. Lyons, 14 December 1878, 15 January 1879, Goodall to IA, 20 December 1878; *MM* 11 January 1879.

Goodall, an ex-British army Captain, joined the Queensland civil service in 1864, arriving at Mackay in 1868. He took his job seriously, and, within the cultural limitations which faced all Europeans in a frontier situation, as Police Magistrate and protector of Pacific Islanders, Goodall showed concern for the Melanesians under his care. He deliberately distanced himself from the planters, and was never involved in their society, wishing to remain impartial when sitting in judgement over them.<sup>46</sup> He made regular visits to all of the plantations and tried to make himself as approachable as possible to the Islanders, although it is doubtful that he was as successful as he supposed:

All the Kanakas on the various plantations here know me, and the position I occupy towards them and come to me when in any difficulty...<sup>47</sup>

As Inspector of Pacific Islanders Goodall had two main problems. While Police Magistrate, the district's senior government official, he was too much bound to the town to be able to travel quickly to a plantation when an urgent matter arose. Secondly, when he brought a charge against an employer in his capacity as Inspector, he could not sit in judgement as Magistrate. The Justices of the Peace who took his place on the bench were mainly employers of Melanesians, notorious for refusing to convict fellow employers. Goodall never found a solution to this dilemma, indeed none was possible while the Magistrate was also the Inspector.<sup>48</sup> When Macdonald took over as Inspector in 1881 many of Goodall's problems were solved.

Administration of the Acts and regulations became much easier with the appointment of full-time officers to the Mackay branch of the Immigration Department, independent of the judiciary, and with quite extensive previous experience of Melanesians. Table Two lists the

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46. *MM Jubilee 1912*, 20 (F. Smith); H.L. Roth, *Sketches and Reminiscences from Queensland, Russia and Elsewhere* (n.p., 1919) (Reprinted from the *Halifax Courier*, September 1915 to May 1916), 13.

47. *QSA CPS 10B/G1*, Goodall to IA, 27 March 1874.

48. *MM* 13 October 1877, 14 August 1880.

nine men who worked in the Mackay office between 1881 and its closure in 1907: two as Assistant Immigration Agent/Inspector of Pacific Islanders and seven as Assistant Inspectors. Four had worked as Government Agent, including the two Inspectors, Macdonald and Hornbrook. Macdonald had become a Government Agent in 1878, serving on seven voyages out of Mackay until December 1881 when he took over from Goodall as Inspector. Hornbrook had served as Government Agent on thirteen voyages between 1883 and 1888, when he transferred to the Mackay office. Of the Assistant Inspectors, C.B. Williams and D. Rannie had both been Government Agents; Rannie worked on seventeen ships between 1884 and 1893.<sup>49</sup> After three years in the Mackay office he left the public service for a few years, but returned to his old post as Government Agent for one voyage in 1899, and back to Mackay at the close of the labour trade, 1905-06. Williams had been Agent on eleven voyages between 1881 and 1886, before transfer to the Mackay office.

There are indications that these men showed compassion and understanding for the Melanesians under their protection,<sup>50</sup> especially when employers attacked officials. In 1885 Macdonald sent some employers a letter advising them not to force Melanesians to work in conditions under which they themselves would not work, such as extreme heat and rain:

nature teaches these boys when to  
work and when to lay up. 51

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49. Refer to Table Three at the end of the chapter.  
Rannie wrote a book describing his years as a Government Agent. D. Rannie, *My Adventures among South Sea Cannibals: an account of the experiences and adventures of a government official among the natives of Oceania* (London, 1912). Also see Rannie, 'Notes on the New Hebrides', *Proceedings and transactions of the Queensland branch of the Royal Geographical Society of Australia*, Sixth Session (1890-1), v.6. Part 1, 1-28.
50. Corris, *Passage, Port and Plantation*, 82; Saunders, *Uncertain Bondage*, 395-405.
51. *MM* 3 June 1885.

His advice was ridiculed as quite impractical: employers wanted maximum benefit per working hour for their six pound a year labourers. Assistant Inspector C.A. Forster was held in general contempt by employers because he did his job too well. In January 1886 Forster wrote a scathing report on the low standard of food, clothing, health and general treatment, detailing cases of illegal employment and incorrect wage payments on a number of the district's plantations. Forster requested that Inspector Macdonald send his report direct to the Immigration Agent in Brisbane.<sup>52</sup> In the 1900s, Hornbrook and Rannie showed themselves to be sympathetic advocates for the Islanders during the traumatic deportation years.<sup>53</sup>

The Inspectors and their assistants were at pains to apply the spirit rather than the barren letter of the regulations.<sup>54</sup> Given the racial attitudes of nineteenth century Queenslanders, financial stringencies imposed by the government, the impossibility of closely supervising day-to-day conditions on properties up to fifty kilometres away, the cultural and linguistic barriers separating them from Melanesians, and the basically exploitative character of indentures, they achieved much. To the extent that Queensland white society offered any protection for the Melanesians against ruthless oppression, it was because of the conscientious work of these harassed ill-paid officials.<sup>55</sup>

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52. Mackay Court House Deposition Book, Forster v's Hyne, 12 May 1885; QSA COL/A453, In letter 622 of 1886, AIPI Forster to IPI Macdonald. Some years later Forster was removed from his position as Assistant Inspector of Pacific Islanders at Ingham by request of the major plantation owners there. Saunders described him as "extremely conscientious, to the point of rigidity, in the application of his duties." Saunders, *Uncertain Bondage*, 399-40.
53. Evidence given by Douglas Rannie and F.C. Hornbrook to the *1906 Queensland Royal Commission into the sugar industry*. Minutes of evidence: Rannie:- 18 April 1906, 179-81, Hornbrook:- 154-5, 159-65 (internal numbering).
54. *MM* 9 June 1892.
55. A more detailed appraisal of the laws controlling employment of Melanesians, and the extent to which the Melanesians themselves were able to take action against unfair exploitation can be found in Chapter Seven.

#### 4. Melanesian work in Queensland

Most Melanesians served their three years and then returned to their original community where they seem to have resumed traditional life with little change in their world outlook. Those who remained longer must have undergone a greater change, presumably finding the return to traditional life more difficult. From 1867 to the present there has always been a Melanesian community in the Mackay district, at least tinged by Australian influences from the first and increasingly Australian down to the present, while never ceasing to be recognisably Melanesian. It is only within the last twenty years that there have been no older members of the community born in Melanesia; but even now the memory and influence of them is still strong. During the 1970s renewed links with Melanesia were established and are likely to be increasingly important in the future.<sup>56</sup> Australian Melanesians have begun to visit their kin in the Solomons and the New Hebrides, and in turn their island-born kin have lived and worked for extended periods in Queensland. Queensland's immigrant<sup>57</sup> Melanesian community is now approaching the size of the Melanesian labour force at its greatest during the nineteenth century. Some of them are now sixth generation Australians. The remainder of this thesis will be concerned with this Melanesian community through the whole period of its existence at Mackay.

With the passage of years after 1868, instead of one type of labourer bound by the terms of the *Pacific Islander Acts* and the *Masters and Servants Acts*, three distinct categories emerged among the colonial Melanesian working class: first-indenture labourers; time-expired labourers; and ticket-holders.

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56. Moore and Mercer, 'The Forgotten People'.

57. The term "immigrant" is used here to differentiate Australian Melanesians of mainly Solomon and New Hebridean descent from Queensland's indigenous Melanesians (Torres Strait Islanders), some 500 of whom now live in the Mackay region. There are approximately 12,000 Torres Strait Islanders, about 2,250 of whom have migrated to the coast of Queensland since the Second World War. Apart from recent inter-marriage between Australia's "immigrant" and "indigenous" Melanesians, mentioned in Chapter Nine, this thesis is not concerned with Torres Strait Islanders at Mackay.

First-indenture labourers were those recruited in the islands and were bound by a three year agreement. Initially the law recognised only this one category of Pacific Islander. Australian folk-history and even some earlier academic writing on the labour trade accepted first-indenture labour as if it reflected objective reality for the nineteenth century working lives of Melanesians in Queensland. While first-indenture labourers were always the most numerous during the period of labour traffic, two other categories also arose: time-expired labourers and ticket-holders. Time-expired labourers were Melanesians who had completed one three year indenture agreement, but opted to stay in Queensland and had entered new agreements. The ticket-holders were 835 Melanesians resident in Queensland for over five years before 1 September 1884, who had no restrictions on the type of work they undertook. There were some minor sub-divisions: Islanders in the first category could have their indentures transferred permanently, or could be hired out temporarily to another employer.<sup>58</sup> And from 1868, gradually, various pieces of legislation restricted occupations available to Melanesians, confining them geographically to the coastal sugar belt and occupationally to field work. Each of these categories, sub-divisions and variations, will be discussed in turn, beginning with the occupation, transfer and hiring variables.

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58. The rights of transfer were essentially held by the employer, not by the employee.

#### 4.A. Occupational restrictions

Initially there were no occupational restrictions placed on the Melanesians. They were employed all over the colony, from the Gulf of Carpentaria to Roma in southern Queensland.<sup>59</sup> The first Melanesians who arrived at Mackay in 1867 could have been employed anywhere, from the town to a hundred kilometres or more inland. In early 1877 the Douglas ministry tried to limit Melanesians to work in tropical and semi-tropical agriculture; in early Queensland this meant the sugar industry. The Bill passed its second reading in the Legislative Assembly in 1878, but foundered at the committee stage before the third vote. Douglas then instituted the same restrictions as a set of regulations stopping licences being issued to recruit Melanesians for employment in pastoral areas, but still allowing labourers to be transferred then on application to the Colonial Secretary.<sup>60</sup> The restriction had little effect until it was incorporated into the 1880 Act. Employment categories were further restricted in 1884 and 1892: the 1884 Act limited Melanesians to unskilled jobs in tropical and semi-tropical agriculture; and the 1892 Act excluded them from any work within sugar mills.

Griffith's 1892 Manifesto and *volte-face*, lifting his earlier ban on recruiting, was accompanied by an Act further delineating work performed by Islanders on indenture agreements. They could continue as field labourers only, using horses and carts within fields but not on roads or around mills; ploughing was forbidden, as was maize cultivation. The only tasks they could undertake at the mills were handling sugar cane and begass.<sup>61</sup> Before 1892 most mills had twelve to fourteen Islanders on each shift; big mills employed up to twenty.<sup>62</sup> For three

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59. *Qlder* 25 December 1875; *QVP* 1868-9, 555.

60. *Qlder* 20 March, 10 April, 15 May 1880 (I am indebted to Dr Ralph Shlomowitz for drawing my attention to these references.); *MM* 2 February, 26 May 1877; *Qlder* 25 December 1875.

61. 55 Vic. No. 38, Cl. 4.

Refer to Section 4.E. of this chapter for a list of the occupations forbidden to all but ticket-holding Melanesians after 1884.

62. In a big mill the twenty Islanders would be employed: 7 at the carriers bringing cane to the mill; 3 at the mill rollers; 1 at the juice pump; 3 at the buckets; 2 feeding the furnaces; 4 stoking the furnaces.

decades prior to this date Melanesians worked in all aspects of the sugar industry,<sup>63</sup> but primarily as field labourers, five and a half days each week, from 6.00 a.m. until about 5.30 p.m. with an hour's break at mid-day.

The Mackay plantations and farms spread over the alluvial plains encircling the Pioneer's lower reaches. On the river's south side between *Meadowlands* and *Marion* the cane land was undulating dark alluvial soil; on the north side from *River* to *Conningsby* the land was more irregular and hilly with pockets of alluvial soil amongst clay. Thick tropical scrub lined water courses and covered the hills. The entire valley floor was covered by long blady grass over a meter high, often so thick that it was virtually impossible for a horse to push its way through. In preparing virgin bush for growing cane the timber had first to be cleared,<sup>64</sup> a back-breaking task, and the grass burnt off. Then the land was broken up with a bullock plough to a depth of twenty to twenty-five centimetres, cross-harrowed, cross-ploughed with bullocks and horses, and harrowed again. Next the soil was drilled into rows four to six feet (1.2 to 1.8 metres) apart, the width depending on the planter's preference. Every sixty centimetres the drills were planted with pieces of cane thirty to forty-five centimetres long. All this manual labour was done by Pacific Islanders under white supervision.

Planting took place at staggered intervals between March and September, so that at any one time, side by side one could see bare fields, young shoots and mature canes. Until the cane shoots grew high enough to overshadow the weeds, labour was needed to clear between the rows. At a later stage the canes were trashed by hand, labourers pulling off dead leaves which were laid between the cane rows as a mulch. Canes were ratooned:<sup>65</sup> on the flats usually only twice but in the scrub land

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63. Excellent detailed descriptions of life on individual Mackay plantations were published as serials in various colonial newspapers. For example refer to: *Sydney Morning Herald* 23 July to 28 October 1884.

64. The timber when dry was fed to the mill furnaces.

65. Ratoon cane came from plants harvested in one season, allowed to shoot again in following seasons. Ratooning was a common practice in the nineteenth century.

around Raff's mountain stools were ratooned as many as six or eight times. The crushing season extended from June to December, all mills endeavouring to complete their crush before the wet season arrived in December or January. The canes were cut green with a wide-bladed knife, heaped into drays and carted to the mill.

In the first few decades of the Queensland sugar industry field labour could include almost any type of work; ploughing was certainly one of the Melanesians' tasks. Excluding them from ploughing in 1892 made that occupation the preserve of Europeans. Thence until the end of the century Melanesians were confined to basic manual field labour. The nearest they were supposed to get to a plough was to clean its path in the furrow. William B. Fordyce was a ploughman at *Richmond* plantation, and later for a few years a tenant farmer on Long and Robertson's *Habana*. His son George was born in 1895 the year *Richmond* closed, and well remembered the late 1890s and early 1900s when he helped his father. Fordyce used a swing plough with no disk. An Islander always accompanied him to push debris away from the beam of the plough as he proceeded. Another task was to take a team of Islanders into the bush to cut firewood for the mill. Then one teamster and one Islander would take a dray out to pick up the wood.<sup>66</sup>

Descriptions of Melanesians at work in the fields vary. Some writers describe happy frolicsome finely-muscled willing workers; others write of sullen brooding fearsome savages. Dress varied with individual whim. Each year the men were supposed to be issued with two flannel or serge shirts, two pairs of trousers and one hat. Women received the feminine equivalent. Some Islander men chose to work naked but for a loincloth while others worked in their Sunday-best moleskins and crimean shirt. The women wore skirts, bright-coloured handkerchiefs binding their hair. Those with small children either worked with them in slings on their backs or left them under nearby shelter.

The two following descriptions are both from the 1890s but present totally different views of Melanesians' working lives. The first, by

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66. CRM 4a:1-3; MM 27 November 1976, 22 November 1979, 22 January 1980.

Michael Davitt a visiting Irish radical politician, intentionally gives an impression of unwilling workers. The scene is Mackay in 1898:

They are not "driven" in their tasks, as slaves would be, but they look when at labour more like prison gangs than groups of free workers. They appeared to work sullenly, as if they had been deceived as to the continuous nature of the labour they would be required to perform. None of them complained to me about the work being hard, or of the food being bad or insufficient. But in no single instance did man or woman of them say, in reply to my questions on the point, that they liked the work or the country. 67

The second, by Harry Blake, is of an unnamed district in 1892, but depicts a happier scene:

On a sugar plantation, whether cutting and burning scrub, weeding or cutting cane and loading it on the trucks for the mill, the "boys" are always a cheerful feature in the landscape....  
Not like tired labourers, but rather as frolicsome urchins school-released, do the gangs make for their huts. Some have long reeds with which they practice throwing the spear, others are sky-larking, all are talking or shouting, with the exception of a few musical enthusiasts who stride along to the strumming of their jews-harps or reed mouth organs. A gentleman from the Solomon Islands, perhaps, bringing up the rear; with a small cloth around his waist, a black clay pipe stuck in the lobe of one ear, a round tin matchbox in the other, and a red hibiscus flower in his ear. 68

It is, of course, impossible to place any reliance upon either account as a general description even of appearances, since both impressions owe something at least to the attitudes of the authors, and neither

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67. M. Davitt, *Life and Progress in Australasia* (London, 1898), 273.  
68. H.I. Blake, "'The Kanaka': a character sketch.", *The Antipodean: an illustrated annual*, Edition 2 (1892), 80-1.

## PLATE 22



a. Islanders planting cane on a Mackay plantation in the 1870s. Note the extreme youth of some of the labourers. (Photo: *JCUNQ: History*)



b. Islander women and children working in the fields. (Photo: *JCUNQ: History*)

takes account of the several categories of Melanesian labour. Oral testimony from Islanders today adds little to the picture: they remember only stories that the hours were long - daylight to dark - and that the overseers sometimes resorted to violence.<sup>69</sup> For what it is worth, contemporary photographs of Islanders at work usually resemble Davitt's rather than Blake's description. Plate 22a and 22b in this chapter show Melanesian men and women working in the fields; their children are working alongside, and the cane planting scene in Plate 22a is closely supervised by European overseers.

Around the mills Islanders worked at many tasks: Robert Kia from Malekula in the New Hebrides helped build the chimney at *Racecourse* in the late 1880s; an Islander was noticed at *Ashburton* in 1891, working in the saddler's shop.<sup>70</sup> Right from the 1860s they worked inside the mill house, ladling and skimming the boiling liqueurs:

these men are invaluable as workers, and their masters find it profitable to supply them with unlimited quantities of good food, comfortable dwellings etc. without expecting more than a reasonable amount of labour in return. 71

Such work needed to be well rewarded for it was most unpleasant and often dangerous. A visitor to one of Mackay's mills in 1876 thought the scene reminiscent of hell:

naked, sweating South Sea Islanders... stand toiling with long spades and pitchforks in the reeking, sweltering vats, up to their ankles in clammy sugar and molasses, like Dante's demons in Malebolge. 72

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69. BOHC 7Ba:1 (TA); BOHC 7Bb:1 (NJF); ABC 9b:1 (SL); BOHC 41Ba:3 (HB); BOHC 6Ba:1 (IT, AM & WM).

70. BOHC 4Ba (WM); MM 6 January 1891.

71. MM 11 September 1869.

72. W. Archer, *Tourist To the Antipodes: William Archer's "Australian journey 1876-77"*, edited by R. Stanley (Brisbane, 1977), 60.

The mills were dangerous places with unguarded revolving parts, enormous wheels and boiling liquids. Melanesians had never faced anything remotely like them before and must have been both fascinated and terrified at first. Some, seeing a mill for the first time, refused to venture near the works. Most mills used steam whistles to signal changes in work shifts. On first hearing the blast of the whistle Islanders sometimes ran pell mell for the scrub. At *Alexandra*, eventually accustomed to the noise, one group of Efate Islanders delighted in blowing the whistle every time they passed, to the annoyance of other mill hands.<sup>73</sup>

Melanesians knew little about the mechanical principles on which the mill works operated. They learnt fast, but often not fast enough. J.E. Davidson once got some of them to set a fly wheel in motion at *Alexandra*. One forgot to release his hold on the wheel, was carried around by it, and escaped abraised. Other mill employees were not so lucky. An unknown number of Melanesians, Asians and Europeans perished in the works of the mills.<sup>74</sup>

The 1884 Act was designed to limit Islanders to work in tropical and semi-tropical agriculture. As early as 1866 a Melanesian was employed as a Turkish bath attendant in Sydney.<sup>75</sup> Bilifiri and Laubelia, men from the Rakwane descent group in east Fataleka, Malaita, worked in Sydney in the 1890s as professional boxers.<sup>76</sup> Most however pursued more mundane labouring occupations on plantations and farms, and a number worked in domestic service in sugar districts and elsewhere. The youngest of the male recruits, women, and others incapacitated for more strenuous labour, often worked as domestic servants. From 1883 comes the comment:

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73. *MM Jubilee 1912*, 24.

74. Also refer to Chapter Eight, Table Nine.

75. J.E. Davidson's Journal, 16 February 1866. This man may not have been an indentured labourer; Loyalty Islanders had been visiting Sydney since the 1850s. Howe, *Loyalty Islands*, 90.

76. Labilier (Laubelia) enlisted at Fakanakafo on the *Helena*, arriving at Bundaberg on 13 July 1893. *QSA PRE/83 a-b*, 139; information from Ishmael Itea and Charles Luiramo, Fakanakafo, Malaita, 13 October 1976.

there is no planter's house in the Mackay district wherein Polynesians are not domestic servants. When in the house of the member for the district [M.H. Black of *Cedars*] I found a black girl making my bed. 77

Islanders continued to find work as domestic and urban servants in Queensland throughout the century, some legally and some illegally.<sup>78</sup> In 1890 Dr Ahearne, a leading Townsville advocate of the Separation movement, was prosecuted for employing a female Melanesian servant. The case was dismissed, but there was public outrage. A few years later, a Queensland Cabinet minister, J.R. Dickson, later Premier, was fined ten shillings for the same offence.<sup>79</sup> Other Melanesians worked illegally as ploughmen, grooms, carters, wood cutters and fencers, but as the trade union movement strengthened in the 1890s most cases were quickly reported and the employers fined.<sup>80</sup> Some Islanders were quite *au fait* with their legal position. In one case at Mackay in 1894, Strumbo, an indentured labourer was asked by Toby, a time-expired labourer, to help with a fencing job. Strumbo refused, saying that it was illegal: Toby, displeased ended up in court for assaulting his law-abiding friend.<sup>81</sup>

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77. *MM* 4 July 1883.

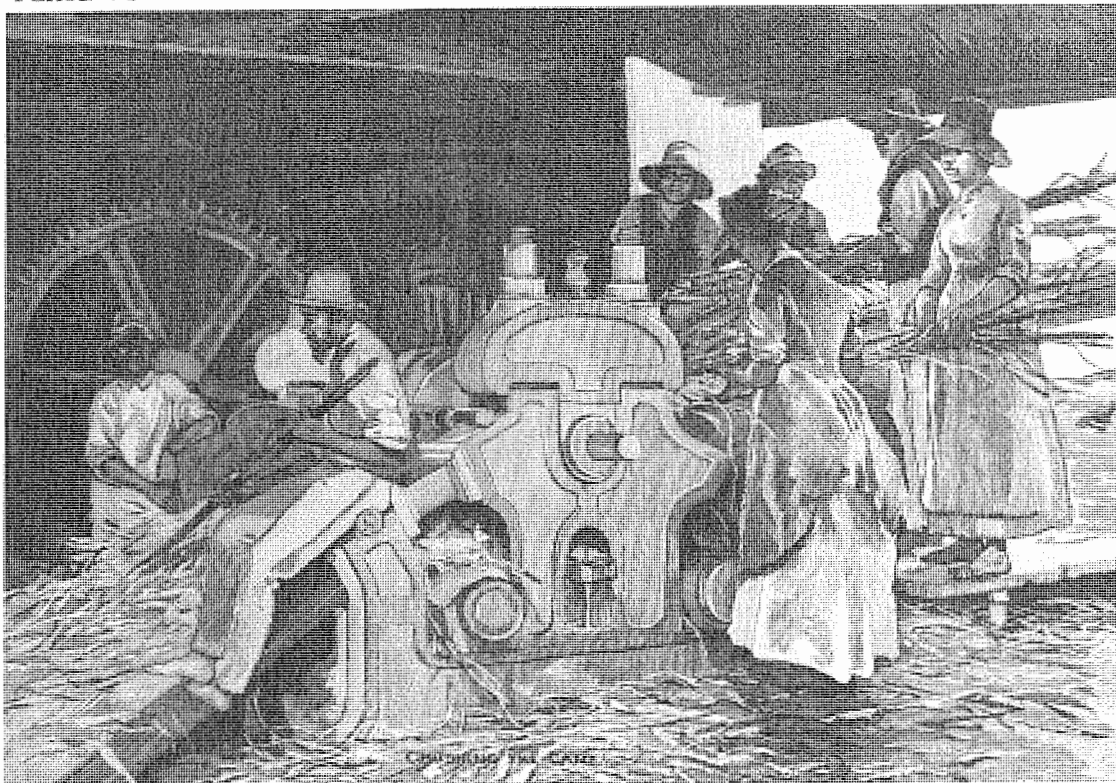
78. Ticket-holders, those who had arrived in the colony before September 1879, could work wherever they pleased. For references to illegal employment of Melanesians in urban and domestic service refer to: *MM* 28 November 1877, 21 August, 7 September 1897; *Steering Wheel* 1 June 1937, 48 (H. Caulfeild); *BOHC* 19Ba:2 (EH).

79. Doran, *Separatism in Townsville*, 135; *MM* 17 August 1897.

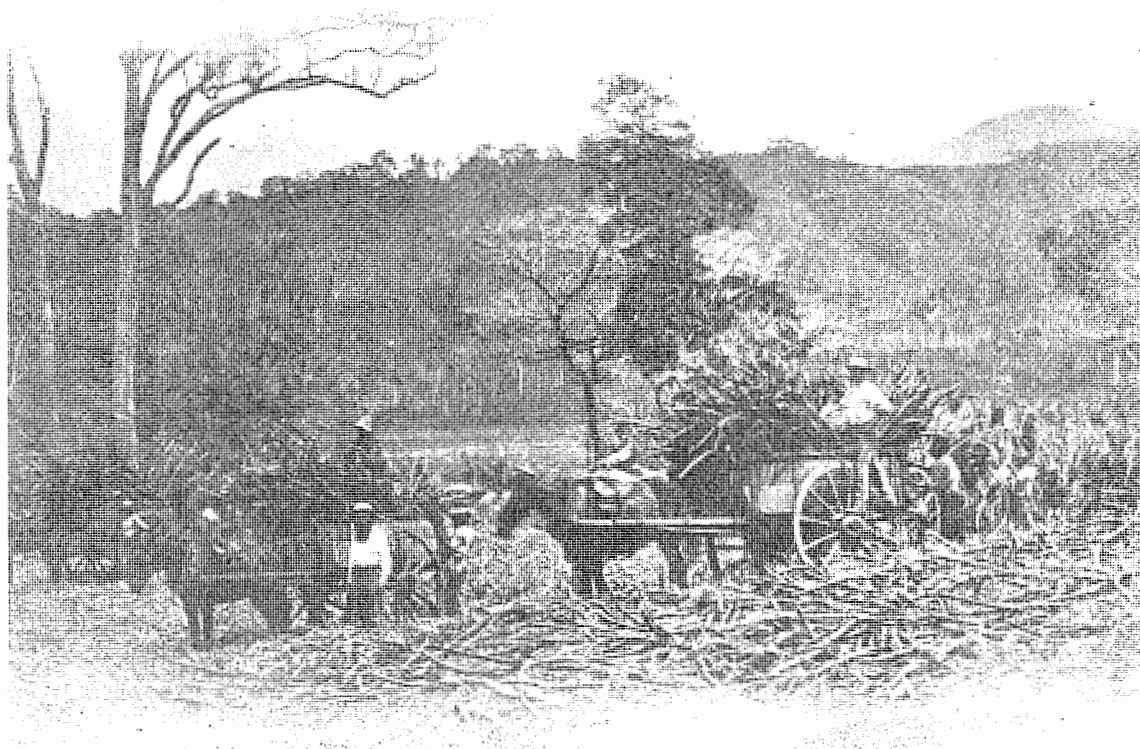
80. *MM* 9 May 1889, 10 June 1890, 19 May 1894, 7 February, 11 November 1898; *QSA POL/J1* Batch 11M, Police Commissioner to Inspector, Cooktown and Townsville, 6 January 1896.

81. *MM* 19 May 1894.

## PLATE 23



a. Islanders feeding cane to an early Mackay mill. (Photo: Garran, *Picturesque Atlas*)



b. Carting cane at McBryde and Finlayson's "Glenalbyn" in the 1870s. (Photo: Roth, *Port Mackay*, 105)

#### 4.B. Transfers and hiring

The indentured labour of Melanesians was important to the sugar industry in two ways: it was cheap, and it was reliable - once obtained it would not strike or desert. Sugar prices were determined world-wide by production costs in areas of cheap, unfree labour. In Queensland the additional cost of hiring Europeans when Melanesian labour was short was enough to jeopardize the financial viability of a plantation or farm. The reliability obtained by means of three year indenture made it difficult to adjust the size of the labour force to varying requirements. The need for labour was always greatest when land was being cleared of its initial cover: thereafter, there was a seasonal peak during crushing, June to December. Good plantation management required careful judgement to ensure that available labour matched requirements as closely as possible. While new indentures and time-expired agreements were the means of obtaining the great majority of workers, transfers made possible a measure of flexibility.

Under the terms of the 1868 Act indentures once entered into could not be transferred to another employer without the permission of the original employer, the labourer and the new employer; the whole process was supposed to take place in the presence of a Police Magistrate or Justice of the Peace, who had to ascertain that the labourer fully understood the change.<sup>82</sup> But law and practice were not always the same.

Transfers were of two types: those occurring immediately a labourer arrived in the colony; and those occurring a substantial period after arrival. Robert Gray, Queensland's Immigration Agent, was questioned about immediate transfers by the 1876 Select Committee into Polynesian Labour. Gray made it quite clear that the employer's name on the recruiting application was irrelevant: labourers were re-allocated immediately they arrived in Queensland:

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82. 31 Vic. No. 47, Cl. 13.

When I was appointed Immigration Agent, the practice prevailed of issuing one license to recruit the whole number of Islanders the vessel was capable of carrying, and upon arrival in the colony to distribute them on applications which were received from employers, as if to recruit. It merely amounted to this; that instead of before it left, the applications and bonds under which the license was issued being replaced by the applications and bonds of employers until the whole of the Islanders were absorbed.

I objected to the practice as contrary to the letter of the law, but was instructed not to alter it; there is certainly no very great harm in it, and it is perhaps a more simple way than compelling the importers to engage the whole lot, and then to distribute them by transfer immediately afterwards under section 13. 83

...no transfer takes place at all. The applications are made on the arrival of the vessel, as if to recruit them. One employer does not engage the whole lot.

It saves stamps, does it not?

There is a saving in duty stamps. 84

In the early decades of the trade recruits and employers seem to have taken advantage of the lax transfer system and over-ordered their first-indenture labourers coming direct from the islands, transferring them to other employers immediately on arrival.<sup>85</sup> Over-ordering may have been a form of insurance against failure on the part of a recruiter to fill the quota, something which clearly happened quite often; it may have resulted from over optimistic estimates of the progress of a newly-established plantation, especially in clearing land; it may have been designed to secure profit from the transfer, although there is no clear evidence to substantiate this.

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83. *QVP* 1876, v. 3, 136.

84. *Ibid.*, 141.

85. Goodall's letterbook for the period 1873 to 1881 contains numerous examples of transfers of this first type. *QSA* CPS 10B/G1, Goodall to J. Walker, 22 November 1877 (J. Walker had 6 Islanders transferred to him by H. Brandon immediately they arrived.); Goodall to IA, 3 June 1879 (Of 79 new arrivals on the *Mystery*, 31 were transferred immediately.).

The second type, transfers occurring a substantial period after arrival, are easier to explain. The need for labour declined sharply after initial clearing of land was completed. Transfers on change of ownership of a plantation were a regular occurrence throughout the labour trade. They were not part of the sale, but the old employer was required by law to make the transfers as soon as possible afterwards. Labour contracts were swapped into the new plantation owner's name, causing no change in location for the Melanesian employees. A typical example of this second type is a transfer arranged between G.N. Marten and G.H.M. King in 1876. Marten sold *Branscombe* plantation to King in September. In October Marten transferred thirty-eight indenture agreements to King and arranged several other labour transfers to *Branscombe* from other plantations and farms in the district.<sup>86</sup> Transfers between plantations intensified for a year or so after 1875 when plantation companies changed ownership because of rust-induced planter insolvencies.<sup>87</sup>

Transfers, whether within or between districts, were usually initiated by the employer with the Melanesian employee acquiescing: only occasionally was a transfer instigated by an employee. In one such case a woman working on *Branscombe* in 1876 applied for a transfer to neighbouring *Alexandra* so that she could live with her husband. In another case, in 1880, an Epi Islander asked to be allowed to leave *Dumbleton* to join two Ambrymese he had met on board ship, then working at Walkerston. Both requests were granted.<sup>88</sup> Far more numerous were transfers motivated by employers. Inter- and intra-district transfers of labourers fresh from the islands could be made quite freely up until the end of 1876. Usually Mackay employers sent for labourers from other districts, but occasionally the reverse occurred. When W. Stuart left *Inverness* for Toowoomba in 1877 he took Mattering Jack Ambrym with him, transferring his indentures.

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86. *Ibid.*, Goodall to IA, 19 October 1876. King was a new-comer to the district which probably explains why Marten arranged the extra transfers for him.

87. *Ibid.*, Goodall to H.J. Jane, 13 June, and to IA, 31 July 1876. Refer to Chapter Four, Table Four: Modification of plantation ownership at Mackay, 1874 to 1877.

88. *Ibid.*, Goodall to IA, 25 October 1876, 9 August 1880.

During 1873-4 *Richmond's* owners transferred over sixty Islanders to other plantations and estates in the district: to neighbouring *Miclere*, *Inverness*, "Glenalbyn" and "Glendarah"; and to *Barrie*, over twenty kilometres south-west.<sup>93</sup> In 1876 the Donaldson brothers of *Inverness* transferred two Islanders to Sir John Macartney's Bloomsbury station in the St Helens area thirty kilometres to the north.<sup>94</sup> *Richmond* and *Inverness* were just across the road from one another. As a result of the transfers Islanders who had been living in close proximity found themselves separated by over fifty kilometres, with no expectation of ever seeing each other again as long as their indenture period lasted.

Five new regulations were gazetted in December 1876, affecting initial agreements, transfers and wages. Each agreement had to be made directly with the employer indicated on the application. Transfers were not to be made without a full enquiry, nor without good reason. No transfer could be made out of the original district "until a reasonable time from the arrival of the labourers in the colony". In 1884 "a reasonable time" was defined as six months.<sup>95</sup>

Common in the 1860s and 1870s, transfers declined when new regulations were introduced in the 1880s. This correspondingly reduced the ability of employers to adjust the size of their labour force to changing requirements, an inevitable but probably unintended consequence of the legislation. Exact figures on transfers are only available for the last seventeen years of the labour trade, 1888 to 1904 (Tables Four and Five, and Graph One). Even in this period twelve percent of all first-indenture agreements were transferred: 398 out of a total 3,201 first-indenture agreements.<sup>96</sup> Of the two types of

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93. *QSA* CPS 10B/G1, Goodall to IA, 20 December 1873, 1 July 1874; Appendix Two: Richmond.

94. *Ibid.*, 12 December 1876; Appendix Three: Inverness; Chapter Four, Map Five.

95. *QGG* 23 December 1876; Wawn, *South Sea Islanders*, 106-7; *MM* 6 January 1877; *QGG* 18 April 1884, Regulation No. 25, issued 17 April 1884.

96. The transfer system only applied to first-indenture contracts. An increasingly significant proportion of labour agreements during the 1888-1904 period were re-agreements: contracts of various lengths made by time-expired Melanesians. They will be discussed later in this chapter.

Table Four

## Mackay Melanesian Agreements: 1888-1904

Year	New Introduction		Re-agreements		Transfers		Total		Employers	Total Melanesians in District
	sets	nos.	sets	nos	sets	nos.	sets	nos.		
1888	30	489	243	710	7	125	280	1324	81*	1911
1889	12	288	268	727	2	32	282	1047	48*	2121
1890	29	582	358	822	3	23	390	1427	n.a.	2816
1891	14	196	393	1112	3	88	410	1396	n.a.	2450
1892	0	0	371	876	6	17	377	893	n.a.	2102
1893	13	109	564	1374	0	0	577	1483	208	2081
1894	21	159	725	1588	2	5	748	1752	283	2168
1895	0	0	725	1304	0	0	725	1304	392	2167
1896	4	133	656	1189	5	14	662	1329	413	1941
1897	13	150	706	1285	1	2	720	1437	441	1780
1898	79	419	867	1501	0	0	946	1920	459	2074
1899	22	65	667	1166	1	1	690	1232	439	1684
1900	16	141	654	1124	2	5	672	1270	335	1775
1901	37	226	694	1401	0	0	731	1627	339	1869
1902	31	164	491	922	13	22	535	1108	249	1708
1903	6	69	329	619	7	32	342	720	222	1301
1904	1	11	380	693	4	32	385	736	201	1260
<u>Mackay:</u>										
Total No.	328	3201	9091	18413	56	398	9472	22005		
% of Total	3.4%	14.5%	95.9%	83.6%	0.5%	1.8%	100%	100%		
<u>Queensland</u>										
Total No.	1680	22272	33053	65420	309	2298	35042	89990		
% of Total	4.8%	24.7%	94.3%	72.7%	0.9%	0.9%	100%	100%		

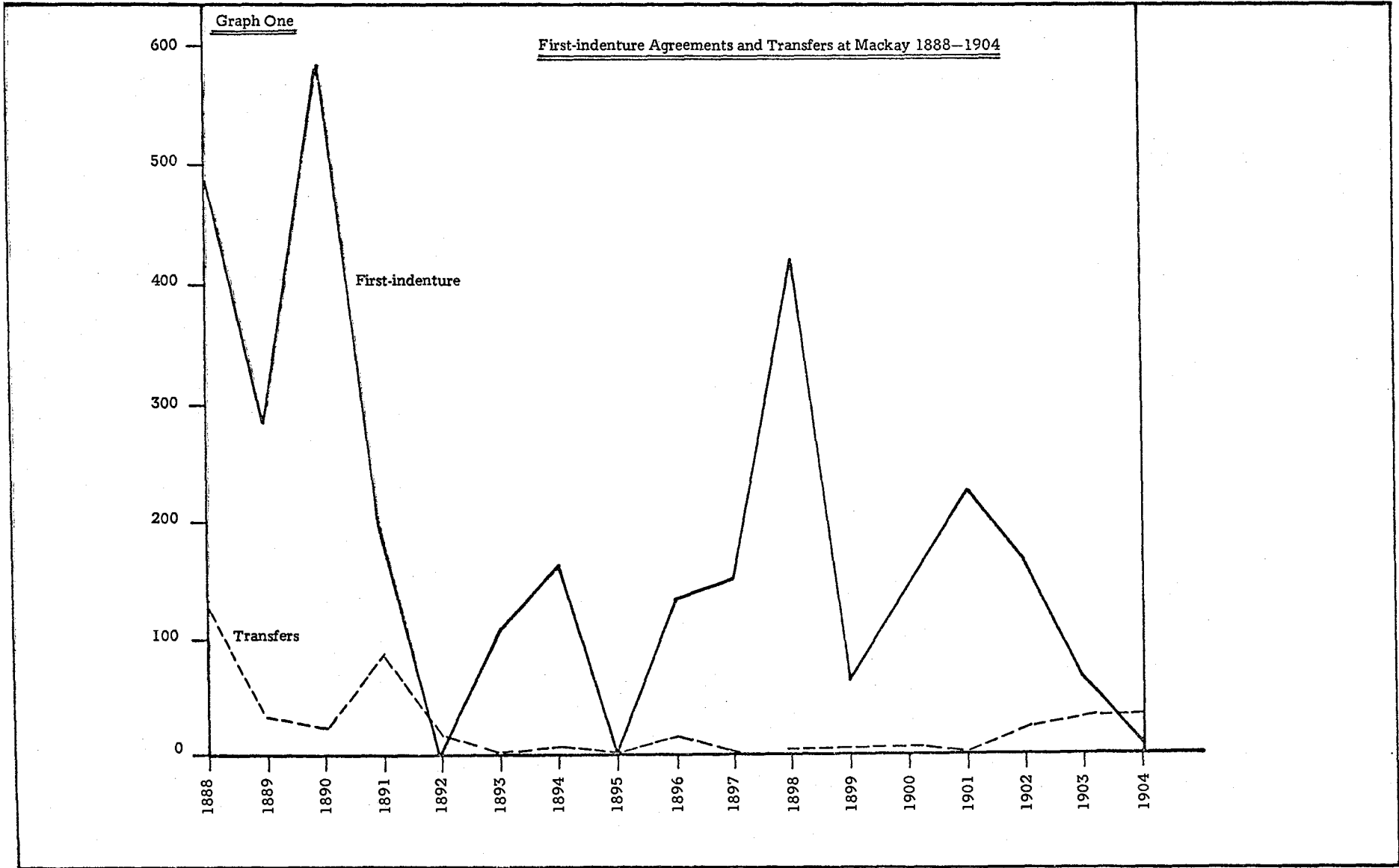
Source: QVP: Annual Reports of the Immigration Agent. For \* refer to QVP 1889 v. 4, 428-30.

Table Five

Mackay Melanesian Agreements: 1888-1904

Percentage of New Introductions, Re-agreements and Transfers  
in each year

YEAR	NEW INTRODUCTION	RE-AGREEMENTS	TRANSFERS
	%	%	%
1888	36.93	53.62	9.44
1889	27.50	69.43	3.05
1890	40.78	57.60	1.61
1891	14.04	79.65	6.30
1892	0	98.09	1.90
1893	7.34	92.65	0
1894	9.07	90.63	0.28
1895	0	100.0	0
1896	10.00	89.46	1.05
1897	10.43	89.42	0.13
1898	21.82	78.17	0
1899	5.27	94.64	0.08
1900	11.10	88.50	0.39
1901	13.89	86.10	0
1902	14.80	83.21	1.98
1903	9.58	85.97	4.44
1904	1.49	94.15	4.34
Average			
1888-1904	13.76%	84.19%	2.05%



transfers mentioned previously, most in this period were the second type: transfers occurring a substantial period after first arrival, occasioned by plantations changing ownership or closing down.

Short-term hiring of Melanesian labour was also possible, although the practice was constrained by the 1868 and later Acts. Hiring needed the consent of the official in charge, and the labourer. Plantation owners hired out Melanesians indentured to them, on daily hire rates to small-scale farmers and to other planters. The monthly accounts for Sloan & Co's Mackay plantations for the years 1875 to 1878, show that the company was hiring out labourers on short-term contracts to planters within their financial orbit.<sup>97</sup> The same happened on CSR's plantations in later decades. Ralph Shlomowitz' research in CSR's archives has revealed comprehensive evidence of short-term hiring, particularly after the sub-division of the company's plantations. Shlomowitz concluded that the daily hire rate was regulated to reflect market conditions. CSR placed a twenty-five percent premium on their daily hire rate in the crushing season, and reduced the rate if they had a temporary excess of labour.<sup>98</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

Since the first Melanesians arrived in Queensland in 1863 allegations have continually been made that the labour trade was a form of slavery. There is no doubt that they were not slaves. Slavery as it existed in the West Indies, South Africa and Mauritius until 1833, and in fifteen southern states of the United States of America until the Civil War of 1861-65, was a legal status lasting for life and transmitted to every child of a female slave: the person of the slave was the property of his owner, capable of being sold, bequeathed, given as a gift, mortgaged or hired like any other chattel; incapable of entering any contract, owning property or giving evidence in court. The Queensland indenture contract, legally enforceable and legally void if the law was satisfied that it was not voluntarily entered, of itself conclusively proves that this was not slavery. Statements

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97. *JCUNQ* (Archives): Sloan & Co. records for Mackay 1875-7.

98. R. Shlomowitz, 'Markets for indentured and time-expired Melanesian labour in Queensland, 1863-1906', *JPH*, v. 16 (1981).

describing Melanesians in Queensland as slaves, when not merely rhetorical, metaphorical, or simply careless, are based on the tacit assumption that free and slave are a simple dichotomy, with no intermediate terms, so that one not free is a slave. In fact the law of Australia (as of other civilised countries) in the nineteenth century recognised many a legal status which was not fully free, but which had attached to it restrictions on control over property, and mobility - married women, minors, certified lunatics, sufferers from some contagious diseases, bankrupts, persons on remand awaiting trial, convicted criminals, aliens, apprentices serving indentures, members of the armed forces, and seamen etc.

If "slavery" is used strictly, it can be categorically denied, irrespective of appearance. If it is metaphorical - for example, an assertion that Melanesians were treated as 'badly as slaves in respect of working conditions, housing, food etc. - it is a question of historical fact to be determined like any other by a dispassionate weighing of evidence. Use of the term merely confuses the issue by introducing an inaccurate and emotionally-charged expression.

The round assertion that Melanesians were bought and sold as slaves is sometimes made today, and was made from the beginning of the trade.<sup>99</sup> Australian-born descendants of the original recruits support this myth. One of them, Faith Bandler, daughter of an Ambrymese, recently published a biography of her father in which she described his sale as a slave at Mackay:

The buying was keen and the bidding high because harvests were heavy. The biggest men were offered first. Seven pounds, ten pounds! Twelve pounds! And all the men from Tanna were sold. Another dray was driven forward. Wacvie felt Weloa's body move closer to his own and some small comfort passed from one to the other. Now it was their turn to be bought. 100

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99. *Courier Mail* 22 August 1863.

100. Bandler, *Wacvie*, 21-2.

Similar descriptions, depicting the arrival of Melanesian "slaves", can be found in southern and overseas nineteenth century newspapers,<sup>101</sup> and occasionally in newspapers and documents from Queensland. Michael J. Fay stood in the 1881 parliamentary election at Mackay; he had lived in the town since 1863. In an election speech Fay said that "when the first Kanakas arrived they were sold by auction at the wharf now known as Paxtons."<sup>102</sup> W.H. Paxton, owned of the wharf in Fay's story, features in a similar piece of evidence. In 1879 Police Magistrate Goodall reprimanded Paxton for transferring newly arrived recruits without permission, accusing him of treating the Melanesians like cattle.<sup>103</sup> Simon Tait is the author of another piece of slave evidence; he arrived at Mackay in 1883, later standing as a Labour candidate for parliament. He told his son about seeing a slave market down by the wharves:

I remember my father coming home in great excitement saying he had witnessed a slave market - a blackbirder had come into port with a consignment of recruits and they went under the auctioneer's hammer. 104

Beyond question all the above cases refer to transfers of indentured labourers, which until 1884 could be made immediately recruits arrived. In 1880 a writer for the *Queenslander* described transfers taking place down on the docks:

the landing of islanders became a kind of speculation in the market which, as some people thought, looked very like buying and selling, especially as the price of the passage money paid by the employer was often three or four times what the cost of the passage really was. 105

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101. *MM* 13 February 1875, 1 December 1877, 16 July 1892.

102. *MM Jubilee 1912*, 13; *MM* 16 March 1881.

103. *QSA* CPS 10B/G1, Goodall to Paxton, 8 March 1881.

104. *MM* 12 March 1896, 30 April 1901, 23 April 1957 (C.S. Tait).

105. *Qlder* 20 March 1880.

Melanesians were traded for at the dockside and on shady verandahs while plantation business was transacted and rum swizzles drunk, but not in the sense of the slave block in America's southern states. Particularly in the first twenty years of the labour trade, transfers often did not conform to the law: the system was used as a mechanism to adjust each employer's human capital investment. Anti-kidnapping bonds for ship owners, the outlay of passage money, bonds and levies paid to the government, wages and concomitant costs of maintaining a labour force accounted for a large amount of any cane grower's liquid funds. Transfers and hiring enabled the most efficient use of the indentured labour; efficiency seldom to the employee's advantage. There is no reason to doubt that transfers were often made with callous regard for the labourers, as Goodall charged Paxton: it may well have been traumatic and humiliating as Bandler conveys, but it was still a transaction quite distinct in law and reality from the sale of a slave.<sup>106</sup>

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106. The relevance of this slavery myth to the self-perception of Australian Melanesians is examined in my article: 'Kanakas, kidnapping and slavery: myths from the nineteenth century labour trade and their relevance to Australian Melanesians', *Kabar Seberang: Sulating Maphilindo*, No. 8-9 (1981).

#### 4.C. First-indenture labourers

The majority of first-indenture labourers, leaving their islands for the first time, enlisted to work in Queensland for six pounds a year, with clothing, food, accommodation and minimal medical care. The cost of their passage to and from Queensland, and the bonds and levies required by the government to administer their stay in the colony were paid directly by the employers: indirectly they were paid by the Melanesian labourers; employers took these extra costs into consideration when calculating the value of their labour.

Price and Baker estimated that 62,475 indenture contracts were entered into by Melanesians arriving in Queensland between 1863 and 1904.<sup>107</sup> Although these are first-indenture labourers as defined above,<sup>108</sup> they do not represent 62,475 different individuals: a significant but unknown number were enlisting for a second or even third time. Some Islanders had certainly returned to the colony by 1870, the proportion growing as the century progressed. The 1876 Select Committee enquiring into Melanesian labour in Queensland examined eight-four logs written by Government Agents in the first half of the 1870s, finding evidence that many Islanders were returning to the colony for a second or even a third time.<sup>109</sup> At Mackay in 1877 it was reported that some:

have been to Mackay, the Herbert, and Mary rivers before. One of them has been a trip to London and back. 110

On the *Isabella* arriving at Mackay in 1879:

A large number of the boys she brought [had] served a term of three years previously. 111

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107. Price with Baker, 'Origins of Pacific island labourers'.

108. Refer to the introduction to Section 4 of this chapter.

109. *QVP* 1876, v.3, 53.

110. *MM* 15 December 1877.

111. *Qlder* 10 May 1879.

T.H. Fitzgerald, in need of labour for his new plantation on the Johnstone river, came down to Mackay, where he had been a major plantation owner until the mid-1870s, and arranged for recruits fresh off the barquentine *Jabberwock* to return north with him.<sup>89</sup>

Until the mid-1870s transfers on arrival were the norm, and Melanesians seem seldom to have been consulted about transfers during their term of indenture. Certain of the Justices of the Peace at Mackay, many themselves employers of indentured Melanesians, were willing to sign transfers without consulting the employee. In 1874, the Police Magistrate, Goodall, wrote that he had often been asked to put through a transfer in the absence of the employee. A year later the Immigration Agent, Gray, accused Goodall of signing blank transfer papers for the Macdonald brothers of *Inverness*, a charge which Goodall successfully rebutted.<sup>90</sup> Even when proper procedures were followed, the system was difficult to administer. When Islanders transferred from town to town their records had to follow them, creating as many bureaucratic problems as similar transfers do for today's public servants. Sometimes lists of names sent from one government office to another were hard to decipher or did not tally with the names the labourers gave on arrival at their new district.<sup>91</sup>

Melanesian labourers could have found themselves transferred twenty or thirty kilometres from where they were working; and before 1880, from agricultural to pastoral areas and vice versa. In the early 1870s there was no shortage of Melanesian labour and plantations at Mackay were established at a quick rate: four in 1872, five in 1873 and three in 1874-5.<sup>92</sup> Labour forces were extremely mobile and at the whim of individual planters. In the early 1870s, *Richmond*, newly established with a small primitive mill, needed quite a large labour force to clear

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89. *Ibid.*, 11 April, 1877, 2 September 1880.

90. *Ibid.*, 6 October 1874, 27 March 1875.

91. *Ibid.*, 3 February 1873; Goodall to PM Townsville, 14 March 1881.

92. Chapter Two, Graph Two: Pacific island labourers to Queensland 1863-1904; Chapter Four, Graph Three: Bar graph of plantation mills operating between 1867 and 1910.

And of one hundred recruits, some of them from Malaita, who arrived on board the *Young Dick* in 1886, forty-five had served as labourers before.<sup>112</sup>

Exact statistics are available only for the period between 1892 and 1903. During these years twenty-eight percent of the 22,272 Melanesian labourers entering the colony had previous experience: twenty-two percent had worked in Queensland and another six percent had been employed outside their island. From 1892 to 1904, 1,646 first-indenture agreements were signed by Mackay.<sup>113</sup> If the Queensland average applied to Mackay (and there is no reason to think that there would have been any great variation) about 460 of the 1,646 were enlisting in the labour trade for a second time and about 360 had worked in Queensland at some earlier time. These calculations are important in discerning their rewards in cash and kind. In the later years of the trade many re-recruiting labourers demanded that the enlistment bonus, previously paid to their kin, be paid directly to them, in cash. The bonus varied considerably, between ten shillings and five pounds: the equivalent of a new recruit's wages from four weeks to ten months. Wages paid to first-indenture males and to all females remained set at the legal minimum of six pounds per annum for the entire trade, but the wage rate for re-enlisting labourers varied: between six and twelve pounds, the amount increasing markedly towards the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>114</sup>

By the 1880s an increasingly significant proportion of the first-indenture labourers who arrived at Mackay came with cash bonus in pocket, on a higher wage than the legal minimum of six pounds. These men and women were self-assured, well aware of what was required of them as plantation labourers. "Old hands" took new recruits in tow, helping to ease them through their first traumatic days in Queensland. As one observer wrote of a ship load in 1880:

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112. *MM* 6 March 1886.

113. Annual report of the Pacific Island Branch of the Queensland Immigration Department, 1892-1904; Table Three of this chapter.

114. Shlomowitz, 'Market for indentured Melanesian labour', footnotes 18 to 20; 'Search for institutional equilibrium', Table One: Cost of Melanesian labour 1881-1904, 102.

Some of the "boys" are not new to work here, having been in Mackay before, and it was amusing to see these "old hands" doing the pilot and showman to the new comers. 115

Re-recruiting Melanesians sometimes asked to be allocated to a particular plantation or employer: their chances of this occurring depended on the good will of the employer and the fairness of the harassed Inspector of Pacific Islanders down at the Immigration depot, surrounded by bewildered "new chums", confident "old hands", and planters and farmers impatient to get home. Even with the tightening of the transfer system after the mid-1870s, the method of allocating newly arrived recruits changed very little during the remainder of the trade. Employers specified the number of labourers they required but it was the task of the Inspector to allocate individuals to fill each employer's quota. F.C. Hornbrook, Mackay's Inspector of Pacific Islanders from 1888 to 1907 described the process in 1895:

I have a difficult job at times to allot the boys without separating relatives. I divide them into lots before I know who is to get them. Say one man wants six, another three, another two, and so on. When they are allotted like that the agreements are made out. The employer comes along and says he wants half a dozen boys. I show the lot to him and tell the boys they have come here to work for three years, and explain to them what they are each to get.

Then I ask each by himself, "You come away yourself, or did any man steal you". If he says, no, he did not come freely, then I stand him back, and there is an inquiry. If there is a doubt it is left to the boy's option, he can either sign or go back. Some have gone back; there has been one or two instances of that. Then each boy comes up and I formally introduce him to his employer, telling him that he is engaged to him for three years, and that if anything goes wrong he must come and tell me. They then touch the pen, and the agreement is completed, I then see that they have their clothes with them when they go off to the plantation. 116

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115. *MM* 26 May 1880.

116. *South Australian Proceedings of the Parliament* 1895, v.2, 157: Report of the Northern Territory Commission.

After twelve months work, the labourer was entitled to be paid. From 1868 the total wage due to the labourer had to be paid yearly, in coin, without deductions on account of goods supplied outside the terms of the agreement.<sup>117</sup> The mode of payment of wages first came under official scrutiny during the evidence given to and in the final report of the 1876 Select Committee. In some instances Islanders faced considerable delays in obtaining their wages, because of the insolvency of an employer. In one case in January 1876 Goodall had to sentence an insolvent planter to three months gaol before wages were paid.<sup>118</sup> The next month Goodall was faced by an even more complicated case. Seventy-four year old Charles Fitzsimmons, resident owner of *Nebia* plantation, was dying; his partner lived in England; *Nebia* was £8,000 in debt after the rust epidemic; and fifty-five Islanders were due to be paid. Goodall did not know how to proceed as Inspector of Pacific Islanders: the local planter-Justices of the Peace refused to adjudicate the case. As a solution he requested a temporary prosecutor be appointed to bring the case to him as Police Magistrate.<sup>119</sup>

Banks and financiers had taken over several of the plantations, but had not bothered to transfer their employees' indenture agreements from the names of the now insolvent ex-employers. The AJS bank took over *Meadowlands* plantation and its hundred Melanesian labourers, but left all of the agreements in the name of penniless T.H. Fitzgerald.<sup>120</sup> Goodall reported a similar case a year later: 225 agreements were in the name of William Paxton, a salaried clerk of Sloan & Co., a Melbourne-based firm controlled by R.J. Jeffray. Paxton had no financial interests at Mackay, beyond his salary. The agreements were in his name by request of Jeffray, an Elder in the Presbyterian church,

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117. 31 Vic. No. 47, Cl. 30, Form D. See also Chapter Seven for detail on wages.

118. This was one of the Donaldson brothers of *Cassada*. Eventually a friendly neighbourhood planter paid the wages. QSA CPS 10B/G1, Goodall to IA, 31 January, 11 February 1876.

119. *Ibid.*, 11 February 1876. Fitzsimmons died on 24 February 1876. Waterson, *Queensland Parliament*, 57-8.

120. QSA CPS 10B/G1, Goodall to IA, 31 January 1876.

who did not want his name connected with the labour trade his church decried. But what, asked Goodall, would become of the wages owed if Paxton left the district and Jeffray refused to honour his commitments?<sup>121</sup>

The 1876 Select Committee recommended payment of wages half-yearly. Following this report, various amendments were suggested for the 1868 Act, one that the wages should be paid quarterly and directly into a bank account. Shopkeepers protested: with 1,400 Islanders in the Mackay district in 1877, these wages were worth at least £8,400 a year to the shops. Others said that the wages should not be paid until the end of the three years, as the Islanders were inclined to waste their money on worthless purchases before they had learnt its value. This time shopkeepers were joined in protesting by planters who petitioned their planter-politician F.T. Amhurst.<sup>122</sup> The solution was that from December 1876 wages were to be paid annually in the presence of the Inspector of Pacific Islanders or the local Police Magistrate. Under the 1880 Act, the pay period was altered to half-yearly, and remained so until the end of the labour trade. This clause was not implemented immediately: the same is true of other clauses. In late December 1882 the Inspector at Mackay circularised all employers in the district, informing them that wages had to be paid half-yearly from the beginning of 1883. Sixteen months later these half-yearly payments were just beginning to be enforced.<sup>123</sup>

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121. *Ibid.*, 15 January 1877; see also Goodall to PM Broadsound, 14 January 1880.

122. *MM* 6, 9, 23 September 1876, 26 May 1877.

123. *QGG* 23 December 1876; 44 Vic. No. 17, Schedule G; Mackay Planters' Association Minute Book, 1 January 1883, 20 May 1884.

#### 4.D. Time-expired labourers

At the end of a three year contract Melanesians had a choice: either to return to their islands, or stay in Queensland as time-expired labourers, returning home later or not at all. Time-expired Melanesians were working at Mackay as early as 1870; some of the first Melanesians to arrive in 1867, re-engaged.<sup>124</sup> Their contracts varied in length, from one month to three years, but were in other respects similar to first-indenture contracts, except that their clothing allowance was usually converted into a cash payment. The proportion of time-expired to first-indenture Melanesians increased steadily during the 1870s but no register of their contracts was kept before 1884 so it is impossible to find earlier comprehensive information on their number, wages and general conditions.

At the peak of the plantation era in the mid-1880s, Europeans in the sugar towns were growing uneasy about the number of time-expired Melanesians and their position in society. In 1883 there were 1,476 time-expired Melanesians in Queensland,<sup>125</sup> some thirty to forty percent of them at Mackay. After time-expired Melanesians were involved in a drunken fracas with Europeans at the Mackay race-course on Boxing day 1883,<sup>126</sup> 733 Europeans in the district petitioned

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124. These were Spiller's labourers at *Pioneer*; they re-signed for another three years. A few months later fifteen time-expired men from J.E. Davidson's ill-fated *Bellenden* plantation near present-day Tully travelled south to Mackay and entered into new contracts.

*Qlder* 30 June 1877 (J. Spiller to Ed.); Jones, *Cardwell*, 119 (quoting *Brisbane Courier* 31 August 1870).

125. *QVP* 1883-4, v.2, 1445.

126. The incident began when the liquor booth proprietor refused to supply alcohol to a New Hebridean. As a result a quarrel began amongst some Islanders, which turned into a bottle-throwing skirmish, ill-directed bottles hitting Europeans. None too sober themselves the Europeans retaliated and the small incident turned into a riot. Melanesians grouped against Europeans, the two sides backing and advancing for some time before European reinforcements arrived from a nearby hotel. Fifty or sixty horsemen took to the field, wielding stirrup irons and riding crops. By the time the police and cooler headed spectators gained control many of the rioters (Europeans and Islanders) had received serious injuries. At least three Islanders died as a result of the riot, but legend suggests a greater number. The racecourse fracas was

the government to impose restrictions. The petitioners argued that because there was no legal restriction on their occupations, time-expired Melanesians were competing with European labour; and because they were free to "walkabout" without engaging as labourers, they diminished the labour pool available for the sugar industry; further, they created disturbances, roaming around the town in large numbers, drunk and disorderly. The solution sought was that Melanesians be confined to tropical agriculture, and that the onus of payment of their return passage be shifted from the original to the current employer.<sup>127</sup> During 1884 the government adopted both of these suggestions.

From 1868 to 1880 the original employer had to deposit a bond with the government to cover the cost of a return passage for each Melanesian employee. Under the 1880 Act the original employer paid the passage money if the Melanesian chose to return at the end of the first contract; but if the Melanesian stayed (regardless of who the new employer was) the original employer had to deposit a five pound bond with the government. In 1884 this was altered: from 1884 to 1892 the bond was paid by the current employer, the original employer receiving his money back, more equitably spreading the transport cost. After 1892 the onus reverted to the original employer. Employers of time-expired labour took into account the incidence of the payment of the return passage money in making offers for labour. This meant that during the period 1884-92, the wage rate of time-expired Melanesians was depressed by five pounds, the amount of the return passage.<sup>128</sup> Also from 1884,

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the largest racial disturbance between Melanesians and Europeans in nineteenth century Queensland. Europeans at Mackay were understandably disturbed by the event.

For a detailed account of the event refer to my article: 'The Mackay Racecourse Riot of 1883' in B.J. Dalton (ed.), *Lectures on North Queensland History: Third Series* (Townsville, 1979), 181-96. (In the article I suggested that there were two deaths, but a more recent examination of the Mackay Cemetery Trust Register of Burials reveals three. I still regard the number as unsettled, perhaps for ever so.)

127. *QVP* 1883-4, v.2, 1453: Petition against employment of time-expired Polynesians.
128. Shlomowitz, *Markets for Melanesian labour in Queensland, 1863-1906* (Unpublished manuscript, 1980), 14-5; 'Market for indentured and time-expired Melanesians'.

all but 835 Melanesians<sup>129</sup> in the colony had their occupations restricted to unskilled jobs in tropical and semi-tropical agriculture, effectively limiting them to work as sugar labourers.

There can be no doubt that in restricting Melanesians (with a single class of exceptions) from working outside the sugar industry, and by causing time-expired Melanesians' wages to fall by five pounds, S.W. Griffith's Liberal government deliberately attempted to discourage time-expired labourers from staying in the colony. In the event they were not successful. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s time-expired labourers formed an ever larger proportion of the total Melanesian population: between thirty-one and thirty-five percent, 1888 to 1892; between fifty-seven and sixty-seven percent, 1893 to 1899; between forty-two and forty-six percent, 1900 to 1901; and between thirty-one and thirty-nine percent, 1902 to 1904.<sup>130</sup> Time-expired labourers formed a distinct sub-group within Queensland Melanesian society in particular and in the colonial society in general.

The changing onus in payment of passage money, 1868-80, 1880-84, 1884-92, 1892-04 was an important consideration behind any wage offer, but so were other government charges involving Melanesians. From 1884 it cost two shillings and six pence, increased to five shillings in 1896, to register every labour contract. Capitation fees on each contract were also introduced to finance administration of the system. Between 1871 and 1884 the capitation fee on first-indenture contracts increased: from ten shillings in 1871, to fifteen shillings in 1873, to twenty shillings in 1874, to thirty shillings in 1881, to sixty shillings in 1885.<sup>131</sup> The 1880 Act introduced another capitation fee

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129. The 835 unrestricted Melanesians (those who had been resident in the colony since before 1 September 1879) were issued with tickets exempting them from the 1884 restriction. These ticket-holders will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

130. Shlomowitz, 'Markets for indentured and time-expired Melanesians', (paragraph of footnote 17). Ralph Shlomowitz's published and unpublished papers on the Queensland sugar industry provide the only statistically rigorous assessment of the economics of the indentured labour system.

131. Shlomowitz, *Markets for Melanesian labour*, 13.

of ten shillings per annum for every labourer employed in a district in which the government had an Islander hospital.<sup>132</sup> All of these costs were paid by the employer: from 1885 onward the sum of all charges, apart from the bond, was equivalent to a payroll tax of around twenty percent on first-indenture contracts. The only direct tax on Melanesians was a ten shilling poll tax levied on all re-engaging time-expired Melanesians for a few years after 1902.<sup>133</sup>

Ralph Shlomowitz has examined the structure and working of the market for time-expired Melanesians, concentrating on the Maryborough and Port Douglas districts for which data is readily available.<sup>134</sup> He found several pronounced trends. Over the years 1884 to 1901, two-thirds of all contracts for less than twelve months covered the harvest season when labour was most in demand. The average contract length became shorter after 1893, and the average wage rate increased substantially during the first half of the 1890s.<sup>135</sup> The alterations were due to changes in demand caused by sub-division of plantations, the increasing numbers of small farm operators, the 1892 change in onus for payment of the return passage money, and Melanesian preferences. Average wages in the Maryborough district were at a rate equal to £20.6.0 a year over the period 1884-1901, ranging from £16 in 1888 to £23.8.0. in 1895.<sup>136</sup> What evidence is available for Mackay is in close accord with Shlomowitz's calculations. In 1895 time-expired

132. Vic. 44 No. 17, Cl. 28. The four districts were Maryborough, Mackay, Ingham and Immisfail.

133. H. Caulfeild, 'Adventurous life of Henry Caulfeild late Inspector of Pacific Islanders', *The Steering Wheel and Society and Home*, 1 July 1937, 41; *JCUNQ* (Archives): Register of Pacific Islanders on Pioneer plantation. Refer to the agreements signed in 1904-5; C.M.H. Clark, *Select Documents in Australian History, 1851-1900* (Sydney, 1970), 652.

134. No equivalent records exist for the Mackay district, but Shlomowitz suggests, based on the fragmentary evidence available, that at least some of these trends were also representative of other areas in Queensland.

135. Shlomowitz, *Markets for Melanesian labour*, Tables 9 to 12, and pages 38-9.

136. *Ibid.*, Table 12.

Islanders at Mackay were asking as much as £25 a year; and the Mackay *Sugar Journal* gave the average wage at between £23 and £25: the Pioneer River Farmers' Association wanted to peg the wage at £20.<sup>137</sup> Two years later a letter to the editor of the *Mackay Mercury* reported that time-expired Islanders were negotiating wages of up to £24 a year.<sup>138</sup> Employer and employee preferences and fluctuations in the labour market meant a large dispersion of wage rates in any one year.

From his statistical analysis Shlomowitz drew one other major conclusion which is borne out by oral testimony from the present day Islander community: although plantations often employed time-expired Melanesians, most were employed by small-scale farmers. Planters had a larger capital supply and obtained economies of scale by employing and training first-indenture labourers: small-scale farmers found time-expired Melanesians less risky, being already trained, less subject to illness and available on short contracts in the busy harvest season. This preference was shared by Melanesians. Time-expired labourers preferred short contracts and the mobility these allowed; they liked to rest between jobs and to move from job to job; they also liked the more personal relationship with employers on small farms. Tables Four, and Five show that eighty-four percent of the total number of agreements made at Mackay, 1888 to 1904, were with time-expired Melanesians, involved 18,413 individual agreements of varying length. Over the same period 3,201 new recruits entered into three year contracts, 398 of which were later transferred.

The time-expired segment of the Melanesian work force grew increasingly important over four decades of Melanesian immigration, with interesting ramifications for colonial society. By 1895 time-expired Melanesians made up sixty-five percent of the Melanesians in the Mackay district.<sup>139</sup> They were quite at home with the labour market; some could almost be said to have gained the upper hand. In 1895

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137. *MM* 7 February 1895; Ole Matsen Diary Two, 10; *SJ&TC*, v.4 15 April 1895, 57.

138. *MM* 2 October 1897.

139. *QSA COL/A807*, In letter 8184 of 1895, A.C. Smith to Premier Nelson, 30 July 1895.

Inspector Hornbrook reported to the Immigration Agent in Brisbane that:

At present Islanders are loafing about for six months of the year getting very high wages for the crushing season on six month agreements, which is not only bad for the Is'ars [Islanders] but is placing them in direct competition with white contract cane cutters. 140

They were mobile within the district and beyond, travelling at will on the coastal steamers. Islanders moved reasonably freely, up and down the Queensland coast; some engaged by a local agent for a plantation; others going of their own volition to a district where they knew work was available, or where they had kin or members of the same dialect group. Nor were Melanesians limited to European methods of transport: in Melanesia one walks, and likewise Melanesians in Australia never shirked travelling enormous distances on foot. Alex Daniels Solomon from Guadalcanal was mentioned briefly in Section Three of this chapter. As a time-expired labourer, in 1901, he walked from Proserpine to Mirani in one very long day: at least 140 kilometres. 141

In an attempt to control time-expired Melanesians more regulations were introduced in 1896, increasing the minimum period of a contract to six months with no more than one month between agreements.<sup>142</sup> Shorter contracts were only supposed to be permitted to fill in time while they were awaiting transport back to the islands. These 1896 regulations were never enforced: in fact small farm cultivators had little need for labourers during the off-season. Another 1896 regulation stipulated that Islanders had to obtain a permit from the local Inspector before travelling on coastal vessels, but permits seem to have been easily obtainable, acting more as a register than a deterrent from travel. Oral testimony shows that inter-district travel continued to

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140. QSA COL/A792, In letter 876 of 1895, IPI Hornbrook to IA, 1 May 1895. Also refer to a similar opinion in the editorial of the *Mackay Mercury* 27 March 1897.

141. MM 2 July 1960. He walked from very early in the morning to late in the night.

142. Additional Regulations under *The Pacific Island Labourers Acts, 1880-1892*, Regulation 9, issued 25 February 1896.

be common place.<sup>143</sup>

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143. *Harry Kwaitaka*, (used as a case study in Chapter Three) worked at Bundaberg, Cairns and Mackay.  
*Andrew Bobongie* (also from chapter Three) worked at Cairns, Innisfail and Mackay.  
*Tom Lammon* (mentioned in Section Three of this chapter) worked in the Burdekin, Cairns and Herbert districts.  
*Peter Santo* (also from Section Three) worked around Bundaberg, Childers, Nambour, Rockhampton, Ayr, Innisfail and Ingham.
- BOHC 1Ba:1 (HSQ); BOHC 41Ba:2 (HB); BOHC 50Ba: (HB&ONF); Dutton, Queensland Canefields English, 117-21; see also Mackay Chronicle 8 January 1900; and MM 19 January 1904.*

#### 4.E. Ticket-holders

One final category of Melanesian remains; an elite but diminishing group of ticket-holders. In 1884 the government placed limits on the occupations available to Melanesians, except for one group: 835 Melanesians who had been resident in Queensland since before September 1879. The complete freedom of this group was guaranteed under Clause Eleven of the 1884 Act. When the Bill was debated in parliament a number of the members objected to the injustice of the legislation, viewing the restrictions as bad in principle and un-British. B.R. Morehead declared that the Bill was introducing "a system of limited slavery",<sup>144</sup> depriving individuals of liberty and free choice because of the colour of their skins. Similarly Albert Norton and S.W. Griffith supported the right of time-expired Melanesians to stay and continue working in Queensland if they so desired. P.M. Mercer summarized this debate in her analysis of legislation affecting Melanesians in Queensland:

a significant proportion of speakers in the Assembly were prepared to argue that Melanesians were entitled to the rights reserved for white colonists in Queensland society. The degree of freedom and privileges they would accord Pacific Islanders, varied among individual politicians of this group. The basic assertion, however, was clear: the Legislature, in seeking to impose limitations upon Melanesians who had completed their original contracts and sought other employment in the colony, was acting both unjustly and in contradiction of their British heritage. 145

To salve the politicians' consciences, complete freedom of employment was allowed to all Melanesians who had lived in Queensland for five continuous years before 1 September 1884.

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144. *QPD* v.41 (1884), 146.

145. Mercer, *Analysis of Racial Attitudes Towards Melanesians*, 152. Mercer gives an admirable summary of the entire debate in Part Four: 'The Melanesian question in the years 1883-5', 112-56.

All other immigrant Melanesians in the colony, except those engaged in diving for *bêche-de-mer* and pearls in the Torres strait,<sup>146</sup> were afterwards supposed to be confined to work in tropical and semi-tropical agriculture as field labourers on a small number of products: sugar cane, cotton, tea, coffee, rice, spices and fruits. Specifically forbidden were all of the following occupations:

- (a) engineer, engine-driver, engine-fitter, blacksmith, wheelwright, farrier, sugar boiler, carpenter, sawyer, splitter, fencer, bullock-driver and mechanic.
- (b) groom or coachman.
- (c) horse or cattle driver (except in the fields).
- (d) domestic duty or household servant.<sup>147</sup>

This substantial group left free to regard their working conditions and rights just as they were when they first arrived in the colony before September 1879, declined over time: to 716 in 1892, 704 in 1901 and 691 in 1906. Shlomowitz expressed their numbers as a proportion of the overall Melanesian population of Queensland from 1885 to 1906: in any one year ticket-holders constituted between seven and eleven percent of the Melanesian population.<sup>148</sup> They worked as farmers rather than just as labourers; and occupied a variety of other occupations: miner, boarding-house keeper, carter, fisherman and market gardener.<sup>149</sup> An ageing group set aside by law from the rest of the Melanesian community, they rather awkwardly bridged the gulf between recruits fresh from the islands and the European community of Queensland.

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146. These immigrant Melanesians - missionaries, fishermen and divers - inter-married with Australia's indigenous Melanesians, the Torres Strait Islanders. J. Singe, *The Torres Strait: people and history* (Brisbane, 1979), 104-6, 160, 165, 172, 184, 194, 209-10, 220, 248.

147. Vic. 48 no. 12, Cl. 2.

148. *QSA* COL/A693, In letter 4063 of 1892, IA to Col. Sec., 4 April 1892; *QPP* 1906, v.2, 454; Shlomowitz, Market for indentured and time-expired Melanesians'.

149. *QVP* 1892, v.2, 825. Occupations of Polynesians according to the census of 1891.

There is no complete list of ticket-holders but 122 names are preserved in a Maryborough register. A large number of ticket-holders must have lived at Mackay; some of their descendants may well live there still, but if so none is aware of the elite status of his or her forebears. In the nine years of interviewing Melanesians from Tweed Heads to Ingham, none of the actual "tickets", surely prized possessions, has ever been located. But given the type of lives the Islanders led up to a decade ago, in grass huts and tin shanties in the tropics, the loss is not surprising. Some of the ticket-holders were Malaitans: two are listed in the Maryborough register, Hoosinger and Leorurea who arrived on the *Cera* in June 1879.<sup>150</sup> In excess of 400 Malaitans had enlisted to work in Queensland by 1879 - 400 out of 9,000 by 1904 - so Malaitan ticket-holders would have been rare.<sup>151</sup> Most were New Hebridean and Loyalty Islanders, reflecting the concentration on these areas by recruiters in the first few decades of the labour trade. Kulijeri, a *wane asi* Malaitan mentioned in Chapter Three, who enlisted in the 1870s, working all his life on pastoral properties around Charters Towers, is the only known Malaitan ticket-holder with descendants in Australia. The other Malaitan families are descendants of men and women who enlisted in the 1880s and 1890s. Wives were scarce amongst the predominantly male Melanesian labourers; most ticket-holders would have been single men, leaving no descendants.

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150. QSA IPI 3/15: Maryborough Register of Pacific Islanders exempt from the provision of Clauses 3, 4 and 10 of the *Pacific Island Labourers Act (1880) Amendment Act of 1884*, 7 May 1884 to 1885.

151. Chapter Two: Table One.

## 5. Conclusion

Melanesians first came to Queensland as indentured labourers to work on cotton plantations. Robert Towns certainly did not realise the future ramifications for Australia when in 1863 he instructed the master of the schooner *Don Juan* to engage young male Melanesians to work for a year in Queensland. Towns wanted labour. In the long term he still hoped to persuade the British government in India to allow Indians to emigrate to Queensland. As a short term expedient he had engaged German immigrants and begun to bring Melanesians, a people whom he knew well from his connection with the sandalwood industry in the Pacific, to work on his plantation. In justifying his actions to the Queensland Colonial Secretary Towns saw himself as doing an enormous service to the colony:

I believe these Islanders will be found well suited; and instead of being attacked and branded in the way I have been, I think I deserve the thanks of the community for the introduction of that kind of labour which is suited to our wants....152

Towns was proved correct but not in the manner he expected. Today descendants of the Melanesian indentured labourers constitute ten percent of the Australian black community. Some individuals of predominantly immigrant Melanesian descent have achieved significant positions as spokespeople within the black community and as campaigners for social reform for all Australians. They are the children and grandchildren of the Melanesian immigrants whom Towns began recruiting for Queensland.

The position of island-born Melanesians went through a series of changes within the wider Queensland and Australian community. At first they were indentured servants free to work in any area of the colony. Gradually the government legislated occupational and geographic limits which confined them to work as field labourers in the coastal sugar regions. But with the passing of years three distinct categories emerged: first-indenture labourers, time-expired labourers, and ticket-holders, all with varying degrees of freedom, earning potential

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152. Towns, *South Sea Island Immigration*, 3.

and ability to cope with life in colonial Australia. The mid-1880s were as pivotal to the Melanesian workers as they were to the sugar industry as a whole. Time-expired and ticket-holding Melanesians exhibited increasing mobility and an ability to negotiate with employers; they also fared best in prosecutions under the *Masters and Servants Acts*.<sup>153</sup> Beginning in the mid-1880s this group formed the base of a Melanesian segment of the general working class, separate from the indentured servant category and making up forty to sixty per cent of all Melanesians in Queensland.

They were not as malleable as the first-indenture Melanesians; they chose where and for whom they worked, negotiating with employers over wages. It appears that Melanesian bargaining with employers dates from about the same period as the first appearance of trade unions among European workers in North Queensland: the late 1880s and early 1890s. The earliest documented disagreements between Melanesians and their employers at Mackay, explicitly described as strikes, begin in 1889 when two time-expired Islanders employed at *Habana* stopped work because they claimed they were working longer hours than the Europeans employed there. In 1890 a further twelve Islanders at *Habana* went on strike for similar reasons.<sup>154</sup> The *Mackay Mercury* in 1891, wrote of an incident in the *North Eton* mill area:

we have lately seen that Polynesians can strike as well as white men...<sup>155</sup>

In two further cases, in 1893 and 1895, Islanders met and passed resolutions not to work for particular farmers; in 1899 Islanders working on *Palms* plantation refused to cut cane which had been badly damaged by frost.<sup>156</sup> Europeans commonly treated such actions as direct imitations

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153. Refer to Chapter Seven and Appendix Five.

154. *MM* 7 November 1889, 10 June 1890.

155. *MM* 14 November 1891.

156. *MM* 16 December 1893; *South Australia: Proceedings of the Parliament*, 1895, v.2:148 (J.V. Chataway); Kirwan, *Sugar Industry*, 8.

of trade unionism. The *Mackay Mercury* report of the 1893 meeting is typical. One night in December 1893 some Islanders at Mackay held a meeting. A Chairman was elected who explained that the meeting had been called to hear the complaints of one of their number against an employer. The man stated his case, two or three others corroborating his evidence. A motion was passed that in future no Melanesian would make agreements with the farmer concerned. Their use of meeting procedure was an innovation; resort to combined action was not.

In Chapters One to Three of this thesis it was argued that traditionally and in their enlistment in the labour trade Malaitans acted as members of descent groups not as individuals. Melanesian societies in general operate more collectively than their European equivalents from which sprang the trade union movement. Melanesians always had descent group, dialect, language and island identity binding them into collective groups in Queensland. In some ways this aided them during their working lives in the sugar industry: the suitability of the butty gang method of organizing sugar labourers, as a Melanesian working unit, was outlined in Chapter Five.<sup>157</sup> Melanesians in Queensland worked and negotiated best as members of a group, not as individuals. Melanesian society, bolstered by the Queensland governments' creation of several distinct categories of Melanesian labourer, provided them with considerable potential as collective bargainers. European sugar workers in the Mackay district did not form a union until 1904.<sup>158</sup> But at least two decades before that, Melanesian industrial action, in refusing to work or absconding from hired service, was often accomplished by small groups rather than by individuals.

What Europeans usually saw as an amorphous mass of black workers was in fact sub-divided into a complex of groups held together by ties carried over from traditional society, much more of which functioned in Queensland than has usually been assumed.

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157. Refer to Chapter Five, footnote 111 and Section 2.C.

158. Hunt, *Labour Movement in North Queensland*, 36 and Chapter Two, *passim*.

Table Two.

Queensland government officials in charge of Melanesians at  
Mackay 1867 - 1907

<u>NAME</u>	<u>YEARS</u>	<u>POSITION</u>
J.T. Baker	1863	Sub-collector of Customs and Harbour Master
	1864-8	Police Magistrate
W.R. Goodall	1868	Sub-collector of Customs
H.S.D. Hay	1868-70	Police Magistrate
W.R. Goodall	1870-84	Police Magistrate
	1873-81	Inspector of Pacific Islanders
M.A. Lyons	December 1878 to January 1879	Acting Insp. of Pac. Islanders
	November 1878	Clerk of Customs
A.R. Macdonald	1881-88	Inspector of Pacific Islanders
C.A. Forster	1884-86	Assistant Insp. of Pac. Is.
A. Ranger	1886	Assistant Insp. of Pac. Is.
C.B. Williams	1886-8	Assistant Insp. of Pac. Is.
F.C. Hornbrook	1888- 1907	Inspector of Pacific Islanders
A. Nixon	1888-92	Assistant Insp. of Pac. Is.
D. Rannie	1893-5	Assistant Insp. of Pac. Is.
W.F. Rankin	1895- 1900	Assistant Insp. of Pac. Is.
A. Philips	1900-04	Assistant Insp. of Pac. Is.
D. Rannie	1905-06	Assistant Insp. of Pac. Is.

Source: Blue Book of the government of Queensland 1867-1908.

Table Three.

Mackay Inspectors and Assistant Inspectors of Pacific Islanders  
who had previously worked as Government Agents.

<u>A.R. Macdonald</u>			<u>F.C. Hornbrook</u>		
<u>Ship</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Port</u>	<u>Ship</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Port</u>
Isabella	22.7.78	Mackay	Fanny	3.2.83	Mackay
Isabella	4.11.78	Mackay	Madeline	8.6.83	Brisbane
Isabella	23.4.79	Mackay	Madeline	5.11.83	Brisbane
Isabella	29.9.79	Mackay	Fred.Whil.	25.6.84	Mackay
Mystery	5.3.80	Mackay	Ariel	23.2.85	Cairns
Jabberwock	15.8.81	Mackay	May Queen	31.8.85	T'ville
Jabberwock	21.12.81	Mackay	Sybil	22.12.85	M'borough
			Sybil	7.6.86	M'borough
			Rod. Dhu	24.12.86	M'borough
			Hector	12.8.87	Mackay
			Helena	29.12.87	B'berg
			Myrtle	18.6.88	Ingham
			Helena	1.11.88	B'berg

<u>C.B. Williams</u>			<u>D. Rannie</u>		
<u>Ship</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Port</u>	<u>Ship</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Port</u>
Sybil	12.9.81	M'borough	Heron	1.9.84	R'hampton
L.Belmore	28.2.82	Mackay	Emily	3.1.85	Brisbane
Spunkie	29.7.82	Mackay	Flora	2.7.85	Ingham
Spunkie	12.12.82	Mackay	Eliza Mary	23.12.85	T'ville
Spunkie	11.6.83	Mackay	Flora	9.7.86	Ingham
Isabella	7.12.83	Mackay	Ariel	1.12.86	B'berg
Fanny	23.7.84	Mackay	Corea	15.2.87	Brisbane
Isabella	27.2.85	Mackay	Para	10.12.87	Cairns
Isabella	21.8.85	Mackay	Madeline	wrecked 1888	
Lavinia	8.12.85	Mackay	Rod. Dhu	11.5.89	M'borough
Lavinia	15.6.86	Mackay	May	23.10.89	Br/Ing.
			May	21.4.90	B'berg
			Fearless	7.8.90	Mackay
			Fearless	11.12.90	Mackay
			Fearless	20.5.91	Mackay
			Empreza	14.12.92	Brisbane
			Foam	1.2.93	T'ville
			Syd. Belle	1.8.99	B'berg

Source: *Statistics of Queensland 1878-1899* (the date given is the date the ship reached port).

CHAPTER SEVEN

433 -- 473

*MELANESIAN REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS*

1. Wages and money 434
2. Melanesian workers  
and the law 458
3. Conclusion :  
indenture or servitude? 468

1. Wages and money

Seriously distorted notions about the wages paid to Melanesian labourers in Queensland are current in Australia today, not least among descendants of those Melanesians. Faith Bandler, daughter of Wacvie from Ambrym island, has published a semi-fictional biography of her father's life in Australia. Writing about Mackay in the 1880s and 1890s she gives the impression that some were not paid for their labour, and those who were, never received more than six pounds a year.

'Since they took us away from our land, then they should give us some of theirs.'

'We would have to pay them money for it', Weloa insisted, starting to grease his own hard boots. 'To do that, we would need them to pay us money for our work.'

For some time now, having learned the importance of this money in the white man's world, they had been asking for payment. If only they could get it, then they would be able to save it up and buy their own land, they thought. 1

Oral testimony, recorded in interviews with scores of Islanders resident in Queensland over nearly a decade, leaves no doubt that almost all Islanders are firmly convinced that their forebears were invariably paid "two and sixpence a week". Although this is close to the weekly equivalent of the statutory six pounds a year paid to first-indentured labourers,<sup>2</sup> it is at best only half-true.

For a year of labour, employers were obliged by law to pay first-indenture Melanesians no less than six pounds, together with accommodation, clothing and basic health care. There is no doubt that the stipulated wages were paid: it is also clear that what the law specified as the minimum was in reality the actual wage. Over a forty year period during which great changes affected all other aspects of

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1. Bandler, *Wacvie*, 40. See also pages 36, 60, 63, 102-3, 106-7, 110.

2. Moore, *Forgotten People*, 33; *MM* 18 July 1974: H. Frizell's article 'A Kanaka's daughter goes home.'. (Actually the amount is two and fourpence).

the industry - including fluctuations in wages paid to re-recruiting labourers, time-expired labourers, ticket-holders and European farm labourers - the six pounds a year paid to new recruits never varied. The unfairness of this set wage, unchanged for forty years, has never been adequately condemned by historians. The only change affecting new recruits was in the method of payment: once a year until 1880, half-yearly thereafter by a change in the law that took several years to become effective.

Cases of fraudulent non-payment of wages are rare: although some may have escaped notice there can not have been many, especially after the first few years when there were experienced workers, the Inspectors, Government Agents and missionaries in the islands ready and willing to report irregularities. This does not excuse the cases that occurred. The case of Macdonald of *Inverness* plantation in 1876, who refused to pay wages owed after he became bankrupt was mentioned in Chapter Six. Earlier the same year a pastoralist over the range from Mackay, having employed ten Ambrymese for two years, decided that he had no further use for them, stopped their rations, and told them to go without paying their wages.<sup>3</sup> Government Agent Gould reported another case in 1883: two Epi Islanders returning home on the schooner *Lavinia* out of Mackay bitterly told him that they had only received three pounds for twelve months work.<sup>4</sup> And even if outright fraud was unusual, there were other ways for employers to re-coup wages paid. Coins of the realm were of limited use in Melanesia and many a swindle may have been worked on unwary Melanesians during the conversion of their wages into goods. Opportunities for employers to swindle workers were not unlimited, but they did occur.

Employers calculated wages other than the basic wage after considering the amount of labour available, as well as their own hidden costs in passage money, bonds, registration and capitation fees.

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3. QSA CPS 10B/G1, Goodall to IA, 31 January, 11 February, 29 December 1876.

The Ambrymese wandered toward the coast, doing odd jobs for settlers, until they reached Mackay and the protection of the Police Magistrate who reported the incident.

4. RNAS 16, L.H.L. Gould to Comm. Erskine, 24 September 1883.



The wage rates for re-recruiting labourers varied: from six pounds to twelve pounds, the amount increasing as the century progressed. Wage rates for time-expired labourers varied depending on the nature of the contract, as well as the previous experience and negotiating skill of the Melanesian concerned. Basing his calculations on Maryborough statistics, Shlomowitz has detailed the variations in male time-expired wages from 1884 until 1903. The results are shown in Table One. For twelve month contracts taken up after three years in the colony Melanesian males at Maryborough could expect to be paid between £13.9 and £22.5. Those with more than three years work experience could expect commensurably more: between £16.1 and £23.3. For contracts of less than twelve months, wage rates varied seasonally: averaging £16.3 to £24.6 during the crushing season and £13.7 to £23.9. during the slack season. The variation in wage rates when labourers had more experience strongly suggests that, if six pounds per year was fair for totally inexperienced recruits in their first year, it was too little in the second year and much too little in the third year of indenture.

As ticket-holders negotiated their own wage rates in a variety of jobs and could also be self-employed, it is only possible to say that they earned more than time-expired labourers. It is also difficult to gauge Melanesian wages against wages paid to Europeans performing similar tasks. Over the same period to Shlomowitz' Maryborough statistics European farm labourers in Queensland received an annual wage averaging at between £30 and £50, plus board and lodging.<sup>5</sup> But European labourers could be engaged as indentured servants or more freely, without the expense of passage money and other fluctuating charges levied by the government on employers of Melanesians. To make further comparison one would have to attempt as complex an assessment of the comparative values, costs and abilities of Melanesian and European labourers as was made for the federal government by Dr Walter Maxwell in 1901. Maxwell calculated the average cost per year of employing a Melanesian labourer in the Mackay district to be £32.0.10, of which

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5. Estimate based on the average wage of a farm labourer, 1880-1900. *QS'tic*: wages. No income tax was introduced in Queensland until 1902. Clark, *Select Documents: 1851-1900*, 652.

the Islander received only £8. His breakdown of the expenses involved is worth publishing in full:<sup>6</sup>

Table Two

Mackay District 1901

ITEMS	COST OF ISLANDER (for 3 years)			COST OF ISLANDER (for one year)		
	£	s	d	£	s	d
Passage Money	20	6	8	6	15	6½
Return Passage money	5	0	0	1	13	4
Capitation Fee	3	0	0	1	0	0
Wages	24	0	0	8	0	0
Food and lodgment	31	18	0	10	12	8
Clothing	4	1	8	1	7	2½
Medical attendance	3	11	8	1	3	11
Tobacco, soap etc.	2	19	0	19	8	
Sanitary attendance	15	0		5	0	
Loss by death and invalided home	10	6		3	6	
<u>TOTAL:</u>	96	2	6	32	0	10

If Maxwell's figures are reliable, they suggest that time-expired Melanesians earning the top wage - say twenty-three pounds a year - were costing their employers quite as much as European labourers.

6. *C'W PP* 1901-2, v. 2, 967-82. A report upon some factors relating to the cane sugar industry of Australia, by W. Maxwell, Director of the Sugar Experiment Stations of Queensland. The Mackay statistics are on page 971.

Dr Walter Maxwell was brought from Hawaii in 1900 to act as director of the Queensland government's Sugar Experiment Stations and allied enterprises.

Whatever the wage variants, a simple point is established: Melanesians were paid substantial sums of money. Collectively they were paid over one million pounds during the years of the recruiting trade. Individually it was quite possible for one Melanesian to amass thirty or forty pounds, although the majority never had more than ten pounds in savings.<sup>7</sup> Their personal fortunes were miniscule compared to those of their employers; nevertheless they are extremely important. This new wealth was vastly different from their traditional wealth: Queensland wealth was free of religious significance and earned as individuals not as members of a kin group.<sup>8</sup> Money was a key to their transition from one mode of production to another. Malaitan exchange networks, outlined in Chapters One to Three, operated communally, the individual working as part of a descent group, bound through reciprocity of his or her kin. Melanesian labourers in the sugar industry - particularly those who stayed in Queensland - lacked, or at best only partially observed, reciprocal obligations. Females also earned money (always less than their male counterparts), achieving some freedom from the role ordained for them in male-dominated Melanesian society.

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7. 489 Melanesians with bank accounts are individually listed in one archives register. Between them they had £3,370 in their accounts in 1903. The richest was Tarcanier, a Malaitan who arrived in Queensland in 1884; in 1903 he had £56.4.4 in his account. In an earlier example, Currow at Mackay had £30 in his possession in 1890. *QSA IMM/260*; *MM* 1 February 1890.
  8. There may have been a relationship between European money earned in Queensland and Melanesian religion, in the shape of cargo cults amongst labourers in Queensland or after they had returned to their islands, but there is no proof of this. In the first half of the twentieth century several cult leaders gained their first experience of European money and cargo in North Queensland, and it is possible that similar situations developed amongst Queensland's Melanesian labourers in the nineteenth century, but went unrecorded by contemporary Europeans.

Traditional Melanesian wealth was the produce of the land and sea, manufactured moneys made of stone, shells, feathers and teeth, as well as the exchange of labour. In Malaita the economy was based upon subsistence production, exchanged at the market place.<sup>9</sup> Major exchanges of commodities took place between individuals and whole kin groups: foods, building materials, ceremonial payments like Brideprice, murder rewards and the products used in mortuary feasts. Group payments could be made for individual needs, but reciprocity bound the receiver to the givers. All these exchanges allowed metaphysical communication, linking living people with their ancestors, the ultimate source of *mamana*. For some plantation labourers three years in Queensland was £18, turned into European artifacts to take back into these exchange cycles: for others it became money in the bank.

Islanders living in the Mackay district retain no memory of traditional Melanesian currencies having been used or even brought from the islands to Queensland. Some artifacts were carried from Malaita to Queensland and have survived,<sup>10</sup> but although one Queensland Malaitan man remembers hearing the old men talk about *tafuli'ae* (shell-disk currency) he is certain he never saw any as a child in the 1920s.<sup>11</sup> His family on Malaita is equally certain that short strings of shell currency were taken to Queensland, even to Mackay, to be used as placatory offerings to ancestors, though not as items of trade. The *tafuli'ae*,<sup>12</sup> are probably not remembered in Queensland because they

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G. Trompf, *Religion and money: some aspects*, *The Young Australian Scholar Lecture Series* (Adelaide, 1980), 5-8; C.R. Moore, Review of F. Steinbauer (M. Wohlwill, trans.), *Melanesian Cargo Cults: new salvation movements in the South Pacific* (Brisbane, 1979). In *Linq: literature in North Queensland*, v. 7: 2-3 (1979), 97-9.

9. H.M. Ross, 'Baegu markets, Areal Integration and Economic Efficiency in Malaita, Solomon Islands', *Ethnology*, v. 17:2 (1978), 119-138.
10. A short Fataleka staff is now on loan to the Material Culture Unit of James Cook University of North Queensland. The staff was brought to Queensland from Malaita in the late 1880s or early 1890s.
11. BOHC 48Ba:3 (NJF). Also refer to BOHC 51Ba:2 (HSQ).
12. Which they call *ani monie*.

were taken back to Malaita for use in rituals re-establishing the plantation labourers' relationship with the *akalo* (ancestors), or were buried with the dead in Queensland.<sup>13</sup>

Even though European money and Melanesian currency were put to some different uses, both served the same basic purpose of facilitating payment of dues and exchanges of commodities. First-indenture labourers were paid after an interval of twelve months (at first) or six months (later). Time-expired labourers on short contracts were paid once a month. Ole Matsen, the Danish farmer mentioned in Chapters Four and Five, described the payment of time-expired labourers late in the nineteenth century:

their wages then was paid to them every month, before the Inspector. A great number of the Boys saved up their money in the Government Savings Bank, the Inspector taking charge of their money they wanted to leave. The "Boys" wages was always paid in Gold, and it was fun to watch them when the Sovereigns was counted out to them on the table; they would pick up two or more and then push the remainder to the Inspector, who would then put them in a strong canvas bag and enter each ones amount in his book. If during the time to the next pay day came around, any of them wanted to draw out of the Savings Bank, they would then have to notify the Inspector what amount they wanted to withdraw and then wait a couple of weeks before getting it. 14

Payment of first-indenture labourers probably would have had ritual overtones: lining up to receive pieces of paper or metal from the Inspector or one of his assistants whom they may not have seen before, or at least not for several months.

Many anecdotes from both European and Melanesian sources illustrate the problem Melanesians experienced in understanding some things about money. Perhaps the oddest, at first sight, concerns Jimmy Go Go,

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13. This argument is first presented in Chapter Three: Modes of production: Malaitans and Europeans.

14. Matsen Diary 10, 118-9.

a Malaitan bush man who had his photo taken with bank notes hanging out of all of his pockets;<sup>15</sup> but in fact it paralleled exactly Malaitans in the Solomons today who like having their photos taken, holding *tafuli'ae*, and on ceremonial occasions decorate their houses with shell money. Many were scared of entrusting their money to banks, and were perplexed if they could not withdraw exactly the same coins and notes they deposited. Others preferred to do their banking more personally: one elderly European resident of Mackay remembered her brother, a bank teller, doing business squatting in their front yard with an old Islander who did not trust a front counter approach.<sup>16</sup> Melanesians were easily cheated of their money, indirectly by inadequate exchanges of European goods, and directly by tricking them into taking bigger less valuable coins.<sup>17</sup> They distrusted paper money, preferring metallic currency. If given a choice between a sovereign and a half-crown, Islanders invariable seem to have taken the bigger coin. Andrew Bobongie who left Malaita in the 1890s told his son a story about this occurring and is supported by another resident of Mackay from the 1890s: George Seymour, Earl of Yarmouth, later 7th Marquess of Hertford. Yarmouth boasted that he tricked an Islander in this manner while living at Mackay.<sup>18</sup>

Islander business was big business. At least one present day Mackay firm began trading as a store catering primarily for Melanesians.<sup>19</sup> By the 1870s purchases made by Melanesians added £7,000 to £8,000 to the local economy each year.<sup>20</sup> As decades past, and wages

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15. *BOHC* 48Bb:3 (NJF).

16. *BOHC* 7Bb:3 (NJF); Eva M. Black, Mackay, 20 July 1977.

17. Similar stories are told of peasants handling money in many countries; and one has only to travel overseas to know how easily it can happen to anyone.

18. *SJ&TC*, v. 2, 15 January 1894, 316; *BOHC* 4Ba:2 (WM & ONF); *BOHC* 7Bb:3 (NJF); *BOHC* 37Bb:1 (S&FB); *MM* 28 January 1902 (quoting *Leader* 4 January 1902).

19. Hossack's store in River street.

20. *Qlder* 2 December 1876, 18 August 1877; *MM* 13 January 1877.

rose, so did the purchases made by Islanders. Throughout the nineteenth century hawkers and traders encouraged Melanesians to obtain goods on credit on the strength of earnings due at the end of labour contracts. The first prosecutions of Islanders in the Small Debts Court, recorded in Appendix Five, are not until 1894. The next year J. McL. McIntyre, a Presbyterian missionary based at Walkerston, asked Assistant Inspector D. Rannie to:

put a stop to the system of credit given to the Islanders, which involves the inevitable extortion practised by store keepers and hawkers after the Islanders have virtually mortgaged their wages to these people. 21

Pressured by critics like McIntyre the shopkeepers called in overdue debts worth in excess of £290. Not a large amount of the thousands of pounds paid to Melanesians in the district in any one year, but at least indicating that Melanesians were more deeply emeshed in the European monetary system than has previously been recognized.

Most of the debts were to storekeepers in the Mackay township. Prominent amongst the suitors were H.L. Neilsen, W. Farrelly and M. Sharpley,<sup>22</sup> all of whom owned what were often called "Kanaka stores" trading not exclusively but predominantly with Melanesians. Storekeepers in the surrounding rural towns also gave their share of credit: the names of storekeepers A.F. Tideman at Hillend, W.H. Kirkup at Walkerston and E. Denman<sup>23</sup> (who had a small store on Habana road at Etowrie) appear as suitors of Islander debts. Only one of the ninety cases was brought by a Chinese: Ah Foo of Eton, for £3. 5.10.<sup>24</sup> The shopkeepers usually won their cases but the magistrates

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21. QSA COL/A792, In letter 5784 of 1895, McIntyre to A IPI Rannie, 10 July 1895. Also refer to R. Shlomowitz, 'Melanesian labour and the development of the Queensland sugar industry, 1863-1906', *Research in Economic History*, December 1980.
22. MM 26 June, 7, 28 August, 9 October 1897.
23. MM 27 February, 6 July, 9 October 1897.
24. MM 21 August 1897.

were not always favourably disposed to the creditors, nor did they always accede to the terms requested. In December 1897 Peter Marlo a time-expired Melanesian with a family was working for Henry Howard a farmer at Sandy creek. Marlo owed Mackay storekeeper M. Sharpley £7.18.2. Sharpley attempted to obtain a garnishee order on Howard for the entire sum but the magistrate only allowed a garnishee of half the amount in consideration of the needs of Marlo's family. Several years later a magistrate totally dismissed one European's claim of £5.15.4. for goods sold, on the grounds that it would teach the shopkeeper not to extend credit to Melanesians.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless shopkeepers continued to advance credit to the Islanders during the remainder of the recruiting trade.

The situation remained the same in the early decades of the twentieth century. In the 1920s and 1930s hawkers and shopkeepers lent up to fifty pounds at a time to Melanesians, in return for liens on their small acreages of cane and mortgages on their houses, furniture and farm implements.<sup>26</sup> Extending credit until after the harvest was a common practise of Mackay district shopkeepers until recent decades, a convenience used by European workers, farmers and Melanesians alike. Melanesians debtors like all other debtors, if unable to pay, lost their possessions or crops.

Wages were always the major source of income for Melanesians, but there were always other sources, beyond legal limits.<sup>27</sup> We must not suppose that Melanesians were victimised only by Europeans. There

25. *MM* 21 December 1897, 1, 8 November 1902.

26. A register of crop liens and mortgages at Mackay in this period is available at the Mackay Courthouse. To take one example: Jack Marau from Guadalcanal was lent £50 in January 1913 by Charlotte Hodget, wife of the publican of a Finch Hatton hotel. Hodget had a lien on Marau's crop, growing on 160 acres, being the whole of Portion 13v of the Pelion Parish. Interest accrued at six percent a year.

27. For sheer initiative nobody bettered one time-expired Melanesian in 1890, who received ten shillings a week for full-time work from each of two different employers. This clever man managed to work in two places at once for quite some time before his employers caught up with him. *MM* 1 November 1890; 10 February 1891.

are indications that unscrupulous Islanders found means of cheating other Islanders, especially new arrivals. Gambling was a common past-time and Islander "carpet-baggers" preyed on their more gullible companions. Stealing money from grass huts was easy;<sup>28</sup> stealing from Europeans was more difficult but was possible: the larceny and burglary cases presented in Appendix Five show that Islanders made keen, if not always successful, thieves. And, after all, Europeans did have more to steal.

There were also two other ways in which Melanesians acquired money. One is more easily established than the other. Melanesian kin groups pool their resources to pay for Bridgeprice and similar expenses incurred by individuals within the group. In return they expect allegiance, labour, support in war, and similar financial support to that which they gave. There is reasonable evidence which will become clearer in the following chapters that this occurred at Mackay in arranging marriages, setting up house and in paying legal fines.<sup>29</sup> The other conjectured source of wealth is logical within the frame of Melanesian society: rewards paid for murders. On Malaita one function of the *ramo* (warrior) is that of professional killer. Rewards are posted, the victim killed, and the reward collected. Chapter Eight contains details of murders committed by Melanesians at Mackay: some are inexplicable other than in strictly traditional terms. Malaitans were the most ferocious and numerically prominent Melanesian killers at Mackay. Oral testimony collected at Mackay abounds with tales of killings and of male and female sorcerers. Such people existed and were much feared by both island-born Melanesians and their Queensland descendants. They seldom performed their tasks for nothing.

Melanesians with money either saved or spent it. Once Inspectors of Pacific Islanders paid over wages due, their responsibility for the money ended. Suggestions were made that the Inspectors should have

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28. *MM* 28 January, 3 March, 6 December 1900; *MCCA*: Mackay Planters Association Minute Book, 1 January 1883.

29. On the payment of fines refer to a letter by P. Keane to the editor of the *Mackay Mercury* 10 April 1900.

supervisory power over the Islanders' money, but these officers were already overworked and had no desire to take on further tasks. If requested they transacted banking for Islanders who did not live close to town, and they had charge of the estates of deceased Islanders, but there their duties ended.<sup>30</sup> Melanesians were left to decide what they did with their money. They could bank it, keep it amongst their own possessions, ask their employers to look after it, convert it into durable goods, or drink, gamble, whore and generally fritter it away.

A large number of Melanesians never understood the savings bank system. Goodall told the Immigrant Agent in 1879 that they

invariably prefer handing any money they do not immediately require to the custody of their employers. 31

Quite typical was Tatutero who worked for Richard Atherton at Howard Park in 1878. When he received his six pounds he put some into a box in his "humpy" and gave the rest for safe-keeping to Mrs Atherton who gave him one or two shillings to spend whenever he went to town.<sup>32</sup> Others put their money and their faith in a locked box. On *Branscombe* in 1901 Silas, Nellie, Captain, Bcb and Harry had pooled their money, eighty-four pounds, and left it locked up in a hut. This proved too much for Tangangasee who stole off with their fortune.<sup>33</sup>

A deposit in the government savings bank was far safer. The first Melanesian known to have money deposited in a Mackay bank was Wainolie, a Lifuan with twenty pounds in his account in 1875. By 11 October 1884 sixty-one Melanesians had £251 deposited in the government savings bank at Mackay.<sup>34</sup> From 1888 until 1904 there is a full record of

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30. *MM* 23 October 1880; *QSA* COL/A411, In letter 117 of 1885, IPI at Bundaberg to IA, 2 January 1885.
31. *QSA* CPS 10B/G1, Goodall to IA, 29 April 1879.
32. *MM* 19 January 1878. Tatutero accused Mrs Atherton of stealing £10 of his money. The case was dismissed, but the circumstances were certainly suspicious.
33. *MM* 8, 12, 17 October 1901. Tangangasee was later caught and forced to return his booty.
34. *MM* 21 August 1875, 8 November 1884.

credits and debits in their accounts: these are presented here in Table Three and Graph One. The number of individual accounts fluctuated between 1,271 in 1892 and 437 in 1894. The total amount deposited fluctuated between £5,985 in 1893 and £2,880 in 1900. Transactions varied but during an average year £2,900 were deposited and the equivalent withdrawn. Individual deposits were small, most no more than five or six pounds, though if these deposits were similar to those at Maryborough some Islanders may have had up to fifty pounds in their accounts.<sup>35</sup>

Most of the money banked, or kept locked in boxes and hidden in bottles in the ground, eventually found its way back into circulation in Queensland. European currency had little value in Melanesia, other than as curiosity pieces or for buying tobacco, guns and ammunition from traders, so Islanders returning home converted their cash into goods and physical pleasure. They patronized small stores in rural towns such as Hillend, Walkerston, Eton and Farleigh and the larger shops in China Town and other areas of Mackay. Although few plantations had their own stores,<sup>36</sup> there were usually shops within walking distance; Indian and Chinese hawkers often set up at the front of plantations, touting for trade.<sup>37</sup> Melanesians preferred the entertainment of a trip to town. Planters, not wanting to alienate town business people, left shopkeeping to others.

A trip into town on a Saturday night was the height of any Melanesian's week. Usually on a public holiday or a weekend night in the 1880s between 500 and 800 Islanders converged on Mackay, out of a total district Melanesian population of over 3,000.<sup>38</sup> They headed straight for Chinatown. Some just walked around, holding hands, conversing with friends, looking at goods for sale, checking prices. Others about to

35. QSA IMM/260.

36. *Pioneer* was the only plantation (out of seventeen) in 1878 with its own Kanaka store.  
MM 26 January 1876; QSA CPS 10B/G1, Goodall to IA, 4 March 1878.

37. MM 20 February 1894.

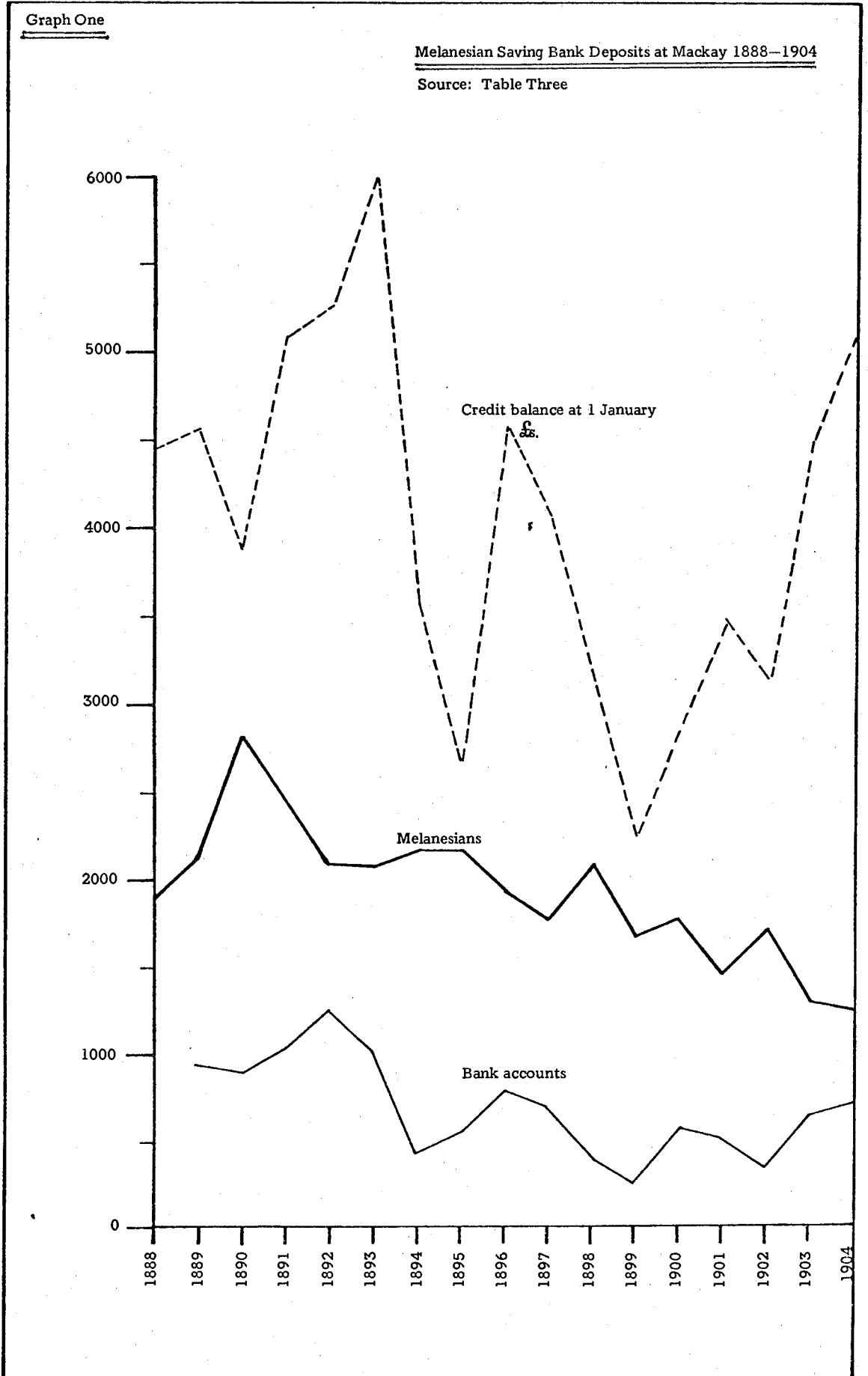
38. QSA COL/A375, In letter 495 of 1884, containing Goodall to CS, 8 January 1884; Chapter Six, Table Three.

Table Three

Melanesian Saving Bank Deposits at Mackay  
1888 - 1904

YEAR	Credit Balance 1 January	Deposits during year	Withdrawn during year	No of Accounts open 1 Jan.	Total Malanesians at Mackay
	£	£	£		
1888	4464	3433	3320	n.a.	1911
1889	4577	3786	4464	946	2121
1890	3899	4148	2969	900	2816
1891	5078	3678	3506	1030	2450
1892	5250	4258	3523	1271	2102
1893	5985	2534	4937	1023	2081
1894	3582	1683	2592	437	2168
1895	2673	2698	813	565	2167
1896	4558	2460	2955	811	1941
1897	4064	1884	2814	711	1780
1898	3134	1122	2022	410	2074
1899	2234	1810	1164	278	1684
1900	2880	2181	1627	569	1775
1901	3434	2660	2979	509	1475
1902	3115	3721	2367	363	1708
1903	4470	2054	1427	659	1301
1904	5097	2942	3336	701	1260

Source: Annual reports of the Pacific Island branch of the Immigration Department.



return to their islands busily bought goods to take home. Melanesians were not permitted to drink alcohol; all the same they could be found in the kitchens and sheds behind hotels getting drunk, or waiting quietly in the shadows of a hotel front verandah while some European or Asian fronted the bar to buy them a bottle of rum or beer. The more adventurous spent ten shillings in a brothel or tried their luck in gambling dens. Drunks became obstreperous, swore, fought with passers-by, or just slept it off out of sight. A considerable number ended up in the Magistrate's Court the next morning.

Chinatown covered a few blocks on the fringe of the European section of Mackay at Nelson street. Similar racial ghettos existed in most of the North Queensland towns.<sup>39</sup> In 1868 there were thirteen Chinese living at Mackay; by 1881 there were fifty-eight; in 1884 there were 500.<sup>40</sup> References to the existence of a Chinatown at Mackay began in the early 1880s. The area continued as a haven for Chinese, other Asian groups and Melanesians until the mid-1930s. Older Islanders today glory in tales of petty thefts perpetrated on Chinese merchants during teenage rampages in Chinatown; they talk of the fun of coming to town with mother in the sulky and slipping off to Chinatown to spend a shilling on fire-crackers and sweets, steal a watermelon, or peer into the gloom of the joss house. After half a century of complaints about shoddy housing and unsanitary conditions the Mackay City Council finally ordered the boarding houses and shops demolished about 1936:<sup>41</sup> today there is no trace of the original Chinatown.

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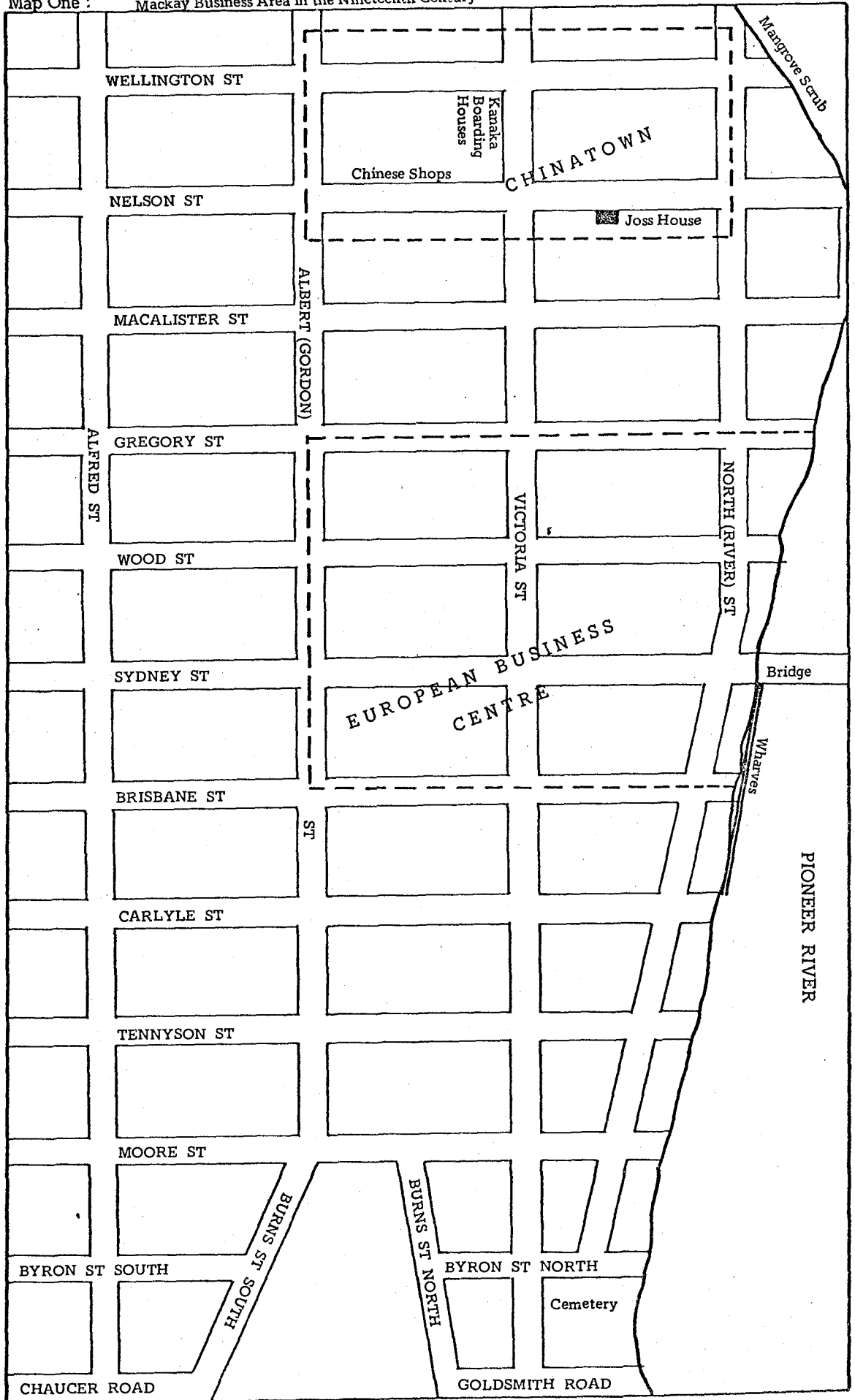
39. May, *Chinese in Cairns and District*, 198-203.

40. *Census Reports for 1868 and 1881*; *MM* 15 March 1884.

41. One of the best sources of colourful description of youthful pranks in Chinatown is a series of tapes/transcripts by Noel Fatnowna, a Mackay Solomon Islander. These tapes/transcripts are held by Prof. Roger Keesing, Department of Anthropology, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University. Also refer to *BOHC* 4Ba:2 (WM); *BOHC* 6Ba:1 (IT & AM & WM).

Further information on Chinatown in the 1920s and 1930s was gained in an interview with Mr George Milton at Mackay, 30 July 1977. Mr Milton served on the Mackay City Council from 1921 until 1930, and was mayor from 1925 to 1930.

Map One : Mackay Business Area in the Nineteenth Century



In 1884 the *Mackay Mercury* called for the town Council to enforce health regulations in regard to Chinatown. Over 500 Chinese were camped along Nelson street:

their houses are in a most filthy and overcrowded state, and altogether the establishments are a public disgrace....<sup>42</sup>

Gambling and opium smoking were rife among the Chinese and "the awful smell of cabbage water and opium"<sup>43</sup> rent the air. The Chinese played mah-jong, pakapu, fantan and other games; many a hard-earned Melanesian wage ended up in the possession of the banker. Police raids on Chinese gaming houses were infrequent and ineffectual.<sup>44</sup> Opium 'palaces' existed - little pine board houses honey-combed with small rooms - but were usually patronized only by Chinese.<sup>45</sup> Brothels flourished in Chinatown for the pleasure of all males, regardless of race: sea captains and Islanders were equally welcome. W.T. Wawn, veteran of the recruiting trade, returned to Mackay on the *Borough Bell* in 1892 with twenty-nine new recruits, his last stop being Malaita where he recruited ten men, three with previous plantation experience. They went to work on plantations and farms in the district: Wawn went to a Chinatown brothel,<sup>46</sup> perhaps even to the same woman who accosted Billy Minor in February the following year:

She asked me to come inside to the verandah...  
the woman said "You come". I said 'how much'.  
The female...said 'ten bob'. I said 'me no want  
hem, me got no money. When I was in the house the  
woman lifted up her clothes along her belly and  
said 'me clean'. I said never mind I no want him.  
I went away. The female...said to me when I was  
in the house 'plenty Englishmen have em me.' 47

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42. *MM* 15 March 1884.

43. *MM* 13 November 1886.

44. *MM* 15 January 1887, 8, 10 March 1888, 5 February 1895, 21 January 1900.

45. *MM* 20 February, 13 November 1886.

46. W.T. Wawn, private log of the *Borough Bell*: recruits 17, 20-9; Corris, 'Editor's Introduction' in Wawn, *South Sea Islanders*, xxxvi.

47. *QSA DCT* 10/N5: Minor, in evidence, 27 February 1892.

Saturday night was the time for sprees:

Chinese, Polynesians, and dark-skinned Asiatics were all there, some drunk, some quarrelsome and all abusive. In the words of the police drunken Kanakas were lying everywhere and it took till midnight to get them out of sight. 48

Ole Matsen, the Danish labourer and later farmer mentioned previously, was a straight-laced Calvin not given to indulging in the pleasures of Chinatown. In half a century at Mackay his only brush with the law seems to have been a furious riding offence in 1876.<sup>49</sup> In 1898 he recorded in his diary his impression of Chinatown and the attitude of the police to the establishments there:

Chinatown in the centre of our little municipality is in a fair way, to become a slum, of the darkest shade, gambling and opium-smoking are the orders of the day; and especially all the coloured races, congregate in great numbers, in the narrow alleys of Chinatown, Chinese, Japs, Coolies, Malays and Kanakas, are found there in great numbers, all bent on gambling, and "Birds of the night pry" in the shape of Japanese women, are there in great numbers, and doing a roaring trade, selling their "Commodities" to any one, who wishes to buy; no matter what colour or creed as long as either gold or silver is forthcoming. I suppose these "Ladies of pleasure" is a necessary evil, otherwise I should think our wise civic Fathers would have them sent away; Our local Police never interfere, in any of the doings in Chinatown, they seem to leave them severly alone - perhaps they have a "cut in" themselves now and again, to kill time, either gambling or any other pasttime as the care may be - We can hardly expect, that a big strapping your fellow, (as most of our Law protection are) to be invulnerable, or blank to the charms of the Ladies from the flowery East. 50

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48. *MM* 6 September 1890.

49. *MM* 2 December 1876.

50. Ole Matsen Diary Two, 76. In 1899 there were 135 Chinese, Japanese and other Asiatic males and females living within the boundaries of the municipality, mainly in Chinatown. Nineteen Japanese women prostitutes were living in Chinatown, in six houses frequented by Melanesians.

D.C.S. Sissons, 'Karayuki-san: Japanese prostitutes in Australia, 1887-1916', *HS* v. 17:68 (1977), 232-41, v. 17:69 (1977), 474-88.

Of course not all the Melanesians' money was squandered on the vices offering in Chinatown: those who did spend their money in this way were mainly time-expired labourers, though even they had limits to their funds. The more pious Islanders attending the Anglican and Presbyterian missions would have been as loath to frequent the place as Ole Matsen. Barnes' Cremorne gardens on the north side of the river opposite the town, was another favourite and more salubrious rendezvous for Melanesians. John Barnes came to Mackay in 1863, settled at Cremorne and began planting a pleasure garden of coconut and fruit trees. In 1875 Barnes' gardens, containing every imaginable type of fruit tree, were opened to the public. 1884 saw the completion of the new town bridge linking Sydney street to the northside, allowing townfolk to stroll across to Cremorne gardens. Melanesians also loved Barnes' gardens, buying coconuts from his 1,200 palms as well as his citrus and tropical fruits.<sup>51</sup>

The bulk of the Melanesians' wages went to the storekeepers who catered specially for them - the Kanaka stores - though they were free to buy in any of the towns' shops. Some of these storekeepers names have already been mentioned in relation to suits brought against Melanesians in the Small Debts Court: H.L. Neilson, W. Farrelly and M. Sharp-ley.<sup>52</sup> Two of the best known in the last decade of the century were Frank H. O'Reilly and Hugh Hossack. O'Reilly operated his store until he returned to Ireland in 1901. Hugh Hossack left Dundee in 1882 on board the *Scottish Knight* with his wife Matilda and daughter Jessie, disembarking at Mackay in 1883. After working on the river wharves for a decade, he rented a store in River (then North) street and began trading in 1894. A few years later he had made enough money to buy land and build a shop close to the same spot. An 1897 photo of the opening of the new store shows both of its verandahs crowded with Melanesians.<sup>53</sup>

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51. MM. 28 May 1875; *Qlder* 24 December 1881; MM 9 July 1945; CRM 5a:4 (A&RD).

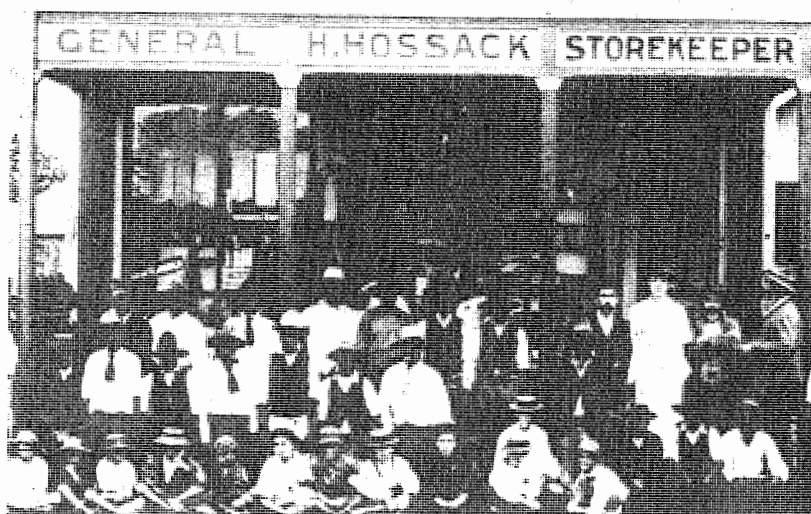
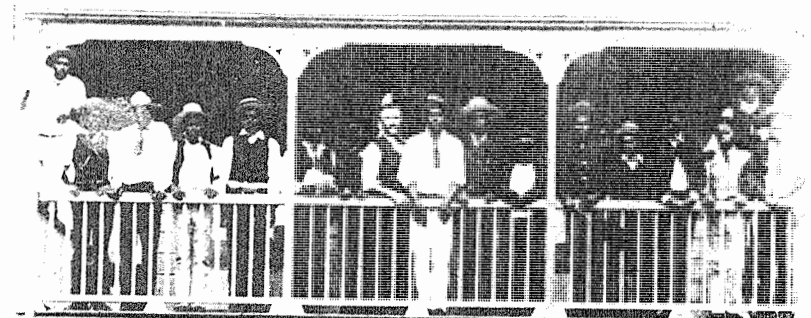
52. Refer above, paragraph of ftn. 20.

53. MM 16 June 1900; *MM Jubilee* 1912, 13; MM 17 June 1977: Hossacks special feature; CRM: 9.

## PLATE 24



a. Taking time off for a photograph.  
(Photo: *JCUNQ*: History)



b. The opening of Hossack's store, River street, Mackay, in 1897. (Photo by courtesy of *The Daily Mercury*)

There is good evidence that their goods were over priced, in reliance on the Islanders not being able to discern variations in quality.<sup>54</sup> Allegations were made in the 1870s and 1880s that storekeepers touted for trade among employers, offering them up to twenty percent commission to direct employees to their stores. On the other hand there are many accounts of Islanders going from store to store carefully checking prices before making any purchase.<sup>55</sup> Islanders kept the goods they bought in large wooden boxes, ninety-one by forty-five centimetres, which they bought at the Kanaka stores and used to carry their new possessions back to the islands. The contents were often a curious mixture: steel tools, guns and ammunition (legally procurable before 1884), cloth and clothes, tobacco and matches; even items like "a magnificently bound album of pictures of beautiful ladies",<sup>56</sup> accordians, jews harps and bibles. In 1884 Queensland banned the export of firearms to the islands. Although this obviously impeded the trade, guns and ammunition were still procurable. Ingenious false bottoms and tops were fitted to the boxes, often arranged by the storekeepers, and many a Snider or Winchester repeater found its way back to the Solomons and New Hebrides until the end of deportation in 1908.<sup>57</sup> The Islanders sometimes kept their boxes at the Kanaka stores, rather than cart them back to the plantations or farms where they worked.<sup>58</sup> This may well explain one common piece of oral testimony today: many a box when opened up in the islands was found to have a layer of stones in the bottom, with some of the goods removed.

The most a first-indenture labourer could hope to have to invest in goods was eighteen pounds, but this was enough to ensure a full boxload of goods. Even by nineteenth century this was poor pay for

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54. *QVP* 1882, v.2, 585: Paper by Baron Miklouho-Maclay. *BOHC* 4Ba:2 (WM & ONF); *BOHC* 7Bb:3 (NJF).

55. *MM* 16 October 1878, 10 July, 23 October 1880; *MM* 30 June, 15 December 1880, 26 April 1882; Mackay Court House Deposition Book, O'Dea vs Anderson, 20 January 1885.

56. *MM* 15 December 1880.

57. Refer to Chapter Three, Section 4 and to Chapter Eight, Section 3.B.

58. *MM* 12 August 1886.

three years labour: the employers were all aware of how little they paid their servants. But the value of the goods to Europeans is irrelevant to the value Melanesians attached to them. Modern Pacific Islanders estimating the value of a steel axe to their grandparents equate its value with what we would place on a brand new automobile, such as the enormous benefit they gained by its possession.<sup>59</sup> A box of European artifacts, products of nineteenth century technology, was of inestimable value to Melanesians who grew up using stone and wooden implements. Comparable today would be a member of a Malaitan descent group who, after three years away working in Honiara or on the oil palm plantations of Guadalcanal, returned and presented his people with a new Toyota pick-up truck to help carry their produce to market and ferry passengers around the island. And in line with the argument pursued in Chapters One to Three, European goods should not be thought of only in terms of their European monetary value, or even their exaggerated physical value within Melanesian society. On Malaita European goods were part of cosmological exchange cycles, refining the power focus within a cluster of descent groups. Over a period of forty years from the 1860s, Melanesians left for Mackay and other Queensland ports hoping to return with European artifacts and knowledge of life beyond island Melanesia. Some died, some were cheated, others gambled their money away, but the majority returned rich in terms of Melanesian society. To value European artifacts in Melanesia in terms of pounds and shillings is to entirely misunderstand the Melanesians' motives for enlisting.

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59. Prof. Sione Latukefu used this example at the first Pacific Historians' Association Meeting at Martindale Hall, May 1980.

## 2. Melanesian workers and the law

Melanesians working in nineteenth century Queensland were bound by European legal and social<sup>60</sup> controls markedly different from those to which they were used in the islands. They were subject to the normal Queensland legal system as well as to specific Acts administered by the local Police Magistrate or officers of the Immigration Department, and enforced by European police supported occasionally by the Aboriginal police force.<sup>61</sup> Melanesians had strategies of resistance to direct and indirect European control, some of which can be easily described in terms of individual and collective physical actions.<sup>62</sup> Other aspects of their resistance passed almost unnoticed by Europeans, both because of their physical stealth and their ability to function culturally as Melanesians, extending their cosmology, religion and magic to protect themselves in Queensland. This is perhaps most obvious in

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60. There were other less direct social controls, such as European and Melanesian racial attitudes and the pacifying effect of Christianity and the missions, but they are of such different natures that they will be discussed later, in Chapter Nine.
61. The Native Police were brought from Nebo to Mackay in 1877 to aid in disarming the Melanesian population; in the event they were not needed. Adrian A. Graves wrongly reported this incident as occurring at Maryborough. Graves also suggested that the local militia - the Queensland Defence Force - was used in the aftermath of the 1883 Mackay racecourse riot. His reference, W.R. Goodall's report on the incident, makes no mention of this.  
L.E. Skimmer, *Police of the Pastoral Frontier: native police 1849-59* (Brisbane, 1975); N. Taylor, *The Native Mounted Police of Queensland, 1850-1900* (B.A. Hons. thesis, James Cook University of North Queensland, 1970); Graves, *Pacific Island Labour in the Queensland Sugar Industry*, 259-60; *QSA COL/A378*, In letter No. 495 of 1884, W.R. Goodall to CS, 8 January 1884.
62. Kay Saunders attempted to divide Melanesian strategies of resistance into several categories: *A* Individual or collective passive obstruction (pretending not to understand, malingering, working slowly, or shirking). *B* Outer-directed aggressive responses (industrial action and physical attacks upon masters and overseers). *C* Inner-directed individual or collective aggression (suicide, maiming themselves, attacking others).  
K. Saunders, ' "Troublesome Servants": the strategies of resistance employed by Melanesian indentured labourers on plantations in colonial Queensland', *JPH*, v. 14:3 (1979), 168-83.

relation to murder, sorcery and general health problems outlined in Chapter Eight, but which are quite impossible to measure in any exact way. Our only measuring stick is the number of times their working and private lives came into collision with Europeans and were recorded by the Queensland legal system.

Table One of Appendix Five is a summary of 1,598 offences with which Melanesians were charged in the Mackay district, drawn from the files of the *Mackay Mercury* between 1867 and 1907. No case was found before 1871; the majority occur after 1890. The *Mercury* reported cases heard in the Police Courts at Mackay, Eton, Walkerston and Mirani. The list is as complete as the reliability of the source and the care of the researcher permit;<sup>63</sup> and cannot be supplemented from other sources.<sup>64</sup> Table Two of the Appendix compares charges brought against Melanesians, by Melanesians, and against non-Melanesians but concerning Melanesians, over the same years as Table One. No similar statistics have ever been compiled for other districts where Melanesians were employed.<sup>65</sup> Appendix Five divides charges brought against Melanesians into thirty-one categories. Several of these categories have already been referred to in this and the previous chapter; several will

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63. Not only may there have been more cases described in the newspaper, reported cases were only a fraction of the incidents which actually occurred. In 1894 "Pro Bono Publico" in a letter to the editor of the *Mackay Mercury* complained that

cases for disobeying orders and even assault by Kanakas on employers have been pretty frequent, and yet not a tithe of the actual misdemeanours have been brought before the Court.

*MM* 23 October 1894.

64. The original deposition books for the Mackay Court are extant; those from the Eton, Walkerston and Mirani Courts have not been located. The Mackay records are contained in: *QSA* CPS 10B/G1, Police Magistrate's Letter Book of Mackay, 2 September 1873 to 2 May 1881; Mackay Court House Deposition Books, 1884 to 1905 (when used these were still in the Court House but they were about to be transferred to the Queensland State Archives).
65. Several smaller lists were compiled by the Queensland government in the nineteenth century. *QVP* 1884 v.2, 1449-51: Convictions of Polynesians, Cingalese, Maltese, Malays, and Chinese during the ten years ending 31 December 1883. *QSA* PRI/8: Melanesians in Queensland Gaols, 1895-99 (in Saunders, *Uncertain Bondage*, Table X, 358); *QSA* PRE/88: Crimes committed by Kanakas and male Whites in Queensland during ten years ending 31 December 1900.

be referred to Chapters Eight and Nine. What follows is an analysis of charges relating primarily to Melanesian working lives,<sup>66</sup> limiting discussion to columns four, fourteen, and eighteen to twenty-one of Table One: common assault; using abusive language; offences in breach of the *Masters and Servants Act* and the *Pacific Island Labourers Act*; failure to obey a Court order; and vagrancy. Even so they constitute 729 out of the total of 1,598 charges: 45.6 percent.

More important than the successive *Pacific Island Labourers Acts* in their direct impact upon the lives Melanesians led in Queensland was the *Masters and Servants Act*. The principal effect was in providing the sanctions by which employers kept the labourers to their contracts, but they could on occasion protect employees in their rights. Newspaper reports usually do not give a legal definition of the offence, often recording only that an individual was found to have breached an undefined section of the *Masters and Servants Act*. Usually the circumstances reported bring the offence under one of two headings: refusing or neglecting to carry out an order (App. 5, Table One: 18); or being absent or absconding from hired service (App. 5, Table One: 20). Together these account for 29.5 percent of charges.

The punitive clauses and major provisions of the *Masters and Servants Act* remained unchanged through the whole period in which Melanesian indentured labourers were brought to work in Queensland. Servants convicted for withholding service due under their agreements, or absenting themselves during the tenure of the agreement could be fined up to twenty pounds with costs. If the servant could not pay the fine and costs the money could be deducted from wages due or by levy on goods and chattels in the employee's possession. Failing this the fine could be converted to a prison sentence of up to three months, in the case of male servants. An employer could prosecute his or her servant for wages or goods advanced on account, or for damage to pro-

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66. The categories in Table One are my own, based on categories used by the Queensland government. Melanesian offences relating to work situations are often indistinguishable from offences committed during their private lives; outside working hours.

perty. Unlawful absences or periods of imprisonment were added to the period of the agreement. The servant could summon his or her employer (or the manager or overseer) for non-payment of wages<sup>67</sup> and for the unlawful detention of property. Cases were usually heard by one Police Magistrate or at least two Justices of the Peace, but in special circumstances, with the agreement of both parties, the bench could comprise only one Justice of the Peace. Costs of Court were optional; complaints had to be made within six months of the offence being committed.<sup>68</sup>

The first two Melanesians in the sample, prosecuted for breaches of the *Masters and Servants Act*, were Parlin and Wattie who arrived at Mackay on board the *Stormbird* in May 1871 with forty-nine other Loyalty and New Hebridean Islanders. From 1871 recruiting ships carried Government Agents to ensure that all recruits understood the terms of the work which they were to undertake; the Police Magistrate should also have ascertained their willingness to work before allotting them to an employer. Yet when Parlin and Wattie were taken to *Branscombe* plantation they refused to work, not understanding the agreements they had signed. In Court the bench explained the work they had to undertake over the next three years, then dismissed their cases. Four months later the pair absconded from *Branscombe*. In their second Court appearance they complained that they had been given insufficient food and that the plantation overseer had beaten them because they refused to work. They were found guilty of absconding and ordered to return to work without punishment.<sup>69</sup>

Other prosecutions under the *Masters and Servants Act* during the 1870s and 1880s were reasonably similar in form. The person bringing the charge was usually a plantation owner or his manager or overseer. The cases were tried before the Police Magistrate or before Justices of the Peace, themselves often owners or managers of plantations or pastoral runs employing indentured Melanesian servants. Punishments

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67. Bankruptcy was not an acceptable excuse for non-payment of wages.

68. 25 Vic. No. 11, *QActs* 1863, v. 2 and 1911, v. 2.

69. *MM* 21, 28 October 1871. (The references in the following footnotes are samples from the cases listed in Appendix Five.)

varied considerably, from being dismissed with a caution, to a fine of from five to twenty shillings, or a gaol term from twenty-four hours up to the maximum of three months.<sup>70</sup> Sentences longer than thirty days were rare and had to be served in the Rockhampton gaol, not in the lock-up at Mackay; they were awarded only for refusing to obey the bench's order to return to work.<sup>71</sup>

The majority of cases resulted in convictions.<sup>72</sup> Usually a fine of from ten to slightly more than twenty shillings. The size of the fine appears to have varied with the seriousness of the offence and the number of times the person had been convicted for the offence, but it is impossible to be certain as it is seldom clear whether the convicted labourer was on first-indenture at six pounds a year or was time-expired, earning up to four times as much. Costs were generally not charged at first: thereafter at a level which remained stable at three or four shillings a case. As first-indenture labourers received no pay during the first year of service (during the first six months after 1883 or 1884) many went to the lock-up for a few days because they could not pay the fine - the period in the lock-up was added to the term of indenture.

Prosecution of Melanesians under the *Masters and Servants Act* grew more frequent in the 1890s when the Melanesian population was actually declining. Prosecutions differ in several ways from earlier years. The heavier punishments were still awarded for absconding, rather than for disobedience, but there was a pronounced increase in the severity of the fines, from a minimum of five shillings to about five pounds.<sup>73</sup> Fewer Melanesians went to gaol for failure to pay fines. Most either paid their fines immediately or allowed the money to be deducted from wages due to them.<sup>74</sup> Those refusing orders and abscond-

70. *MM* 15 February, 1 March 1873, 20 July 1878, 1 March 1879.

71. *MM* 15 August, 10 October, 26 December 1874, 3 April 1875.

72. It is not possible to calculate an exact proportion because of the imprecision of the newspaper reports.

73. *MM* 30 January 1890, 14 January 1891, 14 June 1892, 10 March 1894, 1 June, 9 November 1897.

74. 9 November 1897, 3 February, 16, 23 April, 12 May 1898.

ing were no longer men like Parlin and Wattie, who genuinely did not understand what was being asked of them. Many are readily identified as resisting authority, often standing their ground and challenging a field overseer's decision or authority. For several reasons it seems likely that the majority were time-expired labourers and ticket-holders, or perhaps first-indenture labourers who had previously worked in Fiji or Queensland. Forty to sixty percent of all Melanesian labourers in the district after 1890 were time-expired labourers and ticket-holders, preferring to work on the district's small farms. After 1890 the cases were mainly brought by small farm operators, not plantation owners, their managers or overseers. Time-expired, ticket-holding and experienced first-indenture Melanesians had the money to pay their fines and the ability to confront the system.

The following three cases are typical of cases coming before the bench in the last decade of the century. In September 1892 two Melanesians left *Meadowlands* to walk into Mackay to lodge a complaint with Hornbrook, the Inspector of Pacific Islanders. Not wishing to be reported one of *Meadowlands*' proprietors W.H. Hyne rode ahead and charged the pair with absconding. In the resultant case Hornbrook, representing the "absconders", complained strongly about Hyne's unfairness and the charge was dismissed. A few months later in another case Leomur was charged by farm owner Edward Thatcher with refusing to obey orders. Thatcher justifiably objected to his employee smoking in a field of ripe cane, but Leomur persisted, and was fined three pounds with three and six costs. In the third case Charley Ebi was charged by Joseph Antoney, a *North Eton* mill supplier, with refusing to obey orders. Ebi pleaded not guilty when the case went to the Eton Police Court in June 1900, but the Justices of the Peace on the bench fined him fifteen shillings, with five and fourpence costs and five shillings payment to a witness. Ebi arranged for the money to be deducted from wages owned to him by Antoney.<sup>75</sup>

Of other charges related to the Melanesians' working lives, vagrancy, disobeying a Court order, assault and abusive or obscene language are the most significant. Vagrancy charges were used to hold

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75. *MM* 1 September, 22 November 1892, 7 June 1900.

Melanesians suspected of more serious crimes, or found wandering without gainful employment. The government passed regulations in 1896 intended to force Melanesians to re-engage as indentured labourers within a month of the end of a contract, or return to their islands.<sup>76</sup> It is significant that most vagrancy charges occur after this year. Table One of the Appendix may understate the number of charges of disobeying a court order, as newspaper accounts often make it impossible to distinguish that offence from one committed against the *Masters and Servants Act*. Assaults and abusive language may also be understated, as disputes in the field were certainly not always reported: they are also offences in which working and private lives are not easily separated. In most of the thirteen abusive language cases in Table One the Melanesians concerned seem to have verbally abused their employers or overseers. The cases of assault were more varied but the majority of the 205 cases are attacks on employers, or attacks on European labourers working for the same employers.<sup>77</sup>

The *Master and Servants Act* and the ordinary laws on assault and disturbing the peace were effective in controlling Melanesian servants, but the legal system was not entirely oppressive. In some cases they successfully rebutted the charge. Melanesians were the main body of agricultural labourers in the district, but it is possible to compare their breaches of the Act with some European labourers working on plantations. The *Masters and Servants Act* covered all verbal and written contracts between masters and agricultural and other labourers, regardless of race, but Europeans were rarely prosecuted for offences actually covered under the Act. European immigrants, although good workers, had a reputation for absconding when dissatisfied and for taking even trivial grievances to Court. In the 1870s at least, in relation to offences arising out of their employment, Melanesians appear to have been treated like other indentured labourers, not as

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76. As noted in Chapter Six, Section 4.D., these regulations were never successfully enforced.

77. *MM* 6 December 1879, 16 July 1884, 25 October 1887, 6 February 1892, 4 February 1905.

a group apart.<sup>78</sup> But in the longer term, the lack of use of the Act by employers in controlling their European servants shows the different manner in which Melanesians were regarded. Melanesian servants were in fact a bonded sub-group within the working class, expected to keep their contracts and punished for not doing so.

Melanesians also had recourse to the Courts to bring their own charges against employers. Table Two of Appendix Five lists twenty-two charges brought by Melanesians before the Police Courts of the district, for assault or breach of agreement. The infrequency of these charges (eighteen compared with 729) demonstrates that the legislation worked primarily, but not exclusively in the employer's favour. The eighteen charges recorded are few enough to discuss individually.

The first seven charges concern assault on Melanesians at work. The first of these arose from the incident in which Parlin and Wattie were involved in 1871. They charged a *Branscombe* overseer with assault; the case was dismissed and they in turn were charged with absconding.<sup>79</sup> The second was brought in 1874 when Robert Walker, manager of *Foulden*, was charged by an Islander employee named Jerry who claimed that Walker had struck him with a stock whip. Walker admitted this but in defence said that Jerry had behaved in a disorderly manner, assaulting several *Foulden* employees and attacking a horse harnessed to a cane cart. The bench (four of Walker's friends, including a neighbour) dismissed the case.<sup>80</sup> In the first successful Melanesian prosecution for assault a *Foulden* employee, Donald McGregor, was found guilty in 1877 of common assault against Wurramai and fined two pounds, a moiety of which was paid to Wurramai as compensation. McGregor's defence, that Wurramai had refused to work, was rejected by the Police Magis-

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78. MM 9, 23 November, 7, 14 December 1872, 31 May 1873, 10 October 1877. Quite a number of Europeans were prosecuted for breach of the *Masters and Servants Act* each year. Unfortunately exact statistics on these prosecutions were not kept after the early 1880s. Refer to Appendix Five, Table Three. See also *Statistics of Queensland: Summary Jurisdiction*.

79. MM 28 October 1871.

80. MM 28 November 1874. The bench comprised: D.H. Dalrymple, the mayor; W.H. Long, Walker's neighbour from *River* plantation; C. W. Brown, a pastoralist; and G. Smith, a town businessman.

trate, W.R. Goodall.<sup>81</sup> In the same year Mrs L.J. Atherton pleaded guilty to assaulting her Melanesian general servant Doagene. Goodall ordered her to pay Doagene's wages and cancelled the agreement, but imposed no fine, only cost of Court.<sup>82</sup> The last three cases are from the 1880s. Alfred Hewitt, owner of *Pleystowe*, was fined one pound in 1881 for boxing the ears of his servant Burisaban. His only excuse was extreme provocation. In 1886 John Melherne was fined ten shillings with costs for assaulting Basin. And in 1889 H.G. Robinson, a plantation manager, was taken to Court for hitting an Islander employee on the head with a stick, but the case was dismissed.<sup>83</sup>

These seven charges are only an indication of others never reported. Nevertheless they make interesting comparison with the cases in which Melanesians were charged with assaulting their masters or their masters' European employees. Of the seven cases, two were dismissed and in the three in which fines were imposed the amount was between ten and forty shillings. For a comparable offence against a European a Melanesian usually received a seven to fourteen day gaol sentence.<sup>84</sup> Of the eleven other cases recorded one was for stealing: Mrs Atherton of Howard Park was charged with stealing money she was holding in trust for an Islander employee. Although the circumstances looked suspiciously against her the case was dismissed.<sup>85</sup> The other ten all involved breaches of the *Masters and Servants Act*: six concerned wages; three poor food or conditions; and one illegal detention of property. Five of the wages claims were made in 1876, an aftermath of insolvencies following the rust epidemic. The last was in 1885. Five of the six wages claims were upheld by the bench. The three claims about inadequate food and living conditions were made in 1876, 1877 and 1890; two were dismissed.<sup>86</sup>

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81. *MM* 17 October 1877.

82. *MM* 3 February 1877.

83. *MM* 23 October 1881, 23 October 1886, 6 April 1889.

84. *MM* 24 May, 6 December 1879, 28 March 1885, 25 October 1887.

85. *MM* 19 January 1878.

86. *MM* 15, 29 January, 19 February, 1 July 1876, 19 January 1878, 10 July 1880, 25 November 1885, 20 February 1890; *QSA* GPS 10B/G1, Goodall to IA, 15 October 1877.

The small number of cases brought by Melanesians is no real indication of the frequency of the offences which gave rise to them. The technicalities of British justice were a powerful deterrent; Melanesians probably seldom fully understood the charges against them, let alone wanted to place charges themselves. The system of adversary justice inherent in British law was utterly alien to Melanesian practice. Melanesian evidence was often not accepted by Courts as most Islanders were not Christians and could not be placed on oath. And even Christian Melanesians fluent in pidgin English could not necessarily understand the formal English used in Courts. Faced with:

If you fail to speak the truth, the whole truth,  
and nothing but the truth, you make yourself  
liable to all the pains and penalties of wilful  
and corrupt perjury...

Islanders usually looked blank. There was no chance of any comprehension unless the words were translated into pidgin:

...speak him true, all right. You speak  
him lie, you go along to gaol; you savey. 87

The chances of succeeding before a bench made up of employers of indentured servants were not high, and even Melanesians without direct experience would have had little difficulty in assessing their chances quite accurately. Few would have chosen to confront their employers in a Court challenge. Most charges brought by Melanesians were at the instance of a Police Magistrate or Inspector of Pacific Islanders. Undoubtedly most aggrieved Melanesians sought redress against Europeans and fellow Melanesians alike by methods traditional to Melanesian society.

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87. *MM* 14 July 1880. See also *MM* 22 June 1886 (Supreme Court Judge Cooper while at Mackay asked for someone to teach him pidgin English so that he could talk directly to Islanders in his Court.)

### 3. Conclusion:

#### Indenture or servitude?

It has often been argued that a monoculture creates a distinctive economic, social and political structure. It has also been argued that of various monocultures, sugar cane cultivation (before mechanisation of the industry) created around it an authoritarian system requiring a servile work force. The British parliament outlawed the importation of slaves into any British colony after the first day of March 1808 and the institution of slavery itself from 1834. Nevertheless, nineteenth century indenture contracts, widely used for sugar labourers, have recently been described as a new form of slavery. Legal termination of slavery was one thing: changing the related socio-economic and concomitant juro-political structure of an ex-slave society was another. When slaves, granted their freedom, continued living side by side with the owners of the land, capital and means of producing a monoculture, little of real importance actually altered. Legal servitude was replaced by socio-economic servitude with the same labourers working, sometimes under indenture, for their ex-owners.<sup>88</sup>

Even without importing slaves after 1808 in colonies like Jamaica, Trinidad and Demerara plantation slavery was able to survive for twenty-five years on the resident Negro population. Slave manumission in British colonies was not accomplished until 1833-34, ex-slaves often still remaining bound to their ex-owners by a type of apprenticeship in limited areas of the British West Indies until 1838. Though legally free after the late 1830s they still had only two choices for occupations - to build a new sector of the economy based on selling garden or sea produce and casual labour, or to continue, as most did, working as sugar industry labourers.<sup>89</sup> Similarly in the southern areas of the

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88. G.L. Beckford, *Persistent Poverty: underdevelopment in plantation economies of the Third World* (New York, 1972); E. Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (London, 1964); H. Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: the export of Indian labour overseas, 1830-1920* (London, 1974).

89. W.L. Mathieson, *British Slavery and its Abolition, 1823-1838* (New York, 1967); Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*, Chapter One: 'The legacy of slavery'; M. Craton, *Searching for the Invisible Man: slaves and plantation life in Jamaica* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), 162-9.

United States of America a post-slavery peonage system continued well into the twentieth century, were black and white share-croppers remained bound in servitude to the larger employers.<sup>90</sup>

Recent historians of the Queensland sugar industry have presumed that the industry, particularly in its plantation era, had a social structure similar to sugar cane industries in other areas of the world. Kay Saunders compared Melanesian indentured labourers in Queensland with Negro labour on American plantations, and considers that nineteenth century Queensland possessed a "fully mature plantation system".<sup>91</sup> Ralph Shlomowitz has applied his knowledge of plantation economies in the postbellum American South to the restructuring of the Queensland sugar industry after the 1880s.<sup>92</sup> And much of Adrian Graves' work on the political economy of the Queensland industry is based on theoretical models transferred from other plantation societies.<sup>93</sup> While not questioning obvious similarities between the organisation of the Queensland sugar industry in the nineteenth century and overseas sugar industries,<sup>94</sup> one must be circumspect in presuming that the Queensland plantation system produced social structures which can be equated to those of the Caribbean or the American South. Melanesian indentured labourers were not slaves. The plantation era in Queensland lasted only two decades at the beginning of the industry. There were no planter-dynasties, merely one generation of quite small-time frontier entrepreneurs, most of whom failed to make the transition to central mills and the small farmer-dominated industry of the turn of the century. Historians have concentrated on the plantations, regarding them as the only form of economic organization and society, ignoring the smaller-scale agricultural ventures operating alongside right from the 1860s. The plantation system did "mature", but briefly and in a manner unique to Queensland.

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90. Daniel, *Shadow of Slavery*.

91. Saunders, *Uncertain Bondage, and 'Troublesome Servants'*, 168.

92. Shlomowitz, 'Search for institutional equilibrium', and 'The transition from slave to freedman labour arrangements in southern agriculture', *Journal of Economic History*, v. 39 (1979).

93. Graves, *Pacific Island Labour in Queensland*.

94. Refer to Chapter Four.

Having said all of this, there is still some validity in comparing the situations of postbellum American sugar and cotton labourers and Melanesians in post 1901 Queensland. During the deportation years, 1901 to 1908, the Australian government brought about the mass exodus of as many Melanesians as possible. No longer bound by indentures, those who remained were considered to be "aliens" even more thoroughly restricted in employment by White Australia than in the nineteenth century.<sup>95</sup> A few Islanders became small-scale subsistence cultivators, never aspiring to be part of the rural bourgeoisie. Racial discrimination against them meant that the original island-born Melanesians and their children could never climb beyond the lowest rung on the working class ladder. They lived side by side with planters and farmers to whom they had previously been indentured. Though Melanesians had more freedom than in the nineteenth century they had even fewer choices of occupation. By 1920 there was no longer a place for them in the sugar industry. Australian-born Melanesians were still legally eligible to work in the industry but union pressure meant that they were often strongly discouraged from so doing. Their parents, the island-born Melanesians, had little choice but to tend their own small cane plots and depend on subsistence cultivation, which usually provided a small surplus for sale; a far cry indeed from the much awaited Melanesians who first arrived at the mouth of the Pioneer river in 1867.

Today Pacific Islanders have settled in various areas of Australia but are mainly concentrated in the Mackay district and in other sugar districts along the east coast. Approximately ten percent of the Australian black community are descendants of the Melanesian indentured labourers; they are unique as the only major non-indigenous section of the black community. In 1974 this geographically scattered group formed the Australian South Sea Islanders United Council to seek recognition as a disadvantaged minority in Australia. Prompted by a delegation which presented their case to the Australian government in August 1975 an Inter-Departmental Committee was set up to investigate the situation. The Committee's report was completed in July 1977 but

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95. The process by which aliens were progressively banned from the sugar industry is described in Chapters Five and Six above.

was never tabled. One of its principal conclusions was that

Their socio-economic status and conditions have generally been below those of the white community thus giving the group the appearance of being a deprived coloured minority. 96

Table Four, taken from the 1977 report clearly shows the depressed economic conditions of the Islanders. In 1973 twelve and a half per cent of the total Australian community lived below the poverty line, as defined by the Federal Commission of Inquiry into Poverty. Thirty-seven percent of the total Islander community were in this category; a further twelve percent were living close to the poverty line.

The Melanesian community took on substantially its present character in the years between 1880 and 1920. 'Until the 1960s it changed very little, partly because the leaders of the community were Melanesian born, partly because the community remained largely insulated from the main stream of life in Mackay. Over the same period Mackay itself was insulated by distance and poor communications from changes occurring elsewhere in Australia.<sup>97</sup>

The Pioneer valley remains the longest producing and largest sugar basin in Australia. For more than a century the district's economy depended solely on sugar cane. Although open-cut coal mining to the west and tourism along the coast have developed the local economy in the past twenty years, cane is still the monoculture. The pattern established by the 1920s - small farm operators supplying cane to mainly co-operatively owned central mills - has not changed. During the nineteenth century milling technology underwent a revolution: in

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96. Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on South Sea Islanders in Australia, Canberra, July 1977, 4.

97. The railway linking Mackay to the south was not completed until the mid-1920s. Until an artificial harbour was completed in 1939 all large ships had to anchor off the mouth of the Pioneer river and use barges to ferry passengers and goods to riverbank wharves. The road linking Mackay to Rockhampton remained a treacherously narrow bitumen track well into the 1960s. Kerr, *Pioneer Pageant*, Chapters 18 to 24; H.A. Moore, *The Mackay Harbour Story* (Mackay, 1978).

Table Four

Poverty among Pacific Islanders (1976) compared with rates for Queensland and Australia (1973). \*

	Very Poor	Rather Poor	Clear of Poverty	Total
Income Units	%	%	%	%
Pacific Islanders	37	12	51	100
All Queenslanders	15.6	9.6	74.8	100
All Australians	12.5	8.1	79.4	100

\* This table appears as Table Four within the report. The report states "There can be no guarantees that the percentage distribution of persons categorised as being 'very poor' etc. in 1973 would remain constant with the movement in Average Weekly Earnings to date." The poverty line was defined in the same terms as those accepted by the Commission of Inquiry into Poverty. An income unit is defined to be "rather poor" if it has a total income more than the poverty line but less than 120% of the poverty line. An income unit is defined to be "very poor" if it has a total income less than the poverty line.

(Source: Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on South Sea Islanders in Australia, Canberra, July 1977.)

the twentieth century a revolution has followed in the fields and at the port. Tractors began to replace field labourers in the 1920s and 1930s; bulk sugar facilities date from the 1950s; and the replacement of hand-cutting by machinery, begun in the 1960s, was complete by the end of the 1970s.

The relationship between descendants of Kanakas and the European farming community in the Pioneer valley altered little during the first half of the twentieth century: if anything it got worse for the Melanesians. Although in early decades some of them owned or leased small cane farms, by the 1930s and 1940s almost all were just rural labourers. An analogy can be drawn between Mackay's sugar monocultural society and sugar monocultures elsewhere. The ownership of the land, capital and means of production remained in European hands; the Melanesians continued working as rural labourers and living in rural areas: Melanesians continued to occupy a depressed position in society. In the last twenty years, with increasing mobility between North Queensland and the rest of Australia, much of the distinctive character of the north has been diluted, but discrimination against the black community by Europeans is one of the last aspects of traditional North Queensland to disappear. Pacific Islanders have been part of the landless working class of Queensland society for almost 120 years. Although there are recent signs of change, equality will be a long time coming, given continuing discrimination against them.

CHAPTER EIGHT

474 - 575

*MELANESIAN PRIVATE LIVES, HEALTH AND MORTALITY*

1. Introduction : The 1868 Act and Melanesian welfare on the plantations	475
2. Housing	487
3. Diet : official and private	
A. The official diet	498
B. The private diet	507
4. European medical care of Melanesians	520
5. Melanesian mortality : 1867 - 1907	534
6. First-indenture labourers : acclimatization	547
7. Conclusion	559

## 1. Introduction

### The 1868 Act and Melanesian welfare on the plantations

Ever since the labour traffic began it has been attacked as harsh. While the attack has always centered mainly on the actual recruiting process, there has also been some attention given to treatment in the colony. This chapter is an attempt to consider whether these charges are warranted, by dealing with successive aspects of Melanesian working life in the colony, in conjunction with medical care provided by Europeans and Melanesian perceptions of disease and death.

The first eighteen plantations in the Pioneer valley were established between 1867 and 1874; the last twelve were established in quick succession between 1881 and 1883.<sup>1</sup> During the 1870s and 1880s the planters, aided by European, Melanesian and Asian labour, carved their sugar fields out of virgin bush along the river, nearby creeks and the northside hills. Malaitans formed part of the Melanesian work force from October 1871 when the first twelve arrived at Mackay on the *Isabella*. As the *Isabella* was owned by F.T. Amhurst of *Foulden* plantation, most of the forty-four recruits would have gone to *Foulden* and neighbouring plantations. Nothing further is known of them. Some may appear in a photograph on the following page of fifteen Guadalcanal and Malaita men taken at *Foulden* in the 1870s: certainly the photograph must give a good impression of their original appearance.<sup>2</sup>

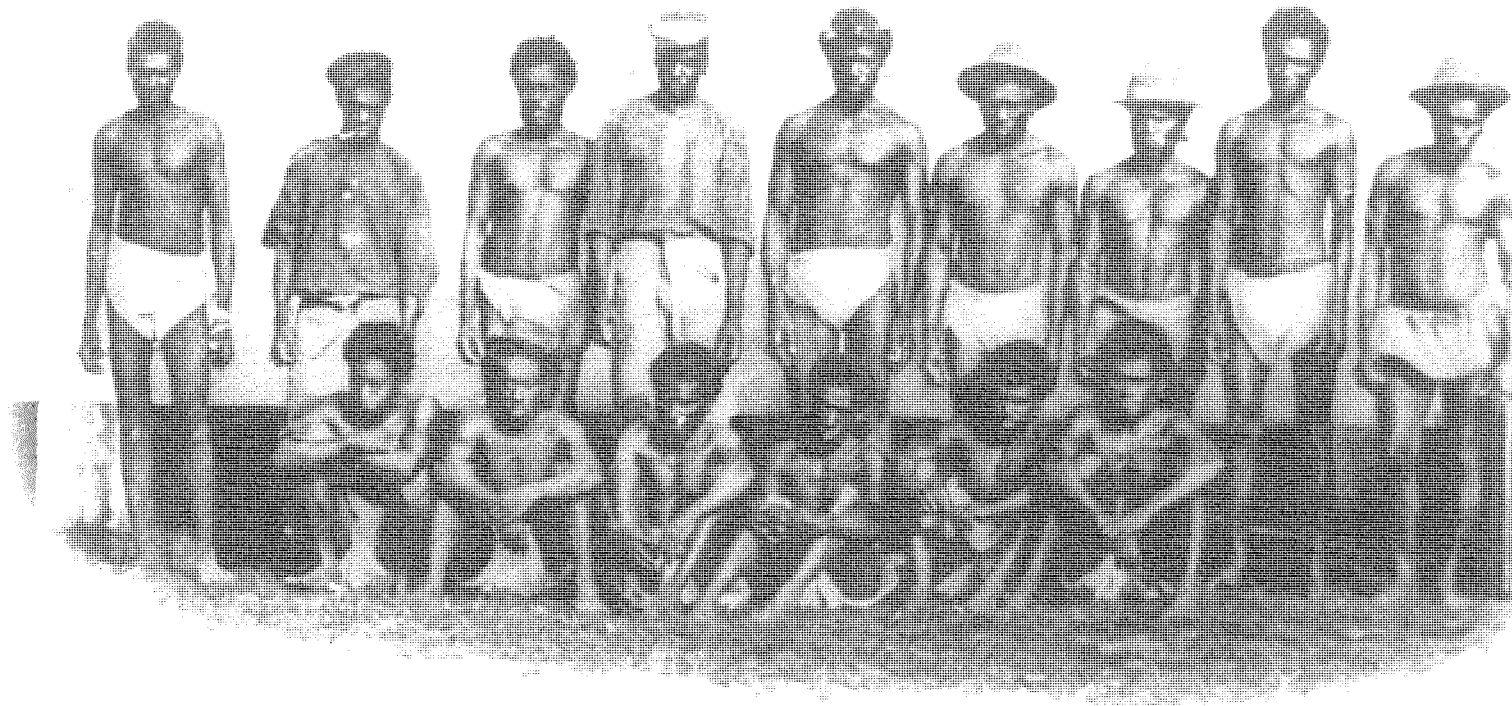
Amhurst arrived in the district in 1869 and erected the *Foulden* mill in 1872. Robert Walker was *Foulden's* manager from 1871 until Amhurst's death in 1881, and as Amhurst was away in Brisbane and London for a large part of the years 1875 to 1881, most of the day-to-day running of the plantation was left to Walker. *Foulden* covered 730 acres, rich alluvial soil with a river frontage between *Pioneer* and *River* plantations. The mill produced 600 tons of sugar per season, from 400 acres of its own cane supplemented by crops from surrounding

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1. Chapter Four, Graph Two.

2. The photograph was used as the frontpiece for W.A.T. Amherst's (brother of F.T. Amhurst (*sic*)) book on the discovery of the Solomon Islands. Amherst and Thompson, *Discovery of the Solomon Islands*.

PLATE 25



Solomon Islanders from Guadalcanal and Malaita, working on F.T. Amhurst's *Foulden* plantation in the 1870s. (Photo: Amherst, *Discovery of the Solomon Islands*, Frontplate)

farms. By 1877 *Foulden* was valued at £20,000.<sup>3</sup> Amhurst's house, built in 1875, was timber, high set with extensive verandahs screened by creepers, surrounded by mown lawns, paths, and gardens of English flowers and tropical shrubs.<sup>4</sup> But while it is relatively easy to find descriptions of mills and liting depictions of the houses and society of the plantation owners, the lives of their Melanesian employees remain relatively mysterious.

The 1868 *Polynesian Labourers Act* was the first attempt to regulate the recruiting trade and govern employment conditions of Melanesians in Queensland. Adapted from regulations used in the Indian labour trade,<sup>5</sup> the 1868 Act was intended to police the migration of a trickle of Melanesian labourers, not the consequent flood of tens of thousands. Most of its provisions were intended to control the island-end of the trade and to administer the Islanders' stay in Queensland. Few of the clauses pertained to their health or welfare.<sup>6</sup> The Act specified that recruits be free of disease and not maimed, halt, blind, deaf or dumb, idiotic or insane. They were to receive a food ration, which although nutritionally adequate was modelled on dietary requirements for Europeans, not Melanesians.<sup>7</sup>

Table One

The food ration for each adult Melanesian in Queensland 1868-80

<u>Daily</u>	<u>Lbs.</u>	<u>Ozs.</u>
Beef or mutton (or fish)	1 2	0 0
Bread or flour	1	0
Molasses or sugar	0	5
Vegetables (or rice) (or maize meal)	2	0 4 8
<u>Weekly</u>		
Salt		2

3. Waterson, *Queensland Parliament*, 3; *Qlder* 17 February, 21 July 1877; Appendix Three : Foulden.
4. Roth, *Port Mackay*, Fig. 36; *The Gentleman's Magazine*, v. 249 (1880), 604.
5. Parnaby, *Britain and the Labour Trade*, 141.
6. The relevant sections of the Act (31 Vic. No. 47) are: 14, 20, 27, 29, supplemented by Forms D. G and I.
7. Refer to Appendix Seven, and to Section Three of this chapter.

Further rations included one block of soap per week and yearly clothing and blanket issues.<sup>8</sup> Melanesians were not supposed to be supplied with alcohol; any person so doing could be prosecuted under the same Act which forbade alcohol to Aborigines.<sup>9</sup> Employers were responsible for all expenses incurred by the government in affording hospital relief to sick labourers and had to report deaths immediately they occurred. The Act was administered by Government Agents (from 1871) on recruiting ships and Police Magistrates and Health Officers in each port or area in which Melanesians were employed.

In the early years of the labour trade two select Committees, in 1869 and 1876, investigated the conditions of Melanesian labourers, but neither collected evidence in the Mackay district. The Queensland government in these early years considered the labour trade to be essential to the colony's progress and was unwilling to fuel criticism against employment of Melanesians in the colony. The 1869 Committee did little other than reaffirm the labour trade as necessary for the development of Queensland. Despite serious allegations made by R.B. Sheridan, Maryborough Inspector of Pacific Islanders, concerning Melanesian living conditions in his area, the 1876 Select Committee (of which Amhurst was a member) found no fault. Conditions at Maryborough were obviously a disgrace. Conditions in other districts, certainly Mackay, the major cane growing area, were quite similar.<sup>10</sup>

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8. Before arriving in Queensland first-indenture Melanesians were issued with their first clothing and blanket allowance; thereafter they received it annually for the remainder of their initial three year contract.

From 1868 until 1880 during a three year contract each Melanesian should have received 5 shirts, 5 pairs of trousers, 5 blankets and 2 hats. 31 Vic. No. 47, Cl. 20 and Form D.

9. 27 Vic. No. 16.

10. *QVP* 1869, v.2, 19-105: Report of the 1869 Select Committee; *QVP* 1876, v.3, 51-5: Report of the 1876 Select Committee. Compare the above reports with those of Wray, Thomson and Gore in 1880. *QVP* 1880, v.2, 414-24 (Drs Wray and Thomson's Report on the cause of excessive mortality on R. Cran & Co.'s Maryborough plantations, 1880) and 425-30 (Immigration Agent Gore's Report on Islanders at Mackay and Maryborough).

The earliest known official descriptions of the rations, clothes and accommodation on Mackay plantations is from 1878, by C.C. Horrocks, Assistant Inspector of Pacific Islanders.<sup>11</sup> Horrocks visited the working places and homes of almost 300 of the district's 1,400 Melanesians. One of the plantations Horrocks visited was *Foulden*. He found that each of *Foulden's* ninety-one Melanesian labourers was issued annually with two shirts (one serge and one cotton), two pairs of trousers (one moleskin and one canvas) and two single blankets.<sup>12</sup> Amhurst had provided a weatherboard iron-roofed house but the Islanders chose instead to live in grass huts of their own design. There was no mess house but a separate hospital was provided. Breakfast consisted of bread (brought out from town); lunch of potatoes and meat; dinner of potatoes, sometimes meat, and molasses if they chose. Every day each received three-quarters of a pound of meat, half a pound of bread and three pounds of potatoes.<sup>13</sup> The labourers made no complaint about the quantity or type of food. Horrocks noted that several deaths had not been reported.

Horrocks also visited two other plantations, two pastoral properties and a large tobacco estate. Four Melanesians were employed in pastoral pursuits at The Grange and Howard Park, Henry Bell and Richard Atherton's properties on Plane Creek. A married couple employed by Bell said in interview that they received plenty of food and the correct clothing allowance, minus the hats. Atherton's two Islanders had an adequate food ration but received only part of their clothing and blanket ration. The men complained that "Master plenty whip him

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11. QSA COL/A265, In letter 3074 of 1878: Report on Polynesians at Mackay, by C.C. Horrocks, 13 August 1878. Police Magistrate P.M. Goodall's letter book 1873-1881 provides a tremendous variety of information about Melanesian life at Mackay during the 1870s, but does not include detailed descriptions of the plantations. QSA CPS 10B/G1.
  12. This was the official clothing and blanket ration as specified under the 1868 Act.
  13. This food ration is quite different from that specified, although it is similar in quantity.

and fight him boy".<sup>14</sup> At Rockleigh, Robert Bridgeman's tobacco estate on the river, Horrocks found seventy-two Islanders living in grass humpies. Their clothing and food rations were below par; the meat ration was too small and they received no bread. For breakfast they were given potatoes, tea and sugar; for lunch, meat, potatoes and tea; for dinner, potatoes and tea. Bridgeman, they said, treated them well but they were not satisfied with the amount of the food. At *Dumbleton*, established by A.H. Lloyd and Charles Walker in 1873, but partially controlled by Sloan & Co., Horrocks found forty-two Islanders living in grass huts, with no wooden building or hospital provided. The clothing issue was inadequate and shoddy. The Islanders complained that they were not given sufficient food. For breakfast they received bread; for lunch, meat and potatoes, for dinner, potatoes. No tea or molasses was issued. Horrocks added that

The Islanders all complained to me that they were very badly treated by Overseer O'Shea - "he plenty fight along'o boy" - by the way he rounded them up I should say the boys were correct in their statements. 15

Horrocks' most comprehensive report was about *Pleystowe*, 6,000 acres of alluvial soil on both sides of the river west of Walkerston. Owners Alfred Hewitt and Charles Romilly installed the mill in 1869, building up their plantation into one of the largest and finest in the district, worth £58,000 in 1882. Very little of the land was actually in use" in 1878 only 350 acres were under cultivation. The mill had the capacity to manufacture 350 tons of sugar in a season, a distillery operating along side.<sup>16</sup> Hewitt and Romilly's residences were built in grand style, surrounded by picturesque sweeping gardens. In 1878 the local newspaper described Hewitt's home as combining

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14. "Whip" in pidgin English means to whip, strike or beat. Atherton need not necessarily have been using a whip. However there is a documented case of Mrs. Richard Atherton ill-treating a female Melanesian house servant in 1877. *MM* 3 February 1877; *QSA* CPS 10B/G1, 30 January 1877; *MM* 19 January 1878.

15. Horrocks' 1878 Mackay Report, *op. cit.*

16. Appendix Three: Pleystowe; Chapter Four, Map Five; *MM* 16 June 1877, 5 October 1878.

room, taste, elegance, airiness, and in the general structure the associations of an English country manor with all the charms and freedoms of an Australian residence. 17

Hewitt hoped that *Pleystowe* would be the home of future generations of his family:

I have now made a permanent home for myself and family in Mackay. I have sons who when old enough will still further improve the property, therefore whatever is erected here is with a view to being made permanent, and as pleasing to the eye as possible. 18

In 1878 *Pleystowe* was a model plantation. The eight-nine Islanders working there lived under conditions not bettered anywhere else in the colony. The single men lived in five weatherboard houses, sixteen to a house. There was another cottage ninety metres away with separate rooms for five married couples, and a twelve bed hospital with an earth closet. The houses all had earthen floors and brick fireplaces. The beds were movable and could be taken out and scrubbed, a regular occurrence as one Islander was always allotted the task of cleaning the quarters. When Horrocks called the houses were all clean, blankets nearly folded, and brass name plates above each bed. There was also a wash house, dispensary and store room. Once admitted to the hospital a sick employee was locked in and could not leave until discharged. The clothing and blanket allocation was as stipulated in the Act. The main foods were sweet potatoes and meat; although not strictly in accord with the Act the ration was quite adequate. Meat was served only at the night meal: one pound of fresh or salted beef for those engaged in hard labour; three-quarters of a pound for others. Each person was served daily with two and a half pounds of sweet potatoes. Molasses was also available. *Pleystowe* had three overseers: one European and two Melanesians.

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17. *MM* 5 October 1878.

18. *MM* 17 June 1878. Ironically, Hewitt sold *Pleystowe* at the height of the sugar boom in 1882 and left the district.

Conditions at *Pleystowe* were exactly the same when Queensland's Immigration Agent Sir St G. Ralph Gore visited there two years later in mid-1880. Gore visited fifteen of the district's sixteen plantations; the fifteen employed approximately 1,500 of the 2,000 Melaneseans in the district.<sup>19</sup> Table Two summarises his findings. Gore was conservative and prone to bias.<sup>20</sup> Even so his report is interesting, providing an almost complete coverage of Mackay's plantations in 1880, stressing what he, the senior Queensland government official responsible for Melanesian immigration, considered the most important aspects of Melanesian physical well-being, while working as sugar industry labourers. By Gore's description the diet was adequate but monotonous, with little attempt being made to include traditional Melanesian foods in the diet. His strongest concern was to condemn the use of grass huts, reasoning that they were prone to fire and increased Melanesian ill-health. Gore advocated their replacement by wooden buildings with iron roofs.

It is apparent from Table Two, in which plantations are listed in order of establishment, that there was a tendency for the older plantations to provide the best physical conditions for their Melanesian workers. This is understandable: in the early years of founding a plantation, when the owner was himself living rough, he would be little inclined - indeed might be quite unable - to divert labour and capital into providing better living conditions for his indentured labourers. But the personal attitude of the owner was sometimes an overriding factor. *Alexandra*, the second oldest plantation in the area and one of the most prosperous, provided poorer

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19. Gore did not visit *Barrie* (many kilometres from Mackay) or *Richmond* (which may have had a primitive mill in operation); nor any of the many estates and farms in the district.
20. Gore was dismissed from office in 1885 for negligence in his handling of the scandal involving kidnapping in New Guinea waters. Earlier in the 1880s he is supposed to have sanctioned breaches of the Act and to have said that the recruiting regulations were a farce, not enforceable by law. Saunders, *Uncertain Bondage*, 113 and *Exclusion, Exploitation and Extermination*, 200; Corris, ' "Blackbirding" in New Guinea Waters, 1883-84: an episode in the Queensland labour trade', *JPH*, v.3 (1968), 85-105.

Table Two

## MACKAY PLANTATIONS : 1880

As reported on by Immigration Agent St G.R. Gore with additional information on the years over which each operated and the standard of mill technology.

(Source: QVP 1880, v. 2, 425-30: Inspection of Polynesians, Mackay and Maryborough)

Plantation Years operated Rollers Vacuum pan fitted	No. of Islanders	Islanders' Quarters	Food	Medical
1. <i>PIONEER</i> 1867-82 Single Vacuum 1876	191	Excellent and new but all under one roof. No grass huts allowed. At Ashburton (the rear section of <i>Pioneer</i> ) a wooden building was provided but the Islanders slept underneath.	Good and sufficient. Ashburton food sent out from main kitchen.	Hospital provided; Islanders looked well.
2. <i>ALEXANDRA</i> 1868-84 Single Vacuum 1879	140	All housed in grass humpies. The owner told Gore that he will replace them with a wooden building.	Good	No hospital; 3 sick (2 only slightly, 1 to see a doctor).
3. <i>PLEYSTOWE</i> 1869-88 Single No Vacuum pan	135	The quarters were the best that Gore had seen: seven detached huts. One Islander assigned every week to clean the quarters.	Good	Hospital provided; 3 sick with small ailments.
4. <i>CASSADA</i> 1870-85 Single Vacuum 1880	36	All grass humpies plus one hut with thatched roof and bag walls.	Good	Hospital being erected; Islanders looked well.
5. <i>MEADOWLANDS</i> 1871-1906 Single Vacuum 1873	110	All slab huts with thatched roofs, and grass humpies	Good	2 sick with small ailments.
6. <i>BRANSCOMBE</i> 1871-84 Single No vacuum pan	61	All grass humpies and one large grass building.	Good	Hospital provided.
7. <i>MICLERE</i> 1872-83 Single No vacuum pan	30*	All grass humpies. The owners were not at home so Gore did not carry out an inspection		
8. <i>NEBIA</i> 1872-86 Single Vacuum 1879	55	Poor looking grass humpies in disrepair.	Good and sufficient.	No hospital, but all well.
9. <i>FOULDEN</i> 1872-87 Single Vacuum 1872	110	Grass humpies in fair to old condition.	Good	2 sick with small ailments
10. <i>CEDARS</i> 1873-86 Single No vacuum pan	56	Quarters very good but all under one roof; building of wood and iron; well ventilated and provision for a fire place.	Excellent and sufficient.	No hospital. One Islander incurably ill, to be sent home.

Table Two cont.

Plantation Years operated Rollers Vacuum pan fitted	No. of Islanders	Islanders' Quarters	Food	Medical
11. <i>DUMBLETON</i> 1873-87 Single No vacuum pan	58	Huts of rough slabs and grass roofs.	Good and sufficient.	
12. <i>INVERNESS</i> 1873-84 Single No vacuum pan	51	Good quarters provided but the Islanders preferred to live in grass humpies.	Complaints made to Gore about insufficient sweet potatoes.	No hospital. One Islander incurably ill, to be sent home.
13. <i>RIVER</i> 1873-91 Single Vacuum 1873	153	Good quarters (all in one building) but Islanders prefer to live in grass humpies.	Good and sufficient.	Hospital and dispensary provided. 3 Islanders sick with slight ailments.
14. <i>BALMORAL</i> 1874-80 Single No vacuum pan	30	No grass humpies allowed, and very good quarters provided.	Good	Hospital provided but Islanders would not use it because of deaths in it. One sick with slight ailment.
15. <i>TE KOWAI</i> 1874-95 Single Vacuum 1874  <i>and</i> <i>Palms</i> 1881 under erection	180	Good quarters but very dirty. Also in use were two thatched huts and three grass humpies.  Quarters makeshift until mill position decided but of a reasonable standard.	Excellent  Good	Hospital provided.  All were new arrivals and looked well.

\* Estimate based on the knowledge that 40 Islanders and Europeans were employed at *Miclere* in August 1877. *Qlder* 11 August 1877; *Pughs* 1882, 341.

Note on mill technology:

Single = mill operating with a single set of rollers.  
 Vacuum = mill operating with a vacuum pan installed.  
 No vacuum = mill operating with an open pan boiling process.

(Source: Appendix Three and Chapter Four, Graph Three.)

Note on terminology used:

Words like "good", "excellent", "sufficient" are as used by Gore.

conditions than any of the three newest plantations. It is probably significant that its owner, Davidson, was regarded as old fashioned, particularly for his reluctance over many years to install a vacuum pan, and never lavished money on his employees' well-being. Each employer had different priorities when it came to the living standard he was willing to provide for his Melanesian employees; priorities which could change with the sugar price, the attitudes and efficiency of a manager, the size of a plantation, and development plans over the next new years. Labour forces also changed, with alterations in the proportion of first-indenture to time-expired labourers and their length of residence on the plantation. The only really obvious conclusion to be drawn from Gore's report is a Melanesian preference for traditional houses, running against a government and employer preference for wooden barracks.

The first and only substantial revision of the welfare provisions of the Act came in 1880, improving the official dietary scale and increasing the clothing and blanket allowance<sup>21</sup> but making no other changes. Throughout the labour trade the Acts left employers virtually free rein to decide what was best for their Melanesian labourers, except on questions of wages, food and clothing. There was never any mention of accommodation nor any set limit on working hours.

Information on Melanesian living conditions after 1880 is easier to obtain. In the first half of the 1880s re-occurrence of kidnapping, the heightening Melanesian mortality rate and the scandalously poor medical treatment available to Melanesians in Queensland generated mounds of official correspondence and reports. After 1881 there was a full-time Inspector of Pacific Islanders at Mackay; but unfortunately the files from the Mackay office are missing from the Queensland State Archives. However, some evidence survives in copies of particular reports which were kept by other government departments.<sup>22</sup> From 1888

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21. After 1880 the ration was 9 shirts, 7 pairs of trousers, 5 blankets and 2 hats. The equivalent for females was 4 chemises, 5 petticoats, 9 dresses, 5 blankets and 2 hats. 44 Vic. No. 17, Cl. 12:7 and Sch. G. (Refer to footnote 8 above.)
22. The few surviving reports by officers of the Immigration Department on Melanesian living conditions at Mackay are included in the Colonial Secretary's records. Often these odd surviving reports were obviously part of a series, the remainder of which are lost. A good example is C.A. Forster's two 1886 reports, numbered 27-8;

annual reports were published by the Pacific Island Branch of the Immigration Department, supplying accurate, regular information and statistics for the years to 1904.<sup>23</sup> In 1885 the members of the Royal Commission inquiring into recruiting at New Guinea and on adjacent islands visited *Palms* (established in 1881) and *Homebush* (established in 1883) where they examined some of the new arrivals. Two of the surviving reports from Mackay officials are also from the 1880s. In 1886 Assistant Inspector C.A. Forster reported critically on conditions on Mackay's plantations and farms; conditions which seem to have altered little from those reported by Horrocks in 1878. In 1888 Dr Clarkson reported on the reasons for excessive mortality amongst certain island groups on Mackay plantations.<sup>24</sup>

No one report is adequate; all show individual and cultural biases, but by weaving them together a reasonably detailed picture emerges of Melanesian life at Mackay. These official sources, used in conjunction with other sources - for example hospital records, newspapers and the oral testimony of Melanesians - provide enough information to examine major aspects of Melanesian life at Mackay. The remainder of this chapter will be divided into several sections: their official and private diet; housing; European medical care of Melanesians; Melanesian perceptions of disease and death; an outline of Melanesian mortality at Mackay, 1867 to 1907; and an attempt to explain the high death rate.

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they are the only reports from this series known to be extant, although there are probably other similar reports scattered through the files of the Queensland State Archives.

*QSA COL/A453*, In letter 622 of 1886: Report No. 27-8, AIPI Forster to IPI Macdonald, 18 January 1886.

23. Chapter Six, Table One; the annual reports of the Pacific Island Branch of the Immigration Department were published in *Votes and Proceedings of the Queensland Parliament*.
24. *QVP* 1885, v. 2: Report of the Royal Commission into recruiting Polynesian labourers in New Guinea and adjacent waters, 906-19; Forster's 1886 Report, *op. cit.*; *QSA COL/A807*, In letter 3082, C.H. Clarkson to IA, 5 April 1888.

## 2. Housing

Rickety old cane-cutters quarters still stand on many farms, sagging memories of the decades during which Queensland's sugar industry was labour intensive, the labourers living on the plantations and farms. Until 1977 one old Islander at Hervey Bay near Maryborough was still living in a slab hut he built in the 1920s. These housing styles are part of an earlier era, one which began when Melanesians were the main work force of the sugar industry. The various *Pacific Island Labourers Acts* did not specify a standard style or quality of housing for Melanesians. The reports mentioned earlier in this chapter (by Horrocks in 1878 and Gore in 1880) indicate the variety of accommodation available on Mackay district plantations, estates and farms. Ralph Gore devoted more than one-third of his report to discussion of the labourers' quarters, outlining the great diversity which he found: well ventilated barrack buildings with woodeen floors and walls and two tiers of bunks around the walls; earthen floored slab or paling buildings with thatched roofs, a fire-place but no provision for ventilation; stout wooden framed huts with cane trash or bagging walls, grass roofs and earthen floors; and traditional Melanesian grass and leaf houses.<sup>25</sup>

Traditional Melanesian houses vary in style but are usually timber framed, with leaf or bamboo wall and roof coverings. Conceptually and spacially they mirror the local culture. On Malaita the house (*luma*) is a rectangular structure of bush timber lashed with vines or natural ropes. The roof is thatched with layers of sago and ivory palm leaves sewn onto lengths of split bamboo. The walls are a combination of leaves, bamboo and bark. The floor is earthen and the only opening in the building is a small door. Conceptually the house is divided into male and female sections: women sleep in the rear of the house; the front porch is a common area where both sexes meet, and is also a cooking place; from the entrance the left is the female side and water storage area, the right is for males and the fire-place. Established families have a pair of houses, one for cooking (*luma naare*) and one for sleeping (*luma tio*). Access to each *luma tio* is forbidden to

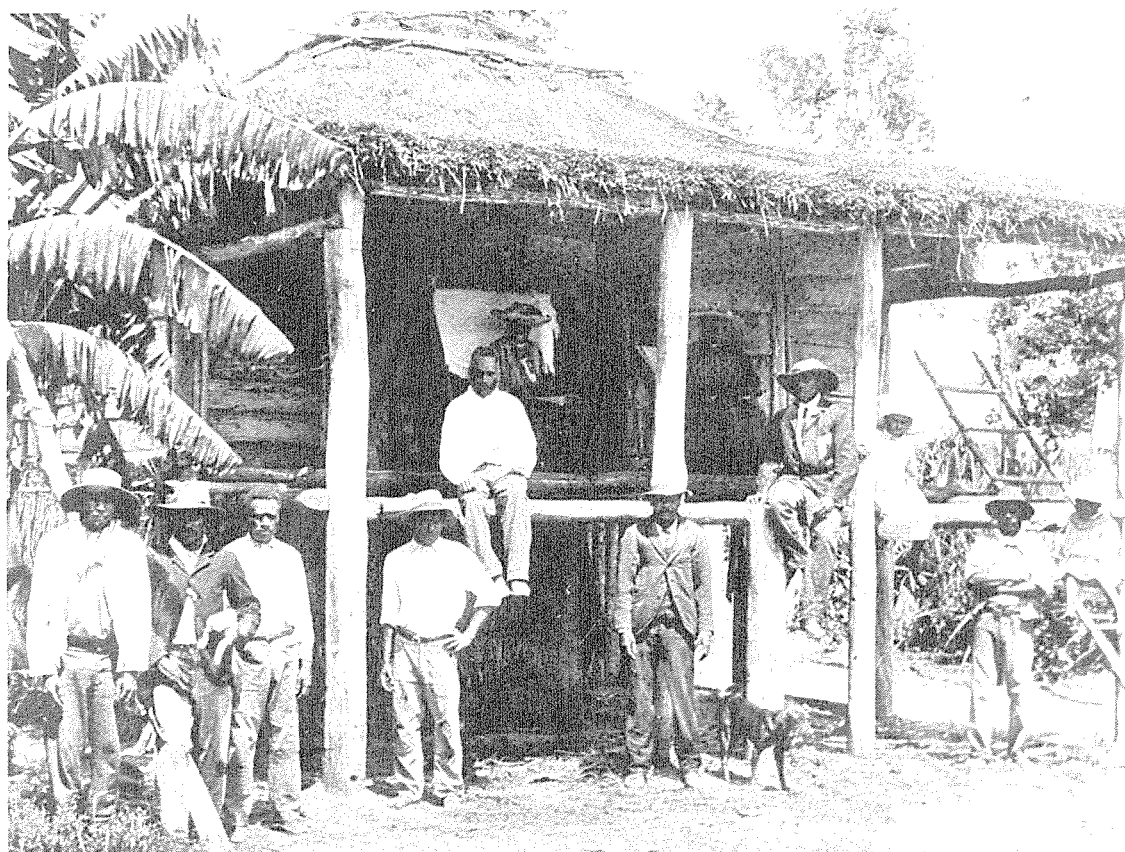
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25. Gore's 1880 Report, *op.cit.*

## PLATE 26



- a. Islanders preferred to build their own houses on the plantations, rather than live in employer-provided barracks. The scene is typical of leisure time in the 1870s and 1880s. (Photo: *JCUNQ: History*)



- b. Islanders at home at Mackay in the 1890s or 1900s. (Photo: *JCUNQ: History*)

males other than the woman's husband. Priests may altogether avoid the women's quarters in their village, even their wives' *luma naare*, fearing *sua* (pollution), staying instead in the *beu* (mens' house). The placing of houses within a village is as conceptually and physically ordered as their interiors: the *beu* will be uphill from the *luma*; the *luma* will be uphill from the *bisi* (the area set aside for menstruation); bathing and latrine areas follow the same male-uphill female-downhill pattern.<sup>26</sup>

Traditional Melanesian houses in Queensland were just as much part of the Islanders' culture. Melanesians newly arrived in nineteenth century Queensland coped with their changed surroundings by extending the perimeters of their cosmology and culture to include wage labour in the sugar industry. It was conceptually possible to include circular migration and wage labour within already operating exchange cycles. Melanesian houses in Queensland must be viewed in the same way, not merely as the crude shelters from the elements which Europeans presumed them to be. Melanesian houses are as important in maintaining culture as is garden cultivation, murder rewards and marriages binding descent groups together. It is almost impossible to distinguish photos of nineteenth century Melanesian houses in Queensland from photos of houses constructed in the islands. Malaitans and other island groups at Mackay continued to build traditional Melanesian houses until the 1930s. Most informants over fifty years of age spent their childhood in grass houses. Malaitan informants describe the houses of their parents and grandparents as similar to their traditional Malaitan style: the same shapes with earth floors, grass walls and roofs. All of the families used at least two houses, commonly known by them as the "boy house" and the "girl house", conforming to the *luma naare* and *luma tio* pattern observing traditional segregation of the sexes. Structures of similar purpose to the Malaitan *beu* also existed, built by males on the plantations and in Islander family settlements in various rural areas.<sup>27</sup>

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26. Refer to Figure One of Chapter One and Ross, *Baegu*, 177-9; Hogbin, *Experiments in Civilization*, 17-8.

27. BOHC 48Ba:2 (NJF); BOHC 51Ba:3 (HSQ); BOHC 41Ba:3 (HB & ONF); BOHC 22Ba:3 (EH); BOHC 7Bb:1 (NJF).

Melanesian concepts of spacial division within houses outlasted traditional building techniques and materials. Physically, if not culturally, the structures were altered to suit local conditions. With different building materials available, over time the more permanent Melanesian residents adopted European styles and techniques as well as a more European attitude to house internal divisions and decoration. Leaves from ivory or sago palms were used widely in Melanesia as the major fabric for house walls and roofs. Although other plants were transferred back and forth on the recruiting ships<sup>28</sup> no evidence has been found that Islanders ever grew these palms in Queensland. Melanesian houses in Queensland were usually constructed with blady-grass, a broad leaf local grass; and with it bamboo, timber slabs, sacking and scrap metal to strengthen and alter traditional designs. Islanders preferred small grass houses to barrack accommodation. The longer they stayed in Australia, and depending on whether they married and had to accommodate their families as well, the larger and more European their houses and the contents became. Some continued living in houses almost identical to those they would have built had they never left their island. But the more permanent members of the Queensland Melanesian community in any area built large grass or slab and bark houses quite similar to the homes of the poorer rural Europeans in turn-of-the-century Australia.<sup>29</sup>

What was probably the last Melanesian house of this type in Australia was still in use at Hervey-bay near Maryborough in 1977, lived in by eight-five year old Fed Davis whose parents were recruited from Motlop (Mota Lava) island in the Banks group. Davis built the house in the early 1920s. As the last of its kind it is worth describing in detail. The house had only two rooms, each 2.5m. by 3.5m., and

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28. The earliest evidence for this at Mackay is an 1869 voyage by the *Prima Donna* which brought bread fruit, taro, kava and several other varieties of plants from the islands. MM 6 January 1869. Also refer to M.A. Bathgate, *The Structure of Rural Supply to the Honiara Market in the Solomon Islands*, Development Studies Centre Occasional Paper No. 11, Australian National University (Canberra, 1978), 12. The Botanic name for blady-glass is *Imperata cylindrica*.

29. For a discussion of buildings of this type see M. Lewis, *Victorian Primitive* (Melbourne, 1977).

a front verandah. Its walls were made from timber slabs Davis had cut on the five acre block. The roof was galvanised iron but originally had been bark. A rickety board floor was fitted over what had for decades been an earthen floor. The walls and roof were patched with beaten out kerosene tins and scrap iron. Inside they were papered in a style once common in many Australian bush homes - layers of newspapers glued onto hessian cloth.<sup>30</sup>

Melanesian oral testimony concerning housing shows an almost opposite perception to that gained from European documentary sources. One Mackay informant said that initially they had no choice other than to use the wooden barracks but that each Melanesian gave high priority to building a traditional house. If left to their own devices newly arrived Islanders usually built a grass house, living there with any other labourers from the same language area or island.<sup>31</sup> Employers willingly acquiesced: there were fewer problems and less expense if the Islanders built traditional houses or some half-Melanesian half-European compromise. On plantations and estates Islanders were often provided with wooden barracks, but few employers heeded Gore's 1880 advice to build a series of wooden houses: more popular than barracks, they were far more expensive. The argument used against grass houses was that they were ill-ventilated unhealthy structures prone to fire. Gore firmly opposed their use:

I invariably during my tour of inspection expressed myself most strongly against these [grass humpies] and the "trash" huts before described, and have been met with almost stereotyped reply, "But the boys prefer these humpies and sulk if we order them into wooden buildings - what are we to do?" My answer has always been, "Insist on your labourers living in the houses you provide for them. Let them have their grass humpies at a proper distance

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30. Noel Fatnowma and I visited Fred Davis on 23 August 1977. Also refer to *BOHC* 80Bb:1 (ONF).

31. *BOHC* 7Bb:1 (NJF). The Black Oral History Collection contains numerous descriptions of Melanesian housing in early twentieth century North Queensland. Some of the references are:  
*BOHC* 20Ba:2 (LL); *BOHC* 25Bb:1 (RL); *BOHC* 31Ba:1 (GA);  
*BOHC* 1Bb:1 (NJF); *BOHC* 11Ba:1 (EY); *BOHC* 11Ba:1 (FP);  
*BOHC* 16Ba:1 (PD & RL); *BOHC* 22Ba:2 (EH); *BOHC* 24Bb:1 (TC);  
*BOHC* 21Ba:2 (CT); *BOHC* 80Ba:1 (ONF); *BOHC* 40Ba:2 (WT).

from other buildings, where they may hold their Sunday meetings if they choose, but don't let them live in them. 32

Not all Europeans were as dogmatically against the use of traditional Melanesian houses. Commenting on Gore's report the editor of the *Mackay Mercury* reminded readers that Europeans in Queensland had continued to build houses and dress in a manner more suited to Europe than the tropical antipodes and that similarly:

the boys come to us with fixed habits as to the construction of their dwellings. They are more happy and contented in their own than in those of European construction... perhaps the grass humpy is considered preferable among the islanders to the quasi "marble halls" that are generally provided for them. 33

Regardless of Melanesian preferences employers continued to erect the weatherboard barracks their employees disliked.<sup>34</sup> The usual compromise reached was that the Islanders kept their valuables in the wooden barracks but entertained and slept in more traditional structures. If forced to use barracks they preferred buildings equipped with a hearth, or at least with an earthen floor on which they could have a fire. Where possible each island group or if sufficient in number, a language group, had a barrack to themselves. Sometimes no amount of urging by Europeans was sufficient to induce them to sleep in barracks. In 1880 Spiller forced his Melanesian employees at *Pioneer* to use the wooden barracks he had provided. Most acquiesced, but a few slept underneath, not inside.<sup>35</sup>

Increasingly after the 1880s a large proportion of the Melanesian work-force were either time-expired or ticket-holders working in small groups on farms rather than on plantations. Small farm operators usually started out living in slab walled houses with iron or thatch

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32. *QVP* 1880, v.2, 427.

33. *MM* 11 August 1880.

34. Wooden barracks were erected on *Barrie* in 1881 and on *Homebush* in 1882. *MM* 28 May 1881; *CSR* 142/1226, Knox to Stuart, 2 May 1882 and 142/1252, Stuart to Knox 24 July 1882.

35. Table Two: *Pioneer*; *Qlder* 3 December 1881.

roofs. The quarters they offered their Melanesian employees were no better. If four or five Islanders worked on one farm they shared one grass house or built individual houses to suit their whims and customs.<sup>36</sup> The extra freedom available in many aspects of life on small farms, as opposed to plantations, was part of the reason long-term Melanesian residents in the colony preferred working for small farm operators. Freedom to build their own houses was undoubtedly part of this preference.

The reasons given by Europeans opposing the use of traditional Melanesian houses were that they harboured disease and were far more likely to burn down than wooden buildings. Accidental fires did occur: one on *Pioneer* in 1878 burnt down all of the Islanders' huts, the hospital, several sheds and part of the stables.<sup>37</sup> But Melanesians have used fibre houses for thousands of years without living in constant fear of incineration. When asked about the frequency with which houses burnt down Queensland Islanders were surprised, saying that they were quite safe and seldom caught fire.<sup>38</sup> Whatever disadvantages grass houses may have had in comparison with easily cleaned wooden buildings were compensated by the cultural value of the structures. Built from bush materials, they cost nothing. Time-expired labourers in the nineteenth century and the Melanesian community which remained into the twentieth century had little money to spare, but regardless they were able to continue living independent of European assistance. Traditional houses were part of the cultural strength of Australia's immigrant Melanesian community.

Grass houses possessed advantages which to Melanesians made them preferable to European-style buildings. They could readily be abandoned or destroyed, and replaced if necessary. Malaitans and other Islanders interpreted ill-health and death as signs that their ancestors

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36. A.E. Munro's *Sugar Fields of Mackay* provides a description of every farm and plantation in the Mackay district in late 1894.

37. *MM* 24 August 1878; Saunders, *Uncertain Bondage*, 288-9, contains several other similar examples.

38. *BOHC* 20Ba:2 (LL); *BOHC* 11Bb:1 (FP); *BOHC* 47Ba:2 (NJF).

were angry with them or that they were under attack by malevolent alien spirits.<sup>39</sup> Wooden barracks, the property of employers, were not easy to vacate, but grass houses were easy to leave. Grass houses could readily be shut up at night and made secure from spiritual or physical intrusion. Different island groups were strongly antagonistic to each other. They fought openly in tribal wars, by stealth in the night, and with sorcery. Maintaining separate dwellings lessened tensions between groups, allowing them to maintain societal equilibrium even in strange and strained living conditions. Even with partial suspension of Melanesian belief systems symbolic male-female divisions and antagonisms remained strong.

One respect in which European and Melanesian ideas harmonized was the need for segregation of unmarried men and women, though the reasons were quite different. To Europeans the prime consideration was sexual morality, but to Melanesians it was the need to avoid pollution. In many areas of Melanesia, physical and spiritual divisions between the sexes are important. On Malaita sexual demarcation is extreme. In Harold Ross's words, "If male-female antagonism is a Melanesian idiosyncrasy, it is a Malaitan obsession."<sup>40</sup> One aspect of this division is separation in housing, particularly of the *luna* and *bisi* from the male section of any village. Malaitans travelling to Queensland feared pollution from women menstruating or giving birth; on board recruiting ships they would have been worried to the extent of fearing death because they had broken sexual taboos. The same must have happened in Queensland when they first arrived. Working as wage labourers meant that women could no longer absent themselves from their menfolk at dangerous times, but attempts were made to compensate even in the changed circumstances. Judging from pictorial evidence women seem to have worked separately from males in the fields, though mill photos and etchings show males and females working side-by-side at the rollers.<sup>41</sup> On plantations, quarters set aside for married couples were usually separate from those of single men. This guaranteed that female pollution

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39. Refer to the conclusion of this chapter.

40. Ross, *Baegu*, 120.

41. For examples refer to: Moore, *Forgotten People*, photo facing page 33; A. Garran (ed.), *Picturesque Atlas of Australia*, v.2 (Sydney, 1886), 393; *MCCA*, Marten photos.

stayed well away from single males, conforming to Melanesian ideas about sexual spacing, but in European eyes the distance was probably intended to preserve privacy and keep females away from lusty males. The married couples quarters on *Pleystowe* in 1878 were ninety metres away from the single men's quarters, and in the twentieth century "boy houses" and "girl houses" always seem to have built many metres apart.<sup>42</sup> Strangely, there is no memory amongst Islanders in Queensland, even Malaitans who traditionally had particular fear of exposure to *sua*, of women absenting themselves during menstruation or birth. As remembered by the oldest Queensland Malaitans today, the only precaution taken was that menstruating women stopped preparing food for their menfolk. But these memories are usually of their grandmothers at a post-menopausal age or of Australian-born women; women who presented only minimal risks. Beliefs were progressively weakened after decades in Australia. Australian-born Islander men and women had only semi-traditional perceptions of sexual taboos.<sup>43</sup> Even so, for traditional Melanesians the transition period in Queensland must have been awkward, often unnerving and dangerous. Breaking sexual taboos is a serious offence in Melanesia. Queensland was a different world, where many beliefs had to be left in abeyance, but many must still have waited and watched for signs of displeasure from their ancestors.

Oral testimony from Islanders who grew up at Mackay in the 1920s and 1930s provides evidence of the symbolic and general cultural significance of traditional housing styles even to the Australian-born children and grandchildren of Melanesian immigrants. It is fair to conjecture that during earlier decades traditional beliefs were even stronger. Several Malaitans were singled out as case studies at the end of Chapter Three. Many of them lived at Mackay; several are involved in the following descriptions of Malaitan housing. Henry, son of Andrew Bobongie from Lau was born in a rural area outside Mackay in 1925. His description of his parents' home, complete with "boy house" (*luma tio*) and "girl house" (*luma naare*) parallels the earlier

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42. QSA COL/A265, In letter 3074 of 1878: report by C.C. Horrocks; BOHC 48Ba:2 (NJF).

43. BOHC 48Ba:2 (NJF); BOHC 51Ba:2 (HSQ); BOHC 37Bb:1 (S & FB); also refer to BOHC 27Bb:2 (MF); BOHC 19Ba:3 (EH); BOHC 9Ba:2 (ONF & NS); BOHC 4Ba:2 (WM); BOHC 81Bb:2 (MS&ONF).

description of a typical Malaitan house. As youths he and his brothers lived in the "boy house", were only allowed to enter the kitchen section of the main "girl house", never their mother's room (*luma lalo*) at the back. The area surrounding their and other Islanders' houses was kept bare of grass, swept clean and smooth. The last task at night was to sweep around the house and take any loose objects inside. Sorcerers or other enemies could and did come in the night to steal items for use in harmful magic, or in some way try to attack the occupants. Whether they came or not, precautions were always taken, and the ground scanned for foreign footprints each morning.<sup>44</sup>

Henry Bobongie was brought up to fear enemy attacks in the night. Although he laughs about it now, as a young man he shifted the position of his bed every night to ensure that it was impossible for an enemy to anticipate exactly where he would sleep, a precaution common amongst Melanesians at Mackay then and even more so in earlier decades. That the danger was not wholly imaginary is indicated by a report in the *Mackay Mercury* in 1899:

when the door was opened, the two occupants rushed out and said that someone had fired through a hole in the wall of the hut, the shot striking the wall on the opposite side about two inches below the bunk of one of the boys, some of the shot just grazing his arm. 45

Noel Fatnowna, Henry Bobongie's cousin<sup>46</sup> also lived in a "boy house":

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44. *BOHC* 41Ba:3 and B:2 (HB & ONF).

45. *MM* 7 March 1899.

46. Henry's mother, Emma Fiukwandi, was the daughter of immigrants Kavisi Fiukwandi\* and Annie Myterrafear\*. Emma was Andrew Bobongie's second wife, married in 1917 after the death of his first wife Joy Kwau, daught of Kwailiu\* and Orrani\* from Fataleka. Harry Norman Fatnowna was their son. Harry married Grace Kwasi, ten of their sixteen children surviving into adulthood; one of them Noel Fatnowna, was born in 1929. Luke Logomier\*, Noel's step-grandfather (Orrani's second husband) and Noel's father had both been Anglican lay preachers, but a few years before Noel was born his father left the Anglican church to become a leading force in the Seventh Day Adventist church. Like their Bobongie cousins the Fatnownas lived in a rural area outside Mackay.

(\* = used as a case study in Chapter Three, Section 6.)

These huts were something - enormous big houses. None of them ever leaked and many of them had big fires in the middle of them. Smoke seemed to preserve them, because the bigger the fire and more smoke, the longer they lasted... We slept around the fire. 47 We were told not to sleep close to the wall because of the *akalo* ancestral spirits who would see you, or in case a man came at you with an axe. We slept high out of a tomahawke reach... 48

Europeans seldom seemed to have realised the intricacy of the structure of Melanesian settlements on the plantations, farms and in rural areas. Simple grass houses could be as sacred as a Christian church, their occupants observing taboos, protecting themselves against antagonistic physical and spiritual forces. It is unlikely that Melanesians suffered from their occupancy, certainly not in the manner observers like Ralph Gore described. Allowing the Islanders to live in the surroundings they chose, not those foisted upon them by employers, had unforeseen advantages.

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47. On beds made from split bamboo, grass and ti-tree bark. *BOHC* 7Bb:1 (NJF).

48. *BOHC* 80Ba:1 (ONF).

### 3. Diet : official and private

#### A. The official diet

Although the Queensland government neglected to regulate Melan-  
esians' working hours or accommodation standards, it did concern it-  
self with their food supply. Two official dietary scales were used,  
from 1868 until 1880 (Table One), and a slightly improved version  
from 1880 until 1908 (Table Three).

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Table Three

The food ration for each adult Melanesian in Queensland 1880-1908

<u>Daily</u>	<u>Lbs.</u>	<u>Ozs.</u>
Beef or mutton	1	0
Bread or fish	1	8
Sugar		5
Potatoes	3	0
(or rice)		6
Tea		$\frac{1}{2}$
 <u>Weekly</u>		
Salt		2

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As a result historians have focused on the official diet, or at least  
on employer-provided food,<sup>49</sup> as if the Melanesians were like European  
children in boarding schools, their food intake limited to what ever  
was placed in front of them. In fact they seldom received exactly the  
official ration, and they had food available to them well beyond that  
provided by employers. Melanesians were no more likely to eat only  
the employer-provided diet than they were to sleep in employer-pro-  
vided accommodation if they found it unsatisfactory.

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49. Corris, *Passage, Port and Plantation*, Chapter Five; Evans *et al.*,  
*Exclusion, Exploitation and Extermination*, 184-5; Saunders, Un-  
certain Bondage, 292-9; Bolton, *Thousand Miles Away*, 81-2.  
Comments on the nutritional value of the daily provisions spec-  
ified for issue to every Melanesian under the terms of the *Pacific*  
*Islander Labourer Acts* are contained in Appendix Seven of this  
thesis.

None of the historians of the labour trade, the present included, has had any special knowledge of medical or dietary matters. Too often, historians have relied on century-old medical opinions, and have made Euro-centric assumptions about the health, dietary preferences and foods available to Melanesians in Queensland which can be shown to be incorrect. The remainder of this chapter has been written in consultation with dieticians, medical practitioners and Melanesians, but shows the hallmark of a non-medical historian. There is still a need for a competent medical analysis to be written in the future.

Kay Saunders is the historian who has completed the most exhaustive investigation to date into the living conditions of immigrant Melanesians in nineteenth century Queensland. Saunders concluded that the official dietary scale was not nutritionally balanced and was not sufficient to sustain men and youths employed in arduous manual labour.<sup>50</sup> Although she uses this to explain the high mortality rate amongst a large minority of the labourers she does not attempt to explain how the majority survived. Adrian Graves in his 1979 study of the Queensland labour trade supports Saunders' assessment of the Islanders' diet.<sup>51</sup> In fact, as analysed by dieticians, the official diet was well in excess of the kilojoule energy value needed for an adult male doing reasonably strenuous physical labour.<sup>52</sup> The official dietary scale was slightly deficient in one element - ascorbic acid - which was easily available from other sources. But the nutritional value of the official dietary scale is only relevant to the hypothetical labourer who lived purely on this diet. From information presented in this chapter it is evident that employers seldom provided exactly the specified diet, and that Islanders derived their total food supply from much wider sources.

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50. Saunders, *Uncertain Bondage*, 293.

51. Graves, *Pacific Island Labour*, 96.

52. Refer to Appendix Seven and to G.C. Bolton's 1963 assessment of the official dietary scale. Bolton, *Thousand Miles Away*, 81-2.

Saunders' second criticism, that little consideration was paid to the Melanesians' previous diet,<sup>53</sup> is correct. Although some employers did attempt to cultivate taro, yams and sweet potatoes to feed their Melanesian employees, most resorted to meat and bread to provide the bulk of the diet, neglecting to include vegetables and tuber, the major foods in a traditional Melanesian diet. Dr. C.H. Clarkson, medical officer in charge of Kanaka hospitals in Queensland for several years in the 1880s, believed that the change in diet of the Melanesians newly arrived in Queensland was the chief cause of their excessive mortality:

...the islanders may be roughly divided into two classes. The one has lived on fish & coconuts (*sic*) with a very small and in some cases with no addition of vegetables or fruit. The other, mostly New Hebrides, the older Solomons &c. are a yam and banana eating race with liberal additions of fruit & fish &c. In both cases they represent a people for ages accustomed to a particular form of diet. This on their arrival here is notably changed, not in its form only but in the essential conditions of nutrition...

To adapt the human intestine to a change of diet is a work of time. Meantime the regulation diet for "new chums" is absolutely unsuitable. 54

Some years earlier Clarkson had urged the Queensland government to import and plant thousands of coconuts for the Islanders. The government's attitude was that providing such food was a task for employers. Clarkson also advocated the introduction of yams, taro and bananas. Employers took the easiest course available, provided sweet potatoes as substitute carbohydrate bulk, and relied on meat and bread to complete the Islanders' dietary regime.

Islanders disliked the unfamiliar rations served to them in Queensland, and were often also unsatisfied by the quantity of food they received.<sup>55</sup> Saunders uses such evidence to produce the *non sequitur* conclusion that "(f)requently masters sought to humble recalcitrant servants by curtailing their food rations."<sup>56</sup> Although one can find

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53. Saunders, *Uncertain Bondage*, 293-4.

54. Clarkson's 1888 Report, *op.cit.*

55. Horrocks' 1878 Report on his visit to *Dumbleton*, *op.cit.*; Saunders, *Uncertain Bondage*, 294-7.

56. Saunders, *ibid.*, 294.

examples of employers behaving in such a punitive manner, they were not the majority. Employers were not blind to the logic that the better fed the Islanders were the better they worked. It is not difficult to match Saunders' quotations with similar quotations proving the opposite. For instance in 1869 the *Mackay Mercury* noted that when the Islanders were engaged in arduous labour inside the mill buildings

their masters find it profitable to supply them with unlimited quantities of good food, comfortable dwellings etc. 57

Starving Melanesians into submission when surrounded by the bountiful Australian bush would have been difficult. Historians unfamiliar with Islander oral testimony have underestimated Melanesian abilities to supplement their diets with bush foods and animals, and vegetables from their own gardens or those of their friends or kin. Many Islanders - forty to sixty percent by the 1890s - were visiting the colony for a second time, or were time-expired or ticket-holding labourers living and working on small farms, not plantations.<sup>58</sup> They had much more freedom to control their own diets than has previously been presumed. Even newly arrived recruits probably quickly developed a sense of *camaraderie* with others from the same ship load.<sup>59</sup> Employers supplying short rations would more often have done so out of financial niggardliness than any desire to punitively affect their workers.

W.R. Goodall investigated complaints by Islanders about the quantity of food served on *Inverness* and *Foulden* plantations at Mackay in 1876 and 1877. On one occasion he arrived at *Inverness* just as the

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57. *MM* 11 September 1869.

58. Refer to Chapter Six, Section 4, parts D and E.

59. According to Ian Frazer, anthropologist working in To'ambaita Malaita, men from there who worked on plantations within the Solomons developed life-long friendships with fellow labourers from other islands who enlisted on the same recruiting ships. They refer to them as *suku* or *sukura*, meaning brother or friend. The words are not from the To'ambaita dialect. It seems likely that similar relationships were formed on the way to and in Queensland. Interview with Mr Ian Frazer, Adelaide, 16 May 1980.

food was being dished out. Although he considered he had enough evidence to convict the proprietors for a breach of the Act, he was also aware that neighbouring planters would occupy the Court bench if he brought a prosecution. They would not give a verdict against their fellow planter. A month earlier Goodall had visited nearby *Foulden*, investigating a similar complaint. He found that the official ration of sixteen ounces of meat for each labourer per day was being weighed raw, complete with bone. Boned, and after cooking all that remained was about two ounces of meat per person.<sup>60</sup> A decade later the situation had altered little. C.A. Forster reported that:

the supply of meat to the Islanders (when cooked) is not in many instances what it ought to be. The supply of bread at some places has improved, also tea and sugar but not generally what the Act requires. ...the meat in some instances is very badly cooked, in fact is reduced to fibrine and is very unequally divided ranging from 2½ to 9½ oz. per man only once a day. 61

It seems that on the plantations at least, Islanders seldom received their full meat ration. But did they want it? And what was the effect of including large amounts of meat in their diet? A traditional Melanesian diet seldom, if ever, consists continuously of a large amount of meat. Coastal people consume large amounts of fish but Melanesians lack domestic animals other than pigs (which are usually reserved for ceremonial occasions) so their only other supply of meat comes from small wild animals and fowls. In the Baegu Malaitan example used in Appendix Seven, traditional protein foods (pig and fowls) are no more than two or three percent of their total diet: sixty percent of the Baegu diet is carbohydrate, the remainder being made up of vegetables, nuts and fruits. Harold Ross, the Baegu's ethnographer says that:

There is little evidence of malnutrition among the Baegu. Both men and women are strong, healthy people with attractive physiques. Children are robust

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60. QSA CPS 10B/G1, Goodall to manager of *Inverness*, 6 March 1876, Goodall to IA, 8 October 1877, and Goodall to E.P. Ashdown, 23 August 1877.

61. Forster's 1886 Report, *op. cit.*

and active; none are obese, and few if any are markedly thin. Apparently people who live on a diet composed largely of starch-rich, protein-poor foods such as taro or sweet potatoes maintain nutritional standards by eating unbelievable amounts of those foods. 62

Melanesians were not used to eating sixteen ounces of meat a day, but this was their official allocation. Contemporary medical observers blamed the meat ration, unrefrigerated and often salt-cured, for causing a good deal of the diarrhoea attacks suffered by the Islander labourers, particularly new arrivals. Employers were pulled three ways. One one side by regulations which specified that they provide a high meat content in the Islanders' diet. Secondly, by the belief that it was partly the meat that was to blame for the prevalence of gastro-intestinal tract illnesses amongst their Melanesian labourers. Thirdly, by a desire to be caused as little trouble as possible in providing the diet. Meat was cheap and easy to obtain. Some planters operated pastoral properties in conjunction with their sugar land or had interests and connections with the pastoral industry. Taro, yams and sweet potatoes were alien crops which took up good sugar land. Meat, bread and potatoes, a basic European diet, was far easier to provide.

Acres of potatoes were grown in the Mackay district from the 1860s.<sup>63</sup> Initially, the English variety predominated, but Islanders preferred sweet potatoes and in later decades it was sweet potatoes which dominated the potato crop. Bread for the plantations usually came from the town bakers. References vary, some assuring the reader that the bread was of similar quality to that sold in the towns, while other sources suggest that bakers sometimes supplied second quality bread to the plantations.<sup>64</sup> It can not be presumed that what Melanesians perceived to be 'quality' bread was the bread preferred by Europeans. The whiter the bread the less nutritious it was likely to be. If the bakers had used what they regarded as second quality flour, it may well have been superior nutritionally, in respect to fibre, to their 'quality'

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62. Ross, *Baegu*, 79.

63. Chapter Four, Table Three.

64. Saunders, *Uncertain Bondage*, 296; Horrocks' 1878 Report on his visit to *Foulden*, *op.cit.*

products consumed in the towns. Saunders makes the strange Euro-centric point that the Islanders were not given butter or cheese to eat with their bread.<sup>65</sup> Traditionally Melanesian tuber crops are eaten dry; fish and meat are cooked in stone ovens without the aid of basting fats. The same procedure was followed by island-born Melanesians in Queensland, who, even in the 1920s when they certainly had a choice, preferred to eat their taro, yams and bread dry and unadorned.<sup>66</sup> Nor were butter and cheese readily available in rural North Queensland during the nineteenth century, unless farmer or planter households made them for themselves.

Saunders also suggested, on the basis of isolated pieces of evidence, that scurvy and protein deficiency were prevalent amongst Melanesians in Queensland.<sup>67</sup> The symptoms of scurvy were well known and quite unmistakable: it is debilitating, then crippling and finally fatal. It is inconceivable that it can have occurred on any significant scale without being recorded. A diet deficient in ascorbic acid to a degree insufficient to produce the unmistakable symptoms of scurvy would still produce less specific symptoms: mental and physical lassitude, and slowness of healing in cuts, wounds etc.<sup>68</sup> A diet restricted to the official scale might have been rather low in ascorbic acid - much would depend on the freshness of the vegetables and the way in which they were cooked - but there were many other sources of ascorbic acid available to Melanesians from fruit and vegetables, grown, bought, purloined and foraged around the district. The ready availability of alternative sources of ascorbic acid is no excuse for the lack of fruit and vegetables in the official ration scale, an oversight on the part of the government. But one cannot extrapolate from the rations that the Islanders' diet was deficient, and so lead to scurvy. Scurvy undoubtedly did occur, particularly in the drier inland areas of the colony, but there is no indication in the Mackay and Maryborough Mel-

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65. Saunders, *Uncertain Bondage*, 297.

66. *BOHC* 48Ba:2 (NJF).

67. Saunders, *Uncertain Bondage*, 293, 297-9.

68. C.S. Davidson, 'Scurvy', in P.B. Beeson and W. McDermott (eds.), *Textbook of Medicine*, volume two, 12th edition (Philadelphia, 1967), 1156-6; C.A. Houssay *et. al.*, *Human Physiology* (London, 1955), 541-3.

anesian mortality and illness statistics in Table Seven of this chapter that it was ever prevalent. The only major case quoted by Saunders occurred at Mackay in 1884 when Melanesian migration was at its highest and the health of the labourers at its lowest in a span of forty years. This case refers to the ill-fated recruits from New Britain and New Ireland who suffered an amazingly high rate of mortality, which needs a far wider epidemiological explanation.<sup>69</sup> The evidence Saunders produced to prove protein deficiency mentions the lack of meat and fish in the labourers' official diet and one example of Islanders eating raw sugar cane, which she suggests is a sign of protein deficiency, illustrated in a craving for sweet substances. Saunders source of information is a popular health book which is not substantiated by reputable medical texts.<sup>70</sup> Taking the Baegu Malaitan example used in Appendix Seven, the Baegu diet consists of no more than two or three percent of protein foods, which they would have received from even the most niggardly meat supply. The sweet pith of cane grasses is widely used in Melanesia as a food source and delicacy. It is hardly unusual that Islanders in Queensland should have availed themselves of sugar cane as a food source when it was growing in abundance all around them. If there was any general deficiency in the Islanders' employer-provided diets it was in vitamins. But even this point is conjecture based upon several cases of dropsy reported in hospital and cemetery records.<sup>71</sup> Dropsy could have been caused by other ailments.

It is doubtful that the food ration specified in the Acts was ever intended to be more than a rough guide to what should be provided. Officials referred to it as a standard and prosecuted employers when they supplied blatantly inadequate diets to their labourers, but they also sanctioned considerable variations. One can conjecture that

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69. Refer to Section Six of this chapter.

70. Saunders reference is A. Davis, *Let's Eat Right to Keep Fit* (London, 1966). For competent medical opinions on the subject of protein deficiency refer to: R.L. Cecil *et al.*, *A Textbook of Medicine* (Philadelphia, 1951), 563-8; W.E. Nelson (ed.), *Textbook of Pediatrics* (Philadelphia, 1959), 356-7; N.B. Taylor *et al.*, *A Text in Applied Physiology*, 7th edition (Baltimore, 1961), 943-5; Houssay, *Human Physiology*, 447-69.

71. Refer to the classification of the items listed in Table Seven, appended to this chapter.

if they had always received the official ration the death rate would have been ever higher. The ration depended on commodity availability and the good will of each employer. Employers could easily cheat on the type of food provided, its quality and quantity. From all surviving evidence it appears that plantation food mainly consisted of boiled meat and potatoes, with very few vegetables. From a Melanesian point of view such a diet was unbalanced and alien, but one can not assume that their overall diet was also unbalanced. It would be idle to assume that Melanesians did not have some say in the arrangement of their day-to-day diets, even on plantations. Melanesian cooks were employed on some plantations and labourers always supplemented their official rations with food grown in their own gardens and from bush foraging, hunting and fishing. Islanders working on small farms often received identical meals to those of their masters, not the specified rations. Oral testimony and contemporary documentary evidence shows clearly that their diet was seldom just the official ration. The "new chum" recruits suffered worst and must often have detested the strange diet. The first-indenture Melanesians had a death rate three times as high as the rest of the population.<sup>72</sup> Strange food and accompanying gastro-intestinal tract illnesses, although not directly responsible for deaths, must have exacerbated anxiety felt by Islanders - that they were being attacked by spirits.

What follows is an attempt to describe the diet of Melanesians in Queensland from the broadest possible perspective, including that of labourers on plantations, workers on farms, and more generally, those living in rural areas. The official dietary scale is but one aspect, important, but not supremely so.

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72. R. Shlomowitz, *Markets for Melanesian Labour*, 26-9.

### 3.B. The private diet

For thousands of years the Pioneer valley's water courses, coastal mangroves, fertile grass plains, the rainforest at the end of the valley and the islands off the coast provided bountiful food and shelter for the Aboriginal inhabitants. The same qualities made the valley attractive to European settlers and to their Melanesian servants. Hunting, fishing, bush foraging and garden agriculture were integral to Melanesian life. In Melanesia the coastal Islanders were dependent almost entirely on the produce of the sea; those living inland depended on garden produce and domestic pigs supplemented with wild foods, animals, birds and fresh water life. In Queensland as wage labourers their time was curtailed but they made use of what free time they had in the evenings or on weekends to tend private gardens, to hunt and to fish.

One has only to wander through the rural areas surrounding Mackay today to notice patches of mango, citrus and banana trees growing along creek banks, or to look closely in swampy pockets along any permanent water course to find taro and yams growing unattended. On enquiry one is told that the land was once part of a plantation or was an Islander encampment during the early decades of the twentieth century. Although employed to cultivate sugar cane the Islanders did not cease to cultivate their own gardens, growing traditional Melanesian tuber and vegetable crops as well as additional plants of European or indigenous origin.<sup>73</sup> Taro and yams were used on board recruiting ships to feed recruits. Some tubers survived the trips and were planted by Europeans

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73. Melanesians in the Mackay district cultivated or gathered the following plants and fruits: Taro (swamp and Chinese varieties), yams (the indigenous *Dioscorea transversa* R. Br. and the Melanesian variety *Dioscorea alata* L.), tapioca, sweet potatoes (red and yellow varieties, eating fruit and leaves), pumpkins (eating the fruit and leaves), tomatoes, bamboo shoots, hibiscus leaves, drumhead cabbages, Chinese cabbages, varieties of island greens, beans, carrots, ferns and other leaves, ink weed and pig weed (*Portulacaceae: Portulaca oleracea* L.), and various types of fruit. BOHC 1Ba:1 (ONF); BOHC 4Ba:1 (WM); BOHC 7Ba:2 (TA&JV) and 7Bb:1 (NJF); BOHC 15Ba:1 (IB); BOHC 19Ba:2 (EH); BOHC 21Ba:1 (CT); BOHC 20Ba:1 (LL); BOHC 31Bb:1-3 (G&G1.A); BOHC 34Ba:1 (ONF); BOHC 40Ba:1 (WT); BOHC 47Bb:2 (NJF); BOHC 48Ba: (NJF); BOHC 51Ba:1-2 (HSQ); BOHC 81Bb:1 (MS&ONF).

and Islanders at Mackay as early as January 1869,<sup>74</sup> only two years after the labour trade commenced. A decade later yams and taro were commonplace on plantations and although employers could not be persuaded to grow enough to make them a major part of their labourers' diets, many at least tried to cultivate some. Regardless of the employers' attempts to grow Melanesian foods the Melanesians themselves were not slow to do so and typical scenes from the 1870s onward were "several patches of yams...growing near the Kanaka row".<sup>75</sup> Other less common plants were especially imported by recruits, particularly re-recruiting men and women who knew which plants were or were not available in Queensland.<sup>76</sup>

There are hundreds of edible plants indigenous to North Queensland. Melanesians were introduced to some of them by Aborigines, but others were similar or identical species to those in Melanesia. These added to plants imported from Melanesia, Asia and Europe provided an enormous range of roots, leaves, piths, nuts and fruits to supplement the official ration. Some of the indigenous foods were known to Europeans, but even now, one hundred and twenty years after first settlement, the European inhabitants of North Queensland still are unaware of the enormous variety of edible plants which surrounds them in the bush.<sup>77</sup> Earlier this century when the remaining Islanders lived unwanted on the fringe of European society they existed mainly by subsistence cultivation and by utilizing bush foods. They had little money but never went hungry.

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74. *MM* 6 January 1869.

75. *MM* 17 July 1878.

76. *BOHC* 15Ba:1 (IB).

77. A German woman Amalie Dietrich, was probably the first botanist to visit the Mackay region. She spent the whole of 1867 in the Pioneer valley collecting botanical and anthropological specimens for Hamburg shipping merchant J.C. Godeffroy. Henry Ling Roth and several of his planter friends were keen naturalists in the 1870s and 1880s. Edward Palmer was one of the first Europeans to investigate the plants used by Aborigines in North Queensland: he read a paper on the subject to the Royal Society of NSW in 1883. Since then research into edible plants in North Queensland has continued spasmodically. A Cairns Naturalist Club published a booklet on the subject in 1948 and currently Army Captain Les Hiddens is researching bush survival techniques in North Queensland. Roth, *Port Mackay*, 81-105; *MM* 24 November 1980 (Dietrich's biography is currently being researched by Ms Ray Summer for the

Nineteenth century Melanesian gardens were never just soil and plants. A garden's surface is the center of the physical and symbolic worlds, surrounded below and above by ancestors. Complex symbolic images like gardens, their palisades, plants and crops to the living and their ancestors. Malaitan gardens are rectangular or square patterns divided into regular sections, surrounded by felled small trees and magically bounded by crotons and cordyline plants.<sup>78</sup> The same protective plants were used around Melanesian gardens in Queensland in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Magical stones were also buried around the Islanders' Queensland gardens to ward off thieves and evil spirits. Taboos were applied, markings made to warn other Melanesians to keep clear. Islanders continued to use traditional digging sticks in cultivating their home gardens, ignoring the steel implements also available to them.<sup>79</sup> It is not possible to say how the Melanesian spiritual world operated in relation to Melanesian gardens in Queensland, whether Malaitans placed murder rewards on

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National Museum of Victoria.); E. Palmer, 'On plants used by the natives of North Queensland, Flinders and Mitchell Rivers, for food, medicine, & &', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales*, v. 17 (1883), 93-113; H. Flecker *et al* *Edible Plants in North Queensland* (Cairns, 1948); L.J. Webb, 'The use of plant medicines and poisons by Australian Aborigines', *Mankind*, v. 7 (1959), 137-46 J. Golson, 'Australian Aboriginal food plants: some ecological and culture-historical implications', in D.J. Mulvaney and J. Golson (eds.), *Aboriginal Man and Environment in Australia* (Canberra, 1971), 197-238; *Newsletter of the Aboriginal & Islander Studies Committee*, James Cook University of North Queensland, No. 7 (1980), 1-3; A.B. and J.W. Cribb, *Wild Food in Australia*, (Sydney, 1974).

78. D. de Coppet, 'Gardens of life, gardens of death in Melanesia', *Kabar Seberang*, No. 8-9 (1981); Ross, 'Bush fallow farming', 565-8.
79. BOHC 48Ba:1 (NJF); BOHC 51Ba:1 (HSQ); BOHC 47Bb:2 (NJF); BOHC 21Bb:1 (CT). There is one documentary example of Mackay Malaitans using taboo markings. Malaitans marked the house gate of their mission teacher Mrs M.G. Robinson with "certain mystical signs" to protect her from other Melanesians less well disposed towards her Anglican Selwyn Mission. Presumably this was not the only time such protective markings were used in the district. R. Fraser, *A Historical Sketch of the Diocese of North Queensland: 1878-1958, 80 years of Anglican progress* (Townsville, 1958), 65.

garden platforms similar to those used on Malaita, or whether first fruit offerings were made to their ancestors. It is certain that the Islanders' gardens were more important to them than as mere sources of supplementary food to their employer provided rations: like their houses their gardens were integral to their cultural strength in a new environment.<sup>80</sup>

Garden produce was used for every day food and for special meals or feasts. *Gwasu* is a Malaitan delicacy, made from pounded taro and coconut; similar puddings are made else-where in Melanesia. Malaitans made *gwasu* on special occasions in Queensland using traditionally shaped bowls made from local timber.<sup>81</sup> Pigs and fowls were slaughtered for feasts. One 1881 reference tells of Solomon and Epi Islanders roasting two whole pigs on vacant land near China Town at Mackay, completing their repast with bread, cakes and cups of tea, afterwards crossing the river to dance and sing late into the night. Pigs being less easily available than in the islands, fowls were often substituted. It was common for feasting Malaitans to slaughter two dozen fowls for a feast, cooking them in stone ovens.<sup>82</sup> The more permanent Melanesian settlers kept domestic livestock, particularly pigs and fowls but even the newest arrivals had equal chances for rich pickings from hunting and fishing.

Thickly timbered virgin scrub surrounded the nineteenth century sugar fields. Gradually cane was planted on most of the plains and small hills in the Pioneer valley until the whole area began to resemble a patchwork of green velvet, but even today pockets of the

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80. The same pattern of Melanesian cultural adaptation is occurring amongst Torres Strait Islanders who have moved from their islands to urban North Queensland in the last few decades. Today in Townsville suburban back yards Torres Strait Islanders plant their gardens with traditional form and content, use garden and weather magic and observe garden taboos, particularly those relating to menstruation. Their European neighbours in suburbia are unaware of what is taking place next door. Europeans in North Queensland in earlier decades would have been no wiser about similar Pacific Islander practices.

Information from Alo Tapim, Townsville, 15 November 1980.

81. BOHC 7Bb:1 (NJF).

82. MM 3 August 1881; BOHC 48Ba:2 (NJF).

original vegetation survive. Raff's mountain, surrounded by Habana, Nindaroo, Cedars and Farleigh, and Mt Vince on the old Greenmount pastoral run remain virgin bush. Some of the creeks, particularly Fursden-Nebia creek and Reliance creek, still have patches of the original luxuriant vegetation along their banks. Although much reduced in size mangroves still protect the coast. A century earlier the untouched bush, the river, lagoons and creeks were a haven for wild life. Early European settlers claimed that the best duck shooting in Queensland was to be had in the valley. Duck driving, beating wild ducks on lagoons toward stationary hunters, was a favourite sport amongst Europeans. H.S. Finch-Hatton was an ardent duck shooter and left detailed descriptions of his shooting expeditions on the lagoons of his Mt Spencer property and along the Pioneer. Finch-Hatton's description of an afternoon's shooting at Mt Spencer is indication enough of the abundant wild life:

This was on the 4th July, 1888 when I with L.K. Rice bagged 111 birds, and another man 7 - total 118. The bag consisted of 89 black duck, 13 widgeon, 10 teal, 4 pigmies [small geese the size of a teal], and 2 wood duck; no whistlers. 83

John Spiller at *Pioneer* on the north side of the river also used the ducks on the lagoons for his larder, though with a little more care than some:

The wild fowl shooting in the old days was particularly good, and big bags could have been made, there being hundreds of duck and other game birds on this lagoon. At first I used it as a larder, never having more than one shot, and always getting two birds; the others were not much frightened, they would rise and pitch again about 50 or 60 yards away perfectly contented. I did not go in for big bags on this water, but always protected the birds, and finally allowed no shooting whatever. Besides Ducks and Geese, there were numbers of other birds, ie. Snipe, Plover, Egrets, Spoonbill Cranes, Giant Cranes, Native Companions and Pelicans, and many of the smaller birds, the Sandpiper in particular. 84

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83. Roth, *Port Mackay*, 85.

84. *Ibid.*, 82.

Wealthy Europeans like Finch-Hatton and Spiller usually limited their hunting activities to birds and the more daring sport of crocodile killing.<sup>85</sup> Poorer individuals - the Islanders and some Asians and Europeans - used the bush for a large part of their sustenance, hunting a wide range of its creatures: kangaroos, wallabys, possums, bandicoots, echidnas etc.<sup>86</sup> The Islanders used traditional weapons,<sup>87</sup> guns and traps to catch their prey. Part of the motivation behind their enlistment in the labour trade was the Islanders desire for firearms, the possession of which increased the power of any descent group, making them more capable of defending their island territory against marauding neighbours and their young men against predatory European recruiters. A gun and ammunition was usually amongst the first items purchased by any first-indentured labourer during the initial two decades of the labour trade. These firearms were used to shoot game in Queensland but to show the extent of their use and availability a diversion is necessary, outlining the arguments which raged around the Islanders and their guns.

Many Europeans argued that it was irresponsible to give guns to "uncivilized people". Guns bought in Queensland were being used in Melanesia against Queensland recruiters and there was fear in some quarters of a Kanaka uprising in the colony. Further, the Islanders were accused of treating their dangerous weapons like toys, accidentally

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85. Salt and fresh water crocodiles as long as four metres were once quite common in the water courses of the Pioneer valley as far up river as Hamilton station west of Mirani. John Spiller shot nine crocodiles during his years in the district; Charles Romilly shot twenty-seven around *Pleystowe*. One of the largest estuarine crocodiles ever recorded in the world was shot from the verandah of the Leichhardt hotel in River street Mackay. It was an unbelievable 9.754 metres (32 feet) long. *MM* 28 September 1867, 8 July 1870, 8 April 1871, 30 January 1875, 11 March 1876, 10 October 1877, 27 October 1883, 27 May 1886, 28 August 1886, 5 March 1889, 13 July 1889, 23 March 1893, 28 March 1905; Roth, *Port Mackay*, 85-9; Finch-Hatton, *Advance Australia*, 32; *The Australian Encyclopaedia* (Sydney, 1958), v. 3, 130.
86. N.H. Smith. *The Good Old Days: "My life story"* (Mackay, 1979), 21-2.
87. *BOHC* 6Ba:1 (IT & AM & WM); *BOHC* 7Bb:2 (NJF); *BOHC* 48Bb:1 (NJF); *BOHC* 51Ba:2 (HSQ); *BOHC* 81Bb:2 (MS & ONF).

discharging them and irresponsibly depleting the previously prolific wild life of the colony:

immediately the labourers are paid off, almost the first article they buy is a gun, and with the least possible delay their anxiety is to make use of it, something after the manner of a child with a new toy. To such an extent is this being carried out that small birds, of every description, are fast disappearing from the neighbourhood. 88

On Sundays Islanders roamed about in large shooting parties of ten to fifty men, often all armed. By the mid-1870s Europeans in Queensland had had enough and the British government was expressing concern about the number of guns available in Melanesia, many of Queensland origin. Europeans at Mackay were the first in the colony to take steps to deal with the problem. On 19 May 1877 Mackay district employers held a meeting to discuss the legality and practicalities of disarming their Melanesian servants. There were 1,400 Islanders in the district about 1,000 of whom were thought to possess firearms.<sup>89</sup> With only five police stationed at Mackay there was fear of resistance, so the Native Police were called in from Nebo to help supervise the disarming. In the event everything went smoothly and all guns were peacefully collected. On Friday 25th and Saturday 26th thousands of pounds worth of guns and ammunition were confiscated without thought of recompense.<sup>90</sup>

The 1877 seizure of the Islanders' guns at Mackay seems to have been a local, not colony-wide initiative, but it came at a time when the Colonial Office was increasingly concerned about the sale of arms to Pacific Islanders. The first direct approach by the Colonial Office to the Queensland government on the subject was not made until later in 1877. The British government supported by the Queensland Immigration Agent wanted to stop Islanders in Queensland from being supplied firearms. The Queensland government was reluctant to do anything that

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88. *MM* 7 July 1880.

89. *QSA* CPS 10B/G1, Goodall to CS, 18 May 1877.

90. *Qlder* 1 April, 2 December 1876; *MM* 12, 16, 19, 26 May 1877; *QSA* CPS 10B/G1, Goodall to Freudenthal, Fort Cooper, 8 May 1877; *Mitchell* BL322-1, Martin Diary, 19 May 1877.

might reduce the number of Melanesians arriving in the colony. Besides, they argued, the Islanders were paid in coin and were free to spend their money as they chose.<sup>91</sup> In early 1878 the colonial government acquiesced to Britain to the extent of using a clause of the *Navigation Act* to limit Islanders returning home to one gun and six pounds of powder each, but the limit seems seldom to have been enforced. The only attempts to regulate their use of guns were occasional prosecutions under regulations forbidding the discharge of firearms on a Sunday.<sup>92</sup>

Through the late 1870s and early 1880s planters continued to complain that the reckless use of firearms by Islanders was decimating wild life, but while shopkeepers continued selling them guns the Islanders continued to use them. Henry Ling Roth, unmindful of his planter friends bagging game in the name of sport, squarely blamed the Islanders for the decline in wild life around Mackay:

In the case of the many square miles of richly-timbered country being brought into cultivation, the larger fauna and avi-fauna very soon disappear, while the smaller animals may still find refuge in the vegetation left on the outskirts of the cultivated area. This disappearance has been specially emphasized in Mackay by the destructiveness of the Kanakas, who, since 1866 (*sic*), have been in the habit of making Sunday excursions, and never spared young or breeding individuals. 93

The main argument against selling guns to Melanesians was never because of the damage they might do to Queensland's wild life or human beings: the real problem was in the islands. Queensland was supplying guns which Pacific Islanders used to shoot each other, recruiters and Europeans resident in the islands. Queensland expected Britain to

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91. Parnaby, *Britain and the Labour Trade*, 173-4.

92. *MM* 16 January, 16 February, 23 March, 24, 26 July 1878, 7 July 1880. See also Table One of Appendix Five: All known charges against Melanesians in the Mackay district, 1871-1907, Items 16 and 17.

93. Roth, *Port Mackay*, 81. Also refer to *QSA COL/A369*, In letter 4770 of 1883, H.L. Roth to CS, 13 September 1883; *MM* 1 February 1881, 11 September 1883.

police the Pacific but refused to contribute anything toward naval expenditure. Queensland refused to stop selling guns while the Islanders could still buy them from French and British nationals in the Pacific.

In 1881 Britain proposed an international convention on the sale of arms in the Pacific, but felt that Queensland had to agree first, not wanting to be embarrassed by a colony repudiating an Imperial agreement. The long awaited change came in November 1883 when S.W. Griffith's Liberals came to power in Queensland. It was Griffith, as seen above, who attempted to close down the recruiting trade in 1885. One of his first moves in this direction was to regulate the traffic in firearms. In November 1883 Queensland prohibited the export of firearms, inviting the other Australian colonies and Fiji to apply a similar ban, which they did in early 1884.<sup>94</sup> Melanesians in Queensland who had purchased firearms prior to the proclamation were able to take their weapons back to the islands, but the supply should then have ceased. As so often happened with labour trade regulations the proclamation which became Clause Nine of the 1884 Act was never strictly enforced.<sup>95</sup> Recruiters no longer gave guns as trade gifts for recruits but Islanders in Queensland continued to purchase guns albeit clandestinely, smuggling firearms, ammunition and explosives back to their islands throughout the trade. Police files for the later period show that Islanders in Queensland still had ready access to guns.

Guns were obviously the most powerful weapons available to the Melanesians; weapons which they used against wild life and occasionally men. But all were equally if not more proficient in using spears, bows

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94. Parnaby, *Britain and the Labour Trade*, 174-5.

95. MM 19 March 1889; QSA POL/J29, Sub. Insp. Bundaberg to Ch. Insp. Brisbane, 26 March 1898. This file shows that Islanders had little trouble obtaining firearms or transporting them back to their islands. It contains reports from Cairns, Ayr, Ingham, Maryborough and Bundaberg but none from Mackay. For example, in 1898 the Bundaberg police confiscated the following from Islanders living in that district: 18 shotguns, 29 rifles, 17 carbines, 6 revolvers, 2 pistols, ammunition, powder, shot and caps, plus a number of native weapons.

and arrows, tomahawkes and clubs which they manufactured in Queensland and had in large supply. With guns, traditional weapons and traps they were able to obtain a significant amount of bush food to supplement their employer-provided diet. Just as their various weapons could be used on land they also could be used procuring sea foods.

Fishing was a favourite past-time for many Melanesians in Queensland, particularly those originally from coastal areas where fishing was their main livelihood. The bulk of the Pioneer valley's Melanesian population have always lived within a few kilometres of the sea in the area bounded by Habana, Marian and Homebush. All had fresh water streams nearby; most were within easy reach of coastal estuaries; mangroves and the tidal reaches of the river.<sup>96</sup> They used to the full available natural materials, maintaining stone fish traps,<sup>97</sup> making fishing nets, lines and crab pots from vines and bark.<sup>98</sup> Such was the abundance of fish in the Pioneer river last century that in a single afternoon with the aid of a line or small net it was possible to catch a score of fish together weighing forty kilograms. A weekend fishing expedition broke the monotony of wage labour with the bonus of providing an alternative to plantation food. When Melanesians from the same island had a chance to get together at a weekend, fishing was always one of their major activities.<sup>99</sup> In 1888 Rongura from Ngela island was working on *Victoria* plantation. One Saturday evening he walked over to *Pleystowe* on the banks of the Pioneer to visit the Ngela labourers there, staying the night with them. On Sunday morning they showed him over the mill then all went fishing until lunch time.<sup>100</sup>

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96. The Pioneer river is tidal as far up stream as Dumbleton.
97. There is a stone fish trap in Reliance creek coastward of Habana and Etowrie but opinion is divided as to whether the trap was built by Aborigines or by Melanesians. Certainly it was Melanesians who maintained it in the late nineteenth century. *BOHC* 30Ba:2 (NS); *BOHC* 48Ba:2 (NJF).
98. *BOHC* 51Ba:2(HSQ); *BOHC* 48Ba:2 (NJF); *BOHC* 30Ba:2 (NS); *BOHC* 7Bb:1 (NJF).
99. Early European reports also extol the pleasures of fishing in the Pioneer. *The Gentleman's Magazine* (1880), 614 ("Among the Sugar-Cane"); *BA & NZ Mail* 9 May 1901, Supp. xiii (E.S. Rawson).
100. This trivial event, which must have had countless parallels, is documented because of its aftermath. On the Sunday afternoon Rongura became involved in an inter-island fight between Tana and other Solomon men and was killed. *QSA* COL/A650, In letter 2566 of 1891. Copy of Deposition, Regina v's Tonacka and Daley, 18 November 1888.

## PLATE 27



a. Hugh McCready and his employees down by Baker's creek on *Palmyra* plantation. (Photo: *JCUNQ*: History)



b. Islanders used their bows and arrows to hunt as well as to pose for photographs. (Photo: *JCUNQ*: History)

The river was rich with whiting, bream, flathead, mullet, and even gropers. In 1878 some Islanders from *River* plantation caught a 163 kilogram fish in the Pioneer, which roasted in a stone oven, provided a feast for a multitude.<sup>101</sup>

Both in the Islands and in Queensland traditional Melanesian fishing practices intertwined marine science, socially approved magic and general customs. Phases of the moon and stars shaped their fishing procedures: night fishing was seldom undertaken by Islanders at Mackay for fear of malevolent spirits; full moon was not the time to go fishing; when the Seven Sisters constellation was high in the night sky the time was right for crabbing.<sup>102</sup> Fishing magic was used, special spells cast and plants rubbed along fishing lines and nets to attract fish.<sup>103</sup> Different groups observed different taboos. Jack Marau from Guadalcanal would not eat crabs because of the image of female reproductive organs on their undershells. Australian-born Malaitans at Maryborough and Mackay when young were not allowed to eat crabs. Andrew Bobongie from Lau Malaita would never eat flathead or sole because of a Lau custom.<sup>104</sup> Much of the traditional knowledge recounted by the older Islanders today seems to have been gained down at the beach around roaring fires while the old men and women wistfully reminisced about custom and history. Noel Fatnowna, born at Mackay in 1929, remembers the beach gatherings of his childhood:

For entertainment in those days we used to go fishing on Saturday nights as soon as Dad came home from Church. We walked through Wilson's swamp, Shann's lake, and down to a place called the Oyster bed or the Ti-trees, then on to Black's beach. We walked through the mangroves on paths cut years before. When we got there they would show us great big heaps of white, bleaching oyster shells, in the New Hebridean language called *kurri-kurri*, meaning mussels. We ate these shells, these *kurri-kurri*, ... and fish cooked in hot stones....

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101. *MM* 30 January 1878.

102. *BOHC* 47Bb:2 (NJF); *BOHC* 1Ba:1 (ONF & HSQ); *BOHC* 7Bb:1 (NJF).

103. *BOHC* 31Bb:1(GA); *BOHC* 11Bb:3 (FP).

104. *BOHC* 4Ba:2 (WM); *BOHC* 81Bb:2 (MS & ONF); *BOHC* 51Ba:2 (NJF); *BOHC* 41Bb:1 (HB & ONF).

We would go down on to the beach or down along the creek and make a big fire. The old people loved to sit around the fire and tell us their stories of the far away places of our homeland. Great orators they were. We would stay there until Sunday evening.... The reason we were down there, as I recall it now was not to go fishing but because this was where we learned our ways. 105

To the original Melanesian immigrants food involved far more than sustenance and taste. Land gardens were located where one had primary kinship rights. Sea harvesting similarly was limited to specific areas. Gardening and fishing were private, tranquil activities. Food came from the ground where the dead were buried. The dead, one's ancestors, controlled fertility, were given the first fruits of the garden and punished transgressors of taboos. Pigs raised for sacrifice to the dead could not be used for general eating. Sorcerers collected food scraps to hex their victims. Their world was carefully balanced to preserve equilibrium and food was integral to the balance. Food was life and death in a manner never dreamed of by the author of the official Queensland dietary scale.

#### 4. European medical care of Melanesians

The first buildings on the site of Mackay township were erected in late 1861. The town grew during the 1860s to include most essential community services - shops, hotels, a church and graveyard<sup>106</sup> - but there were no medical practitioners nor a hospital. Residents had to travel to Bowen or Rockhampton in order to consult a doctor unless one happened to be passing through. Dr Belinfanto spent a short period in the district about 1865 and a Bowen doctor T.J. O'Grady saw patients at Mackay while a prisoner *en route* to Rockhampton gaol in March 1866. D.H. Dalrymple a failed medical student who set up Mackay's first chemist shop in 1865 or 1866, provided most of the early medical care for the district.<sup>107</sup> The first resident medical practitioner was Robert McBurney who arrived in 1869 aged twenty-four. Trained in Belfast and Edinburgh, he was appointed Government Medical Officer in Mackay and made Superintendent of the public hospital opened in 1872; he worked in the district until his death in 1899. McBurney was responsible for medical examinations given to the Islanders when they first arrived at Mackay and with Dr C.H. Clarkson (appointed specifically to attend to the Islanders from 1883 to 1889) was the doctor who had most to do with the Islanders. Other doctors came and went, some of dubious reputation. H.H. Finch-Hatton claimed that in the late 1870s he found one of Mackay's medical men drunk in a town gutter.<sup>108</sup>

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106. The first grave yard was in the reserve on the river bank between Bryon St North and Goldsmith Rd, shown on Fitzgerald's 1864 survey of the township and reproduced in this thesis as Map One of Chapter Seven. The Mackay Cemetery Trust was formed in 1875 and a new cemetery established on the site of the present-day Mackay Cemetery near Rockleigh. The other major cemetery was opened at Walkerston in 1885. *MM Jubilee 1912*, 18 (Daniel Shepherd); *MCCA : Mackay Cemetery Trust Record of Meetings*, 29 March 1873 to 26 August 1936; Pioneer Shire Health Dept.: Walkerston Cemetery Trust Record of Burials, 1885+.

107. *MM Jubilee 1912*, 21 (James Robb) and 2 (G.F. Bridgeman); *MM 4* April 1866 in 4 April 1966; 29 May 1867; Waterson, *Biographical Register*, 43.

108. *MM 17* February 1869, 16 May 1899, 31 December 1906; *QSA CPS 10B/G1*, Goodall to CS, 4 December 1876; Finch-Hatton, *Advance Australia*, 28.

Not until the district's immigrant population was 1,400, 700 of them Melanesians, was there any formal move to establish a hospital. J.E. Davidson of *Alexandra* wrote to the local paper in 1870 calling for support to petition the government for a hospital. The next year public meetings were held, a permanent Hospital Committee resulting. By August 1872 a two room hospital had been built, capable of accommodating six patients. McBurney was in charge.<sup>109</sup>

During their first decade in the district, 1867 to 1876 the Islanders had increased in number from seventy to 1,600. Probably about 400 of them died during this decade; many others suffered from serious illnesses.<sup>110</sup> The town hospital was intended primarily to serve the European population: Islanders were admitted grudgingly, and then only to a special Kanaka ward. Chinese and other Asians were also segregated from European patients. This was not peculiar to Mackay: racial segregation in Queensland's public hospitals was common at least until the 1930s. In the nineteenth century public hospitals were a relatively new concept. The government was reluctant enough in accepting responsibility for care of poor whites without also supplying beds to blacks. Medical knowledge of disease causation was still extremely primitive. Cholera, typhus, typhoid and dysentery, diseases which thrived in dirty insanitary conditions, were rife. Often disease was blamed on poverty and inferior background rather than the actual cause. Europeans were at their most racist when it came to disease and sickness: a black savage in the next hospital bed would have been too much for most European patients to cope with; Kanaka diseases were not the sort of thing a self-respecting European wanted to know about. In the 1860s and

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109. *MM* 6 August 1870, 29 April 1871, 24 August 1872, 4 January 1873, 1 April 1905.

These sources do not give any indication where the building was erected. I presume that the first hospital was in the hospital reserve (where the Islander hospital was built and where the present Mackay Base Hospital is). Recent statements about the present hospital suggest that it was constructed in 1882, not 1872 (*MM* 12 June 1980), but I am convinced that there was a European hospital already on the reserve when construction began on the Islander hospital in August 1882.

110. Refer to Table Six.

1870s European medical care was seldom wasted on Melanesians.<sup>111</sup>

The 1868 Act was as vague about medical treatment for the Islanders as it was for so many matters, merely specifying that all expense incurred by the government in affording hospital relief to Islanders was to be met by their employers.<sup>112</sup> Employers spent as little as possible on maintaining the health of their workers. Those who developed degenerative diseases or in other ways became incapacitated were paid off and sent home.<sup>113</sup> Very few plantations had hospital buildings in the 1870s so sick labourers stayed with their fellows in grass huts or barracks. Planters contracted the town doctors (at Mackay usually McBurney) to visit their plantation when any of the Islanders were ill. If surgery was necessary McBurney took the patient to the public hospital, but in less serious cases in the early decades sick Islanders were dealt with on the plantations. There they might be administered patent medicines or folk remedies by the employer or overseer: or have medicines or treatment prescribed by a doctor of pharmacist; or receive traditional Islander remedies involving herbs, folk-lore and magic.<sup>114</sup>

Because of high mortality and poor health amongst Islanders in the 1870s, specifically at Maryborough but also colony-wide, a series of investigations into Melanesian physical well-being in the colony was made between 1876 and 1880. These were outlined earlier in the chapter. The most substantial result of this government-sponsored introspection (concerned more with Queensland's reputation than with humanitarian principles) was the establishment of separate Islander hospitals com-

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111. F.B. Smith, *The People's Health 1830-1910* (London, 1979), 265-84; E. Barclay, *The Public Health Movement in Queensland, 1859-1900* (B.A. Hons. thesis, University of Queensland, 1969); J. Pearson, *The Growth and Development of Social Services in Queensland* (B.A. Hons. thesis, University of Queensland, 1955); Loos, *Aboriginal-White Relations in North Queensland*, 755-9; May, *The Chinese in Cairns and District*, 184-8.

112. 31 Vic. No. 47.

113. *QSA* CPS 10B/G1, Goodall to Hewitt & Co., 25 May 1876.

114. *Qlder*, 1 January 1876; *QSA* COL/A453, In letter 622 of 1886, A IPI C.A. Forster to IPI A.R. Macdonald, 18 January 1886; Mercer and Moore, 'Indigenous religious and magical practices', 19-80.

plete with medical officer, financed by the Islanders' employers in each district.<sup>115</sup> The 1880 Act imposed an annual hospital capitation fee of ten shillings on employers for every Melanesian they employed in the four districts where hospitals were built; in 1885 the capitation fee was doubled. The segregated hospital system operated from 1883 until 1889 at Maryborough, Mackay, Ingham and Johnstone (Innisfail), after which the hospitals closed and the capitation fee was no longer collected. The cost of the buildings and hospital expenditure beyond the capitation fee was met from the Pacific Islanders' Trust Fund, containing the employers' return passage deposit and a portion of the wages of deceased Islanders.<sup>116</sup>

For some years before the special hospital was established there had been concern at Mackay about overcrowding of the Kanaka ward in the local hospital,<sup>117</sup> which although much expanded from its 1872 size was still inadequate. But when the government proposed a new hospital for the Islander-half of the population the plan met with little approval, particularly from their employers, who considered the capitation fee an unwarranted imposition. Those who had built hospitals on their plantations resented having to finance a central Islander hospital. If for example a planter employed one hundred Islanders, from 1883 he was taxed an extra fifty pounds a year, and from 1885 until 1889 an extra one hundred pounds. Finances aside, employers doubted the wisdom of bringing together all sick Islanders in the district under the one roof, and with good cause. Removing sick Islanders to hospitals, away from their friends, often had a detrimental effect on their recovery. Isolation on plantations did at least stop the spread of contagious diseases, and bringing enemy island groups

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115. K. Saunders, 'The Pacific Islander hospitals in colonial Queensland: the failure of liberal principles', *JPH*, v. 11:1 (1976), 32-3.

116. Vic. 44 No. 17, Cl. 28 and Vic. 49 No. 17, Cl. 6 and 7; Vic. 48 No. 12, Cl. 3, 4 and 11. *Report upon the financial condition of the Pacific Islanders' Hospitals, presented to both houses of Parliament* (Govt. Printer, Brisbane, 1887).

117. In 1878 the Mackay Planters' Association set up a Sub-committee to investigate the problem. Mackay Planters' Association Minute Book, 5 (?) May 1878.

together in a hospital ward could inadvertently lead to bloodshed.<sup>118</sup> One such incident occurred on CSR's *Victoria* plantation at Ingham in June 1883. Unknowingly sick Islanders from antagonistic tribes were locked together at night in the plantation's hospital. Next morning one was dead, one seriously ill and others injured, the result of a bloody night battle.<sup>119</sup> The government delayed the hospital plan until 1883 to allow employers time to straighten out their finances, but insisted that the plan proceed.

Table Four

Melanesian Mortality in the Mackay District 1881-1890			
Year	No of Melanesians	Melanesian deaths	Average Melanesian mortality rate for Queensland (per 1,000)
1881	2087	(135)	64.74
1882	3008	368	82.64
1883	3845	323	75.31
1884	3697	823	147.74
1885	3400	(336)	98.84
1886	2686	(156)	58.20
1887	2077	(122)	59.00
1888	1911	112	64.70
1889	2121	123	59.20
1890	2816	98	44.50

Note: No death statistics for Melanesians at Mackay have been located for 1881 or 1885-7. The figures are an estimate based on the Mackay Melanesian population and the average death rate for all Melanesians in Queensland.

(Source: Refer to Table Six.)

118. *Ibid.*, 3, 24 March 1882; CSR 142/1251 (IN), Stuart to Knox, 27 March 1882; QSA COL/A341, In letter 3959 of 1882, IPI A.R. Macdonald to U CS 23 March, 5 May 1882 and H.L. Roth (Secretary of the Mackay Planters' Assoc.) to CS, 12 July 1882.

119. Saunders, Uncertain Bondage, 34-5.

A significant increase in the mortality rate in 1882 did much to overcome planter opposition to the hospitals. The only suitable site for the Mackay Islander hospital was on the already designated twenty-three acre hospital reserve on the river bank, the site of the present day Mackay Base Hospital. The European hospital with its Kanaka ward was already there when in August 1882 tenders were called to construct the Islander hospital at a discreet distance to its rear. It was larger than the European hospital and the building's plans (reproduced here as Plan Two) show it to have been quite substantial. At the start of 1884 the Islander hospital was complete but far from operational.<sup>120</sup> To cope with increasing sickness amongst the Melanesians the building was rushed into service ill-equipped. Dr J.A. Thompson, the first Superintendent found himself in March 1884 with 189 patients when "for all practical purposes no hospital exists."<sup>121</sup>

The site was poorly drained and unfenced. There was no fresh water and few essential items like bedding. Thompson complained that there was no operating theatre, mortuary, post-mortem rooms or isolation wards for patients with infectious diseases. Employers wanted their moneys worth and brought in their sick. As one employer wrote in April 1884:

I utilised this establishment by sending a couple of boys to kill or cure. 122

The government wanted to spend as little money as possible and seemed to think that Melanesians did not need the same sanitary standards as European hospital patients. Dr Thompson berated the Under Colonial Secretary on this point:

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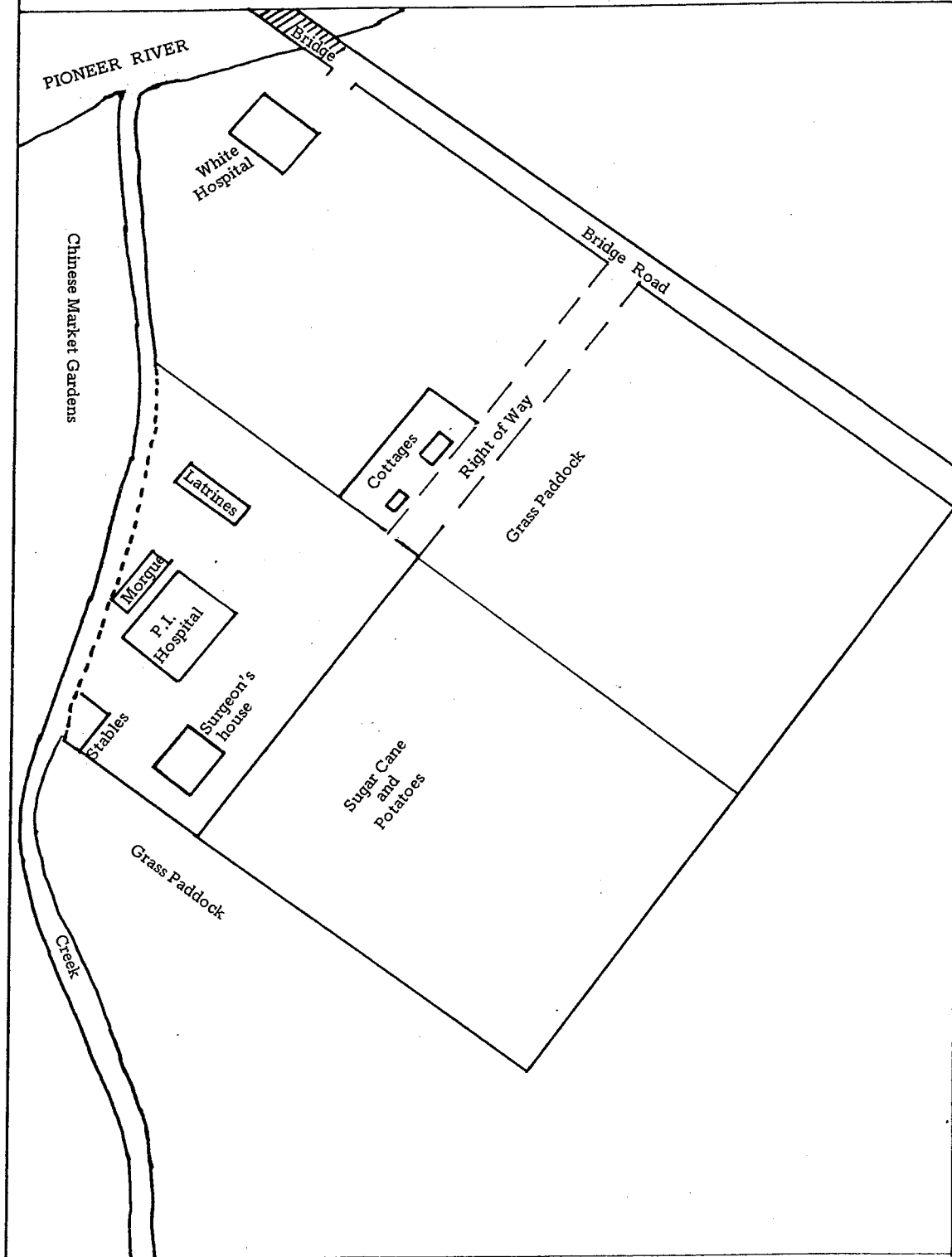
120. *MM* 2 August 1882. No details are available about exactly what equipment was provided, but a list of the contents of the similar Islander hospital at Maryborough are available in *QSA* HOS 3/1.

121. *QSA* COL/A384, In letter 1945 of 1884, J.A. Thompson to U CS, 13 March 1883.

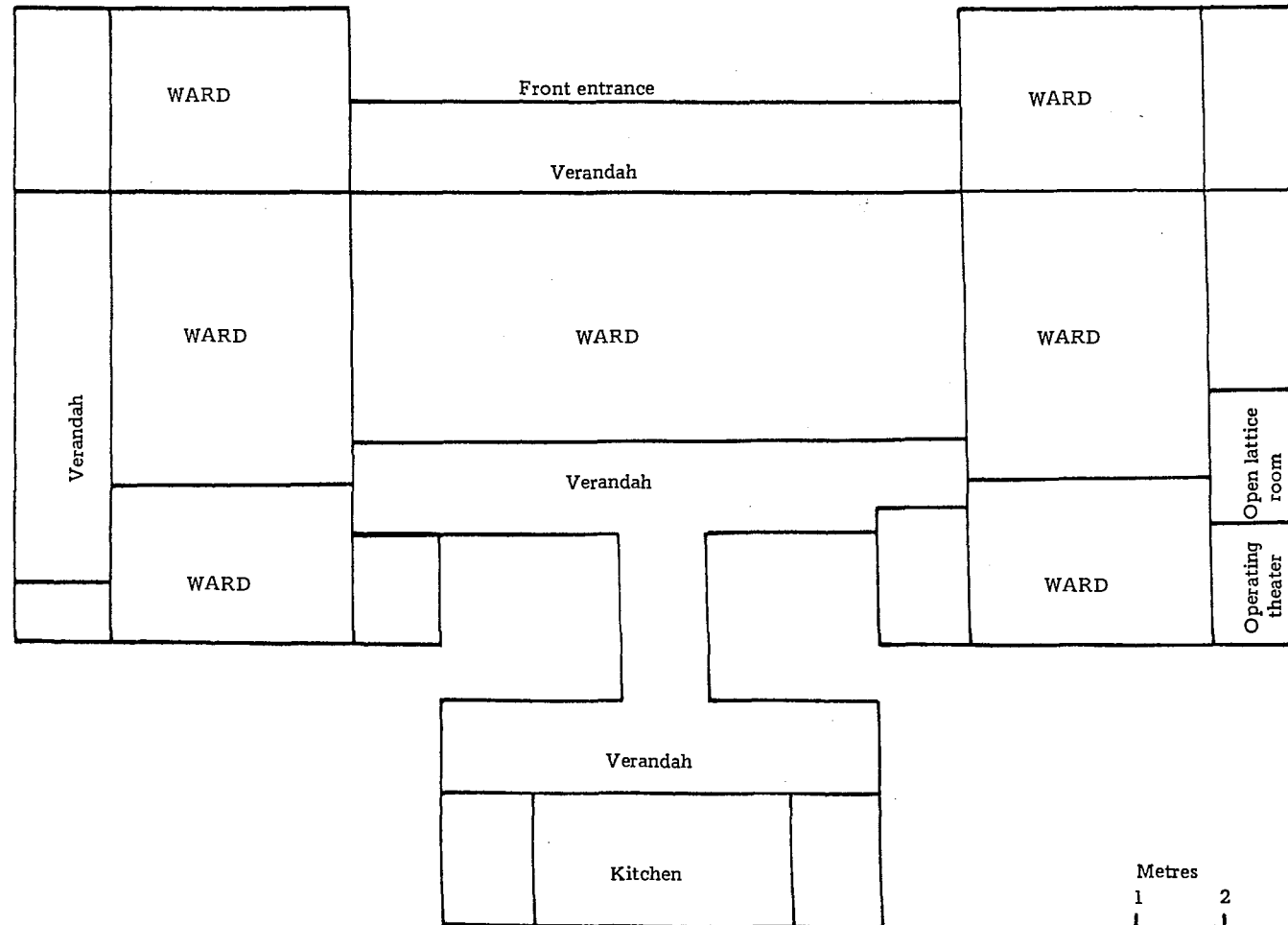
122. *MM* 23 April 1884.

Plan One: Mackay Hospital Reserve 1890

(Source for Plans One and Two: QSA COL/346)



Plan Two: Pacific Islander Hospital at Mackay circa 1889



Source: QSA Co1/346

...this institution is intended for the cure of disease...the conditions under which disease is curable are known not to vary with the race attacked but to be essentially the same for all men. 123

The hospital was so crowded that patients were camping in surrounding cane fields. Premier Griffith, aware of the dangerous situation developing, agreed to appoint a second surgeon and order a halt to admissions until conditions improved and the over-crowding was reduced.

Horrorific stories circulated, inflamed by the press. The hospital was depicted as a charnel-house reeking of dysentery and death, an image not far from the truth. Thompson was unfortunate enough to have opened his ill-equipped hospital in the midst of the worst epidemic ever to affect Melanesians in Queensland. The sugar boom was at its peak and extra labour was desperately wanted. Recruits were becoming difficult to get in the New Hebrides and the Solomons so recruiters diverted their attention to the islands off New Guinea. Beginning in May 1883 the first of these recruits arrived in Queensland. Between then and November 1884 approximately 3,000<sup>124</sup> Islanders from New Guinea, New Britain, New Ireland, Woodlark and the D'Entrecasteaux and Louisiade archipelagos arrived at Queensland ports on thirty-two voyages. The first of them to reach Mackay were probably those on the *Fanny* in July 1883. Subsequent investigations proved that the vast majority of these north Melanesia recruits had been kidnapped and did not understand the terms of their agreements. Plucked from their homes, frightened and unable to adapt to wage labour, strange food and surroundings, and the new disease environment, they died. In Mackay 323 Islanders died in 1883 from the Islander population of 3,845. In 1884 823 died in a

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123. QSA COL/A385, In letter 2230 of 1884, Thompson to U CS, 17 March 1884.

124. Peter Corris gives their number as 5,797 which does not appear to be correct. Price and Baker give the number as 2,808. My own count using statistics covering 1883 and up until the end of June 1884 come to 2,596. With only five months missing from my statistics Price and Baker's figure seems more likely to be correct.

Corris. 'Blackbirding' in *New Guinea Waters*, 86; Price with Baker, *Origins of Pacific Islands Labourers in Queensland*, 116; *QVP* 1884, v. 2, 770: *Pacific Island Immigration 1883-4*.

population of 3,697.<sup>125</sup> Almost all the dead were the newly arrived north Melanesians. Melanesian communities, isolated each from their neighbours, did not have any resistance to alien diseases; north Melanesians fared worst of all. They lacked immunity to many common diseases and they also failed to weather Queensland's winter months.

Thompson, criticized by the planters, by a particularly vicious anonymous article in the *Queensland Leader*, himself sick with fever, horrified by the pathetic dying Islanders, resigned in April.<sup>126</sup> His place was taken by Dr C.H. Clarkson on transfer from the Maryborough Islander hospital. Clarkson slowly began to pull into shape the shambles left by the unfortunate Thompson. The building was fumigated, disinfected and painted; its drainage and sanitation were attended to. By the end of 1884 his hospital had ninety patients (as opposed to Thompson's 189), and there had been a reasonable decline in the death rate. From January to April 1884 thirty-five percent of the patients died (169 of 493). From June to December nineteen percent of Clarkson's patients died (150 of 754).<sup>127</sup>

The Mackay Islander Hospital was one of four built in the colony, the others being at Maryborough, Ingham and Johnstone (Immisfail). Even with the capitation fee they were a losing concern financially. Appendix Six is a summary of expenditure and revenue in these hospitals, particularly the Mackay hospital, 1883 to 1887. The Mackay hospital was by far the most expensive to operate: the four were £19,079 in debt by the end of 1887 but the Mackay hospital accounted for £10,712 of the

125. Table Six.

126. *MM* 29 March, 23 April 1884; *Queensland Leader* 1 March 1884. The article was written by George de Latour, Government Agent on the *Jessie Kelly* which sailed from Mackay on 23 February 1883. *QS'tic* 1884: Polynesian Emigration. Saunders, 'Pacific Islander hospitals', 42-6 gives a detailed description of the 1884 fiasco at the Mackay Islander hospital.

127. *QSA* CQL/A414, In letter 729 of 1885, Clarkson to Committee of Management of Mackay Pacific Islander Hospital, 2 January 1885. Even so, Clarkson was not dealing with all Islander patients in the district. Over the same period June to December thirty-three Islanders died without being admitted to the hospital. *QVP* 1885, v. 2, 999.

sum. The debit was recouped from the Pacific Islanders' Fund, but the government fearing further indebtedness which would have had to have been met from public funds, gradually curtailed the hospitals, first reducing staff, then closing down each hospital. First Maryborough closed, then Ingham and Johnstone, and finally Mackay.

Employers met at the Mackay Court House in October 1889 to discuss closing the hospital. They said that it was too expensive to run, Islanders working farther down the valley were too far away to make use of it, and the number of Islanders in the district was decreasing. The government agreed that the Mackay Islander Hospital be closed on 31 December 1889. The planters had disbanded their private hospitals when the government hospital system was introduced; then the government blythly told them to hurry up and get them re-established. What to do? Dr Clarkson, still Superintendent, arranged to operate the government hospital as a private venture, charging three shillings per day for each patient. The biggest plantations (*Homebush, Habana, Palms* and *Te Kowai*) refused to use his services as they had made arrangements with other doctors. J.E. Davidson of *Palms-Te Kowai* wanted the hospital's medicines and furnishings sold to his and other plantations. Clarkson battled the employers and the government but finally closed the hospital in June 1890. His last correspondence in the Queensland Archives concerning the hospital makes his feelings clear. He wrote to W.H. Ryder, Assistant Under Colonial Secretary in November 1890:

There is no hospital accommodation worthy of the name on any plantation and if any serious illness arose the white hospital is quite unable to cope with it from deficiency of space. After a gross (*sic*) experience I am concerned that a grave act of carelessness if not on inhumanity was committed by the Polynesians Dept. ... in allowing over two thousand of a sickly race to be left without proper provision in case of an Epidemic.... If they are sold [the hospital buildings] you will be having boys dying all over the country, as in the old times for want of a house of refuge...If you have any say in the matter give the poor Devils a chance. 128

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128. QSA COL/A346: Mackay Kanaka Hospital closure. C.H. Clarkson to Ass. U CS Rhyder, 20 November 1890. There are more than thirty pieces of correspondence in this file all directly concerned with the closure of the Mackay hospital.

Table Five.

<u>In-Patients cared for at the Mackay Base Hospital</u>						
<u>1891-1905</u>						
(Total number, and the number of Asians, Aborigines and Melanesians.)						
Year	Total In-patients	Asians	Aborigines	Melanesian		
				In-patients		Deaths in the District
				Total	Deaths	
1891	181	16	1	10	2	151
1892	157	7	1	8	2	104
1893	204	13	0	10	1	74
1894	247	12	0	17	2	55
1895	278	21	0	24	4	51
1896	311	22	3	37	0	61
1897	338	17	3	28	(discontinued counting)	59
1898	583	33	0	91		48
1899	(discontinued counting)	23	0	58		48
1900		27	0	72		29
1901		21	0	81		44
1902		28	3	60		44
1903		33	7	33		38
1904		32	8	27		20
1905		30	11	25	n.a.	

(Sources: Mackay Base Hospital Register and Table Six of this chapter.)

Clarkson was correct in his fears. Over the next six years 496 Islanders died in the Mackay district. Only eleven of these were being cared for at the public hospital when they died. The others were in plantation hospitals, or as the plantations were growing fewer, working for small farm operators and cared for by farmers' wives or by their fellow labourers. Clarkson's Islander hospital was used by hundreds of Islanders each year from 1883 until 1889. Although much of this period was when the greatest sickness occurred and the Islander population was at its height, all through the 1890s on an average there were still more than 2,000 Islanders in the district at any time. During the decade and a half after the Islander hospital closed only 581 Islanders were admitted as In-patients to the Mackay Base Hospital: an average of thirty-eight Melanesian patients per year.<sup>129</sup> The only ameliorating factors to the government neglect of the Islanders health during the 1890s and 1900s are that there were no major epidemics and perhaps fifty percent of them had lived in Queensland for more than three years. Having survived the change in climate, food and disease environment they were less likely to have needed medical care. But as ever, first-indenture labourers suffered the full brunt of the labour trade. In the early twentieth century the immigrant Melanesians and their children continued to receive medical care in a separate ward of the Mackay Hospital. As late as 1937 a segregated ward was in use for Melanesian and other 'alien' patients.<sup>130</sup>

It is a serious question whether hospital treatment of the Melanesians in the nineteenth century had any beneficial effect whatever. Medical knowledge of the day did not make it possible for any special treatment to be given for serious illnesses. Removal of the patient from contact with fellow workers might have been beneficial to them in the case of infectious diseases, if it occurred early enough, but often the infectious disease would have been transmitted to others before the patient was seen to be sufficiently ill to require removal to the hospital. In the case of minor illness the hospital might have

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129. Refer to Table Five.

130. *BOHC* 36Ba:2 (ONF); *BOHC* 47Ba:2 (NJF).

been able to take prophylactic action by ensuring rest, warmth and adequate nourishment, thus preventing the development of more serious diseases such as pneumonia; but on the one hand this possible effect might well have been offset by the patient's fear of his or her surroundings, and on the other most cases removed to the hospital would be already serious. The hospitals were of dubious value.

5. Melanesian mortality : 1867 - 1907

One concrete piece of evidence which has always seemed proof of harsh treatment of Melanesians in Queensland is their high death rate. Over the four decades of the trade, each year on an average, fifty Melanesians in every 1,000 died in Queensland.<sup>131</sup> These were young men and women in the prime of life, aged mainly between sixteen and thirty-five. The death rate amongst Europeans in Queensland over similar years - of all ages - was fifteen per 1,000. The death rate amongst European males in the colony of similar age to the predominantly male Melanesian population, was closer to nine or ten in every 1,000.<sup>132</sup> The general Queensland mortality rate was average for Australia and acceptable by world standards. The Queensland Melanesian mortality rate (which at its height in 1884 was 147 per 1,000) was unacceptable by humane standards anywhere.<sup>133</sup>

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131. Refer to Table Six of this chapter. No figures are available for the years 1863-1867 and 1872-1874. The average mortality rate, calculated for all other years 1860 to 1904 is actually 52.056 per 1,000, but the figure varies dramatically: from 18.20 in 1870 to 147.74 in 1884.

132. R. Cilento and C. Lack, *Triumph in the Tropics: an historical sketch of Queensland* (Brisbane, 1959), Plate LXXII (figures provided by the Dep. Govt. Statistician of Queensland); Saunders, *Uncertain Bondage*, 200; QSA PRE/88; AUS CSD to RG, 4 December 1901.

133. For example the mortality rate for Collingwood (an industrial inner-city Melbourne suburb) in the 1880s was between 19 and 21 per 1,000. The rate for the City of Melbourne and the rest of the Melbourne metropolitan area was similar. The mortality rate for the colony of Victoria in the 1880s was between 14 and 17 per 1,000 inhabitants. At a similar time the rate for England as a whole was 19 per 1,000; for London 20; for Liverpool 26; and for Manchester 29.

The Queensland Melanesian death rate is excessive even when compared with that of British troops serving in tropical areas in the nineteenth century. A.H.B. Barrett, *The Making of an Industrial Environment: Collingwood, Victoria, 1851-91* (M.A. Thesis, Melbourne University, 1970), 176; P.D. Curtin, 'Epidemiology and the Slave Trade', *Political Science Quarterly*, v. 83 (1968), Tables One to Three, 203-6; QVP 1880, v. 2: Report of the excessive mortality amongst Islanders on R. Cran and Cos. plantations, Maryborough. By Drs Wray and Thomson, 416-7.

Table Six

## MACKAY DISTRICT MORTALITY : MELANESIAN AND TOTAL POPULATION

1867 - 1904

MELANESIAN					MACKAY DISTRICT		
YEAR	MACKAY MELANESIANS	MACKAY MELANESIAN MORTALITY	MACKAY MORTALITY RATE PER 1000	QUEENSLAND MORTALITY RATE PER 1000	MEAN POPULATION	MORTALITY	MORTALITY RATE PER 1000
1867	70	(2)				11	
1868	109	(5)		47.90	658	4	
1869	(250+)	(5)		21.50		8	
1870	(300)	(5)		18.20		18	
1871	700	(30)		43.10	1440	55	38.19
1872	(700)					50	
1873	(900)					78	
1874	(1200)					n.a.	
1875	(1700)	(144)		85.11		172	
1876	1600	(101)		63.60	3766	150	39.83
1877	1400	(71)		51.39		110	
1878				85.87		245	
1879				55.78		182	
1880				62.89		160	
1881	2087	(135)		64.74	5787	259	44.75
1882	3008	368		82.64		507	
1883	3845	323		75.31		520	
1884	3697	823		147.74		1192	
1885	3400	(336)		98.84		594	
1886	2686	(156)		58.20	11082	280	25.26
1887	2077	(122)		59.00		275	
1888	1911	112	58.6	64.7 *		214	
1889	2121	123	57.9	59.2		220	
1890	2816	98	34.8	44.5		230	
1891	2450	151	61.6	55.9	10538	255	24.19
1892	2102	104	49.4	39.4		225	
1893	2081	74	35.5	47.4		215	
1894	2168	55	25.3	40.6		170	
1895	2167	51	23.5	29.6		195	
1896	1941	61	31.4	31.6		205	
1897	1780	59	33.1	32.8		180	
1898	2074	48	23.1	23.8		215	
1899	1684	48	28.5	32.8		135	
1900	1775	29	16.3	29.3		120	
1901	1475	44	29.8	30.1	11144	114	10.22
1902	1708	44	25.7	36.8		160	
1903	1301	38	29.2	27.1		170	
1904	1260	20	15.8	22.5		105	

Sources: Parnaby, *Labour Trade*, Table 3, 205; Annual Report of the Queensland Immigration Department; Census Reports; Statistics of Queensland; Table One of Chapter Six. (\* the figures below are from a different source.)

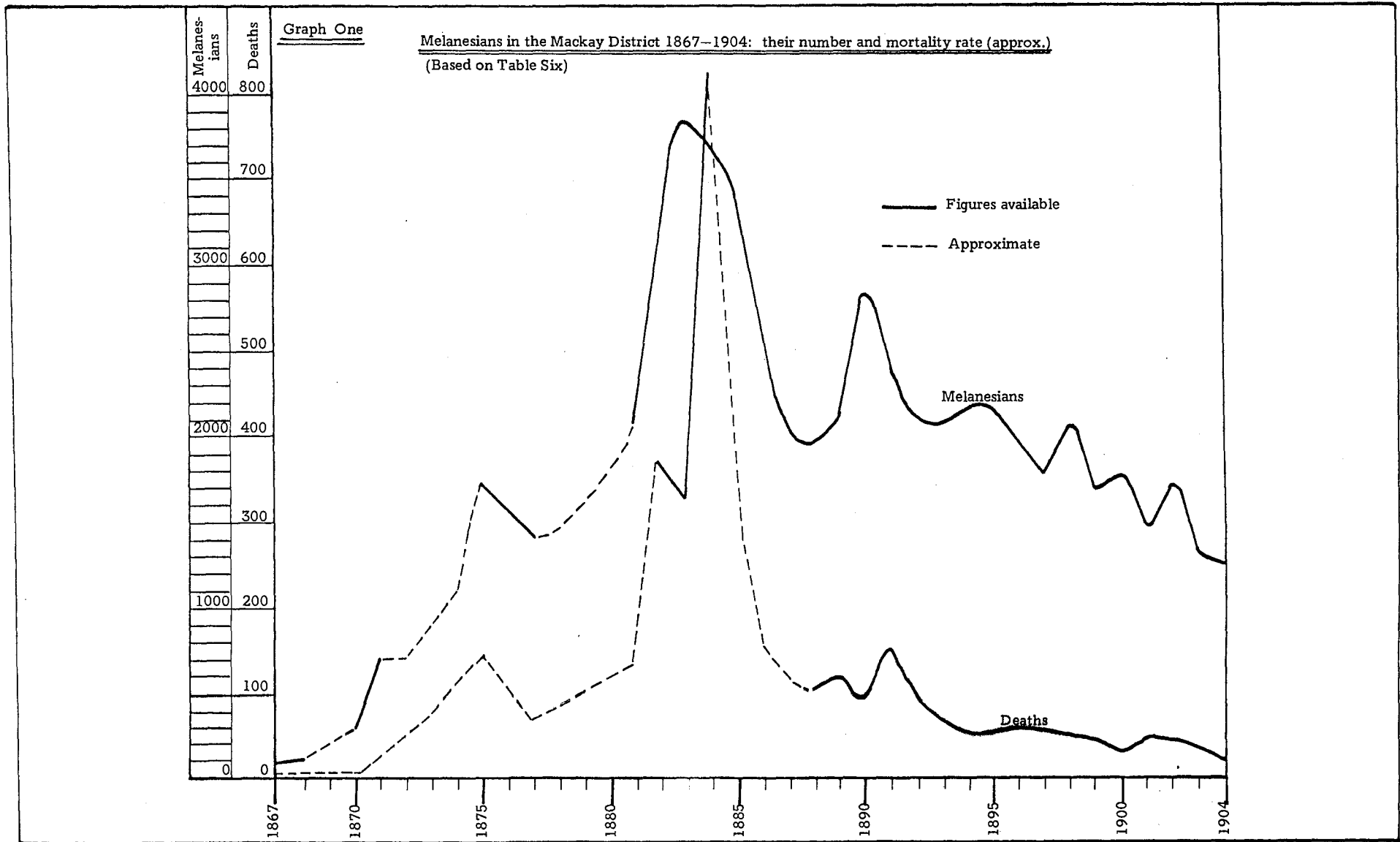
Table Seven

SAMPLE OF MELANESIAN DEATHS IN QUEENSLAND

1867 - 1895

Deaths relating to:	Mackay Newspapers & Government Archives 1867 - 1907	Mackay Cemetery Trust Register 1875 - 1884	Maryborough Islander Hospital Register 1884-1888	Mackay Hospital Register 1891-1895	Total
1 Cardiovascular System	2	2	1		5
2 Respiratory System	2	25	95	9	131
3 Gastro-intestinal tract	2	20	41	2	65
4 Nervous System	1	1	9		11
5 Genito-urinary System			8		8
6 Haemopoetic System					0
7 Endocrine Gland		1			1
8 Bones, joints & Collagen diseases		1	4		5
9 Infectious diseases	59	1	10		70
10 Skin diseases		1	2		3
11 Degenerative diseases					0
12 Fever, debility and un- classifiable	8	4	26		38
13 Chemical agents	5				5
14 Trauma	22	6	5		33
15 Suicide	18		1		19
16 Murder	31	1			32
TOTAL	150	63	202	11	426

(The sources and the explanation of the classification can be found at the end of the chapter.)



Based on Table Six it seems fair to estimate that between 4,000 and 5,000 Melanesians died in the Mackay district between 1867 and 1907. The problem is to assign and apportion causes of these deaths. Table Seven is an analysis of a 426 person sample of Melanesian deaths which occurred in the Maryborough and Mackay districts during this time. In the 426 cases the cause of each death can be defined reasonably accurately. 202 of the cases came from the Maryborough Islander Hospital register between 1884 and 1888. The remaining 224 are all from Mackay: drawn from a cemetery register from 1875 until 1884 (63 deaths); the Mackay Base Hospital register from 1891 until 1895 (11 deaths); a thorough reading of the *Mackay Mercury* from 1867 until 1907 and a sampling of Queensland government archival records (150 deaths). The combination of records gives a wide chronological and source outline, providing a fair balance between deaths from diseases as well as those caused by trauma, suicide and murder. The number of deaths attributed to trauma, suicide and murder is likely to be reasonably accurate, given the violence of the incidents and the public interest in them. The sample is less accurate in its listing of deaths from natural causes (Items 1 to 12), although the emphasis on respiratory, gastro-intestinal and infectious diseases is accurate.

Historians have not seriously attempted to analyse the high degree of ill-health and death amongst Melanesians in Queensland. Peter Corris and Kay Saunders merely catalogued the more logical of the causes suggested by contemporary observers: long hours and monotonous work; poor accommodation and inadequate food rations; unaccustomed clothing; poor drainage and inadequate sanitation; lack of immunity to disease and the low standard of medical care.<sup>134</sup> Although these points are part of the reason, they fall short of the whole. The remainder of this chapter is an attempt to remedy this myopia from the widest possible perspective.

The explanation for the high mortality cuts two ways - European and Melanesian - allowing no simple answer. The legislation governing

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134. Corris, *Passage, Port and Plantation*, 69-84; Saunders, *Uncertain Bondage*, 278-328, and 'Pacific Islander Hospitals'.

the Islanders' living conditions was inadequate and even as it stood was not always enforced. Police Magistrates and Inspectors of Pacific Islanders could do little other than occasionally inspect the labourers' quarters and rations and ensure that they were paid correctly. They seldom were able to arrive un-announced and usually only reported on conditions when they were called out to investigate a complaint. Regardless of their claims to have the Islanders' confidence, Islanders were as loath to complain to them as they would have been to the police or any other European.<sup>135</sup> Conditions on plantations and farms owed more to the discretion and good will or otherwise of individual employers and their managers and overseers. Early planters started off living in bark and grass huts in similar manner to most new settlers on Queensland's northern frontier in the 1860s and 1870s. They expected their white and black employees to rough it as well and were not averse to cutting financial corners to save money. Often the savings came from cheating on the quality of the Islanders' food, clothing and accommodation. Some showed a callous disregard for the lives of their labourers, but more often they were exhibiting a lack of medical knowledge and the racist *Weltanschauungen* typical of Europeans in that era.

In addition, Melanesians faced other problems more akin to their own culture. They were quite unused to the type of work they were expected to perform in the fields and mills, and unused to constant day-long labour of any kind. The climate differed from that of Melanesia. The food provided for them, although generally nutritionally adequate,

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135. Further information on the role of the Police Magistrate or Inspector of Pacific Islanders can be found in Chapter Six, Section Three: Legislation and Administration, 1868-1919. According to one Bundaberg Inspector, a planter in that district used a flag system operated from his house to give him advance warning of any unexpected arrival by the Inspector or the government doctor. At Mackay Police Magistrate Goodall and the Inspectors tried to inspect regularly all plantations and farms employing Melanesians but it would not have been difficult to anticipate their arrival, direct them away from the quarters of sick Islanders or improve the quality and quantity of any meal under inspection. Goodall claimed that the Islanders trusted him. While this may have been the case with time-expired labourers, it is unlikely that first-indenture labourers understood his power over them and kindly disposition towards them.

*Steering Wheel and Society and Home*, No. 8, 2 August 1937; *MM* 13 October 1877; *QSA CPS 10B/G1*, Goodall to IA, 27 March 1874.

was different in type and presentation from that to which they were used in the islands. Epidemiologically many Melanesians, particularly those new to the colony, fared poorly. And lastly and importantly, there were vast conceptual differences between nineteenth century European and Melanesian views of sickness and death; differences that although not primarily responsible for the high mortality rate, certainly exacerbated it considerably. These vast differences in outlook passed unknown to nineteenth century writers and have either been ignored or glossed over by historians content to draw conclusions from contemporary European sources without sufficient effort to utilise anthropological and medical knowledge which lead to different conclusions.<sup>136</sup>

From the first Melanesians behaved differently from Europeans at Mackay when faced with illness and death. Some of these first arrivals began work at Balnagowan in May 1867. Four months later one of them, spitting blood, died, but not at Balnagowan: he ran away towards the south, dying at Bell and Atherton's property on Plane creek twenty kilometres away. Others were employed by Fitzgerald and Davidson on *Alexandra* plantation. As his diary entry for 2 October 1867 Davidson wrote:

One South Sea Islander very ill, would not take medicine of any kind. 137

The next morning the man was dead. These two Melanesians were the first of thousands who came to Mackay as part of a circular-migration

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136. A short historiography listing studies of Melanesian migration to Queensland can be found in the Introduction of this thesis. In the last two decades several historians have written substantial tracts describing the conditions under which Melanesians lived on Queensland's sugar plantations and farms. None has stressed the differences in approach to disease and death between the Melanesians and Europeans, all too much bound by a Euro-centric approach. This particularly applies to: Parnaby, *Britain and the Labour Trade*, Chapter 7; Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, Chapters 4, 7, and 11; Corris, *Passage, Port and Plantation*, Chapter 5; Saunders, *Uncertain Bondage*, particularly Chapter 8, and her section in Evans, Saunders and Cronin, *Exclusion, Exploitation and Extermination*, Part Two.

137. MM 14 September 1867; (refer to Map Four of Chapter Four ; JCUNQ: Davidson's Journal, 2 - 3 October 1867.

they were unable to complete, cheated by death of the promised return to their islands. Their reactions to serious illness, to run away and to refuse medication, were typical of thousands of other Melanesians who found themselves ailing in a foreign land surrounded by alien people and points to several differences between Melanesian and European attitudes to nutrition, health, sickness and death: differences so vast that when Europeans and Melanesians came face to face on the plantations there was an enormous physical and spiritual clash.

European ignorance of the aetiology of tropical diseases placed the diseases beyond the control of nineteenth century medicine, a situation compounded by treatments based on ignorance of human physiology, irrelevant pharmacopoeia, as well as ignorance of Melanesian beliefs concerning disease causation. The classic work on the epidemiology of migration is by P.D. Curtin. Europeans knew from an early date that they experienced high mortality rates overseas; their explanations were overwhelmingly racial: Europeans believed that Negroes and other native races were immune to the effects of a hot climate, while Europeans were particularly liable to die in the same environment. This argument provided the cornerstone of pseudo-scientific racism, as used in Queensland to justify importing coloured labour to work in the tropical environment. But as Curtin suggests, epidemiology provides another answer:

People die from disease, not from climate, and the world contains many different disease environments, each with a range of viruses and bacteria that differ in varying degrees from those found elsewhere. Physical environment and climate obviously play a role, but epidemiological differences exist even where physical environment is the same.... Diseases themselves change radically over short periods; new strains of virus or bacteria appear, and old strains die out.

...In the longer sweep of history over the past two or three millennia, increasing intercommunication has made disease environments more nearly alike, not more diverse; but each breach of previous isolation has brought higher death rates, as unfamiliar diseases attacked populations whose environments provided no source of immunity. ... 138

The most significant immunities are acquired, not inherited. Childhood disease environment is the crucial factor in determining the immunities among the adult population. Some immunities are inherited, and as a result the genetic make-up of each succeeding generation will shift slightly toward a tendency to mild rather than fatal infection ;

In general...the individual will be safest if he stays in the disease environment of his childhood; if he migrates, a fully effective set of immunities to match a new disease environment could not be expected to appear in his generation. 139

The more isolated a human community the more specialized and individual its disease environment is likely to become: Melanesia with its small isolated communities was sheltered, the whole from the outside world, and each part from the other. As a result the interaction between Melanesians in Queensland, as well as between Melanesians and Europeans, Aborigines and Asians was devastating to newly-arrived recruits. The three year length of the circular-migration also exacerbated the situation, constantly exposing a fresh supply of labour to a new disease environment.

Doctors often hid their own inadequacies behind diagnoses inspired by current racial theories, divining natural unhealthiness as the cause of unknown diseases and accepting skin colour as a guide to Melanesian health. A memorable example appeared in Drs Wray and Thomson's 1880 report on excessive mortality on R. Cran & Co.'s Maryborough plantations:

The general impression seems to be the blacker the name the stronger he is, and that the paler the Islander the more readily is he attacked by the sickness, and there can be no doubt that the finest men are those from Tanna and they are very black... The smaller races and those which readily succumb are pale in colour...140

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139. *Ibid.*, 197.

140. *QVP* 1880, v. 2: Report by Drs Wray and Thomson, 414.

A diagnosis of malingering often covered medical problems beyond the practitioner's competence, satisfying pre-conceived beliefs held by the employer, but doing little for the unfortunate sufferer other than gaining him a kick in the ribs from an overseer.<sup>141</sup> Although some plantations had hospital buildings<sup>142</sup> none had resident doctors, relying instead on planter or overseer administered cures - more often than not a large dose of castor oil. If home remedies failed a town doctor might be called out to the plantation or the patient could be transferred to a segregated ward at the town hospital.

The most common ailments for which the Islanders were treated involved diseases of the gastro-intestinal tract. Often the deaths were listed as having been caused by diarrhoea, an unpleasant symptom but not the cause. The actual causes were typhoid or amoebic and bacillary dysentery, the result of placing Melanesians in a new disease environment with a change in diet and generally unsanitary conditions. Gastro-enteritis is not usually a killer disease, but when complicated by Melanesian beliefs in the supernatural cause of sickness, it may well have proved fatal. Newly arrived Melanesians struck down with gastro-enteritis could logically have attributed the sickness to ancestral anger or attack from other malevolent spirits. Amoebic and bacillary dysentery results from poor sanitation, the common house fly carrying the infection from faeces to food. Poor sanitation on the plantations and at the hospital exacerbated the problem.<sup>143</sup> The

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141. One of the best examples of Melanesian oral testimony concerning malingering was provided by Malaitan Henry Bobongie of Mackay. Malaitan Tom Robins was working at Mosmann in far North Queensland in the 1890s. One morning he stayed in bed, too ill to go to work. The overseer arrived and poked Robins with a stick to force him to get up. Robins did as requested but unexpectedly punched the overseer and knocked him through the doorway. The result was a trip to Court for Robins. *BOHC* 41Ba:3 (HB).
142. Table Two shows that in 1880 seven out of sixteen plantations in the Mackay district had a separate hospital building.
143. Neglected sanitation was a common failing of pre-twentieth century health and medicine. Before condemning the conditions on plantations and in the Islander hospitals one should read about conditions in slum and working class areas of European and Australian cities of the time. Urban sanitation was just as bad, if not worse. Smith, *The People's Health*, Part 1: Dirt and Disease, 195-248; M. Pelling, *Cholera, Fever and English Medicine, 1852-1865* (London, 1978); Barrett, *The Making of an Industrial Environment*: Collingwood; Davidson, *Marvellous Melbourne*.

Islanders lack of immunity made the problem worse. The ignorance of nineteenth century doctors did nothing to help. A typical diarrhoea cum dysentery cure of the time was to place a teaspoon of ground pepper into a pint of milk. The mixture was boiled and allowed to stand. Then the superlatent fluid was removed and the patient drank the mixture whilst it was still hot. Pharmacological analysis suggests that this unlikely treatment may well have worked in cases of minor gastro-intestinal infection,<sup>144</sup> but if this was the type of treatment used in the Islander hospitals it was no wonder that so many of their patients died.

Doctors were more often used to certify death than to prolong Melanesian life. In early decades many employers did not even bother to notify government officials when an employee died. The dead were buried on the plantations. Before Christian missions to the Melanesians were established at Mackay in the late 1880s most were completely pagan, and even if espousing Christianity it was only as a thin veneer over their pagan beliefs. Melanesians, pagan or Christian, had their own concepts of disease and death, working in often unrealized antagonism to rudimentary nineteenth century European medicine.

In Melanesia medicine, magic and religion are inextricably intertwined. Illness and death were not the natural corollaries of disease, epidemics or old age; sickness always had a supernatural cause. In this regard Malaitans are typical of other Melanesians. Traditionally when individual Malaitans fall sick it is because they have broken some societal rule; the sickness is a direct punishment for misconduct inflicted by ancestors whom they must appease in order to survive. Epidemic illnesses are caused by foreign spirits originating in other dialect areas on Malaita or from other parts of their "eight isle" world. These antagonistic foreign spirits constantly move around in the heavens among the sun, moon, stars, clouds and rainbows. Each

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144. *CSR* 142/122, page 16: Cure for Dysentery, 7 March 1882. The boiled milk formed rennet which is a folk remedy for diarrhoea. The volatile oils in the pepper would have acted as an irritant and diuretic with possible anti-cholinergic and anti-spasmodic effects. I am indebted to Drs Peter Keary and John Mackerell for this information.

descent group lives on land surrounding an ancestral shrine. *Mamana* is centrally focused on the shrine like the vortex of an invisible cyclone around the periphery of which wander malevolent foreign spirits.

Daniel de Coppet, anthropologist working with the 'Are 'are of Malaita has written extensively on 'Are 'Are attitudes to death and disease. The 'Are 'are divide their dead into two categories: those whose illness was caused by their personal ancestors; and those murdered by living people. People murdered, either by sorcery or by some physically violent means, must be avenged to maintain societal equilibrium. Conceptually joined with the murdered are women who die in child-birth, suicides, and infants who die within forty days of birth. Even after vengeance their bodies remain unburied, left to rot in the forest. They receive no mortuary rites and their spirits (better translated as "breath" or "image") are lost forever. Unavenged spirits wander with the foreign spirits, encircling the ancestral vortex above the shrine. When ancestors are perceived as responsible for individual illness and proper mortuary rituals take place, after some years the individual becomes an ancestor at the shrine. After two more generations the 'Are 'are ancestor leaves the funeral site and goes to the islet of Marapa in Marau sound at the east end of Guadalcanal. Later still the ancestor slips off to another island called Lost-for-ever in a realm beyond the foreign spirits of the "eight isles".<sup>145</sup> North Malaitans share a similar view, with variations. Fataleka ancestors, with all ancestors from the "eight isles" travel first to Gaomae (Ramos) a small islet midway between Malaita and Gao (Isabel), then on to the island of the dead, Maumolu naunitu (San Jorge) off the southern end of Gao.<sup>146</sup>

Pagan Malaitans in the Solomons today attend medical clinics and stay in hospitals, but under circumstances carefully controlled so as not to clash with their traditional beliefs and practices. Similarly the divergent views of disease and sickness held by Europeans and

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145. I am indebted to Dr. D. de Coppet for this description of 'Are 'are beliefs. The material was taken from a draft of his paper 'The life-giving death: a Melanesian case', presented at a Seminar on the Anthropology and Archeology of Death, London, 14-15 June 1980, revised in November 1980.

146. The Fataleka information was provided by Ishmael Itea, 14, 23 October 1976.

Melanesians in nineteenth century Queensland could have been bridged by careful legislation and understanding on the part of officials, the employers and the medical profession. But the beliefs of the Melanesian labourers were never treated with sufficient respect by Queensland's Europeans. Europeans treated Melanesians in ways they thought were best for the Melanesians, not in ways acceptable to their Melanesian employees or patients. Legislation governing the health of the labourers was basic and inadequate. European aetiological, physiological, pharmacological and racial knowledge was limited, leaving little chance that they could understand Melanesian health problems. Melanesians worked as indentured labourers for masters who viewed them as mentally inferior. Europeans, carving a new agricultural industry out of virgin tropical bush were interested in the strengths of their Melanesian labourers, not their weaknesses in facing disease; nor traditional Melanesian reactions to disease and death - sorcery and violent retaliation. For their own part Melanesians could do little to explain their reactions and feelings. They spoke many different languages and dialects, and pidgin English only at a basic level. The cultural gulf between the employers and employees was seldom bridged.

6. First-indenture labourers: acclimatization

Subsistence cultivation in Melanesia is bound up with the culture. Interpersonal relationships are expressed in primary or usufructuary cultivation rights, separation of gardens used by males and females, and produce trading between coastal and bush people. Gardens act as a focus for exchange cycles maintaining societal equilibrium, with garden taboos being observed and first-fruit offerings made to ancestors. A garden is a place to be alone, but reciprocity ensures that when an individual undertakes a large gardening task his or her kin will lend a hand. On Malaita gardens are the center of physical productivity and fertility. Menstruating women can spoil a garden, love-making is an inappropriate garden activity and murder rewards are as integral to garden productivity as is taro cultivation.

Put rather beautifully by Ian Hogbin, "a Malaitaman's garden is his castle".<sup>147</sup> Malaitan men live together in a *beu* (men's house) and each village and *beu* is public domain. A husband takes his evening meal at his wife's house, has sexual intercourse there, but never stays for an entire night for fear of damaging his garden's fertility, returning to sleep in the *beu*. Malaitans congregate gregariously at markets and religious ceremonies, but gardening, which occupies a large part of their time, is a private activity. Hogbin's description of To'ambaita settlements and gardens in the 1930s is typical of the surrounds and attitude to gardens in all *wane tolo* settlements even today:

The settlements are separated by stretches of jungle so thick that the narrow paths are often mere tunnels through which a pale green light filters from overhead. The country is broken and rough, and in order to reach a near neighbour it is sometimes necessary to drop into a deep ravine and climb the otherside. Even the precipices are clothed with tall trees, clinging lianas and vines.

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147. Hogbin, *Experiments in Civilization*, 51.

Here and there the growth is cut away, and one comes upon a garden surrounded by a stout fence to keep out the wild pigs. The principal crop is taro, but sweet potatoes and bananas are also grown, as well as a few yams. 148

...once a fence has been erected around the garden no one approaches except by invitation, and a man with a message to deliver to another will rather sit and wait for him in the *mbiu* [*beu*] than follow him half a mile to his garden. 149

Men and women work unobserved, at their own pace, but large and productive gardens are part of the strength of any *wane baita* or powerful descent group. When extra labour is needed, as when clearing land for new gardens, reciprocal obligations are called into play. Young men without gardens are obliged to help their kin and the surrounding community. Requests for assistance are seldom ignored; laziness or shirking is regarded with contempt.<sup>150</sup>

The Queensland recruiting trade was a vast affair: 62,000 Pacific Islanders brought from more than eighty Melanesian, Polynesian outlier and Micronesian islands spread over millions of square kilometres of ocean. Its effects on individuals participating was just as complex. Some survived better than others. A Lifu man from the Loyalty islands could have found himself working in Queensland alongside people from New Britain or Ontong Java, thousands of kilometres to the north. The Malaitan "eight isles" perception of the world was typical of other areas of the Pacific; their world was small and outside its immediate environs they were at the mercy of strange people and malevolent spirits. Chapters Two and Three presented the general pattern of recruiting, focused on Malaita. Some recruits - particularly between 1863 and the mid-1880s - were blatantly kidnapped; some were under age; some enlisted more to benefit their descent groups than themselves; some went willingly but reacting to lures offered by cajoling recruiters keen to fill quotas.

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148. *Ibid.*, 18.

149. *Ibid.*, 51.

150 *Ibid.*, 46; Ross, *Baegu*, 228.

For those who were kidnapped the wrench from their island world was both violent and traumatic. The best documented example of mass kidnapping concerns the Melanesians kidnapped from islands off New Guinea in 1883 and 1884. They were brought to Queensland against their wills, fared poorly epidemiologically and failed to adapt to plantation life. Hundreds died at Mackay alone. In 1885 Inspector A.R. Macdonald at Mackay was asked to report on the reasons for their high mortality:

I think the death rate among the Islanders from New Guinea returned per *Victoria* would have been much greater than among ordinary run Islanders landed in Mackay from Solomon Islands and New Hebrides because the latter knew perfectly well before coming what they will have to do and the nature of their treatment which they learn from return Islanders and therefore they do not become homesick where as the former came to work entirely strange to them and not knowing for what they had come. 151

The New Guinea recruits fared markedly worse than any others, but they were not the only group whose high mortality rate and general debility in Queensland led to a ban on recruiting from their islands. In 1888 Dr Clarkson, in charge of Mackay's Islander hospital, reported to the Immigration Agent that:

In my opinion exactly the same conditions which attended the introduction of natives from New Ireland & adjacent groups will attend that of the natives of Santa Cruz and some parts of Malaita and Pentecost. 152

The high Santa Cruz mortality rate led to the temporary closure of the labour trade there in 1888 and its permanent closure in 1893. Also in 1893 recruiting was suspended at Tongoa in the New Hebrides, but potential Tongoa recruits merely paddled to nearby islands, enlisting

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151. QSA CRS/150: 1885 Report by IPI Macdonald on mortality among New Guinea recruits.

152. QSA COL/A807, In letter 3082 of 1888, top numbered to 8768 of 1896, Clarkson to IA, 5 April 1888.

from there, so the ban could not be enforced.<sup>153</sup> Europeans were well aware that some island groups fared poorly if transferred to a new environment - Bishop Patteson had this problem with his mission students in the early 1860s<sup>154</sup> - but they lacked our knowledge of epidemiology to explain the phenomenon.

By the middle years of the trade most Queenslanders were satisfied that kidnapping had stopped, that giving trade goods to the recruit's kin was not the same as buying a slave, and that Islander working conditions in Queensland were reasonable. The trade's detractors focused more on the consequences of importing cheap black labour into the colony - not on the island end of the trade. They were correct that the majority of Melanesians came of their own volition, like Malaitans, managing to include the labour trade within existing cosmological exchange cycles. But it is easier to intellectualize about their circular-migration decades after the event than to have actually participated. Melanesians leaving their small-scale societies equipped with a limited

153. Ivens, *Sa'a and Ulawa*, 226; QGG 13 October 1893; QSA COL/A807, Out letter 4963 of 1893, Premier McIlwraith to Governor Norman and In letter 591 of 1894, Ripon to Norman, 30 November 1894; Price with Baker, 'Origins of Pacific Island Labourers', 144.

154. Patteson noted in his diary entry for 28 July 1861:

I find from experience that natives of Melanesia, taken to a different island, however fertile, dry and apparently healthy, do seem to be affected by it, I most modify my plans, try as soon as possible to have more winter schools, and, what is of more consequence, I must reconsider the whole question of native teachers. If a great amount of sickness is to be the result of gathering scholars around me at an island, I could do, perhaps, more single-handed, in health, and with no one to look after, then with twenty fellows of whom half are causing continual anxiety on the score of health.

C.M. Yonge, *Life of John Coleridge Patteson: missionary Bishop of the Melanesian islands*, v. 1 (London, 1874). 530.

Charles Darwin made reference to Patteson's experience in his *The Descent of Man*; the danger to health of removing Islanders to a new environment was known to science, even if the cause was not.

C. Darwin, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection: or the preservation of favored races in the struggle for life and The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (New York, Random House, 196?).

cosmology actually went through a physically and mentally rending experience which many failed to survive. Any of the recruits, even the most voluntary, could have found life in Queensland more than that for which they had bargained on the beaches of Melanesia. A large proportion of the Melanesians who died in Queensland were first-indenture labourers. The longer any Melanesian lived in Queensland the more chance he had of a natural life expectancy. But the labour trade was not designed for immigration, rather it was a circular-migration over three years, which although acceptable in terms of exchange cycles, only compounded the death rate.

Planting, maintaining and harvesting large open permanent fields of sugar cane, using steel tools bereft of religious significance, bore little resemblance to Melanesian small plot swidden farming. Sugar labourers worked long continuous hours under supervision from overseers who resorted to punishment to control them: punishment administered illegally by direct physical force and legally through the punitive powers of the Courts. The work regime, implements, vehicles and machinery of the sugar industry were all alien to Melanesian labourers working in their first term of indenture. Often forced to begin continuous labour immediately they arrived at a plantation or farm, they found the hours and type of work onerous, the machinery and implements unwieldy, even frightening. Some contemporary observers noted a sense of despair and depression when they first realised the true nature of their three-year agreements. Kinder employers took this bewilderment into account, allowing them time to become accustomed to the long hours of hard work, not pushing them too fast too soon. The less understanding employers saw no reason for not gaining full work value from their hired servants immediately their arrived.<sup>155</sup>

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155. The government set no mean maximum number of hours. Most reports, oral and documentary, suggest that Islanders usually worked for 9 or 10 hours a day, 5½ days a week.

Saunders, *Uncertain Bondage*, 280-4; *QSA COL/A807*, In letter 3082 of 1888, top numbered as 8769 of 1896, Clarkson to IA, 5 April 1888; *QVP* 1880, v. 2, 415; Drs Wray and Thomson's 1880 Maryborough Report; *BOHC* 7Ba : 1 (TA); 7Bb : 1 (NJF).

Physical causes of death are usually reasonably obvious - diseases, accidents etc. - but what is harder to divine is the less exact background causes. Causes labelled "depression" by the most enlightened contemporary observers and a "pure funk" by the less enlightened. In 1880 Dr C.H. Clarkson attributed some of the deaths to depression:

it is an impossibility for a savage to understand the nature of continuous work...the men do not understand their bargain and labour under a feeling of disappointment and consequent depression. 156

Also in the 1880's Harold Finch-Hatton, an aristocratic Englishman, made his own assessment of what ailed the Islanders:

They are strong sturdy men as a rule, capable of doing a good day's work, but their constitutions seem to be perfectly incapable of standing against any sort of illness. Directly a Kanaka gets ill he lies down and apparently very often dies for no reason at all except pure funk and the lack of wish to get well. 157

What both were trying to interpret was the Melanesian reaction to a new, often dangerous world. Unfamiliar surroundings and people, the new work regime, different food, sickness, isolation in hospitals: all experiences which had to be faced by young Melanesians out of their natural element, away from their families and ancestors. Their logical interpretation of illness was that some person around them or some malevolent spirit was the cause. Mental withdrawal was common, suicide not unknown. 158

Occasionally first-indenture labourers expressed a preference to work in a particular district. Ralph Shlomowitz has written that:

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156. QSA COL/A807, Clarkson to IA, 5 April 1888.

157. Finch-Hatton, *Advance Australia*, 163.

158. Refer to Table Seven, Item 15: (Suicide) and to the comments on sorcery in relation to the total number of deaths, in the last section of this chapter.

Bundaberg and Maryborough were noted as preferred districts; Townsville, the Herbert River, and Cairns were not liked; while the reports about Mackay were mixed. 159

The only record of Mackay being disliked by new recruits dates from 1884 in the New Hebrides, a direct aftermath of a drunken riot which occurred at the Mackay racecourse on Boxing Day 1883 when men from the New Hebrides and the Solomons were killed, injured and imprisoned.<sup>160</sup> The alleged preference for Maryborough and Bundaberg is perplexing given that wages and conditions were reasonably similar in all areas of Queensland, and that southern Queensland is more prone to cold, even frosts, than Mackay or more northerly areas. The scattered references to Melanesians preferring one district to another probably have several explanations: whether there were a number of plantations with large labour forces or mainly small farms; whether a different number of labourers from a certain island were known to be in a district; and certainly climatic considerations. Exposure to cold weather and related unhygienic use of clothes and blankets are part of the explanation for the high mortality rate.

Melanesia lies between the Tropic of Capricorn and the Equator. Of the nineteenth century Queensland cane growing areas only the districts north of Rockhampton<sup>161</sup> are above the Tropic. Although not extreme in world terms, the climatic change did affect the chances of survival of the Melanesian labourers. Even at tropical Mackay Melanesians had to contend with climatic conditions and related problems concerning clothing and bedding which they had never faced in the islands. In 1888 Dr Clarkson listed Mackay's climate as a prime contributing factor to Melanesian mortality:

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159. Shlomowitz, 'Market for indentured Melanesian labour', footnote 21.

160. C.R. Moore, 'The Mackay Racecourse Riot of 1883', in B.J. Dalton (ed.), *Lectures on North Queensland History: third series* (Townsville, 1979), 181-96.

161. Sugar cane was grown at Yepoon near Rockhampton from the 1880s but the industry there was not successful. *MM* 12 February, 31 October 1889.

Absurd as it may sound to southern ears a Mackay cold season is a very trying time to a true tropical resident especially where conditions of depression exist. You will note that in the list [of names] sent to me the majority of arrivals were in winter and nearly all of the deaths were from lung disease very soon after. The causes of death are absolutely correct as they were all verified by post mortem exam. 162

Back on their islands Melanesians went naked except for minimal genital cover. Cold nights were combatted by closing themselves into their houses and lighting fires: on Malaita on cold nights in the mountains people still cover themselves with pandanus mats and sleep beside the ash beds of their hearths. In Queensland they had to adjust to European conditions and methods of dealing with cold weather. They faced early morning work starts, which in winter from Mackay south occasionally meant temperatures as low as frost point. They were encouraged to sleep in wooden buildings, often without fireplaces, and had to learn to use clothing and blankets as substitute methods of keeping warm.

Through the early years of European settlement in the Pioneer valley the mean shade temperature was 17°C. min. and 27.5°C. max. The average annual rainfall was 1,730 millimetres falling over 130 days.<sup>163</sup> Seasonal variations were slight but still significant to Melanesians from an even hotter climate. During the summer months Melanesians preferred to wear as little clothing as European modesty permitted and bartered away blankets and clothes made unnecessary by the heat. 1870s photos of the Islanders working the fields at Mackay usually show the men in loin cloths and the women in skirts, bare from the waist up.<sup>164</sup> When out hunting or exploring in the bush surrounding the cane fields, or in the privacy of their living quarters Melanesians often went naked. Occasionally they even worked naked: in mid-summer 1879 W.R. Goodall complained to the manager of *Foulden* that Melanesians

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162. QSA COL/A807, In letter 842 of 1888, Clarkson to IA, 5 April 1888.

163. Chapter Four, footnote 4.

164. Refer to the Marten Photo Collection, most taken at Mackay between 1872 and 1876, held by the Mackay City Library.

employed there had been seen naked, driving carts on the public road. But in winter their forsaken clothes and blankets became necessities, the lack of which, or the poor quality of which, could affect their health.<sup>165</sup> Further, in any season, clothes and blankets, misused, added to Islander ill health. Melanesians were often compelled to work in the rain or walked to town in soaking rain. Unused to European clothes and ways, the first-indenture labourers in particular seldom bothered to change into dry clothing.<sup>166</sup> And although (by regulation) provided with a block of soap every week there was no means of enforcing cleanliness. Time-expired and ticket-holding Melanesians usually dressed cleanly and sensibly, to swank and fashionable extremes. But the vulnerable first-indenture labourers permitted their clothes to become dirty and damp resting places for dirt-borne diseases and themselves candidates for thoracic diseases.

Respiratory tract infections are the most frequent minor illnesses of mankind. For Melanesians, particularly those newly arrived in Queensland, tuberculosis, pneumonia, bronchitis and pleurisy were more than minor illnesses. They were the major killers. The largest number of Melanesian deaths were caused by respiratory illnesses, a point well illustrated in Table Seven. In the nineteenth century tubercular infections were difficult to diagnose. The source of tubercular infection is usually the sputum of the infected person, even in a dry form. Initial symptoms were usually mistaken for fatigue so that by the time the disease had a strong hold it was too late to halt its advance. Pleurisy and bronchial disorders are common complications to tuberculosis, and tuberculosis itself spreads through the blood stream to bones, kidneys and other organs. Last century doctors were puzzled by the manner of its propagation though they had long suspected a connection with overcrowding and poverty. There was no cure other than rest and good food. Tubercular Melanesians were suspected of shirking in the early fatigue stage of the disease. Plantation and

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165. *QSA CPS 10B/G1*, R.W. Goodall to R. Walker, 15 December 1879; Saunders, *Uncertain Bondage*, 284; *QVP* 1880, v. 2, 428; information from Ishmael Itea, Ambe, Malaita, 30 October 1976.

166. Saunders, *Uncertain Bondage*, 285-6; *MM* 2 March 1881; *CSR* 142/1226, Knox to Stuart, 3 April 1882.

hospital accommodation and food only aided the spread of the disease. Nineteenth century attempts at a cure combined various chemicals, opium and mercury. That both mercurials and opiates were relatively expensive and not used to cure Melanesians was probably to their advantage.<sup>167</sup> The different disease environment, colder weather and over-crowded living quarters were prime conditions for respiratory tract infections. It is not surprising that so many died in this way.

The average crude death rate declined as the labour trade progressed, mainly because the Melanesian population included a decreasing proportion of first-indenture labourers, not from any European-inspired improvement in their working or living conditions. Time-expired and ticket-holding labourers became acclimatised to Queensland. They were used to the climate and work regime, had weathered the change in their epidemiological environment, and learnt to cope with any cultural dislocation. First-indenture labourers had not. Ralph Shlomowitz has calculated that:

the estimated crude death rate of Melanesians in the first year of their indenture (81 per 1000) was over three times as great as the estimated crude death rate for the rest of the Melanesian population (26 per 1000),<sup>168</sup>

If a Melanesian survived the first three years in Queensland he or she would probably have lived until old age. Documentary evidence of this is fragmentary but supporting. One 1895 report acknowledges that the first year, even the first six months in the colony was the critical survival period.<sup>169</sup> At Mackay from 1882 to 1884 there were 1,514 Melanesian deaths; every one a Melanesian who had resided in Queensland

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167. Smith, *The People's Health*, 287-94; D.W. Piper (ed.), *Medicine for the Paramedical Professionals* (Sydney, 1970), 47-75; Craton, *Searching for the Invisible Man*, 127-8.

168. Shlomowitz used regression analysis relating the number of deaths in the overall Melanesian population in each year to the size of the overall Melanesian population at the beginning of each year, and the number of newly-arrived indentured Melanesians in the previous year.

169. *Ibid.*, 27, quoting *SAPP* 1895, v. 2, 79.

less than three years.<sup>170</sup> Another piece of evidence concerns the relatively low crude death rate amongst ticket-holders. Shlomowitz calculated that over the years that the system operated, 1884 to 1906, the upper bound of their death rate was about fourteen per 1,000, a similar rate to Europeans in Queensland.<sup>171</sup> And in a 388 sample of Melanesian deaths at Mackay, collected from funeral records between 1898 and 1959, many Islanders lived until they were at least fifty, and some to over eighty years of age.<sup>172</sup>

It was always the new-comers, the first-indenture labourers, who suffered worst in Queensland. During the first two decades of the trade kidnapping and underhand recruiting methods were prevalent. The majority of the recruits were making their first voyage to Queensland and plantation conditions there were primitive. In the last two decades voluntary enlistment was the norm, many recruits were not novices to the labour trade and were actually re-recruiting. Working and living conditions had improved and an ever increasing proportion of Queensland's Melanesian population was either time-expired labourers working for small-scale farmers, or ticket-holders. Long-term Melanesian immigrants probably had a higher but not too dissimilar death rate from that of other labourers in Queensland. The short-term circular-migratory Melanesians bore the brunt of the cultural and physical change.

That death was most prevalent in the first year of residence in Queensland of itself disposes entirely of any suggestion that over-work, insufficient or unsuitable food or lack of medical care (or any combination of these) was the cause, since these would obviously have a combined effect, making the death rate increase with length of residence. Exposure to the new disease environment was the fundamental cause of death. Neither employers nor government can be blamed for the high death rate accompanying the use of Melanesian indentured

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170. This included a large proportion of the ill-fated New Guinea recruits. *QSA CRS/150* : Statement showing death rate among Pacific Islanders in the district of Mackay.

171. Shlomowitz, 'Markets for Melanesian Labour', 27-8.

172. Mackay Funerals, Record book.

labour, nor for failing to foresee it. But they can be blamed for persisting with the system when it had become clear that the death rate was the price. There is a heavy burden of guilt borne by the Queensland government and those it represented.

## 7. Conclusion

Historians have made the mistake of assuming that Melanesians lived complacently in plantation barracks, eating the official food ration; and that their health can be corollated with hospital treatment. Melanesians who did not receive trained European medical care were no worse off without it. Ill Melanesians could often have recovered as well in plantation hospitals, under their own care or under care provided by Melanesian herbalists and sorcerers. Melanesians in Queensland used socially approved magic for protective and productive purposes, and 'legal' sorcery for legitimate destructive purposes. Botanical remedies served as magical counter-measures and as herbal cures for medical problems.<sup>173</sup> Melanesian ignorance of the aetiology of diseases meant that they never saw illness and death as the natural corollary of disease, epidemics or old age: all sickness had a supernatural cause.

The major causes of death listed in Table Seven are diseases of the respiratory system, the gastro-intestinal tract, infectious diseases and fevers. Fifty-eight of the fifty-nine deaths listed as due to infectious diseases were caused by a measles epidemic in 1875. Measles killed more than 7,000 people each year in Great Britain in the nineteenth century. The disease is an especially virulent killer when accompanied by malnutrition or poor living conditions. The Islanders had nil resistance to this common European disease. Their overcrowded, poor living conditions can only have encouraged its spread.<sup>174</sup> Other infectious diseases occurred but these have mainly been dealt with earlier in discussing fevers, and diseases of the gastro-intestinal tract. Some of the deaths listed as being caused by fever would have been from dysentery and typhoid but the majority in this category would have been of malarial origin. The information available does not allow a more exact analysis. Comparing the Islanders death statistics with death statistics available from the Palmer river gold field in far North Queensland in the 1870s

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173. Mercer and Moore, 'Retention of indigenous and magical practices', 76-88.

174. *MM* 2, 16 October 1875, 29 April 1904; Smith, *The People's Health*, 142-8.

the Islanders do not seem to have been as prone to fever as the European miners.<sup>175</sup> Perhaps the prevalence of malaria in Melanesia gave the Islanders an epidemiological advantage over Europeans in Queensland. No degenerative diseases appear in the sample. Melanesian labourers were relatively young, and those who contracted degenerative diseases were returned to their islands and lost from statistics. No other disease categories are predominant enough to warrant explanation.<sup>176</sup> Further information on these minor categories is available in the appendix to this chapter: the classification division used in Table Seven.

The last four categories in Table Seven classify deaths of a different type: deaths due to chemical agents, physical trauma, suicide and murder. Deaths from misuse of chemical agents were unusual but occur even among Europeans and certainly must be expected amongst Melanesians totally unused to such substances. Table Eight lists several accidental injuries and deaths from chemical agents and trauma occurring in non-work related circumstances. In three cases Islanders were recorded as having died from quaffing whole bottles of alcoholic spirits. Another died after drinking carbolic oil. Clause Twenty-nine of the 1868 Act specified that Melanesians were not to be supplied with alcohol but the Clause was rarely enforced. Drunkenness was the most common offence for which Islanders were convicted. Publicans and store keepers openly sold them alcohol and were seldom prosecuted. Only the unlucky were caught and even then fines were light. No

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175. Refer to Peter Bell's 'Summary of causes of death from entries 1-200 in Register of Deaths, Palmer District, 26 October 1873-4 July 1875.' The table was included in Bell's paper 'Mining Settlement in North Queensland' presented to a History Dept. Seminar at James Cook University, 24 October 1980 and will form an Appendix to Chapter Three of his forthcoming Doctoral thesis on mining architecture in North Queensland.

176. Hansen's disease (leprosy) is one chronic communicable disease which deserves mention. Several Islanders in the Mackay district were reported to have had the disease. A leper colony was established at the mouth of Baker's creek in the 1890s-1900s which accommodated lepers of all races.

*MM* 11, 15 October 1892, 18 January 1894, 4 June 1895, 5, 7 January, 11, 16, 18 February, 18 May, 12, 23 December 1899, 18, 20 January, 27 February 1900.

publican even lost his or her licence for the offence.<sup>177</sup> In Melanesia Areca palms, betel pepper (*Piper betel*) and *Piper methysticum* (the source of Kava) are used as mild narcotics. Areca nut and pepper leaf chewing are prevalent in north Melanesia; Kava is drunk in south Melanesia but is more characteristic of Polynesia. No evidence has been located that Areca palms or the Kava root were ever grown in Queensland by Melanesians. Reliable Islander informants from Mackay do not remember either ever being used or even growing in the area. It appears that Melanesians adopted alcohol and tobacco as acceptable substitutes.<sup>178</sup>

Most of the deaths listed as caused by trauma resulted from Melanesians coming into disastrous contact with products of European technology. Tables Eight and Nine provide specific details of these types of accidents and deaths. Table Nine lists a sample of deaths and serious injuries sustained by Melanesians at work in the Mackay district. In some cases they were innocent victims of faulty technology - mill boilers and vacuum pans exploded, centrifuges collapsed - but in most cases the injuries and deaths were the result of allowing people unused to factories access to unguarded moving parts and vats of boiling liquids. Field accidents also occurred, centred around mishandling of railway trucks and bullock drays. In many of the reports no death is mentioned, but the reports usually came close on the heels of the incidents so victims may have died at a later stage. Islanders were also notoriously careless with firearms and explosives. Five cases in Table Eight involve Islanders maiming or killing themselves in this way. The hospital records contain many other examples of minor non-fatal accidents when Islanders suffered from cuts or broken and sprained bones from which they presumably recovered.

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177. Refer to Appendix Five: All known charges brought against Melanesians in the Mackay district, 1871-1907 (Items 9 and 10) and to Chapter Seven, Section 2: Melanesian workers and the law.

178. Chowning, *Peoples and Cultures of Melanesia*, 52; BOHC 48Ba: 1 (NJF); BOHC 51Ba: 2 (HSQ); BOHC 40Ba: 3 (WT). What purports to be a complete list of palms in the Mackay district in 1888 does not include the Areca palm. MM 20, 27 October 1888.

Table Eight

A sample of injuries and deaths occurring to Melanesians in the Mackay district related to non-Melanesian aspects of European society.

No.	Name (island)	Mill-area year	Incident
1.	Waimolie (Lifu)	1875	Died after drinking a bottle of brandy.
2.	Wasey	1876	Blew his hand off while dynamiting fish.
3.	Unknown	Te Kowai 1877	Two Islanders killed in a shooting incident.
4.	Unknown	ex-Lorne 1880	His musket burst and blew his hand off.
5.	Tommy (Santo)	1884	Tommy accidentally shot himself.
6.	Tony	Oakenden 1886	Tony accidentally shot herself.
7.	Unknown	1889	Died from excessive drinking
8.	Davey	River 1890	Died from drinking carbolic oil.
9.	Nanty (Malaita)	Habana 1895	Died after drinking a bottle of rum.

Sources: (1) *QSA* JUS/N50 1876/281; (2) *MM* 8 July 1876; (3) *MM* 24 November 1877; (4) *MM* 7 July 1880; (5) 23 April 1884; (6) *MM* 4 September 1886; (7) *MM* 11 July 1889; (8) *MM* 4 November 1890; (9) *MM* 20 April 1895.

Table Nine

A sample of incidents involving injury and death of Melanesians in the Mackay district, related to European technology.

No.	Name (island)	Mill-area Year	Incident
1.	Unknown	Pleystowe 1872.	Foot crushed in roller cog wheel; amputated.
2.	Unknown	Branscombe 1872	Stumbled in the wheels of the centrifuges; is likely to recover.
3.	Unknown	Foulden 1873	Bullock dray accident: 1 killed; 3 injured.
4.	Unknown	Meadowlands 1874	Fell into mill machinery; multiple fractures; unlikely to recover
5.	Unknown	Alexandra 1875	Islander's hand crushed in the rollers while he was feeding in cane.
6.	Unknown	Pioneer 1876	Injured while lopping branches off trees.
7.	Unknown	Nebia 1877	An Islander was injured when two centrifuges exploded.
8.	Unknown (Tana)	Meadowlands 1880	An Islander crushed his arm in the mill machinery.
9.	Jerry	Hamilton 1880	Fractured thigh while mustering cattle.
10.	Unknown	River 1880	Mill tank fell and broke his leg.
11.	Unknown	Habana 1883	An Islander was fed into the rollers; an arm and leg were torn off.
12.	Unknown	Alexandra 1883	An Islander fell into boiling syrup.
13.	Unknown	Nindaroo 1883	An Islander fell into the centrifuge.
14.	Unknown	Palms 1885	An Islander had a hand caught in the juice pump; his arm was later amputated.
15.	Unknown	Nindaroo 1887	A boiler exploded killing 2 Islanders and severely injuring a third.

Table Nine cont.

No.	Names (Island)	Mill-area Year	Incident
16.	Quahvaleah (Malaita)	Homebush 1888	Quahvaleah fell under a railway truck.
17.	Unknown	Te Kowai 1890	An Islander had his foot crushed by a dray; the foot was later amputated.

Sources:

The *Mackay Mercury* (MM) for the following dates:

- (1) 7 September 1872; (2) 28 September 1872; (3) 28 June 1873;  
 (4) 21 February 1874; (5) 2 October 1875; (6) 18 March 1876;  
 (7) 17 October 1877; (8) 8 September 1880; (9) 9 June 1880;  
 (10) 29 September 1880; (11) 1 September 1883; (12) 28 August  
 1883; (13) 20 October 1883; (14) 18 November 1885; (15)  
 5 November 1885; (16) 3 November 1885; (17) 16 December 1890.

Table Seven also lists thirty-two cases of murder<sup>179</sup> of Melanesians. In most of these the murderer was another Melanesian. In addition there are several reports of cases in which Europeans almost certainly beat Melanesians to death in work-related circumstances, and a whole series of reports of Europeans violently ill-treating Islanders. These have not been included in Table Seven. Other Europeans always covered for the offenders and in no case was a conviction for murder ever obtained, although there are convictions for ill-treatment of Melanesians even by the most upright citizens in the district.<sup>180</sup> Typical in this regard was the death in 1878 of Callio from Epi island, then working on *Te Kowai* plantation. An inquest was held after Callio died mysteriously. W.R. Goodall was quite satisfied that Callio had been beaten to death by an overseer with a reputation for violence, but the plantation's manager Hugh McCreedy and the other European employees covered up for the man. No conviction was possible and Goodall had to content himself with demanding that the overseer be dismissed.<sup>181</sup>

The vast majority of the murders were internal to the Melanesian community, involving inter-tribal and inter-island skirmishes. The first of these occurred in 1867 only a few months after the initial group of Islanders arrived. J.E. Davidson recorded in his diary that one of his Islander employees had killed another with the aid of a tomahawke. The next year two more Islanders were killed near *Alexandra*; one of them was cooked and eaten.<sup>182</sup> Similar violent skirmishes took

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179. Also refer to Appendix Five: Item 1.

180. QSA JUS/N34, 1872/200, Inquest: Vacou, 17 July 1872; QSA JUS/N41, 1874/258, Inquest : Hammangi; MM 3 October 1874; QSA JUS/N52, 1877/32, Inquest : Mittabrissy; QSA CPS 10B/G1, Goodall to (?), 5 February 1877; MM 10, 17 February 1877; MM 1, 12 November 1884, 21 March 1885 (the death of Kindo at *Nindaroo*); QSA CPS 10B/G1, Goodall to R. Atherton, 30 January 1877; MM 3 February 1877, 19 January 1878; QSA CPS 10B/G1, Goodall to Carol and Avery, 19 November 1879; QSA CPS 10B/G1, Goodall to A.H. Lloyd, 9 August 1880; Mackay Planters' Association Minute Book, 1 January 1883 (Sir Ralph Gore).

181. QSA CPS 10B/G1, Goodall to W.H. Paxton, 2, 5 August 1878.

182. J.E. Davidson's Journal, 27 November 1867; MM 4 March 1905. Another incident involving cannibalism occurred in 1884 when New Ireland men are suspected to have eaten a European boy. MM *Jubilee* 1912, 23 (Pilot Williamson).

place all through the nineteenth century for a variety of reasons. The following cases are typical. H.L. Roth recorded that in the 1870s Wattercliblib, newly arrived from Pentecost with his wife Vadim, killed another Melanesian for interfering with her. About the same period whilst the recruiting ship *Mystery* was at sea on its way back to Mackay one of the recruits used an axe to cleave open the head of an Islander member of the crew. In 1881 Tabby-Kart and Angury, first-indenture labourers, attacked two *Foulden* labourers with an iron bar, killing one.<sup>183</sup> Much larger fights often occurred, usually between island groups or antagonistic descent groups from the one island. The incidents seen and reported by Europeans were only a small part of the total number of such incidents. This report of a battle between river-side Islanders from around *Branscombe* and their neighbours from *Cassada* on Baker's creek is typical of a hundred forgotten inter-tribal fights:

About 10 am, on Sunday last, several guns were heard to be discharged in the immediate vicinity of Walkerston, and shortly afterwards a crowd of Kanakas, supposed to have come from Branscombe and the adjoining plantations were seen on ridges near Cassada estate. The boys were armed with bows and arrows and several guns, and commenced an attack on the Cassada boys, who were not slow in repelling their assailants. After some desultory warfare the Cassada boys retreated to the plantation, the kanakas from the other estates following them up. 184

The fight was stopped by police before anyone was injured but not all tribal fights were such tame affairs: fractured skulls, broken bones and savage wounds were common results.<sup>185</sup>

Wars and killings were part of the way of life of nineteenth century Melanesians. Although the sugar fields were a non-traditional situation the Queensland setting may have provoked an even greater degree of violence than that normal in the islands. Melanesians who

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183. Roth, *Sketches and Reminiscences*, 13; *MM* 10 December 1881; *QSA* JUS/N53, Inquest: Billy Lifu, 3 August 1877.

184. *MM* 23 April 1884.

185. *MM* 28 July 1888, 17 February 1891, 25 September 1892, 3 October 1893.

traditionally would have been enemies in the Pacific were placed together in the same barracks: some, members of antagonistic descent groups from the same island; and others, inhabitants of islands with long traditions of antagonism between them. Fighting went on between individuals and groups from every island, but none fought with greater dedication than the Malaitans. Throughout the 1890s Malaitans were proportionally the dominant island group in Queensland. They fought amongst themselves and with other Islanders, murdering and wounding more people at Mackay than any other island group.<sup>186</sup> As murderers they were brutal, crushing skulls and severing heads. Their fame inspired the leader writer for the local paper to claim that:

White men who have lived in the district for years, now sleep with revolvers near to hand, and admit the terrorism inspired by this class of boy. 187

Melanesian oral testimony supports the documentary evidence but adds new dimensions which passed unknown to the original European recorders. The main antagonisms were always between Islanders from the Solomon group and those from the New Hebrides, particularly between men from Malaita and those from Tana and Ambrym. New Hebridean oral testimony clearly shows fear of the Man-Maratta (Malaitans) from the plantation days, but New Hebrideans had two valuable advantages when dealing with their aggressive opponents. Tana men fought with their feet and were adept at kicking opponents in the head.<sup>188</sup> Malaitans fought hand-to-hand or with clubs and always had problems

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186. The references for the murders listed in Appendix Five are as follows: *MM* 26 September, 14 November 1874; *QSA* CPS 10B/G1, Goodall to Crown Pros. Nth. Dist. Court, Bowen, 11 November 1874; *MM* 13 September 1884, 17 May 1888, 27 March, 16 September, 18, 25, 30 December 1890, 6 January 1891, 13, 29 October 1892, 28 June, 28 December 1893, 28, 31 July, 7, 14, 21, 28 August, 13 October 1894, 12, 15, 17 January, 7, 24 September, 1 October 1895, 30 April, 2, 7 May, 13 October 1896, 28 September 1901, 21, 23 January, 6; 8 November 1902, 7, 11 April 1903, 29 August 1905, 23, 27 January, 3 October 1906.

187. *MM* 29 November 1894. Also refer to *MM* 11 May 1896.

188. *BOHC* 31Ba : 1 (GA); *BOHC* 6Ba : 1 (IT & AM & WM); *BOHC* 16Ba : 2 (RL); *BOHC* 33Ba : 2 (HSQ & ONF & II).

when faced with a high-kicking opponent. Malaitans made up for any lack they may have had in fighting finesse by their sheer ferocity, achieved, say Malaitans, by calling their *akalo* (ancestors) to aid them during fights. The New Hebridean's second advantage was that they were more prone to using sorcery than Solomon Islanders: this view is supported by both groups.<sup>189</sup> Solomon people are proud of the powers of their forebears as honest straight-forward killers and disparage the New Hebridean preference for sorcery:

The Malaitans don't have anything [like sorcery] to kill you. They're not a bad tribe. They just kill you with a tomahawke. 190

Sorcery and calling on ones ancestors for physical power is another completely unmeasurable dimension, invisible but devastatingly potent. Oral evidence indicates that during the lifetimes of the original immigrant Melanesians religious and magical beliefs and practices figured prominently in the life of the Mackay Islander community. Reputed sorcerers were regarded with fear and awe. The last reasonably verifiable case in which a death at Mackay was attributed to sorcery occurred in the late 1940s.<sup>191</sup> Threats of sorcery were used by the elders in the community to control its younger members. When it is remembered that to Melanesians there were no natural causes of illness or death, that one major cause was sorcery by a foe, many violent incidents from the plantation days, seemingly incomprehensible attacks on innocent people, take on new significance.<sup>192</sup> So also do European descriptions used earlier in

189. BOHC 50Ba : 1-3 (HB & ONF); BOHC 42Bb : 1 (HB & ONF); BOHC 51Bb : 3 (HSQ); BOHC 7Bb : 2 (NJF).

190. BOHC 37Ba : 2 (FB).

191. BOHC 54Bb : 1 (NJF); BOHC 55Bb : 1 (NJF); BOHC 9Ba : 1 (NS & ONF); BOHC 15Bb : 2 (SM); BOHC 19Bb : 1 (EH); BOHC 24Ba : 3 (TC); BOHC 34Bb : 1 (ONF); BOHC 31Bb : 1 (GA); BOHC 11Bb : 1 (FP); BOHC 16Ba : 3 (RL); BOHC 24Ba : 2 (TC); BOHC 21Bb : 1 (CT). Also refer to Mercer and Moore, 'Retention of indigenous and magical practices'.

192. Proof of this is almost all from oral sources although occasionally one finds documentary evidence. In 1891 Malaitans at Mackay claimed that two of their number working at *Farleigh* had been poisoned by a New Hebridean man. The newspaper reported that they had died from dysentery. *MM* 24 March 1891.

this chapter which attribute Melanesian physical decline to depression consequent on arrival in a strange land. Nineteenth century observers were puzzled when Islanders died in a period of a few days, for no apparent reason. One writer from the 1890s said that:

once the kanaka becomes despondent in sickness, it is almost impossible to cure him. He cannot fight with disease. It is so foreign to his nature that his gaiety deserts him, and he sinks an easy prey to an attack that a more energetic mind would have been able to repel. 193

H.H. Finch-Hatton was even more forthright:

Directly a Kanaka gets ill he lies down, and apparently very often dies for no reason at all except pure funk and lack of the wish to get well. 194

Part of the answer is that Melanesians fared poorly in the new disease environment, but a hidden part of the answer is that to Melanesians sickness had a supernatural cause. Melanesians often seemed to offer no resistance to illness because they knew that it had been caused by their own ancestors or by other spirits or sorcery controlled by the alien Melanesians with whom they lived. There was no cure unless the correct sacrificial atonements were made.

The most perplexing deaths listed in Table Seven are the thirty-three cases attributed by contemporary reports to suicide. The two cases described below were classified as suicide. The new life faced in Queensland may well have driven some of the labourers to suicide, but among the cases are many which may better be described as murders or as the result of sorcery. Certainly the suicides should be explained in terms of psychological stress in a new environment coupled with cultural patterns established in Melanesia. The suicide cases illustrate the estranged world of the Queensland Melanesians.

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193. Blake, 'The Kanaka: a character sketch', 84.

194. Finch-Hatton, *Advance Australia*, 163. For a similar view refer to Davitt, *Life and Progress in Australia*, 276.

Charlie Tobacco (or Lorbacco) and his wife Mary Narris, both from Tongoa in the New Hebrides, committed suicide together in 1877. Charlie Tobacco had been living in Queensland since 1869. In 1877 he and Narris were working for John Spiller, in charge of a small farm rearing pigs and poultry and cultivating gardens for Spiller's *Pioneer*. Early in the morning of 13 August they went to the house of William Kitchener a labourer at *Pionerr*, wanting to stay there for the remainder of the night. Tobacco told Kitchener:

Me sick me stop over there no more.  
 Me stop no more there, me want to  
 go along big fellow house: too much  
 sick there.

Kitchener persuaded the couple to return home, but promised to send Spiller to see them in the morning. At ten the next morning Kitchener went over to visit them only to find that Tobacco had shot first Narris, then himself:

The bodies when found were arrayed in all the clothing the Islanders possessed and dozens of yards of calico, carefully and recently stained with red and yellow ochre were, wound round their bodies which were adorned with beads, plaited human hair and a varied collection of trinkets. 195  
 ...[Tobacco's] head was dressed with feathers, and a red handkerchief was bound round his forehead; his neck was encircled with a bead necklace, and a new sheath knife was attached to his waist by a belt. 196

Every article belonging to Spiller was carefully placed and uninjured, but everything belonging to themselves, not actually upon their persons, was either broken up or destroyed by fire. A similarly incomprehensible case occurred at *Homebush* in 1891. Geor hanged herself in her hut after attempting to strangle her four month old baby. That morning Geor had distraughtly told her husband that a "devil-devil was chasing her and would kill her".<sup>197</sup>

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195. *MM* 1 September 1877.

196. *Qlder* 22 September 1877.

197. *MM* 9 June 1891.

Whilst Europeans then and today would find the two incidents puzzling, any Melanesian in Queensland or the islands would have heard similar stories or know of similar cases happening to members of their own families. Tales of sorcery, angry spirits and ritual deaths are common-place in the oral testimony of Queensland's Pacific Islanders. Their parents and grandparents lived in constant communication with the spiritual world. The older Islanders hold similar though less pronounced beliefs in the efficacious power of their ancestors and believe that their ancestors can communicate with them. The metaphysical exchange cycles between Queensland Malaitans and their *akalo* continue to operate. Peter Corris in his otherwise excellent *Passage, Port and Plantation* missed this crucial point about immigrant Melanesian culture in Queensland:

Among those Melanesians in Queensland who were untouched or scarcely affected by the work of the missions, traditional religious practices and other customary observances seem, nevertheless, to have fallen temporarily into abeyance. In the absence of the priests and sorcerers, a suspension of observation, if not of belief, was likely....

There is no evidence, however, of sorcery and other forms of magic being practised among the Melanesians in Queensland such as has been recorded about the immigrant labour compounds of the island plantations... One man explained this feasibly in terms of the local associations all aspects of Melanesian religion had. 'Queensland was a white man's country', he said, 'and the spirits weren't there.' 198

This thesis does not attempt to argue a case for all of the Melanesians who came to Queensland - Melanesian societies vary too much for that to be possible. The argument is only valid for the 14.7 percent of the labour recruits from the island of Malaita in the Solomon group. We must await similar research in Vanuatu (New Hebrides) to see if the same argument is applicable there. For the present, all that can be suggested is that Malaitan recruits included the circular-migration within already existing cosmological exchange cycles. Physical and spiritual exchanges allowed metaphysical communication, linking

living people to their ancestors and ensuring the continued receipt of *mamana*, the Malaitan variant of the Oceanic term *mana*. Certain areas of belief were held in abeyance or modified to fit their new circumstances but overall their traditional belief system continued to operate, allowing them to function culturally as Melanesians within European controlled surroundings. From fragmentary documentary sources and the memories of the children and grandchildren of Australia's immigrant Melanesian settlers enough of the lives of the original labour recruits can be pieced back together to say with certainty for Malaitans and with reasonable probability for other Islanders that the culture of Melanesia, though disrupted and truncated, was successfully transplanted to Queensland.

Classification used to list diseases for Table Seven

1. Cardiovascular system

Oedema (Dropsy) can be a cardiovascular disease or a genito-urinary disease. Deaths listed as having been caused by Dropsy have been recorded alternatively as 1 or 5.

Heart Attacks.

2. Respiratory system

Pulmonary tuberculosis (Phthisis)

Pneumonia

Bronchitis

Laryngitis

Haemoptysis (coughing blood)

Pleurisy

Consumption

Congestion

3. Gastro-intestinal tract

Diarrhoea

Dysentery

Intestinal obstruction

Tabes mesenterica (Tuberculosis of the peritoneal glands)

Enteritis (inflammation of the intestines)

Liver disease

Hepatitis

Appendicitis

Ascites (abdominal Dropsy)

4. Nervous system

Abscess to the brain (ear or sinus infections)

Cephalitis

Cerebritis (Meningitis ?)

Cephalgia (head ache)

Apoplexy (Stroke or blood pressure)

Hemiplegia (stroke and paralysis)

Congestion of the brain

5. Genito-urinary system

Bright's disease (Nephritis)

Kidney disease

Infection of the female organs

Cystitis (inflamed bladder)

6. Haemopoietic system

No anaemias or other blood cell disorders were found.

7. Endocrine glands

Sunstroke

8. Bones, joints and collagen

Rheumatic fever

9. Infectious diseases

Measles

Bubo (enlarged lymphatic glands)

Inflamed eye

Quinsy (peritonsillar abscess)

Malaria

Gonorrhoea (not classified under 5)

Syphilis

Tetanus

10. Skin diseases

Malignant ulcers

11. Degenerative diseases

None was found

12. Fever, debility and unclassifiable

Fever

Debility

Pyrexia (fever)

Teething (of a baby)

Mortification

Table Seven was compiled with the kind assistance of Drs A.G. O'Connor and J. Mackerell of Townsville. Whilst their advice was heeded the interpretation is my own responsibility.

Sources:

All extant copies of the *Mackay Mercury and South Kennedy Advertiser* (which became *The Daily Mercury*) from 1867 to 1907.

A variety of sources from the Queensland State Archives.

The Mackay Cemetery Trust Register 1875-1884.

The Maryborough Islander Hospital Register 1884-1888. (QSA HOS 3/3)

The Mackay Base Hospital Register 1891-1895.

CHAPTER NINE

576 - 654

*MELANESIAN SOCIETY IN THE LATE**19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURIES*

1. Introduction	577
2. White Australia and the deportation years: 1901-1908	579
3. The deportation : 1906-1908	592
4. Melanesian politics and society at Mackay	
A. Introduction	597
B. Divisions within Melan- esian society	598
C. Racial and ethnic prejudices	609
D. Melanesian languages and Kanaka pidgin English	615
E. Christianity	623
F. Literacy and education	640
G. Power and authority	647

## 1. Introduction

The Australian descendants of the Kanakas comprise the largest, longest-established Melanesian community living outside Melanesia. The Islanders at Mackay are the largest segment of this community; and many of them are of Malaitan descent. Whatever differences there may be within the total Islander community they all share a common identity as South Sea Islanders.<sup>1</sup> This pan-Melanesian feeling was not present amongst their forebears, who came from small-scale societies on more than seventy islands in Melanesia (and Polynesia and Micronesia), travelling to Queensland under a variety of circumstances for more than forty years. How then did it originate?

Malaitans succeeded in incorporating circular migration within their cosmological exchange cycles. Physical and spiritual exchanges allowed metaphysical communication, linking living people with their ancestors and ensuring the continued receipt of *mamana*, the Malaitan variant of the Oceanic term *mana*. Certain areas of belief were held in abeyance or modified to fit their new circumstances but broadly speaking their traditional belief system survived, allowing them to function culturally as Melanesians within European-controlled surroundings. This argument is valid for the 14.7 percent of the labour recruits who came from Malaita, but one cannot be certain that it applies equally to other Pacific Islanders - island societies vary too much for that to be possible. In particular, work needs to be done in Vanuatu (New Hebrides), and amongst New Hebrideans in Australia to see if the same argument is applicable.<sup>2</sup> However, enough evidence has been encountered in the course of this research to suggest strongly that what has been established about Malaitans will be found to be broadly

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1. They prefer to be known as South Sea Islanders, rather than Pacific Islanders or Melanesians.
  2. Patricia M. Mercer of the History Department, School of General Studies, Australian National University, is in the final stages of completing her Doctoral thesis on the Pacific Islander population of North Queensland from 1900 to 1940. Although her thesis does not single out New Hebrideans, because New Hebrideans are the dominant Islanders in all Melanesian communities other than that at Mackay, Mercer's work will redress much of the imbalance. There remains the urgent need for field work of a similar nature to that presented in the first three chapters of the present thesis to be completed in Vanuatu.

true of Melanesians generally: the culture of Melanesia, though disrupted and truncated, was successfully transplanted to Queensland.<sup>3</sup>

The thesis thus far has been largely concerned with the Melanesian immigrants, rather than their Australian-born children. While the children's oral testimony has provided a significant part of the evidence upon which the thesis is based, their lives have not been discussed. This concluding chapter outlines the historical development of the Mackay Melanesian community during the first half of the twentieth century, stressing the cultural elements which shaped their pan-Melanesian society. A full-scale treatment would constitute a whole thesis, not just one chapter, yet their story cannot be told without the eight foregoing chapters - the "eight isles" of the present-day Mackay Malaitans.

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3. It seems applicable to note here that the culture of white settlers in North Queensland was also severely truncated and changed, but no one would hesitate to describe their culture as European.

## 2. White Australia and the deportation years: 1901-08

The concept of a "White Australia" was supported by the majority of the members of the first federal parliament.<sup>4</sup> Two pieces of racially discriminatory legislation were amongst the first passed: the *Pacific Island Labourers Act*, intended to halt Melanesian immigration after 31 March 1904 and to deport all but the dwindling number of ticket-holders after 31 December 1906; and the *Immigration Restriction Act*, intended to exclude non-white migrants.<sup>5</sup> The White Australia policy, which had grown in strength and general acceptance during the last few decades of the nineteenth century, had become law.

Reaction to the proposed repatriation of the Islanders built up slowly between 1901 and 1906. The Queensland government had given notice in 1885 and 1892 that Melanesian immigration was to cease;<sup>6</sup> the federation of the Australian colonies made this inevitable, but the mass deportation which ensued had not been envisaged in the earlier plans. The initial reaction varied, depending on the interests involved. Mackay farmer Ole Matsen recorded in his diary what must have been the sentiments of many farmers:

the poor Kanakas will have to leave the Commonwealth,  
and they are the onlieth (*sic*) coloured people  
what is any good for the sugar industry. 7

Aside from the European cane growers with a vested interest in the retention of Melanesian labour, Europeans who supported the Melanesians usually couched their support in morally indignant, often religious,

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4. The only real dissenters were a few of the Free-traders and some of the Queensland members. R. Norris, *The Emergent Commonwealth Australian federation: expectations and fulfilment, 1889-1910* (Melbourne, 1975), 68-80.
  5. Acts 16 and 17 of 1901.  
The means of exclusion introduced by the *Immigration Restriction Act* was a dictation test: applicant immigrants could be asked to pass a written language test in any European language.
  6. Griffith's reversal in 1892 was avowedly only a temporary respite.
  7. Matsen Diary Two, 137.

but intrinsically racist terms. The attitude of Fanny Nicol, who helped organise a petition from the Islanders to King Edward VII in 1902, was typical:

the South Sea Islanders are destined by natural law to receive their knowledge and gain experience from their more advanced brothers. They are "the stranger within our gates"....<sup>8</sup>

The Melanesians' own reaction is harder to gauge. When Peter Corris interviewed several men who had been deported themselves, they gave a variety of explanations. The deportation order was remote and little understood by them: some felt it had been ordered by the King or by the Bishops, or had been caused by some terrible murder or crime committed by one of their number.<sup>9</sup> Few knew any more than "Algetta finish with you me now".<sup>10</sup> But a small, active minority formed a political organisation and fought for what they saw as their right - to remain in Australia,

The Pacific Islanders' Association was formed at Mackay in mid-November 1901, even before the Act to deport them had received assent. Its Chairman, Tui Tonga, stated in an interview that the Association had been formed

for the purpose of securing the rights of absolute freedom of contract amongst those islanders now in the colony [and to] prevent the gross injustice of the deportation of civilised islanders to their savage homes. 11

Nothing more is known of the Association until 1906 when it re-emerged as a militant well-organised political force operating in several Queensland Melanesian communities. Melanesian political activity continued through the intervening years, but the most active were those living

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8. *C'W A CRS A6 1901/346*, cutting from the *Bundaberg Star* 28 February 1901.

9. Corris, *Passage, Port and Plantation*, 131-2.

10. *CRM 22a* : (JM); *BOHC 7Ba* : 1 (TA).

11. *MM* 16 November 1901.

south of Mackay, particularly around Rockhampton. K.M. Grant, newly elected MLA for Rockhampton, wrote to the Prime Minister, Andrew Barton, in April 1902 on behalf of the Islanders in his electorate. Grant pointed out that many of them had lived in Australia for periods up to thirty-years. They had established farms, paid rates, and led settled married lives, some with European wives:

these Kanakas are civilised, their children are educated, they have made this their home, [and] they have all a great hatred to be sent back. 12

A year later it was also this small 200-person Rockhampton Islander community which petitioned the Governor of Queensland asking that they be allowed to stay.

At least eight petitions from Islanders in Queensland were presented to the Queensland and Australian governments between 1903 and 1906. The two Rockhampton petitions were presented to Queensland's Governor Sir Herbert Chermiside in late March 1903. Twenty-Two adult Melanesians, mostly long-term residents of Queensland, requested that they "be permitted to 'lead a quiet and peaceful life' in Queensland where most of us have resided for many years".<sup>13</sup> The other petition carried the names of fifty-three young Australians of Islander descent, aged from three to twenty-four. Australian-born, they were exempt from deportation, but pleaded that their families should not be broken up, as would be the case if the 1901 Act was enforced. Later in the year a petition to King Edward VII was circulated amongst Melanesians in southern Queensland. Signed by more than 3,000<sup>14</sup> Islanders it called on the King to review the Australian government's decision, pleading that many of them were permanent residents of Australia and no longer capable of living in

12. *C'W A CRS A1 1903/1694*, Grant to PM, 2 April 1902.
13. *QSA PRE/87*, F. Hopkins to Sec to Gov, 15, 17 March 1903; the file also contains copies of the petitions. See also *QSA IPI 3/17*, A. Deakin to Premier of Queensland, 8 May 1902.
14. Fanny Nicol collected 1800 names and signatures between Brisbane and Rockhampton.  
*C'W A CRS A1 1903/1694*, F. Nicol to A. Deakin, 9 September 1902.  
A copy of the petition was published in *QVP*, and in contained in *QSA PRE/87*.

Melanesia. The petitioners claimed that, at the least they were alienated from their old culture and way of life, and at the worst many faced death by returning: some among them were fugitives from island justice; others, because they had married outsiders, were no longer welcome to return. Alfred Deakin, the Attorney General, scathingly wrote to the Governor General that the "nominal petitioners"

are taught to act at the bidding of their employers, and have no doubt done so in this instance...

and that hundreds of the petitioners

probably had no understanding of the paper in an unknown tongue to which they were putting their mark. 15

In the event the King, acting on the advice of the Australian government disallowed the petition.

Not to be discouraged several more attempts were made to petition the government. Lord Northcote, the Governor General, visited Mackay in July 1904; he was presented with two petitions from Islanders: one signed by seventy-one adults, and another signed by twenty-six children.<sup>16</sup> In May the next year Rockhampton Islanders petitioned the Labour Prime Minister J.C. Watson during a visit by him to the town.<sup>17</sup> Then in 1906 the Mackay-based Pacific Islanders' Association presented two further petitions: in April to the Sugar Industry Labour Royal Commission; and in September, when two delegates were sent to Melbourne to present a 427 name petition from members of the Association and other Islanders from Mackay, Proserpine and Bowen, to Prime Minister Alfred

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15. *C'W A* A1 1903/1694, A. Deakin to GG, 29 September 1902; also refer to J. Chamberlain to Gov. Chermiside, 30 August 1902. Deakin clearly answered entirely on the basis of preconceived ideas, making no attempt to grapple with the argument in the petition or to inquire into the facts. Also refer to J.A. La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin, a biography*, v. 1 (Melbourne, 1975), 276-83.

16. *MM* 23 July 1904.

17. *MM* 23 May 1905.

Deakin.<sup>18</sup>

The attitude of Melanesians at Mackay to the proposed mass deportation can be seen from their two 1904 petitions, a letter from the Association to Winston Churchill<sup>19</sup> in March 1906, and the August 1906 petition. Although the 1904 petitioners asked to be allowed to remain in Australia, they appeared to accept deportation as inevitable. A request was made that they be compensated for loss of property<sup>20</sup> and that if deported they be sent, not to their home islands, but to a safe area under British rule. The young Australian-born Islanders asked that they not be separated from their parents. In its letter to Churchill the Association similarly accepted as inevitable the repatriation of the majority, but wanted the exemption category extended to include Islanders with farms and families. They stressed their loyalty to the Crown; that they were mere agricultural workers and farmers, unlikely to interfere with the job prospects of European tradesmen, and suggested that they could perhaps be re-settled in some other area of Queensland.

The same re-settlement theme was continued in the August petition to Deakin. If allowed to stay the Islanders were willing to shift to a reserve elsewhere in North Queensland or the Northern Territory where they could continue as agriculturalists without interfering with the jobs of European workers. The Association proposed that the settlement would be internally self-governing, maintaining law and order and caring for its own sick and elderly. The Islanders argued that many areas in northern Australia were

in no way profitable to the state to which  
they belong, and will remain so for an  
indefinite time before being opened up  
or settled upon by any of the present white

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18. *MM* 5 September 1906, 7 March 1907; *C'W A A1* 1906/6324. The September 1906 petition had 427 names: 362 from Mackay; 34 from Proserpine; and 31 from Bowen. There were only 41 Malaitans among the 362 Islander names from Mackay.
19. Churchill was at this time Secretary of State for the Colonies.
20. *C'W A CRS A1* 1906/4761, *EA* 06/4432, Tonga to Churchill, 26 March 1906.

population in the Australian Commonwealth, though they may contain untold wealth in minerals, which if (as they probably would be), unearthed and discovered by a Pacific Islander, could be worked solely by white men. 21

Peter Corris described their request for a separate settlement as a last "desperate and pathetic"<sup>22</sup> move. Although their offer of mineral rights is phrased in an embarrassingly supplicatory manner it was no more than the fact of the situation: the Crown always has the power to dispose of mining rights. Corris' judgement that the request was unrealistic, is hasty, in the light of Crown rights, the Aboriginal reserve system which was (and still is) operating in Queensland, and later Melanesian settlement plans in the 1930s. Since 1897 the Queensland government has been empowered to forcibly segregate Aborigines in designated reserves. Although the 1897 Act has been much amended, and its implementation somewhat liberalised, the basic frame-work remains in force today along with many of the reserves established under its provisions.<sup>23</sup> It is difficult to say why a similar policy should not have been extended to Islanders, had the government wished. A similar plan was suggested by Islanders in 1920, and almost came to fruition in 1932-3 when, with Queensland government support, Islanders from Mackay started to clear land at Nulla near Bloomsbury to form a

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21. C'W A A1 1906/6324.

22. Corris, *Passage, Port and Plantation*, 128.

23. Despite platitudinous assurances of its good intentions toward Aborigines, the Queensland government continues to enforce the *Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders Acts*, considered to be the most discriminatory legislation current in Australia and a violation of fundamental human rights. Some individuals of predominantly immigrant Melanesian ancestry live today on Aboriginal reserves and are bound by these Acts.

At the time of writing (May 1981), the Premier of Queensland has announced his intention to repealing the Acts, though no steps to give effect to this declaration appear to have been taken. It seems likely that if the Acts are abolished the reserve land will revert to the Crown and not to the Aboriginal people. Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action, *Beyond the Act: Queensland Aborigines and Islanders, what do they want?* (Brisbane, 1979): *Commissioner for Community Relations: fourth annual report* (Canberra, 1979), 27-35.

separate settlement.<sup>24</sup> Such plans were based on racist, separatist ideas, which unquestionably prevailed in the Commonwealth generally and in Queensland in 1906, and indeed for at least a generation later.

The Pacific Islanders' Association was the most significant, and the only organised, response by Islanders to the Commonwealth's harsh deportation order. Beyond the fact that it was formed at Mackay in 1901 by Tui Tonga, a well-educated Melanesian who had lived in the district for more than twenty years,<sup>25</sup> nothing further is known about the Association until 1906 when it re-formed under the leadership of Henry Diamur Tonga. H.D. Tonga (a New Hebridean from Tongoa island) denied that the new Association had any connection with the old one, and he does not appear to have been related to Tui Tonga (who claimed to be Fijian). The 1904 petitions from Mackay seem not to have emanated from Tui Tonga's Association, which nevertheless did have a solicitor in 1905 and probably existed, if only in name, until Tui Tonga's death in December 1905.<sup>26</sup> H.D. Tonga's new Association was active throughout 1906: branches were formed in other towns, the Association wrote to the British government, petitioned the Royal Commission into sugar industry labour, and sent delegates to Melbourne to present a petition to the Prime Minister.

Beginning in early-February 1906 the Association held regular bi-monthly meetings throughout much of the year. In late February a delegate was appointed to visit Islanders in Proserpine 120 kilometres north, and in May the Chairman H.D. Tonga and the Secretary D.M. Sandwich travelled to Proserpine and Bowen (a further sixty kilometres north) to organise a branch. On his return from Melbourne in December H.D. Tonga addressed meetings of Islanders at Bundaberg and Tweed Heads at which it was decided to form branches. The Association had Articles and by-laws; it held elections for office-bearers, and minutes of the

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24. *QSA PRE/A662*, In letter 5241 of 1920: Petition to Queensland Parliament from Polynesians living in the Mackay District; *BOHC 54Ba* : 2 (NJF).

25. *MM* 27 March 1880. For further information on Tonga refer to Section 4.G. : 1880s to 1907.

26. *MM* 18 January, 18 April 1906.

previous meeting were read and confirmed. Membership drives were held, canvassers receiving a commission on each five shilling membership fee. Fines of between ten shillings and one pound were imposed on members in breach of the Articles or by-laws. The Association's main purpose was to fight the deportation issue, but it also concerned itself with the members' welfare, attempting to provide meals for Islanders visiting town and asking the police to clean up vice and immorality in China Town.<sup>27</sup>

The 1906 Royal Commission collected evidence in the Mackay district in April 1906; all Islander farmers were invited to give evidence. A few days before the Commissioners arrived the Association held a meeting, attended by 200 of the more than 900 adult Islanders in the district, to discuss policy to the Commission.<sup>28</sup> Although a number of Islanders attended the hearings, only three gave evidence: H.D. Tonga, Noah Sabbo, and William Seekis. Tonga had been in Queensland since 1884, employed initially at *Palms*. Since 1903 he had leased a fifty acre farm at Homebush and was growing ten acres of cane; two other Islander farmers assisted him when necessary. Tonga was under the impression that Islanders leasing land would not be deported.<sup>29</sup> Commissioner W.T. Paget, the local parliamentarian and until 1901 owner of *Nindaroo*, asked Tonga what would happen to Europeans in the islands if the Melanesians were deported. He was not happy with Tonga's reply:

If the "boys" have to leave Queensland then  
the white men will have to leave the islands. 30

Noah Sabbo was twenty-two years old, of Epi descent, but Australian-born. He had attended the state school at Mackay, and in 1906 was leasing a thirty-five acre farm at Baker's creek. Sabbo voiced the concern of

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27. *MM* 10, 27 February, 20, 27 March, 18 April, 1, 14, 28 May, 26, 27 June 1906; *Qlder* 1 December 1906 (I am indebted to Patricia Mercer for this reference.)

28. *MM* 18 April 1906.

29. The Commission's report noted that this belief was widespread amongst the Islanders. *1906 Queensland Sugar Industry Labour Royal Commission* (Brisbane, 1906), LXIII.

30. *Ibid.*, 152 (Q:5249).

the Islander farmers in the district, only three of whom were exempt from deportation:

They say that if they are obliged to go they have ploughs, horses, and implements, and a bit of cane, and they do not know what they are going to do with them.

The Commission's Chairman, R.A. Rankin, then asked Sabbo what the Islanders' reaction was to the idea of a separate Melanesian settlement. After consulting those present, he answered negatively:

They don't like to be shifted about. Where they are now they are growing cane, and would like to stay there until their leases are up. They would like to stay longer if the land lord will allow them. 31

William Sigges (Seekis) from Lifu in the Loyalty group had lived in Queensland since 1871. As one of the original 835 ticket-holders,<sup>32</sup> Seekis was exempt from deportation; as a French subject he was doubly exempt. A Catholic, he was married to a European and had four children. Since 1894 he and his family had been living at Chelona on an eighty acre leasehold farm. Free to stay, Seekis told the Commission that he did not want to remain in Australia without his friends, and because of the rebate offered to growers who used only white labour, he doubted that he would be able to find employment to supplement what money he made from his own cane.<sup>33</sup>

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31. *Ibid.*, 204 (Q:6905-38). A 1903 list shows 74 Islanders at Mackay as "apparently domiciled permanently in Queensland". They had assets worth at least £1,000. *QSA PRE/89 1903/7600: Summary of Pacific Islanders apparently domiciled permanently in Queensland* (attached to IA to UC CSD, 19 October 1903).

32. When restrictive legislation was passed in 1884, 835 Islanders who had been in the colony since before 1 September 1879 were exempted from any further restrictions. Only 681 of them were still in the colony in 1906. For further information refer to Chapter Six: 4.E. Also see *MM* 3 May 1957.

33. *1906 Royal Commission*, 203 (Q:6856-87).

When the Commissioners presented their report on 30 June 1906 about 4,500 Melanesians were liable to be deported at the end of that year. In their judgement the 1901 Act was inadequate in its definition of Pacific Islanders due to be deported, and if enforced would have caused considerable inhumanity. They recommended that Islanders be exempted from compulsory deportation if they:

1. were introduced into Australia prior to 1 September 1879 (this group was thought to have been covered under Section 2 (a) of the 1901 Act, but some had never registered for exemption tickets under the 1884 Act, or had subsequently lost them);
  2. were of such extreme age, or suffering from such infirmity as to be unable to obtain a livelihood if returned to their islands;
  3. were married to, or living as man and wife with, a native of some island other than their own, and could not be deported without risk of life to themselves or their families; 34
  4. were married to, or living as man and wife with a female not a native of the Pacific Islands;
  5. had offspring who had been educated in state schools;
  6. were registered from before 1 July 1906 as the beneficial owners of freehold in Queensland; 35
  7. held an unexpired leasehold, compensation of which had not been paid;
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34. Refer to Table One: there were 31 Islanders from Mackay in this category.
35. This only applied to 13 Islanders at Rockhampton.

8. or had been continuously resident in Australia for periods of not less than twenty years prior to 31 December 1906.<sup>36</sup>

The other recommendations related to the organisation of the deportation process and providing a labour supply for the sugar industry after the withdrawal of the Islanders.

After its petition to the Commission in April the Association canvassed for new members around Mackay, while also broadening its base to include Proserpine and Bowen. The resultant increase in funds enabled the Association to attempt its most ambitious political activity: H.D. Tonga and John Bomassing voyaged to Melbourne to present the Association's petition to Alfred Deakin in early September 1906. By any standards the Association's progress between February and September 1906 was impressive: as a Melanesian political organisation it was amazing. There were obviously some well-educated Europeans involved who kept well in the background while aiding the Islanders in drafting letters and petitions. There is however nothing to indicate that they did any more than solicitors do in any similar Association. The rank and file members of the Association were probably illiterate and guided by their leaders (particularly H.D. Tonga) who were efficient political organisers, combining Melanesian Bigmanship with European political roles.

There had been debate over whether the deportation clause of the 1901 Act was *intra vires* of the Australian constitution and parliament. A test case was organised in October to go before the High Court in Brisbane: Robtehines, from Vanu Lava in the New Hebrides had been in Queensland since September 1897 and was due for deportation. Although there is a large Australian government file on the case, it is unclear who suggested the move to Robtehines. At the time of the case, Rev. James Gillespie, Presbyterian minister at Walkerston outside Mackay, wrote to the *Mackay Mercury* appealing for funds to cover Robtehines'

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36. In a rider C.F. Nielson dissented from this last recommendation. He felt that it was too general and that most of the Islanders affected were already covered by recommendations 1 to 7.  
*Ibid.*, LXXI.

Table One : Statistics from the Mackay Melanesian Community  
in mid-1906

Total Melanesian Population	1079
<u>Adults:</u>	
Males	918
Females	44
<u>Children:</u>	
Male	49
Female	68
<u>Males married or cohabiting with:</u>	
Europeans	4
Aborigines or half-castes	0
a female from their own island	27
<u>Males and females in Queensland for:</u>	
10 to 15 years	215
15 to 20 years	262
over 20 years	143
<u>Landholders:</u>	
Freehold	8
Leasehold	155

Source: *1906 Sugar Industry Labour Royal Commission*, App. XVII.

expenses, but it appears that they were eventually paid by the government.<sup>37</sup> The case went before Chief Justice Sir Samuel Griffith, Mr Justice Barton and Mr Justice O'Connor, who upheld the validity of the legislation. There was little more the Islanders could do to fight deportation. In late 1906 the Association fell upon hard times, culminating in severe financial troubles and litigation in 1907.<sup>38</sup> There was however some consolation: all except two of the Commission's recommendations for extra categories of exemption (5 and 7, listed above) were incorporated in an October 1906 revision of the 1901 Act.<sup>39</sup> All other Islanders had to go.

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37. Robtehines lived in southern Queensland, not at Mackay. *C'W A* CRS A1 1907/293; *MM* 4, 8 October 1906.

38. In March 1906 H.D. Tonga was sued by the Association for misuse of its funds. Tonga claimed that the Association had granted him a £100 per annum salary in July 1906, but other members denied this. *MM* 5, 7 March 1907.

39. Act No. 22 of 1906.

3. The deportation : 1906-08

Good-bye, Queensland, good-bye, White  
Australia; Good-bye Christians. 40

(Words shouted from the deck of the *Malaita*, departing Cairns with  
204 Solomon Islanders in November 1906.)

.....

Administering the deportation of 7,068 Islanders between 1904 and 1908 was complicated. The 1901 Act included provisions to taper Melanesian migration during 1902 and 1903,<sup>41</sup> to end completely on 31 March 1904. Islanders whose agreements had expired were obliged to re-engage or return home. By this gradual diminution the 9,844 Islanders in Queensland in 1901 were reduced to 5,389 by 10 April 1906. Approximately 4,000 were still due for deportation at the end of 1906.<sup>42</sup> All through the 1900s the Queensland and Australian governments negotiated with the Western Pacific High Commissioner and his deputies in the Solomons and the New Hebrides. These officials were not satisfied that the Queensland government showed enough concern over the well-being of returning labourers, the seaworthiness of the labour trade vessels, or the constant but illegal supply of arms and ammunition taken back to Melanesia by ex-Queensland labourers.<sup>43</sup>

In a newspaper interview in March 1903, Captain Ernest Rason, Resident Deputy Commissioner of the New Hebrides declared that :

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40. *MM* 24 November 1906.

41. Act No. 16 of 1901. In 1902 no more than two-thirds of the number returned in 1901 were allowed to be recruited, in 1903 only half of the number of returns in 1902.

42. *1906 Royal Commission Report*, LX; Queensland Immigration Agent's 1901 Report on Pacific Island Immigration.

43. *QSA PRE/84*, Sir Everard im Thurn to Lt Gov of Queensland, 7 July 1905; IA to US CSD, 15 September 1905.

it is an outrageous act for Australia to  
return these men to barbarism after  
civilising them, 44

and communicated his fears for their safety direct to the Colonial Office. In return the Colonial Office suggested that vessels carrying returning labourers should report first at Villa to afford them an opportunity to engage as labourers on plantations within the islands.<sup>45</sup> Rason continued to show his concern through following years, making it clear that Islanders who were landed without friends present on the beach to protect them, stood a high chance of being killed or enslaved, or at the least having their possessions stolen. He also stressed that European settlers in the Islands were put at risk by the social upheaval caused by Australia's deportation plans.<sup>46</sup>

622 Islanders were returned from Queensland to the Solomons in 1904, leaving about 5,380 Solomon Islanders still in the colony on 31 March 1905. The Solomon Resident Commissioner, C.M. Woodford, expected 4,500 to 5,000 of them to be deported during 1907. Like his colleague Rason he was concerned over the logistics of the proposed repatriation of so many people, so quickly. In November 1903 Woodford had a new regulation passed, making it compulsory for labour vessels to call first at Tulagi. Early in 1905 he proposed that all Solomon Islanders to be deported from Queensland be grouped at one Queensland port, where he personally would supervise their return home. This policy was partly adopted: during the main repatriation period Solomon deportees were grouped at Brisbane, Cairns and Mackay, while New Hebrideans left from other ports, but Woodford was not allowed to supervise the process from its Queensland end. Instead he had to be satisfied with total control in the Solomons. From late in 1905 each vessel returning labourers had to carry an Agent appointed by the

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44. *The London Daily Mail*, 21 March 1903, clipping contained in QSA PRE/88, CS In letter 4205 of 1903.
45. This policy, of transferring some ex-Queensland labourers direct to plantations within Melanesia, was followed in the New Hebrides, Solomons and Fiji over the next few years.
46. QSA IPI 3/17, E. Barton to P of Q, 31 July 1903; QSA PRE/84, RDC E. Rason to CS of Q, 15 December 1905.

Protectorate, as well as the usual Queensland Government Agent.<sup>47</sup> As in the New Hebrides, Islanders unwilling to return to their villages were employed on plantations in the Protectorate, or taken to mission stations. The Anglicans established a mission at Fiu on the Malaitan west coast, primarily to provide a home for returning Christian Malaitans. Other such stations were established in following years.<sup>48</sup>

In 1903, at about the same time as the Colonial Office suggested that returning New Hebrideans might wish to travel directly to plantations within the islands, CSR conceived the idea of recruiting time-expired Islanders from around Bundaberg to work on the company's plantations in Fiji. The scheme failed because the estimated cost of the transfer was too high and the Islanders too few, on account of a good cane season in Queensland. In 1905 the idea re-emerged under official sponsorship: Sir Evard im Thurn informed the Governor of Queensland that Fiji would accept a number of Islanders from Queensland. The details were arranged during 1906 and in 1907 427 Queensland Islanders left for Fiji; one hundred were from Mackay. The Fiji transfer lessened the pressure on the forced exodus from Australia, but still left about 3,500 to be repatriated direct to the Solomons and New Hebrides.<sup>49</sup>

Only lepers were immune;<sup>50</sup> for the rest deportation got under way in late 1906, continuing steadily through 1907 into 1908. By May 1908 there were just over one hundred still to leave. On 31 July the offices of the Pacific Island Branch of the Queensland Immigration

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47. *British Solomon Islands Report, 1903-05*, 24-5, enclosed in QSA PRE/84. See also PRE/84, IA to US, CSD, 15 September 1905.

48. QSA PRE/89, Cecil, Bishop of Melanesia, to Gov of Q, 31 October 1902; QSA PRE/84, George, Bishop of Melanesia, to Gov of Q, 8 March 1906; D. Hilliard, *God's Gentlemen: a history of the Melanesian Mission, 1849-1942* (Brisbane, 1978), 178-81; Bennett, *Wealth of the Solomons*.

49. MM 11, 23 January 1907. The Fiji scheme is described in more detail by Peter Corris, *Passage, Port and Plantation*, 132-3.

50. C'W A CRS A1 1907/9881, A. Deakin, memo, 12 September 1906.

Department closed; deportation was officially over, although a further 194 left Australia between 1908 and 1914.<sup>51</sup> The Queensland police were used to assist Immigration Department officials. They were instructed to act with discretion and tact, but to use force if necessary. In the event little was needed and deportation was accomplished with surprisingly little resistance.<sup>52</sup> The scene at the wharves was rowdy, sometimes violent and always emotional. One wharf-side brawl has entered Islander folk lore at Mackay: Malaitans and New Hebrideans had a last drunken fight, one man having both of his arms broken in the process.<sup>53</sup> But other breaks were more serious in the long term.

Sad, pathetic letters remain in government files, written by Islanders literally pleading for their lives. Malaitan Peter Janky from Nambour was eventually granted exemption, but not without a long battle. Recruited from Ataa on the *Empreza* in 1892, he may well have been from Fataleka:

Nambour  
June 1907

Dear Mr. Brennan,

I am writing to let you know of you want to send me home or not but I am frightened to go home. I got trouble in my country if I go home to my passage I might get kill because they are waiting for me all the time the best for me to stop with my brother Dick Assie and Tom Sulla. Dear Mr. Brennan you will let me stop in Queensland beucase I will get kill

that is all I ask

I remain your trully son

Peter Janky  
Malaita 54

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51. C'W A CRS A1 1908/5120, IA Brennan to S, Dept. of External Affairs: Statement of Repatriation, 23 May 1908; C'W A CRS A38 : Register of Departures of Coloured Persons from the Commonwealth, 1903-1935.
52. *Correspondence between the Premier of Queensland and the Prime Minister of the Commonwealth respecting deportation of Kanakas, laid before the table of the Legislative Assembly, 7 August 1906* (Govt. Printer, Brisbane, 1906); QSA POL/J35: A. Deakin to Premier of Q, 4 October 1906; Commissioner of Police, Circular Memo No. 407, 18 October 1906.
53. MM 16 February 1907; BOHC 33Bb:2 (ONF&HSQ); BOHC 18a : 3 (ONF&HSQ).
54. C'W A CRS A1 1908/1459.

Despite the alleged concern for humanity on the part of the government, families were split up, parents and children, brothers and sisters, separated for ever. Several of the older Islanders remember being taken down to the wharves to farewell friends and relations. At Mackay two of the Kwasi children went back to the Islands, while two others stayed.<sup>55</sup> Sandy McKela was left in Queensland by his parents, to be raised by a family friend whose name he adopted. One of the Viti girls went back to Guadalcanal, but because another child was too young to travel her parents and the rest of the family stayed behind.<sup>56</sup> Ivy Thomas says that her father was one of the men transferred to Fiji in 1907.<sup>57</sup> Similar traumatic partings occurred in every Islander community.

The number of Islanders remaining after deportation, including Australian-born children, was estimated at about 1,500, but the actual figure is higher, probably nearer 2,000. Islander oral testimony from several areas of Queensland suggests that an unknown number ran away and hid in the bush until the deportation round-up was over. They claim that some European farmers knew, and assisted them in hiding from the police. Many Islanders, including leading Mackay families, are a little reticent in saying how their parents managed to stay in Australia.<sup>58</sup> Today, Australian South Sea Islanders can smile wryly about it all. They now number more than the total number proposed for deportation in 1901.

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55. *BOHC* 43Ba : 3 (ONF&VF). These were the children of James Corsay (Kwasi), mentioned in Table Four.

56. *BOHC* 7Ba : 1 (JV); *BOHC* 4Ba : 3 (WM).

57. *BOHC* 3Ba : 1 (IT), and 3Bb : 2 (IT). Ivy Thomas' father was Fijian Willie Marlla. For a few years after he returned he kept in touch with his wife (Katie Natofelinga from Aoba), but they lost contact eventually.  
*BOHC* : Transcript Two: 'History of my mother's life', by Ivy Thomas (2 pages).

58. *BOHC* 8Ba : 1 (NJF); *BOHC* 27Ba : 2 (ONF); *BOHC* 30Ba : 1 (NS); *BOHC* 19Bb : 2 (EH); *BOHC* 4Ba : 2 (WM); *ABC* 9B : 1 (SL).

#### 4. Melanesian politics and society at Mackay

##### A. Introduction

The Melanesian reaction to the deportation order seems normal enough in European terms: they formed a political pressure group and petitioned the government. But the theme of this thesis has been that these people functioned culturally as Melanesians within European controlled surroundings: the culture of Melanesia though disrupted and truncated, was successfully transplanted to Queensland. How then did Melanesians, from hundreds of islands, language and dialect groups, bind themselves together into a European-style political movement?

The explanation is partly contained in the development of a segmented Melanesian working class. Beginning in the mid-1880s, time-expired and ticket-holding labourers formed the base of a Melanesian segment of the general working class separate from indentured servants. The leaders of the European-style anti-deportation movement were all long-term residents of Queensland: time-expired and ticket-holding Melanesians. But this only partially explains the politics of the deportation years: several further points are needed to convincingly explain the phenomenon of pan-Melanesian political unification. Firstly, the unity is deceptive: there were at least two and perhaps more major political groups amongst the Melanesians. Secondly, racial discrimination against the Melanesians and more general European social attitudes toward them helped create one Kanaka people from fragmented groups living along Australia's northeastern seaboard; people traditionally divided by island group, island, language, dialect and descent group loyalties. Thirdly, related to this is the unity achieved by the use of one language - first pidgin English, and later creole English and English. Fourthly, the effect of the missions in giving an understanding of the religion, philosophy and culture of Europe, and at least a veneer of unity through Christianity. Fifthly, the educative power of the missions as perveyors of literacy, which allowed Melanesians to communicate with Europeans on more nearly equal terms. Sixthly, traditional Melanesian authority and power, altered but bolstered by the above and the cultural adaptation of long-term Melanesian residents of Australia.

#### 4.B. Divisions within Melanesian society

Because of the fragmented nature of Melanesia, both geographically and culturally, it would be reasonable to expect at least some of these divisions to extend into Melanesian society at Mackay. Geographic and linguistic divisions are constantly iterated themes in Melanesian oral testimony from Mackay and other parts of Australia. Islands of origin are still remembered - and regarded as important by older members of the community<sup>59</sup> - but sub-group divisions like Loyalty, Banks and Torres etc. are not regarded as important: the major division is between the New Hebrides and the Solomons. Other dividing factors are remembered (for instance, the blackness of the Bougainville-Buka people, the Polynesian features of the Santa Isabel people, or the French rather than English-speaking people from the Loyalty and some of the New Hebridean islands<sup>60</sup>), but these are overshadowed by division into northern and southern Melanesian groups along a line between the Santa Cruz and Banks islands. Although most of the Australian immigrant Melanesian community today identifies first as Australians, in the minds of some the old divisions remain - particularly in relation to marriage and politics.

In earlier decades divisions were more pronounced. Map One shows the areas of Melanesian settlement in the Pioneer valley in post-deportation years, up until 1940. Regardless of European land holdings in the valley it was divided into two Melanesian territories with a common boundary along the river: New Hebrideans around Baker's creek-Homebush-Sunnyside, the Solomon Islanders across the river in the hills around Farleigh-Miclere. Much of this division was established when the first Islander farmers took up land in the 1890s and early 1900s.

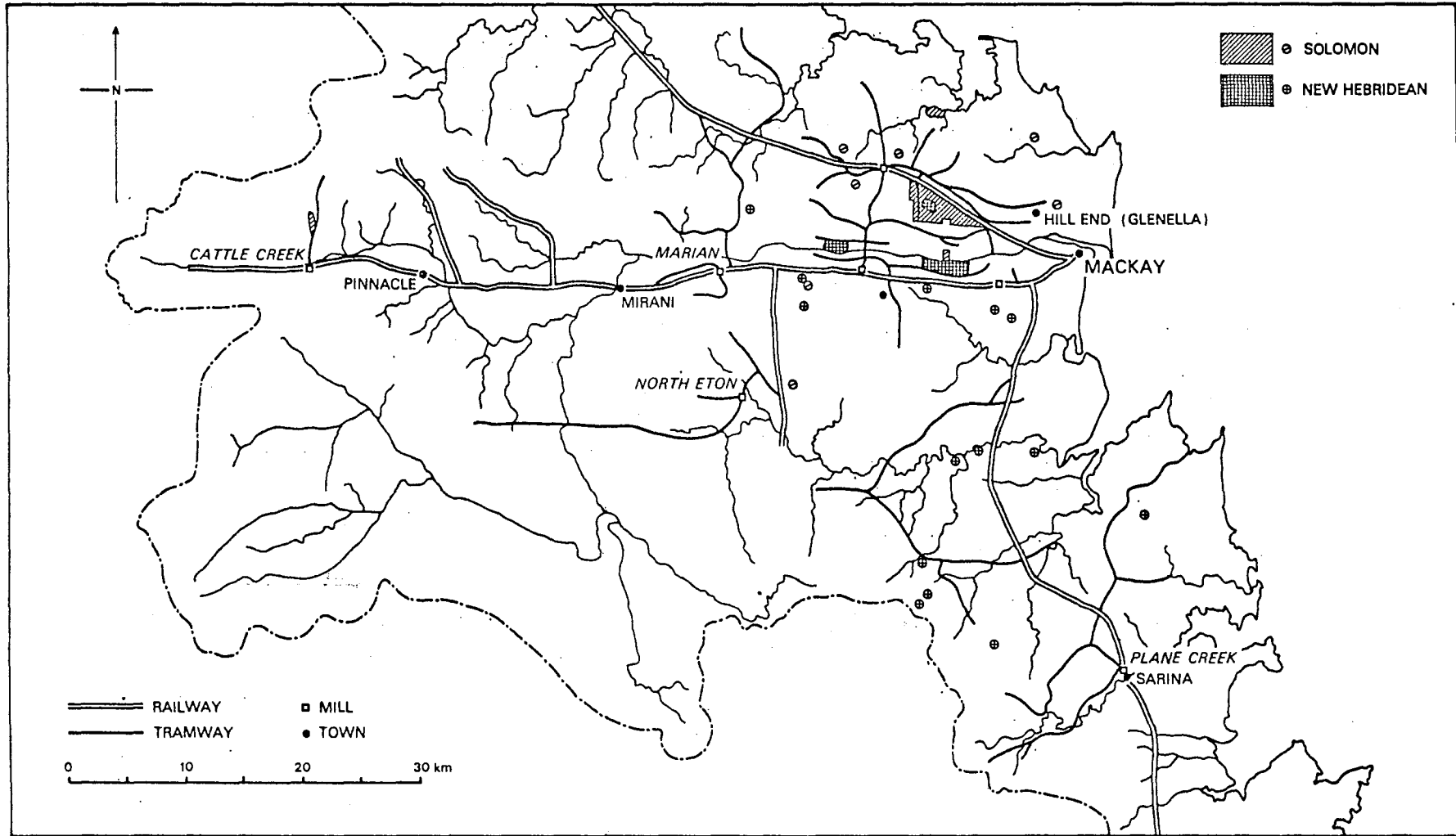
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59. Much of the name analysis integral to this thesis is only possible because of the knowledge of the older generation of the present day community at Mackay and Ayr. Special thanks are due to Noel and Norman Fatnowna, Noah Sabbo, Henry Stevens Quaytucker, Esther Henaway and Rhoda Lammon.

60. One of the items in the *Pacific Islander Photographic Collection* held by the History Department, James Cook University of North Queensland is a copy of a 1942 Free French Movement card which belonged to Fanny (Lucy) Batangaroa Toga from Tweed Heads in northern New South Wales.

*PIPC* v. 1, No. 7.

Map One: Areas of Melanesian Settlement in the Pioneer valley, circa 1910–1940



These geographic divisions were mirrored culturally. Traditional cultural and spiritual activities were focused, for New Hebrideans, around Sunnyside, and for Solomon Islanders, around Kangaroo Hill at Miclere. Melanesian Christian cultural and spiritual activities were similarly focused, for the New Hebrideans, around the Sandiford (Homebush) and Walkerston Presbyterian missions, and for Solomon Islanders, around the Anglican Selwyn mission at Pioneer.<sup>61</sup>

This same division also seems to have been present in the politics of the deportation period. Table Two shows the islands of origin of the 959 Islanders liable for deportation in mid-1906: 330 were from the New Hebridean, Banks and Torres groups; 561 were from the Solomon islands. Fifty-eight percent of the 959 came from only three of the Solomon islands - Malaita, Guadalcanal and Nglea; Malaitans alone made up twenty-eight percent of the total. The preponderance of Solomon and more particularly Malaitan Islanders was not an historical accident evident only in 1906: the majority of recruits in the late 1890s and 1900s came from this central Solomon area. This preponderance is reflected in mission records from

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61. There are of course variations to this pattern, although the New Hebridean (south side of the valley) and Solomon (north side of the valley) division can not be doubted. Some Islanders speak of three divisions: the Homebush mob (New Hebrides); the River mob (New Hebrides and Solomon); and the Saltwater mob (mainly Solomon) living around Etowrie-Habana and Eimeo-Shoal point.

The references to substantiate this claim are spread throughout the *Black Oral History Collection*, and must be considered in relation to the island or island group origin of the speaker. Researchers attempting to pursue this point would do best to refer to *Printout C* (held in the History Department, James Cook University of North Queensland) in conjunction with the Mackay tapes from the *Black Oral History Collection*. Some of the more significant references are:

BOHC 28Ba : 1 (ONF&AS); BOHC 30Bb (JV); BOHC 1Bb : 1-2 (ONF); BOHC 4Ba : 1 (WM); BOHC 27Bb : (MF & ONF); BOHC 33Bb : 1-3 (HSQ & ONF); BOHC 22Ba : 2 (HSQ & ONF); BOHC 37Ba : 1-2 (S & FB); BOHC 29Ba : 1-2 (NS); BOHC 43Bb : 2 (WBQ & MDQ); BOHC 49Ba : 1 (NJF); BOHC 30Ba : 1 (NS & PT); BOHC 4Ba : 2 (WM); BOHC 54Ba : 1-2 (NJF); BOHC 51Bb : 1 (HSQ); BOHC 40Bb : 1-2 (WT); BOHC 31Ba : 3 (GA); BOHC 16Ba : 1 (PD); BOHC 80Bb : 2 (ONF).

Supporting documentation can be found in the files on crop liens from the 1910s-1930s period, held at the Mackay Court House.

Mackay (Table Three) over a longer period,<sup>62</sup> but not in the membership of the 1906-07 Pacific Islanders' Association, which was overwhelmingly New Hebridean. Almost all the Association's members were from the New Hebridean islands of Aoba, Epi, Ambrym and Malekula; there were only a few Solomon Islanders, and they were from Proserpine and Bowen, not Mackay.<sup>63</sup> Although Solomon Islanders probably attended the big 200-person meetings held at Mackay when the Association was formulating policy towards the 1906 Royal Commission, only 102 were included among the 362 Mackay names on the Association's August 1906 petition to the Prime Minister.<sup>64</sup>

It might be thought that a large number of the Solomon Islanders (as the most recent arrivals, on first-indenture contracts, or as the most recent of the time-expired labourers) were less likely to be literate and confident enough to be vocal in matters concerning conflict between the Melanesian community and Europeans. Against this, a large number of Solomon Islanders had been baptised and were also attending reading and writing classes held by the missions:<sup>65</sup> there were at least some among them quite as capable as the New Hebrideans of participating in the politics of deportation. It seems reasonable to conclude that Solomon Islanders and New Hebrideans deliberately chose to remain separate in opposing deportation. Certainly there is direct evidence of active opposition by Solomon Islanders outside the Association: there is also strong though indirect evidence of the means by which they were organised. The majority of those who presented the 1904 petitions to the Governor General were Solomon Islanders. There are nine different surnames among the

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62. The earliest of the 573 baptisms shown in Table Three date from 1884, but more than 500 are from the 1890s and 1900s. Also refer to Table One and Graph Two of Chapter Two, and Graph One of this chapter.

63. There were also a few from Tana and Tongoa. For information on the islands of origin of Melanesians at Mackay in 1906 refer to Table Two.

64. *MM* 18 April, 1 May 1906; *C'W A* A1 1906/6324; Corris, *Passage, Port and Plantation*, 128.

65. Refer to the section on the missions. (4.E.) Some Solomon Islanders, particularly those from Ngela, had contact with missionaries before arriving in Queensland.

Table Two

Origins of Pacific Islanders to be deported from  
the Mackay region as of mid - 1906

<u>ORIGIN</u>	<u>NUMBER</u>	<u>ORIGIN</u>	<u>NUMBER</u>
<u>New Hebrides</u>		<u>Solomon</u>	
Ambrym	47	Bougainville	1
Aoba	80	Guadalcanal	143
Efate (Sandwich)	4	Malaita	275
Emae (Mai)	4	Ngela	93
Epi	43	Ontong Java	2
Eromanga	2	San Cristobal	14
Futuna	1	Santa Cruz	7
Makura	1	Santa Isabel	17
Malekula	25	Savo	9
Malo	11		
Nguna (Moonah)	2		561
Paama	17		
Pentecost	26		
Santo	21	TOTAL	959
Tana	16		959
Tongoa	8		
	308		
<u>Banks</u>			
Gaua (Lacona)	32		
Merlav	4		
Mota	8		
Mota Lava (Matlop)	14		
Ureparapara	2		
Vanua Lava	8		
	68		
<u>Torres</u>			
	22		
	22		
	398		

Source: *1906 Sugar Industry Labour Royal Commission App. XVII.*

Table ThreeIslander Anglican Baptisms at Mackay 1884-1906

(Total 573)

<u>ORIGIN</u>	<u>NUMBER</u>	<u>ORIGIN</u>	<u>NUMBER</u>
<u>New Hebrides</u>		<u>Uncertain origin</u>	
Ambrym	7	McKela	3
Aoba	8	Foonalab/Fooulab	2
Aore	1	Line	1
Emae (Mai)	1	Miraloa	1
Epi	16	Burra-Burra	2
Futuna	2	Unknown (SS1)	228
Maewo	2		
Malekula	4		237
Malo	5		
Mortlab	9		
Paama	2		
Pentecost	1		
Santo	18	TOTAL	573
Tana	17		
Tongoa	4		
	<hr/>		
	97		
<u>Banks</u>			
Gaua (Lacon)	6		
Mera Lava	2		
Mota (Valua)	2		
Ureparpara	1		
	<hr/>		
	11		
<u>Solomon</u>			
Booka-Booka (Bougainville?)	8		
Guadalcanal	25		
Malaita	103		
Ngela	53		
Santa Cruz	2		
Santa Isabel	7		
Savo	2		
Solomon	28		
	<hr/>		
	228		

Source: *Printout A: Angbap.*

eleven available for identification: the origins of two are unknown; two are New Hebrideans; the remainder are all Solomon Islanders from Malaita and Ngela. None had any known connection with the Pacific Islanders' Association of 1906-07. (See Table Four)

Two of the children involved in the 1904 petitions were Joy and Cicely Fatnowna, Australian-born daughters of Kwailiu and Orrani, who were among the Malaitan recruits singled out for biographical mention in Chapter Three. Kwailiu, from the Rakwane descent group in east Fataleka, twice travelled to Queensland: on the first occasion he may have been kidnapped but on the second occasion he willingly enlisted. The first time, probably in the 1880s, he spent only three years on the plantations, before returning home. He then married Orrani from west Fataleka. The couple returned to Queensland, it would seem, to plantations around Innisfail as the first two of their children were born in the Johnstone river district in 1891 (Joy) and 1893 (Lucy).<sup>66</sup> By 1895 the couple were in Mackay where their next child (Cicely) was born. Kwailiu and Orrani seem to have worked on *Meadowlands* and *Palms* plantations in the late 1890s.<sup>67</sup> Around the turn of the century the family shifted over to the north side of the river to work for farmers in the Pioneer and Cedars area. By 1900 when his children were baptised at the Anglican Selwyn mission at Pioneer, Kwailiu was calling himself John Fatnaoona (Fatnowna), a name which family tradition says was given him by his cousin Fikui, also a labourer in Queensland, but who returned to Malaita in the early 1900s. The couple's last child, Eva, was born in 1901.<sup>68</sup>

When Joy and Cicely presented their petition in 1904 they were respectively fifteen and eleven years old. Kwailiu, aged about forty years, died of malaria at Pioneer on 25 March 1906, just as the Islanders

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66. *Printout C*: 1 (561 to 3). Also refer to Chapter Three, Section Six, Case study four. Members of the family are certain that Kwailiu and Orrani first worked on *Meadowlands*, but Cicely was born on *Palms* in 1895, as was their next child, Harry, in 1897.

67. *Printout C*: 1 (563-4, 567, 571).

68. *BOHC 33Bb* : 2 (ONF).

Table Four

Analysis of the island origins and religions of the Islanders who presented the two 1904 petitions to the Governor General at Mackay

NAME	ISLAND	RELIGION	STATUS
Joseph Barramulle (Barramulla)	Malaita	Anglican	Adult
Joy Fatnaoona (Fatnowna)	Malaita	Anglican	Child
Sicel (Cicely) Fatnaoona (Fatnowna)	Malaita	Anglican	Child
Mabel Stephen	Malaita	Presby.	Child
Jessie Stephen	Malaita	Presby.	Child
Frank D'Arbinsan (Darboosie)	Ngela	Anglican	Adult
James Crosay (Kwasi)	Nglea	Anglican	Adult
Eliza Siletarse (Tass)	Maewo	Presby.	Child
Simon Boulesko	Pentecost	Presby.	Adult
Harry Quier	?	?	Adult
Sam Marill	?	?	Adult

Sources: *MM* 23 July 1904; *BOHC* 44Ba : 1 (ONF & MDQ); *BOHC* 54Bb : 1 (NJF); *BOHC* 47Ba : 2 (NJF); *Printout A* : Angbap (403); *Printout C* : 1 (192, 393, 426, 561, 563); *MM* 7 January 1907.

## PLATE 28



Kwailiu, Orrani and children: Joy (born in 1891), Lucy (1893), Cicely (1895), Harry Norman (1897), and Eva (1901). The photo seems to have been taken in 1906. (Photo by courtesy of the Fatnowna family)

final struggle against deportation was beginning. He was buried the next day in the Anglican section of the cemetery, in what was the largest Islander funeral recorded by Europeans at Mackay up until that date. The local newspapers did not bother to report Islander funerals, but Kwailiu's was too impressive to ignore:

The Islander had been a mission boy, and his countrymen for miles around rolled up to his funeral. Immediately following the hearse were buggies and spring carts, next were about 100 Islanders on foot, and behind these came many Islanders on bicycles and last of all a number mounted on horse back. Fully 258 Islanders were present and the scene was most imposing. 69

Who was Kwailiu to warrant a funeral on such a scale, attended by at least one-quarter of the Melanesians in the district? From the newspaper report one could infer that Kwailiu was an important leader in the Selwyn mission at Pioneer, but it is clear that although his children were Anglican, he was still pagan: oral testimony and the Anglican mission records substantiate this. The only other logical conclusion is that Kwailiu was an important traditional leader among Malaitans at Mackay.<sup>70</sup>

It has been seen that Melanesians in Queensland had to function in two separate but overlapping societal systems, one traditional, the other European. It is suggested that, confronted with the need for organised opposition to deportation, New Hebrideans chose to use predominantly European forms of organisation, while Solomon Islanders utilised mainly traditional and therefore less conspicuous, means. Deep divisions within Melanesian society at Mackay were thus projected into attempts to achieve the common goal. The means chosen by each group presumably reflect the longer familiarity of New Hebrideans with European society. But just as the Solomon group had to utilise the European practice of petitioning, so - we

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69. *MM* 28 March 1906. Although Kwailiu is not named it was without doubt his funeral being described. *Printout A* : Deathdat : 66; *Printout C* : 1 (565).

70. *BOHC* 1Ba : 2 (ONF); *BOHC* 7Bb : 3 (NJF); *ADB*, entry for John Kwailiu Abelfai Fatnowna (1886? - 1906). In press.

can feel confident - New Hebridean sources of authority continued to operate within their European-style Association.<sup>71</sup>

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71. Refer to Section 4.G. : Power and Authority.

#### 4.C. Racial and ethnic prejudice

The term "race" has a series of meanings, depending on who is using it and the situation in which it is applied. Keith McConnochie in *Realities of Race* distinguishes three current uses of the term. The most widespread is the *cultural* definition of race, which differentiates groups according to distinguishable cultural traits. McConnochie suggests that *ethnic group* is a better term. The second is the *biological* definition of race, where groups are characterised by a common gene-pool, a history of endogamy and some shared physical characteristics. The third is the *social* definition of race, where groups are classified in terms of ethnic or cultural uniqueness and perceived biological traits.<sup>72</sup> "Racism" and "ethnocentrism" are the social and psychological attitudes of one race or ethnic group toward others perceived to be different. In the colonial era European racism often had an underlying economic aspect when Europeans exploited the indigenous peoples of colonized areas in the pursuit of gain. Today, both racism and ethnocentrism remain, more subtle than in the colonial era, but still affecting minorities the world over.

Over the last decade a considerable body of literature on race relations has been produced in Australia. Historians attempting to apply to colonial Queensland sociological models of race relations (particularly those suggested by John Rex and Harold Wolpe) have been criticized for their uncritical and piecemeal approach to theory.<sup>73</sup>

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72. K.R. McConnochie, *Realities of Race: an analysis of the concepts of race and racism and their relevance to Australian society* (Sydney, 1973), 5-8.

73. *Ibid.*; F.S. Stevens (ed.), *Racism: the Australian experience. A Study of race prejudice in Australia*, v, 1: Prejudice and xenophobia (Sydney, 1974); P. Corris, 'Racialism: the Australian experience', *HS*, v. 15:61 (1973), 750-9; H. Reynolds, 'Racial thought in early Colonial Australia', *AJPH*, v. 20:1 (1974), 45-53; S. Rosewarne, 'Racism in Colonial Queensland', *Intervention*, No. 1 (1976), 60-70; R.A. Wild, 'Social Stratification and Race Relations', *Mankind*, v. 11:2 (1977), 81-92. (and 100-2), (See also answers from J. Beckett, J. Bern, J. Collmann, R. Evans and M. Hartwig, 92-104); M. de Lepervanche, 'Exclusion, Exploitation and Extermination', *Mankind*, v. 11:2 (1977), 106.18.

The approach used in this thesis is to relate racial inequality to the ownership and control of the land, the means of production and access to power. Racism was inherited by Queensland colonists as part of the ethos of British colonialism, bolstered in the nineteenth century by the deterministic theory of Social Darwinism which categorised races on an intellectual scale according to colour. In the Pioneer valley's multi-racial society Europeans felt superior to Aborigines, Asians and Melanesians. The landless working class position which Melanesians occupied all through the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century, reinforced this attitude. From the moment Melanesians stepped aboard a recruiting boat they came up against European racism in every aspect of their lives. In the initial kidnapping phase of the labour trade Europeans obviously treated Melanesians as less than their equals as human beings; this racial arrogance continued, though less blatantly, into the more legitimate period of recruiting - here dubbed "cultural kidnapping" - when they took advantage of the Melanesians' ignorance concerning the place of their labour in the capitalist mode of production. In Queensland Melanesians had their freedom controlled and restricted by a stream of legislation and regulations culminating in the 1901 deportation Act. The legal system operated in their employers' favour. Their general welfare was of a low standard. They were not allowed to acquire freehold land, drink alcohol, travel freely, or enjoy many of the other benefits of Queensland society which Europeans took for granted. They were converted to Christianity and educated in missions separate from the parent churches. European medical care available to them was below par and biased by theories relating skin colour and race to health. They were "niggers", shunned by European society, but too useful to do without.<sup>74</sup> This thesis has not dealt with racial discrimination in isolation

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74. Elderly Europeans at Mackay invariably call the Islanders either Kanakas or niggers. There were always Europeans opposed to Melanesian migration who spoke out against the labour trade, but there is only one case from Mackay when Europeans organised what the *Mackay Mercury* described as an "anti-Kanaka Sect". The "White League" operated briefly in 1877, aiming to stop Melanesian immigration and control Islanders already in the district. The *Mercury* described the organisation as

composed of five or six local thunderers, calling themselves a parliament, non-representative of towns or district.

from other aspects of Melanesian life in Queensland. Racism pervaded every aspect of their lives and hence pervades every chapter of this thesis.

In writings on race relations in Australia "racism" is usually explained only from a European point of view. European writers, imbued with a strong sense of guilt, construct sociological models to explain the racist attitudes of their fellow Europeans. When black Australians theorize and attempt to explain racism they often have a political interest in presenting the Australian black community as occupying a similar position in the sociological model - the bottom. But within the black community there are concepts akin to European notions of racial and ethnic superiority; concepts which historically and today have provided them with unity and strength in the face of oppression. Terms like "black racism" or "black ethnicity" are not precise enough descriptions, but perhaps "black pride" or "black chauvinism" come closer to the term needed. What follows is an attempt to explain this group identity in the perspective of the North Queensland black community in general and Pacific Islanders in particular. Much of the explanation is drawn from personal experience over many years with Aborigines and Islanders in North Queensland, and during two periods in the Solomon Islands.<sup>75</sup>

Black chauvinism is partly a defence mechanism used against European racism. Contemporary blacks are united because of the discrimination they face every day - at work, in hotels, schools, in shops and offices, and in the streets. Politically and socially divided against itself the contemporary black community unites against a common oppressor. An early example of this is the actions of Islanders during the 1883 Racecourse riot at Mackay. Until Europeans joined the brawl the fighting had all been among Islanders, but from the moment Europeans became involved the Melanesians made common cause against the whites.<sup>76</sup> The united stand of Melanesians in the Pacific Islanders'

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75. In writing this section I have also drawn on the experience of Chips Mackinolty, Peggy Havnen and Malcolm Cole.

76. Moore, 'Mackay Racecourse Riot of 1883', 186-7.

Association can also be explained in this way: Europeans provided the Melanesians with unity through discrimination.

Black pride and strength is expressed in many ways. There is pride in the strength of culture and tradition, ancestors and the spirit world, knowledge of geneology and extended family relationships, language<sup>77</sup> and sexuality. Aborigines have their Dreaming,<sup>78</sup> their close identification with land and ancestors. When Europeans first came to Australia the more astute noted Aboriginal self-confidence in their relationship with whitemen. They had mastery over the practical skills of life in the bush, but their self-confidence was more than this. As Henry Reynolds explained in his monograph *The Other Side of the Frontier*,

Aboriginal self-confidence was not based solely on the mastery of practical skills but on the spiritual relationship with the land, the sense of belonging and responsibility for performing the increase ceremonies which ensured the proper ordering of nature, the coming of the rain and the renewal of plant and animal life. Belief in the necessity and efficacy of increase ceremonies continued on well into the period of European settlement. Europeans brought change and damage to many local ecologies but the larger rythms of nature remained constant and predictable to those who had learnt the signs. It remained possible despite the European presence to go on believing in the causal link between tribal ceremony and the turn of the seasons. 79

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77. Language is dealt with in a separate section below. (4.D.)

78. According to Aboriginal belief, all life as it is known today - human, animal, bird and fish - is part of one vast unchanging netowrk of relationships which can be traced to their spirit ancestors of the Dreamtime. These ancestors are responsible for the whole pattern of life as Aboriginal people know it today: they govern the seasons and therefore the growth of vegetation, reproduction of animal species, and the cycle of life from birth to death.

79. H. Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier: an interpretation of the Aboriginal response to the invasion and settlement of Australia* (Townsville, 1981), 48.

Aboriginal society was weakened by the European invasion of Australia but was much more innovative and generative than standard accounts have suggested, and elements of the same traditional self-confidence remain. Today even urban Aborigines share some of this pride and identification with land and ancestors. Earlier chapters of this thesis stressed that Melanesians saw themselves as the physical part of cosmological life-cycles which joined them to their land as co-members of descent groups at ancestral burial grounds. While such relationships were modified by their migration to and many years residence in Australia, they were not destroyed. That they continue to affect their Australian children and grand-children today is proof of this. It is difficult to relate this feeling in Aboriginal and Melanesian cultures to some European concept, certainly not to ordinary situations, but the strength of faith of Christian saints and martyrs to the point of death is quite close. Aborigines and Islanders have a quiet faith in their own secure position within the spirit world, a position which the majority of Europeans cannot even begin to understand.

Connected to this is the strength of kin relationships and the support drawn from extended families. By the turn of the century the Islanders who had settled permanently in Australia had marriages and friendships to add to traditional relationships from Melanesia. It is no exaggeration to say that today all immigrant-Melanesians in Australia are related by marriage - 15,000 people spread from St Kilda, Melbourne to Katherine in the Northern Territory, descended from a few hundred people originating in dozens of Melanesian islands; and in turn they are related by marriage to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander section of the black community. This web of relationships was well under construction by the 1900s and would have provided part of the unity on which the Pacific Islanders' Association was based. By-and-large blacks prefer to socialize and marry within the black community. Part of this is defence against the racism they continually encounter outside, but it is also through pride in their own culture and race. There is a sense of relaxation in knowing that values, ideas and concepts (as well as extended kin relationships) are shared.

Until the last few decades it was customary - almost mandatory - for Melanesians in Australia to marry only other Melanesians. Those who neglected this custom incurred the wrath of older members of their community, who treated mixed-marriages with contempt. The advice given to young Melanesians was to seek out a person from the same island, or the Australian-born child of one. Failing that, the most acceptable choice was a person from the same group of islands; then a Melanesian of any description; an Aborigine or (rarely) an Asian. Only as a last resort should they marry a European.<sup>80</sup> Racist Europeans who feared miscegenation did not realise just how many Melanesian supporters they had: there was no prestige in marry a European. Blacks pity whites: they have no spirit world and no extended kin relationships; sexually they think whites inhibited and boring;<sup>81</sup> and it is common to hear blacks of all ages say "Whiteman got no shame". Blacks feel shame, compassion and a sense of brother and sisterhood with fellow blacks in trouble, or in embarrassing or pathetic circumstances. Europeans do not feel as one with other Europeans in this same way. The Pacific Islanders' Association was organised by Melanesians who had lived in colonial society for many years. European oppression produced Melanesian political unity as an unforeseen product; black chauvinism did the rest.

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80. BOHC 1Ba : 1 (ONF); BOHC 43Bb : 2-3 (ONF); BOHC 40Bb : 1 (WT); BOHC 82Ba : 1 (MS & ONF); BOHC 50Bb : 2 (HB & ONF); BOHC 42Bb : 3 (HB & ONF); BOHC 41Bb : 1 (HB & ONF); BOHC 49Ba : 1 (NJF); BOHC 48Bb : 2 (NJF); BOHC 6Ba : 1 (IT & AM & WM); BOHC 7Ba : 4 (TA & JV); BOHC 9Ba : 1 (NS & ONF); BOHC 10Bb : 2 (AC); BOHC 15Ba : 1 (IB); BOHC 15Bb : 1 (SM).

81. The psycho-sexual aspect is tremendously important, but beyond the scope of this thesis and the abilities of the writer.

#### 4.D. Melanesian languages and Kanaka pidgin English

Melanesian labourers arrived in Queensland speaking scores of different languages and dialects, with no common medium of communication. Although many spoke more than one language or dialect, or understood key phrases from other languages, they had no way of communicating with more than a small number of their fellow labourers. Pidgin English became their *lingua franca*, establishing linguistic unity, probably the single most important factor in creating today's pan-Melanesian society. A political development like the Pacific Islanders' Association - uniting Melanesians from many islands<sup>82</sup> - would never have been possible without a *lingua franca*. But in coping with life in colonial Queensland Melanesians did not become more multi-lingual, maintaining their Melanesian languages alongside English. Instead, the reverse occurred; they adopted pidgin English at the expense of their own languages, and few of their children learnt more than a few phrases from their parents' languages. Today, most of the Australian descendants of the immigrant Melanesians speak standard English, but with an additional creole second language: for the older Islanders - the first generation born in Australia - this is a development of their parents Kanaka pidgin English (KPE); but the creole spoken by the younger Islanders is much more complex in origin - KPE combined with a wider North Queensland black creole (NQBC).

The longer Islanders stayed in Queensland the more likely they were to have learnt new Melanesian languages and have increased their knowledge of dialects within their own native languages. The more capable acted as interpreters for their "new chum" *wantoks*<sup>83</sup>, but most Melanesians in Queensland seem to have quickly developed at least a shallow knowledge of a variety of languages, for ease of communication

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82. The Association had members from at least a dozen islands in the New Hebrides and the Solomons, including: Aoba, Epi, Malekula, Tana, Tongoa, Efate, Santo, Ambrym, Makura, Valua, Ngela, and some other Solomon islands.

83. *Wantok* is the pidgin English word for people who speak the same language or dialect (ie. one talk).

in the multi-racial, multi-lingual society.<sup>84</sup> Islanders knew basic phrases in several languages:

Where do you come from brother?  
 Where is your island?  
 What is your father/mother's name?  
 Where can I get a job? 85

The next most common words learnt in other languages seem to have been related to the spirit world.<sup>86</sup> Linked here is the influence of the missions on language. Missionaries in Queensland taught their charges to sing hymns in Melanesian languages, and translated Christian concepts into Melanesian languages to aid the Islanders understanding of their teachings.<sup>87</sup> Immigrant Melanesians became more multi-lingual, but those who stayed in Queensland did not pass this quality on to their children, seldom even passing on their base language. Some couples had no common language other than KPE,<sup>88</sup> some children refused to learn,<sup>89</sup> but most informants claim that it was deliberate: their parents reasoned that in a whitemen's world it was most important that

84. This not only applies to Melanesian languages. There are Malay words mixed with Melanesian words in some of the oral testimony collected at Mackay. *BOHC* 1Ba : 1 (HSQ).  
 Also worth noting is the use of sign language, which eased the communication problem.
85. *BOHC* 86Ba : 1 (GR); *BOHC* 47Bb : 2 (NJF); *BOHC* 20Ba : 1 (LL); *BOHC* 1Ba : 1 (HSQ).
86. *BOHC* 15Bb : 1 (SM); *BOHC* 2Ba : 1-2 (NS); *BOHC* 3Ba : 1 (IT); *BOHC* 11Bb : 1 (EY).
87. *BOHC* 5Ba : 1 (GM); *BOHC* 81Bb : 1 (MS); *BOHC* 20Ba : 2 (LL), b : 1 (LL). The pitfalls of translating Christian concepts into Melanesian terms are admirably shown in Susan P. Montague's 'Kaduwagan Christianity: a Trobriand response to Western colonialism?', *Kabar Seberang*, No. 8-9 (1981). Also refer to the following section on Christianity and the missions. (4.E.)
88. *BOHC* 31Ba : (GA); P. Mühlhäuser, 'Remarks on the Pidgin and Creole situation in Australia', *Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies Newsletter*, August 1979, 49-51.
89. *BOHC* 21Ba : 1 (CT). The refusal of children to learn the parents' language is a very common experience in migrant communities.

their children learnt English.<sup>90</sup> A few of the older Islanders can still speak or understand a Melanesian language,<sup>91</sup> but only because they listened to their parents talking to their *wantoks*. Most commonly they remember only childhood rhymes, lullabies, greetings and a few words for foods or spirits.<sup>92</sup>

Europeans rarely learnt to speak Melanesian languages. John Spiller claimed to have learnt Lifuan when he first employed Islanders in the 1860s:

I find a great advantage in being able to talk to them, and I think it has helped to make them fond of me. 93

Government Agents, Inspectors of Pacific Islanders and missionaries often were able to speak fragments of various languages, but few other Europeans in Queensland did; nor would it have been particularly useful for them to have done so, given the variety of languages which the Melanesians spoke. Moreover there seems to have been a general

90. *BOHC* 41Ba : 1-3 (HB); *BOHC* 1Ba : 1 (HSQ); *BOHC* 7Bb : 1 (NJF); *BOHC* 10Ba : 1 (AC); *BOHC* 11Bb : 1 (FP); *BOHC* 16Ba : 1 (PD); *BOHC* 24Ba : 1 (TC).

91. In most cases they have had no *wantok* to speak to for upward of two decades, so their knowledge of the language has declined, but in recent years with visits to and from relatives in the islands they have once again been able to practise their language skills. At Mackay this is particularly noticeable amongst Malaitan families, the Fatnownas, Bobongies and Henry Stevens, the last Australian member of the Quaytucker family. Mary Swali, born in 1900, living at Hervey bay outside Maryborough, is the oldest Australian Malaitan. When I visited her in 1977 she was still able to speak a surprising amount of the Fataleka dialect, considering that she had not used the language for several decades.

92. The most fascinating example of this in the *BOHC* is Tape 82Ba : 1 (MS & ONF): Mary Swali (adopted daughter of Tom Swali, Chapter Three, Section Six) then 77 and Noel Fatnowna (grandson of Kwailiu and Orrani, Chapter Three, Section Six) then 48, Mary brought up in southern Queensland and Noel at Mackay, were able to sing together Fataleka children's songs taught to them by their parents. See also *BOHC* 37Bb : 2 (S & FB).

93. Kennedy, *Four Years in Queensland*, 174.

policy amongst Europeans to foster the use of KPE: to lessen inter-group tensions, to make the Melanesians easier to control and generally to ease the Melanesian-European communication problem. One Malaitan bushman at Mackay, Dick Satavi, even claimed that the Courts had ordered that Islanders stop using their own languages and learn KPE.<sup>94</sup>

In the absence of a common Melanesian language, a variety of pidgin English developed in Queensland. Pidgin languages develop as contact languages among people who have no other language in common: Kanaka pidgin English (KPE) developed as a communication system, vertically between European masters<sup>95</sup> and their Melanesian servants and horizontally amongst Melanesians. As a result of the migration of labour to plantations during the European colonial era, new pidgin languages developed, the best known of which are probably those of the West Indies where Africans settled, developing new languages,

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94. BOHC 47Bb : 2 (NJF); BOHC 7Bb : 1 (NJF).

Interesting in the light of this is the following comment by a European who worked in the Sepik district of New Guinea during the 1920s and 1930s:

To have boys all, or most of whom spoke the same dialect was to court disaster. With ease they could desert their master. Boys who speak the same dialect (one-talks they are called) will stick to one another, but will pimp on all others. With a mixed lot they can talk only pidgin English one to another, so it is almost impossible for them to bring about concerned action....

R.A. Beazley, 'New Guinea Adventure', *Oral History*, v. 6:9 (1978), 91.

95. In Melanesia there is also a European variety of pidgin English which has developed because Europeans have imperfectly mastered Melanesian pidgin English, applying to it English rules of grammar and pronunciation. Europeans often lack the motivation to learn correct pidgin English and have only limited exposure to it. Mühlhäusler says that the use of *Tok Masta* (language of the master) constitutes a compromise allowing Europeans to remain socially distant from the 'native' at a minimal cost of themselves. It seems likely that a similar situation existed in nineteenth century Queensland.

P. Mühlhäusler, 'Foreigner Talk: tok masta in New Guinea', *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, v. 28 (1981), 93-113.

the creole<sup>96</sup> forms of which continue to be used by their descendants. But pidgin languages also developed in the Pacific, particularly in association with the labour trade in Melanesia. Often pidgin languages have been regarded as inferior to the parent languages, their development explained in racist terms, as if they existed because of the lesser abilities of their dark-skinned speakers. Research into pidgin languages has however shown them to be examples of the human capacity to form new languages. They can be structurally and functionally reduced but are capable of developing into systems comparable in grammatical complexity to their original parent language. Many pidgins have developed specialist vocabularies and are quite capable of being used to express abstract and philosophical thought.<sup>97</sup>

Kanaka pidgin English (KPE) has recently been studied by linguists Tom Dutton and Peter Mühlhäusler. Dutton recorded several interviews in 1964 with two of the last immigrant Melanesians. He began working on this material in January 1978 and later in the year returned to North Queensland to carry out further field research in collaboration with Mühlhäusler. In 1980 Dutton published annotated transcripts of his 1964 interviews, and in 1979 and 1981 Mühlhäusler published papers concentrating on KPE.<sup>98</sup> They have suggested four periods in the development of KPE in Australia:

1860s to 1880 : jargon period

During these years the majority of the recruits could not speak pidgin English, though some of them must have had a smattering of trader-whaler jargon English. The jargon period was characterized by a small lexicon, very short

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96. Creole languages develop where pidgin languages become the native tongue of a speech community.
97. R. Clark, 'In Search of Beach-la-Mar: towards a history of Pacific pidgin English'. *Te Reo*, v. 22 (1979), 3-64. I would like to thank Drs Dutton, Mühlhäusler and Clark for their comments on this section of the chapter.
98. Dutton, *Queensland Canefields English*; Mühlhäusler, 'Remarks of the Pidgin and Creole situation in Australia', and 'Melanesian Pidgin English (Kanaka English) in Australia', *Kabar Seberang*, No. 8-9 (1981).

utterances with great individual variations, and was used mainly in vertical (master-servant) communication. 99

1880 to 1900 : stable period

During these years more complex rules for grammatical structures emerged, the lexical core was more stable, and standards of correctness developed. In this period KPE was used mainly in horizontal (Islander to Islander) communication, and as a means of social cohesion and self-expression. This period coincides with the class developments amongst Melanesians, which have been described earlier in this thesis, affecting relations between Melanesians and between Melanesians and the wider colonial society from the 1880s.

1900 to 1907 : expansion period

At about the same time as the mass deportation, KPE was reaching the stage of being an extended pidgin with complex grammatical constructions and an increased speech tempo. At this stage KPE was used in almost all domains of everyday life, providing cohesion amongst the various groups of Melanesians in Queensland. KPE enabled them to act as one group during their struggle against the deportation order.

1907 to the present : declining period

The post-1907 Melanesian community was much reduced in size and use of KPE declined: parents discouraged their children from using it; children learnt proper English at

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99. Ross Clark doubts that there was the long initial jargon period, because (a) the pidgin had already undergone 20 years of development in the sandalwood trade, and (b) pidgin languages do not take long to stabilize, once the social context is established. Letter to the author from Dr R. Clark, 29 April 1981.

school and their teachers and peers looked down on the use of KPE. Mühlhäusler suggests that there was a gradual but total change from KPE to English, and that the following elements were involved:

1. the gradual merger of KPE with English in a kind of post-pidgin/post-creole situation;
2. a continued period of bilingualism and bidialectalism;
3. a language shift, involving rapid wholesale replacement of one language by another.<sup>100</sup>

Both Dutton and Mühlhäusler conclude that today knowledge of KPE is very restricted among second and third generation Australian-born Melanesians and is in many cases non-existent.<sup>101</sup>

However, what Dutton and Mühlhäusler failed to detect, for social reasons and because of the nature of their research, was that later generation speakers use a variety of English that appears to include KPE and various types of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pidgin English, which we shall label North Queensland black creole (NQBC) for the timebeing.<sup>102</sup> During the twentieth century descendants of the immigrant Melanesians have predominantly married within their own community as well as with the Aboriginal and indigenous Melanesian (Torres Strait Islander) population in North Queensland. The result has been that the younger Islanders, as well as speaking standard English, use a creole language among themselves and the wider black community. NQBC provides a sense of identity for the North Queensland black community: a private language which can be spoken in front of, but over the heads of most Europeans. The development has important

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100. Mühlhäusler. 'Remarks on Pidgin and Creole', 50-1; Dutton, *ibid.*, 7.

101. They reached this conclusion, based on the claim by informants that their parents felt that in a whiteman's world it was more important to be able to speak standard English than KPE or any Melanesian language.

102. This is my subjective impression, but I have not made a formal linguistic analysis of it. NQBC is most developed in the Townsville region, but also exists at Mackay.

ramifications in terms of the development of black racial and cultural chauvinism as discussed above. (Section 4.C.) There is an urgent need for a detailed study of this linguistic development.

#### 4.E. Christianity

The Islanders who led the struggle against deportation were Christian and literate. The Fijian, Tui Tonga, claimed to have been educated in Sydney.<sup>103</sup> H.D. Tonga had been in Queensland since 1884, mostly at Mackay where he was educated at a mission school.<sup>104</sup> Noah Sabbo, the Australian-born Islander who gave evidence to the 1906 Royal Commission, had attended one of the local state schools. William Seekis also gave evidence: he was Catholic and literate (in his own Lifu language) when he arrived in 1871.<sup>105</sup> Christianity was an important asset for any Melanesian dealing with Europeans. No matter how well Melanesians might have learnt to speak pidgin English, Europeans seldom took them seriously while they remained pagan and illiterate. Christianity was viewed by Europeans as one of the major benefits they had to bestow on Melanesians; literacy went hand-in-hand with Christianity in that Melanesians were taught to read and write using the bible and hymnals as their primers. The whole European educative process is immensely complicated and can best be discussed as a series of discrete but related topics: Christianity, the missions, Melanesian religious thought (4.E.) and Melanesian literacy, leading through to the place of Melanesians within the Queensland education system. (4.F.)

Like all European communities in Australia, the early settlers at Mackay in the 1860s felt the need for churches and priests. At first they had to rely on passing clerics. Dr Tufnell, Anglican Bishop of Brisbane called into the embryonic town in 1863, married two couples and arranged to have land bought for the church. A Roman Catholic priest was appointed at Mackay in November 1865 and in January the following year held the first mass in the newly consecrated St Patrick's church. An Anglican clergyman arrived in 1867 to

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103. *MM* 16 November 1901.

104. *1906 Royal Commission*, 151.

105. *Ibid.*, 203-4; *MM* 3 May 1957; Matsen Diary Ten, 98-9.

establish a parish.<sup>106</sup> Other Christian denominations followed (Presbyterians in 1872, Methodists in 1881, the Salvation Army in 1888, and Lutherans in 1890)<sup>107</sup>, but they all paid little or no attention to the heathen Melanesians. The first to show concern for the Islanders was Rev. Albert A. Maclaren, Anglican priest at Mackay from mid-1878 until early 1883, and in 1891 founder of the Anglican mission in Papua.<sup>108</sup> In a letter written during his years at Mackay Maclaren accurately depicted the general attitude of the Europeans toward Christianity and Melanesians:

In my parish there are 4,000 white people and 2,000 South Sea Islanders who work on the sugar plantations. It is all important that we should build a church at Walkerston which is the centre of the sugar plantations where the South Sea Islanders reside. It seems a great pity that something is not done for these poor fellows when they come to our country. The white people are against me doing anything in the way of teaching them, their argument being that they pay me not to look after the souls of black but of white people. 109

Maclaren was a zealous but hot-tempered man, described by a later Bishop of North Queensland as:

firm to obstinacy and angry on occasions, then the soft eyes would flash defiantly and his words would sting. 110

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106. J. Williams (comp.), *Anglican Parish of Holy Trinity Mackay, Centenary, 1867-1967* (Mackay, 1967), 6; St Patrick's Parish Mackay, Queensland, *Building Fund plus Budget Canvass* (Mackay, 1958). There were probably also itinerant visits from Rockhampton Roman Catholic priests before this time.
107. *MM* 21 June 1977; R. Bardon, *The Centenary History of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland, 1849-1949* (Brisbane, 1949), 33; *MM* 3 March 1891, 6 June 1978.
108. *Qlder* 20 April 1878; Williams, *Holy Trinity*, 9-12, 26-7; D. Wetherell, *Reluctant Mission: the Anglican Church in Papua New Guinea, 1891-1942* (Brisbane, 1977).
109. J.O. Freetham and W.V. Rymer (eds.), *North Queensland Jubilee Book, 1878-1928* (Townsville, 1929), 37-8.
110. *Ibid.*, 36.

Through his goading, the first Christian missions to Melanesians in Queensland were established.

Beginning in the 1860s there had been Christians amongst the Melanesian immigrants; in 1868 Rev. J.D. Lang remarked on the Christian piety of some Islanders on Raff's plantation near Brisbane.<sup>111</sup> Many of the earliest recruits were from islands in the Loyalties and the New Hebrides which had long been visited by missionaries. Over a 1,000 of the recruits who arrived between 1863 and 1872 were from the Loyalties; 659 were from one island, Lifu, one of the most colonised of the Melanesian islands, first visited by sandalwood traders and Samoan missionaries in 1842.<sup>112</sup> William Seekis grew up on Lifu under a French administration, his spiritual needs catered for by two rival groups of squabbling missionaries, the Marists and the London Missionary Society. In 1870 the French withdrew their garrison, leaving the Lifuans to their own devices and in the clutches of feuding Protestant and Catholic missions.<sup>113</sup> Seekis, a Catholic, joined a recruiting ship the following year and arrived at Mackay, one of an unknown number of early Christian Melanesians in the district. Eight years later another amazed Anglican Bishop Stanton when he visited the recruiting ship *Isabella*: on asking what one Islander was doing, the Bishop was informed that he was reading the bible.<sup>114</sup>

In 1876 the *Mackay Mercury* began to advocate the introduction of missions for Islanders in Queensland;<sup>115</sup> similar moves began in other cane growing areas at about the same time.<sup>116</sup> The argument used

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111. Saunders, *Uncertain Bondage*, 196.

112. Price and Baker, 'Origins', 114.

113. Howe, *Loyalty Islands*, 35-45, 57-64.

114. *MM* 1 October 1879.

115. *MM* 1 April 1876; Wetherell, *Reluctant Mission*, 100. Also refer to the *Mackay Mercury's* attack on Ralph Gore's 1880 report on Mackay's plantations, because he failed to stress their spiritual welfare. *MM* 11 August 1880.

116. There were many other missions established among Melanesians in Queensland during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Best known is Florence Young's Queensland Kanaka Mission which originated at Bundaberg in 1882: staffed initially by Plymouth Brethren the Queensland Kanaka Mission established eleven centers in Queensland; after deportation the mission shifted its headquarters to the Solomon islands. (p.t.o.)

was that the Islanders were being led astray by the vices of China Town, and that creating a pool of Christian Melanesians in Queensland who could diffuse Christianity throughout all Melanesia was easier than the arduous task of establishing missions in the Pacific. At Mackay Father Maclaren was able to interest two European women, Mary Goodwin Robinson and Elizabeth Watt Martin, in ministering to the Islanders. Mary Robinson was the wife of H.J.G. Robinson, one of the Robinson brothers from *Lorne* plantation (closed in 1876) and from 1877 manager of nearby *Branscombe*.<sup>117</sup> Elizabeth Martin was married to Robert Martin, who with his brother James settled on Hamilton station in 1863. When James died in 1879 the Martins sold Hamilton, moving to Mandurana, a smaller property close to Mackay.<sup>118</sup> Both women were devout Anglicans and willingly aided Maclaren: in 1882 Mary Robinson began giving bible lessons to Islanders in her own home,<sup>119</sup> and at about the same time Elizabeth Martin started a similar mission at Mandurana which operated for some years.<sup>120</sup>

As Mary Robinson knew the planters and plantation managers she was able to plead for land and funds to continue her work: Hyne and Bridgeman of *Meadowlands* donated 1.6 hectares of land; others gave money. From 1882 until 1903 she operated the Robinson, later Selwyn,

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Mrs Clayton also had a mission at Bundaberg. In 1896 Rev. P.T. Williams was sent by the Anglican church of Melanesia to organize a mission for labourers on the Isis river (Childers). Father Pritt established an Anglican mission on the Herbert river (Ingham).

Corris, *Passage, Port and Plantation*, 94-6; Ivens, *Dictionary of Sa'a and Ulawa*, 230-1; Feetham and Rymer, *North Queensland Jubilee*, 43.

117. The *Lorne* partners became insolvent during the rust epidemic and were forced to sell to Sloan & Co. in 1876. In 1877 H.J.G. Robinson became manager of *Branscombe* for G.H.M. King. Appendix Three : Lorne, Branscombe.
118. *Mitchell*: B1322-1-2, Diary of J.J. Martin, 1876-79; *MM* 16 August, 31 December 1879.
119. John Williams suggests that Mary Robinson began her teaching in 1879, but gives no reference for his information. All other sources say she began in 1882. Williams, *Holy Trinity*, 26; Wetherell, *Reluctant Mission*, 100; Corris, *Passage, Port and Plantation*, 193.
120. Elizabeth Martin provided land for a church and graveyard at Mandurana. St Peter's church was completed in 1884. *MM* 12 March 1884.

mission. *Branscombe* closed in 1884, its owners transferring Robinson to *Te Kowai*, another of their mills nearby. *Te Kowai* also closed, and at the beginning of the 1890s Robinson was forced to take another managing job, this time at *Marian* mill father down the valley.<sup>121</sup> His wife had to shift her mission headquarters to *Marian*, but after a few years the couple moved back to the Lorne-Te Kowai area and a permanent mission building was erected near *Racecourse* mill on the land earlier donated by *Meadowlands*.<sup>122</sup> Mary Robinson continued to run the Selwyn mission until 1903, when, old and seriously ill, she retired to Adelaide. As the mission became established she had trained Melanesian lay preachers and had a European assistant: they were able to carry on the mission's work after she left, but at a new base - St Mary's church at Pioneer on the north side of the river.<sup>123</sup>

The Presbyterian mission was not established until 1888, although moves to do so went back twenty years.<sup>124</sup> In 1888 Rev. J. McLean McIntyre was appointed missionary at Mackay with a £200 per annum stipend, part of it provided by local planters, the rest by the parent church. Until 1907 McIntyre operated his mission at Walkerston (a small town just outside Mackay) with three principles in mind: to bring Christ to the Melanesians, to persuade them to sign the pledge, and to teach literacy and general education. He was assisted by several

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121. Corris, *Passage, Port and Plantation*, 93-4; Wetherell, *Reluctant Mission*, 100; Appendix Three: Branscombe, Te Kowai, Marian.

122. W.T. Wawn visited the *Marian* mission in the early 1890s:

A fine and commodious school-house was erected there, with excellent fittings, prettily decorated walls, and a harmonium. There were over 80 pupils.

Wawn, *South Sea Islanders*, 439 (photo, 437). The mission was still based at *Marian* in 1894-5. *MM* 17 May 1894, 29 June 1895.

123. *MM* 10 November 1903; *Northern Churchman* 1 October 1904.

124. In 1868 the General Assembly of the church instructed its Committee on Foreign Missions to attempt to raise funds for a mission to the Islanders in Queensland, but nothing further eventuated.

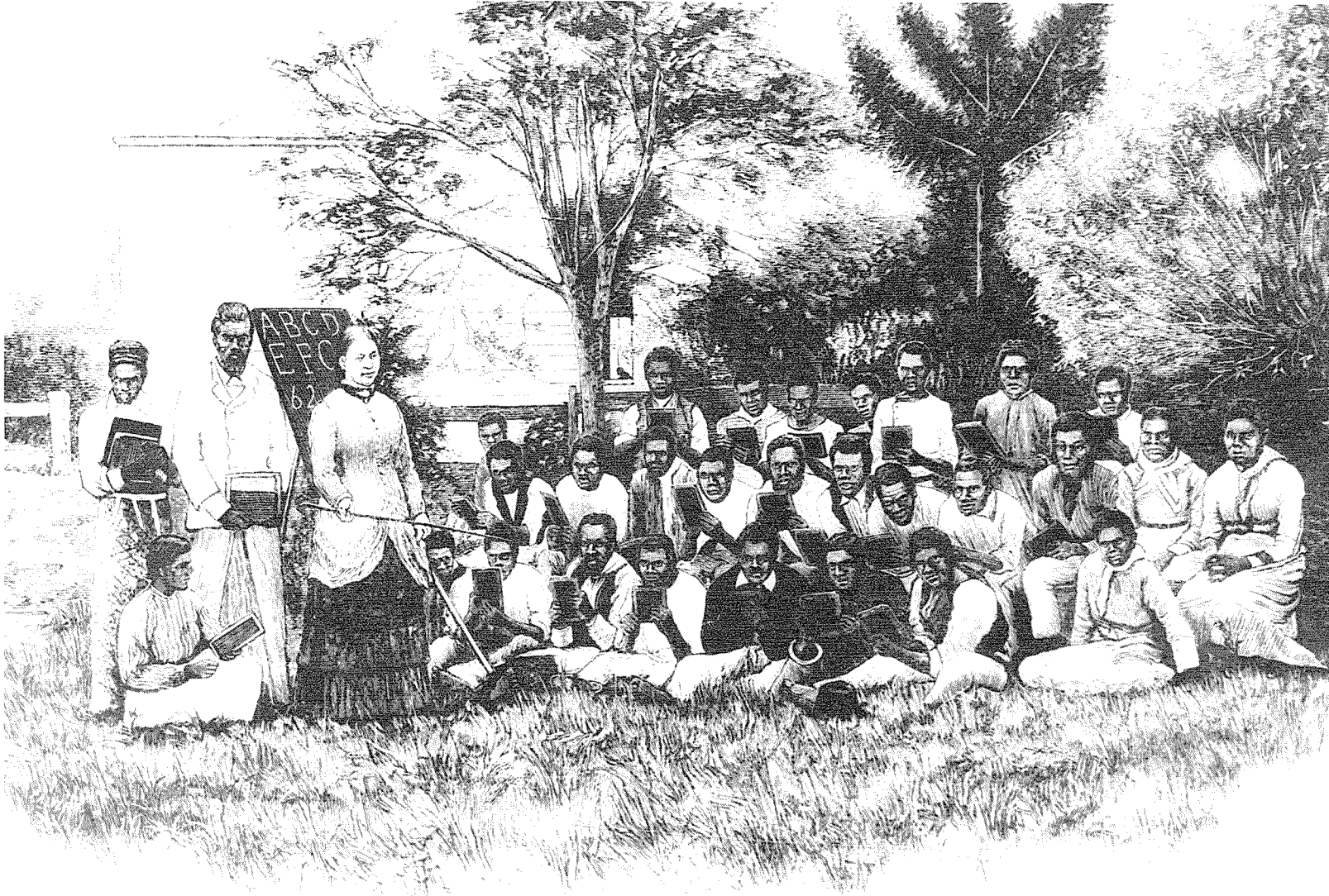
Bardon, *Presbyterian Church in Queensland*, 45.

parishioners of the Walkerston church who set up branches of the mission during the 1890s: Elizabeth Donaldson ran a branch at Sandiford near Homebush from 1890 until 1896,<sup>125</sup> which was then taken over by F.J. Stevens until the 1920s;<sup>126</sup> from 1895 until 1903 Mr J. Walker ran another branch at Miclere on the north side of the river.<sup>127</sup>

Both missions had a similar *modus operandi*: they taught fundamentalist old testament Christianity to Melanesians, in mission halls separate physically and philosophically from the parent churches; employed full-time missionaries supported by European parishioners and Melanesian lay preachers; combined Christianity with more general education (Islanders attended Sunday services, were baptised and confirmed, but they also attended night classes where they learnt to read the bible and to write); and they denounced alcohol, encouraging the Islanders to become law-abiding peaceful citizens. In 1892 McIntyre commented on the change which the missions had brought after only a few years:

there are plantations in this district where, a few years ago, on Sundays it was a veritable pandemonium, where hell seemed to have been let loose, and where drunkenness and fighting endangered the lives of blacks and whites alike. On these same plantations the Sabbath is now one of peace and tranquility. In the place of the shrieks of the drunkard, the hymns of praise to Almighty God rise peacefully from the boys' quarters. 128

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125. Brothers James and Robert Donaldson established *Cassada* plantation in 1869. Elizabeth Yates married James in 1880. In 1886 *Cassada's* bankers foreclosed; the next year James and Elizabeth shifted to Robert's property "Sandiford". James was an Elder in the Walkerston church; Elizabeth assisted with the mission. They returned to England in 1896. Minute Book of the Walkerston Presbyterian Church, 15 October 1896; *MM* 7 August 1880, 20 December 1898; Bardon, *ibid.*, 45-50; Appendix Three: Cassada; *SAPofP* 1895, v. 2, 145.
126. Stevens gave advice to the Pacific Islanders' Association in 1906, many members of which he would have known through the mission and his farm. The Sandiford church was wrecked in a cyclone in 1918, but was rebuilt by Stevens and Neils Paterson and used for Presbyterian and Methodist services for many years. After 1907 it was used more by Europeans. State Centenary of Education Project, *History of the Sandiford State School*, 24-5; *MM* 1 May 1906.
127. Bardon, *Presbyterian Church in Queensland*, 47.
128. *MM* 4 August 1892.



Elizabeth Donaldson and pupils at the Sandiford branch of the Walkerston-based Presbyterian mission in the late 1880s or early 1890s. (Photo: *JCUNQ*: History)

Even planters and farmers less pious than McIntyre appreciated the change, and were happy to support the work done by the missions, as mechanisms of social control as well as vehicles for spreading Christianity.<sup>129</sup>

To judge purely from statistics the missions were successful. At the end of the nineteenth century each plantation had a Melanesian mission teacher who taught Christianity and the elements of literacy in his spare time. Between 1888 and 1895 the Presbyterian mission baptised 379 Melanesians and persuaded 2,158 to "don the blue ribbon". Over the first eight years in which the Presbyterian mission operated Melanesians contributed £200 to mission funds. In 1895 300 Melanesians were being taught in the mission's school, 538 services were held, McIntyre made 262 visits to plantations and farms, and twenty-one new converts were baptised.<sup>130</sup> The Anglican Selwyn mission had similar success: church records show 580 Melanesian baptisms between 1884 and the end of deportation in mid-1908. Islanders were baptised and confirmed, signed the pledge, and helped raise money to finance the mission.<sup>131</sup> Yet such statistics are deceptive, and it is too easy to be trapped by the missionaries claims of success. There are more important issues concerning Melanesian Christianity than the statistical claims of those who ministered to them.

Baptisms and mission attendance statistics are no proof of spiritual conversion. Melanesian Christianity is a complex amalgam of traditional cosmology and biblical teachings. Conversion to Christianity in Queensland did not necessarily involve Melanesians in any denial or suspension of traditional religious practices. Employers encouraged their Melanesian labourers to attend the missions; some Melanesians may have regarded attendance as mandatory rather than optional. Melanesians viewed the missions as part of the wider European

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129. *MM* 6 August 1892.

130. *QSA COL/A807*, In letter 8184 of 1895, CS to Gov, 1 August 1895 (attached extract from *Brisbane Courier*, 9 May 1895, quoting McIntyre's report to the Presbyterian General Assembly at Brisbane, May 1895).

131. *Printout A* : Angbap; *MM* 16 April 1893, 15 November 1898, 3 July 1900.

social order: just one more of the non-traditional activities required of them by their European masters. Some of the Melanesians attending the missions would have done so just to accompany friends or for entertainment, rather than for any more serious purpose. There were also those who perceived immediate, powerful temporal advantages in gaining a mission education, advantages which, like the entire recruiting process, could be linked into cosmological cycles operating at home on their islands and extending to Queensland. Melanesians on the plantations in the nineteenth century, and in the islands today, adopt Christianity in accordance with their own cultural values and assumptions. Christianity was fitted into already existing cosmological exchange cycles in a type of religious syncretism common the world over.<sup>132</sup>

This thesis has stressed the manner in which Melanesians fitted their Australian experiences into established cosmological cycles; this is particularly so of the entire circular-migratory recruiting process and attitudes to disease and death. It has also been pointed out that it is not possible to compartmentalise the various life experiences of Melanesians, nor can an individual be considered in isolation from his or her descent group, or the living be separated from their ancestors. Spiritual beliefs involving philosophy, cosmology, sorcery, magic and *mana* are intermeshed with physical existence. Although we can discuss the missions as a unit, Melanesian attitudes to Christianity cannot be similarly confined.<sup>133</sup> What follows are several broad points

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132. In preparing this section I have benefited particularly from reading the following:

A.R. Tippett, *Solomon Islands Christianity: a study in growth and obstruction* (California, 1967); H. Laracy, *Marists and Melanesians: a history of Catholic Missions in the Solomon Islands* (Canberra, 1976); Hilliard's, *God's Gentlemen*, and Protestant Missions in the Solomon Islands, 1849-1942 (PhD. thesis, Australian National University, 1966), Chapter 9; S.P. Montague, 'Kaduwan Christianity: a Trobriand response to Western colonialism', *Kabar Seberang*, No. 8-9 (1981).

133. Informants make the point that the immigrant Melanesians always drew comparisons of similarities between traditional Melanesian beliefs and Christianity, particularly the Old Testament on which mission teaching was based. David Hilliard noted the importance of ritual in Melanesian Christianity. The most powerful force in Melanesian religion is belief in the immediate activities of spirits and the power of *mana* on the living, not a distant god-creator and rewards after death. *BOHC* 3Ba : 1 (WT & IT & ONF); *BOHC* 34Ba : 3 (IT); Hilliard, Protestant Missions, 489-90.

relating to but extending well beyond the missions and Christianity.

In the preceding section of this chapter (4.D.) it was noted that the missions taught the Islanders to sing hymns in Melanesian languages and translated basic Christian concepts into Melanesian languages. From research in Melanesia it is evident that the linguistic inadequacies of European missionaries have led some Melanesians to completely misunderstand basic Christian theology.<sup>134</sup> Few if any of the Mackay missionaries could speak even one Melanesian language perfectly. Their main medium of instruction was pidgin English, which in the 1880-1900 period was developing into a complex language, but was not fully capable of expressing abstract and philosophical thought. Missionaries in the islands and in Queensland equated belief in ancestral spirits with belief in the devil: the Malaitan *akalo* were always translated as the forces of the devil, as were *tarunga*, the Guadalcanal equivalent;<sup>135</sup> similar examples from other islands appear in oral testimony from all over Queensland.<sup>136</sup> Despite the dedication of the European missionaries, they actually had very little social interaction with the Melanesians, except at the missions and mission schools. As David Hilliard pointed out about the Solomons

even the most magnanimous and perceptive of missionaries were also convinced of the existence of an 'impassable barrier' between white and black and were sceptical of the ability of Europeans to achieve a genuine understanding of the 'Melanesian mind'. 137

So not only was mission Christianity of a most elementary kind, but it seems likely that Melanesians in Queensland may have misconstrued

134. Montague, 'Kaduwagan Christianity'.

135. *BOHC* 40Ba : 2 (WT); *BOHC* 30Bb : 1 (JV); *BOHC* 1Ba : 1 (HSQ & ONF); *BOHC* 2Ba : 1 (NS); *CRM* 2Ba : 1 (II); 17, 21, 27 July 1976 (correspondence concerning the Guadalcanal Tarungahut at Miclere). Some missionaries in the Solomons today unfortunately follow the same policy, equating ancestor worship with devil worship.

136. *BOHC* 1Bb : 1 (HSQ); *BOHC* 3Ba : 1 (IT); *BOHC* 2Ba : 2 (NS).

137. Hilliard, *Protestant Missions*, 500.

the very basis of the theology.

Linguistic problems and the cultural gap between the Melanesians and the missionaries was compounded by religious syncretism. Although interpreted by Europeans as a quaint way of showing their loyalty, on one occasion Malaitans at Mackay seem to have actually placed Mary Robinson and her Selwyn mission under the protection of their *akalo*. She had incurred the enmity of some other island groups through persuading certain of the Islanders to give up their weapons and desist from tribal fights. Some of her enemies wanted to kill her.

This came to the ears of the Malayta men, of whom a number were working near, and they inscribed on Mrs. Robinson's gate certain mystic signs which were interpreted to mean that if any man interfered with Mrs. Robinson in any way he would find himself dying by the most uncomfortable and painful death known.... 138

On Malaita, places, objects and people can be made *ambu*, held sacred and separate under threat of supernatural punishment. In Ian Hogbin's words:

Everything connected with the spirits is said to be *ambu*, the local form of the more generally known Polynesian word *tapu* or *taboo*, and must be approached with great respect. For this reason no one ever goes near a sacred grave unless a burial or sacrifice is taking place, and even then care is exercised. 139

Priests and grave diggers can be *ambu*; paths can be closed by an *ambu* sign. At the opposite pole from *ambu* is *sua* - translated as defiled or ritually unclean: women are *sua* during menstruation and according to Hogbin are never *ambu*.<sup>140</sup> The Malaitans may have just closed the

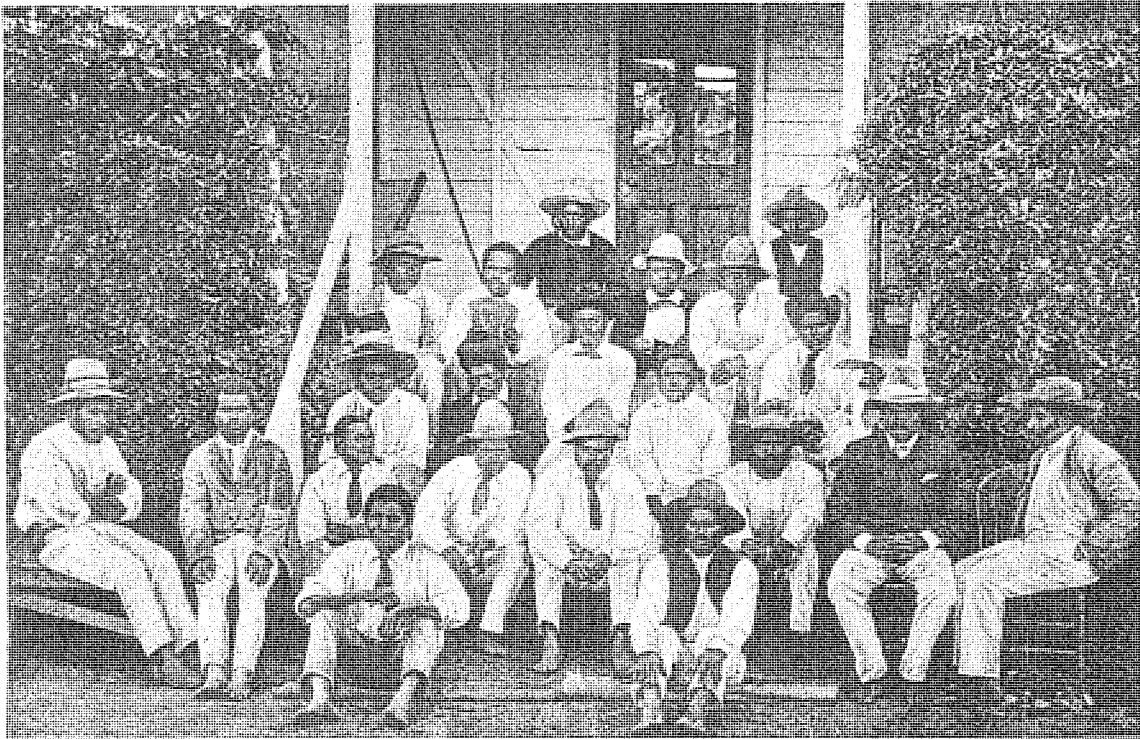
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138. Feetham and Rymer, *North Queensland Jubilee*, 65.

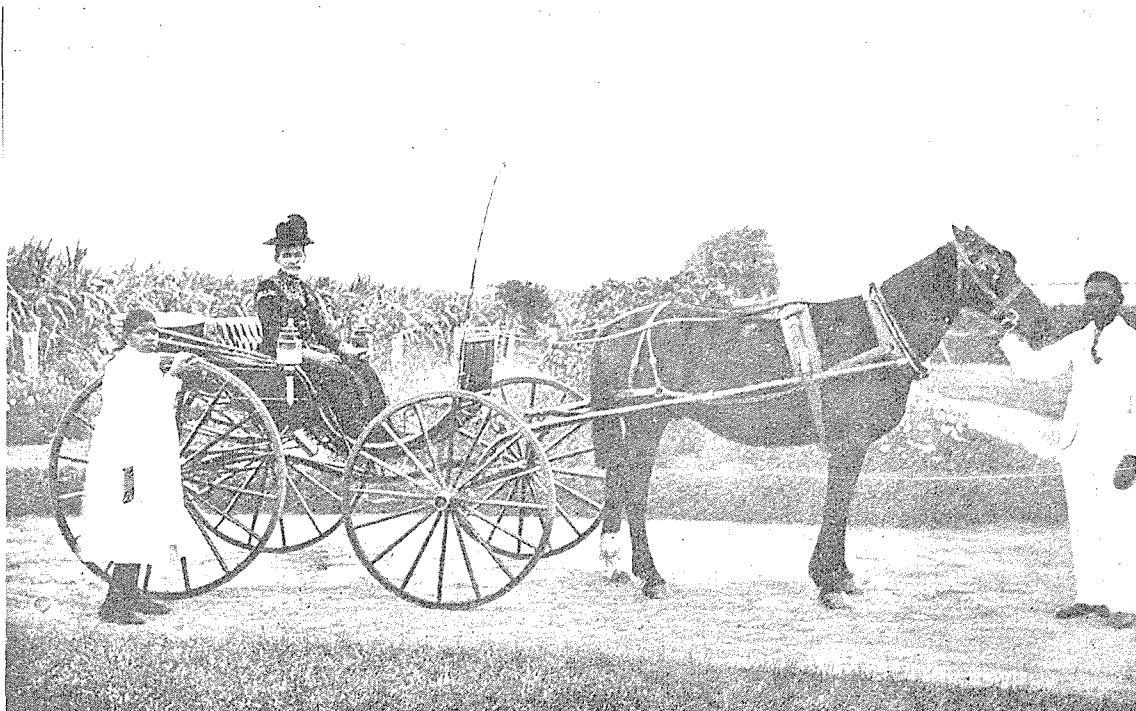
139. Hogbin, *Experiments in Civilization*, 113. Also refer to G. Denig, *Islands and Beaches: discourse on a silent land, Marquesas, 1774-1880* (Melbourne, 1980), 86-94.

140. Hogbin, *ibid.*, 113-6.

## PLATE 30



a. Mary G. Robinson's pupils at the Selwyn mission while it was based at Marian in the early 1890s. (Photo: Wawn, *South Sea Islanders*, 437)



b. Sarah, Mary Robinson and Jack Talafuila. (Photo: Feetham and Rymer, *North Queensland Jubilee*, 64)

path to Robinson's house or they may have actually declared the women *ambu*,<sup>141</sup> but whatever their intention they were using sacred 'devil' power to safeguard their mission teacher. If Malaitans associated the success of the Selwyn mission with the power of their *akalo*, then one must entirely re-assess their attitude to the missions.

The next point relates more generally to Melanesian religious beliefs and practices. Oral testimony collected in Queensland during the 1970s shows that the original immigrants, many of them remembered as fervent Christians, also continued to practise traditional beliefs relating to the spirit world. The most common testimony concerns magico-religious superstitions and taboos, particularly those associated with the night. As well, the evidence collected suggests two main categories of magical beliefs and practices: socially approved magic for protective and productive purposes, and 'legal' sorcery, that is, destructive magic for legitimate purposes. Socially approved magic was, as it still is in Melanesia, not the property of specialists. Its main form appears to have been love magic: not surprising in view of the sexual imbalance of Melanesian society in Queensland.<sup>142</sup> Herbs and plants were used as protection against spirits around the barracks and huts on the plantations and farms, and as counter-measures against spells. Sorcerers could also be called upon to perform socially approved destructive magic. Reputed sorcerers, now long dead, are still spoken of in awe. Destructive magic seems to have fulfilled in Queensland similar functions to those it serves in Melanesia: it acted as a very effective means of social control, reducing physical tensions between opposing groups.<sup>143</sup> The same men and women who practised sorcery and the more common place magico-religious activities were amongst those baptised at the Selwyn and Presbyterian missions.

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141. Because of the dominant relationship Mary Robinson had with them it is possible that they did not think of her as a woman, and Malaitan customs do not necessarily apply to other Melanesian women, let alone European women.

142. Women never made up more than 5 to 10 percent of the total number of recruits.

143. For more details refer to Mercer and Moore, 'Melanesians in North Queensland: the retention of indigenous religious and magical practices, and to Chapter Eight, Sections 6 and 7.

Among the original immigrants there was only limited understanding and acceptance of Christian theology, in a syncretic form with Christianity overlaying Melanesian beliefs. The variations between individuals may have been enormous. Men like Seekis, with a Catholic upbringing in Melanesia, probably had a deeper, purer, faith in Christianity. The more recent converts to Christianity are unlikely to have experienced a great deal of change to their pagan cosmologies and theologies. The earliest Australian-born Melanesians were the most likely to believe seriously in the superior power of Christianity, but even they had (and still have) vestigial belief in the efficacious power of the Melanesian spirit world. Today Melanesian Christians in Australia often have a dichotomous attitude to religion: they are practising Christians but still believe in something quite different - the power of their ancestors and the Melanesian spirit world. Mission Christianity in the nineteenth century caused no real conceptual change for Melanesian adherents, rather its results were more concrete in terms of power amongst the living. The missions brought Melanesians closer to European culture than any other aspect of their lives. The missionaries were caring, devout humanitarian Europeans who while sharing many of the racist attitudes of their fellow Europeans, were prepared to try to teach Melanesians about Christianity, to make them literate and generally more able to cope with living in a European society. Susan P. Montague suggests of Trobriand Christians that they

...have construed Western culture in Trobriand terms and have used the Western presence as a new arena for playing Trobriand games of life. 144

The major value of Christianity to Melanesians in nineteenth century Queensland was in inter-personal relations, authority and unity within the Melanesian community, and in relations between Melanesians and Europeans.

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144. Montague, 'Kaduwagan Christianity', 19.

(Postscript on Christianity)

The Presbyterian mission closed in 1907,<sup>145</sup> but the Selwyn mission, by then based at St Mary's, a small rural church at Pioneer, continued to operate. During the first two decades of the twentieth century St Mary's lay preachers were mostly Malaitans. Joseph Barramulla, baptised in 1890, was Mary Robinson's main assistant at the turn of the century, and took charge for a year after she left Mackay in 1904, after which he also left to be trained on Norfolk island as a missionary and return to his native Malaita.<sup>146</sup> His place was taken by Alex Sayven: baptised in 1898, Sayven led the Anglican Islanders until 1914, when in ill-health he decided to return to Malaita for a short visit, but he became worse and died.<sup>147</sup> Next came Luke Logomier, the Fataleka Malaitan whose enlistment was described in Chapter Three. Arriving at Mackay in 1884, he was baptised in 1889, but lapsed into ancestral worship when the mission shifted down the valley to Marian. Restored to faith in the early 1900s, he ministered to the congregation from 1914 until his death in 1919.<sup>148</sup> He was replaced by Matthew Malachai, from Ngela in the Solomons, who continued as lay preacher until his death in 1932, but to a declining congregation.<sup>149</sup>

In the 1920s Harry Fatnowna, son of Kwailiu and Orrani, step-son of Luke Logomier, was being groomed as Malachai's successor. In 1918 he married Grace, daughter of Solomon Islanders James Kwasi from Ngela and Lizzie Nego from Buka Buka. James Kwasi died in the early 1900s and in 1908 Lizzie Nego became Mrs Matthew Malachai. Harry Fatnowna had been chosen to attend the Anglican Synod in Townsville in 1921, but was unable to do so until the next year.<sup>150</sup> Fatnowna, approved of by

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145. *MM* 7 January 1907.

146. *Printout C* : 1 (192); *Northern Churchman* 7 April 1905.

147. *Printout C* : 1 (1926); *Northern Churchman* 1 September 1914.

148. *Printout C* : 1 (1071-3); Moore 'Luke Logomier'.

149. Minutes of the Council of Holy Trinity Church of England, Mackay, 9 May 1928; *Printout C* : (1137-8).

150. *Northern Churchman* 1 September 1921; identification from a photo of the 1922 Synod, aided by Father E.C. Rowland, Townsville, August 1980; *Printout C* : 1 (571).

the European ministers, was the logical successor to Logomier and Malachai, but in 1925 he was converted to Seventh Day Adventism and led most of Malachai's congregation away to the new church the same year. Over the following decades the majority of the Melanesians in the district were converted to Adventism.<sup>151</sup>

After deportation the Presbyterian and Anglican churches showed little concern for the reduced number of Melanesians who remained and certainly did not welcome them into their wider congregations. The Islanders built two Adventist churches, at Farleigh and Walkerston, significantly, the same areas in which the missions had been based. Islander Adventism is a continuation of the separatist Christianity begun by the missions. Today their separatist approach continues, but for different reasons. The two Melanesian churches, particularly the one at Farleigh, are family churches. They are as meeting places, focuses for the now widely scattered Melanesian families to come together once a week.

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151. *BOHC* 55Bb : 3 (NJF); *BOHC* 48Bb : 1 (NJF); *BOHC* 54Ba : 1-2 (NJF);  
*BOHC* 43Ba : 1-3 (MDQ & ONF); *BOHC* 28Ba : 3 and b : 1 (ONF);  
*BOHC* 34Ba : 1-2 (HSQ & ONF).

PLATE 31



The opening of the first Seventh Day Adventist Church at Farleigh in 1925. (Photo: *JCUNQ*: History)

#### 4.F. Literacy and education

During the 1860s and 1870s there was strong public support for the provision of state education, except from the clergy and their supporters who wanted education to continue to be tied to Christianity. From the beginning there were small private schools and academies at Mackay, but the first state school was not opened until 1871. Later in the 1870s and 1880s other state schools were established in surrounding rural areas, but not catering for adult education and certainly not intended for adult Melanesian labourers.<sup>152</sup>

During the first three decades of Melanesian settlement in Queensland any literacy achieved was a by-product of Christianity, not secular schools. There were literate<sup>153</sup> Melanesians living at Mackay from the early 1870s, mainly from Lifu and Mare in the Loyalty group. Luene from Lifu signed his name on an official statement in 1875. As noted in the previous section on Christianity, Bishop Stanton met an Islander at Mackay in 1879 who was able to read.<sup>154</sup> Dick from Mare island was working on the recruiting ship *Lavinia* in 1882: he could sign his name, read the alphabet and play euchre.<sup>155</sup> Lifu Islanders at Mackay in 1872 were writing letters home. Ole Matsen and William Seekis have both been mentioned earlier in this thesis; they first met in 1872, remaining friends over the next half century. Matsen described an incident from the first year of their acquaintance, when both were employed on *Pioneer* plantation in 1872:

There was also about 40 Kanakas, employed, who were living in small grass humpies, all over the place.

Those boys were all educated to a certain extent,

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152. P.H. Partridge, *Society, Schools and Progress* (Oxford, 1968), 16-34; *MM Jubilee 1912*, 21; *MM* 17 October 1877.

153. It is difficult to judge just how literate they were. Often we know no more than that a person could sign his or her name. Others, as in the Lifu example below, could only read and write their own languages. For the purposes of this chapter any person who can sign his/her name has been considered literate.

154. *QSA JUS/N46*, 1875/318; *MM* 1 October 1879.

155. *The Leader* (Melbourne) 22 October 1882.

as the Missionaries, had for a long time been on their island, Lifo, and every evening they held a sort of a prayer meeting, and sang hymns, in their own island languages and nothing pleased them better, than we came to listen to them. All of them could both read and write, in their own languages, and used to write letters home to their island friends, and, when they found that some of us could write better than themselves, they were greatly pleased when we copied their letters for them, and would send the copy home to their friends.

They were indeed a splendid lot of boys, and would do anything for us New chums. Now after the lapse of fifty years there is still one of the Lifo boys, old Seekis. I often have a conversation with him about old times. 156

There was a much higher rate of literacy after the 1880s when Melanesians began attending mission schools in Queensland. A beginners class was underway at the Walkerston Presbyterian mission when a reporter from the *Maackay Mercury* visited there in 1888:

Our attention was first directed to the right of the hall where on the wall at the end was pasted a placard with all the letters of the alphabet in capital and small letters. A tall and rather good looking boy (Johnnie Sandich to wit) elevated on a form with pointer in hand, was doing his level best to instruct a large class of beginners into the mysteries of the alphabet. After going over it several times he endeavoured to puzzle his class by demanding the sound of any letter taken at random and his delight when a boy called a G a K was rather a treat to witness. He smole (*sic*) a wide smile and tried to curl his leg round his head, but as such manifestations were rather *infra dig* he quickly pulled himself together and proceeded with the lesson. 157

An 1892 reference says that on one of the district's plantations forty-five percent of the Islanders could read and write.<sup>158</sup> A copy of what is the earliest surviving letter written by a Melanesian from

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156. Matsen Diary Ten, 98-9.

157. *MM* 4 September 1888.

158. *MM* 4 August 1892.

Mackay, by Peter Solomon in 1896, is gramatically poor but quite clear and informative and certainly of a similar standard to letters being written by the less well educated Europeans of the time.<sup>159</sup> Considerable effort was often involved in the Islanders getting to the night classes, many having to walk several kilometres to attend. In 1897 night classes were being held at *Habana*. Local farmers asked that these classes only be held on weekends:

It was thought that these two days afforded the Islanders sufficient schooling, their attendance on other evenings interfering with their work.... 160

Exactly what standard of literacy they achieved is difficult to say, but there were obviously quite extreme variations. The *manbus* (the bush people), including many of the Malaitans, often never learnt to read or write, returning home a little richer in material possessions but without literacy skills. The longer any Melanesian remained in Queensland after the mid-1880s the more likely he or she was to have received a rudimentary European education. Oral testimony suggests that most of the immigrant Melanesians who remained in Queensland had achieved basic literacy, but often they seem only to have been capable of reading sections of the bible and hymnals which they had learnt by heart and were quite incapable of reading anything else. The majority could only sign their names or at most arduously write a short letter if the need arose.<sup>161</sup>

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159. *MM* 3 March 1896.

There was also a high degree of illiteracy amongst Europeans at this time. For example, in 1891 the Mackay Census District had a total population of 10538. About 2469 of the total were Melanesians, 265 were Chinese, and another 274 were non-European races. (Aborigines were not included in the Census.) Of the 10538, 5317 could not read or write, 350 could read but not write, and 4848 could not read. There was no information available on 23 individuals.  
*QVP* 1892, v. 3, 1281.

160. *MM* 30 December 1897.

161. *BOHC* 43Bb : 1 (ONF); *BOHC* 31Ba : 1 (GA); *BOHC* 25Bb : 1 (RL); *BOHC* 80Ba : 2-3 (ONF); *BOHC* 19Ba : 2 (EH); *BOHC* 15Ba : 1 (IB); *BOHC* 8Ba : 1 (NJF); *BOHC* 7Ba : 2 (TA).

Queensland parliament recognized the desirability of educating the Melanesians but preferred to leave the task to the missions, which received a government subsidy for that purpose.<sup>162</sup> After the Anglican Bishop of Melanesia visited Mackay and other cane growing districts in 1895 he complained to the Premier about the government's neglect of the Islanders' education. In reply the Premier claimed that

sufficient is being done by their employers and by local missionary effort in the way of both secular and religious education to throw upon the opponents of the trade the onus of proving that the same men would have enjoyed greater opportunities of improvement had they remained in their native islands. 163

By the 1890s the Islanders' children were also being educated in Queensland, in mission and state schools. Oral testimony from Islanders who attended state schools in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries indicates that they were treated contemptuously by their fellow pupils and their teachers. For many of these children, their time at school was their most direct experience of racial discrimination.<sup>164</sup> Government policy was vehemently against Kanaka children attending state schools. In 1892 the Chief Clerk of the Education Department believed that the admission of Aboriginal, Melanesian and half-caste children into state schools would lead to

almost certain risk of physical and mental contamination to the white pupils for whom the school was instituted...

I think there is a clear distinction between the offspring of such races as the Chinese, Japanese, and Hindus on the one hand, and the children of Kanakas and Aborigines on the other in respect of a claim to be admitted to Queensland

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162. McGrath, *Exile into Bondage*, 262-3; *MM* 10 June 1902.

163. *QSA* GOV/A29, CS to Gov, 1 August 1895. Also refer to *QSA* COL/A807, In letter 8184 of 1895, Wilson to Premier, 23 May 1895; *MM* 30 May 1895.

164. *BOHC* 20Ba : 1 (LL); *BOHC* 21Ba : 2 (CT).

schools. The former are resident, settled, intellectual, civilized, in comparison with the latter who are non-resident or nomadic, of inferior intellectual capacity, and barbarous in manners, morals, and habits.

This Department is not organized to educate the children of Aborigines and Kanakas; and the uneducated children of these races cannot be regarded as neglected children, in the sense that we do not provide schooling for them. The schooling of our schools is of no use to these children - or so little use as to be a quantity neglectable. What they need is teaching in religion, moral duty, decent behaviour and habits of perseverance in settled industry. 165

Against such unbridled racism Melanesian and Aboriginal children stood no chance of gaining a decent education in Queensland schools in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries.

The same blatantly racist sentiments, from the parents of European students and Queensland Education Department authorities retarded the progress of Aboriginal and Islander school children for the first several decades of the twentieth century. In 1910 a writer in the local Labour paper *The Pioneer* protested about the seventeen coloured (predominantly Melanesian) children attending Farleigh school:

There is no reason why the black children should be deprived of educational facilities. They should be provided with a school of their own. From hygienic as well as other reasons it is highly undesirable to allow them to mix with white children. 166

Such a sentiment was not extreme (in the sense that it was widely held by the Europeans in North Queensland): in 1932-3 it led to the Queensland government establishing a separate school for Melanesian children,

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165. Loos, *Aboriginal-European Relations*, 751-2 (quoting *QSA 'Education Various 1 - Mission Schools'*, 8939 of 1896, Minute by D.E. (Chief Clerk), 23 July 1896, and W. Earnshaw, *State School, Buderin Mountain to Under Sec., Dept. of Public Instruction*, 17 July 1896.)

166. *The Pioneer* 29 January 1910.

in the old Presbyterian mission hall at Walkerston. The school only operated for one year, closed, not because the authorities had listened to the protests from the Melanesian parents, but because it cost too much to run in a period of financial stringency.<sup>167</sup>

Since the 1930s there has been gradual but continuous improvement in the standard of education available to Islander children. Harry Fatnowna's oldest son Norman was the first Melanesian to attend a secondary school at Mackay, in 1932.<sup>168</sup> Up until the 1960s it was still rare for black students to continue at school after the primary level. If they did they took commercial and industrial, rather than academic courses. Parents had only minimal formal education and seldom placed a high value on education. Children left school to help support their families. Until the last decade schools did not have the staff or equipment to deal with remedial reading and related problems. Black students were always at the bottom of their classes. Racism grew less obtrusive but still affected their relationships with teachers and other students. Melanesian children entering the Queensland education system before the 1960s and 1970s had very little chance of emerging with a standard of education similar to their European class-mates.<sup>169</sup>

Christianity and European education radically altered the Melanesian community in Queensland, particularly the more permanent settlers who developed a reasonable standard of literacy. Melanesian protests during the deportation period could not possibly have occurred on such a scale, nor in such a European form, without the missions. Melanesians living in Queensland at the turn of the century were in transition between their small-scale societies and the wider perspectives they gained through exposure to Europeans. Many of them managed successfully to synthesize the two, relying for stability on their Melanesian

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167. *QSA* EDU/Z22-47: Correspondence concerning the Polynesian Provisional school; *BOHC* 43Bb : 1 (MDQ); *BOHC* 54Ba : 2 (NJF); *BOHC* 34Ba : 2 (ONF); *BOHC* 6Ba : 2 (IT & AM & WM).

168. *BOHC* 43Bb : 1 (ONF).

169. *BOHC* 29Ba : 2 (NS); *BOHC* 28Ba : 1-2 (ON & MF); *BOHC* 18Ba : 1 (EY); Mercer and Moore, 'Australia's Pacific Islanders, 1906-1977', 90-101, particularly 95-6.

world-view, the authority of traditional patterns of leadership and power; but with the added dimension of being literate wage labourers in a colonial society. When Anglican Bishop Montgomery wrote to Governor Norman of Queensland in 1892, reporting on his recent visit to Melanesia, he described the cultural transformation underway for Melanesians in the islands and in Queensland; and noted

You can not open a man's eyes and expect  
at the same time he will never wish to  
use them. 170

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170. *RNAS* v. 17, 423, Montgomery to Norman, 14 November 1892. Rt. Rev. H.H. Montgomery, Bishop of Tasmania 1889-1901, was the father of Field-Marshal Sir B.L. Montgomery, the distinguished British war-time leader. P. Searle, *Dictionary of Australian Biography*, v. 2 (Sydney, 1949), 148-9.

#### 4. G. Power and authority

One difficult question remains to be answered. How was leadership expressed among Melanesians in Queensland? Who were the power-brokers and from what did they draw their authority?

The classic definition of a Melanesian Bigman was given by Marshall D. Sahlins in 1963, but has since been severely criticized:

An historically particular type of leader-figure, the "big-man" as he is often locally styled, appears in the underdeveloped settings of Melanesia.... In several Melanesian tribes in which big-men have come under anthropological scrutiny, local cultural differences modify the expression of their personal powers. But the indicative quality of big-man authority is everywhere the same: it is *personal* power. Big-men do not come to office; they do not succeed to, nor are they installed in, existing positions of leadership over political groups. The attainment of big-man status is rather the outcome of a series of acts which elevate a person above the common herd and attract about him a coterie of loyal, lesser men. It is not accurate to speak of "big-men" as a political title, for it is but an acknowledged standing in interpersonal relations - a "prince among men" so to speak as opposed to "The Prince of Danes". In particular Melanesian tribes the phrase might be "man of importance", or "man of renown", "generous rich-man", or "center-man", as well as "big-man". 171

Roger Keesing, ethnographer of the Kwaio in Malaita has written widely on Malaitan political organisation and Bigmanship. In his *Kwaio Descent Groups* Keesing suggests that

"Bigness" in Kwaio society is a matter of degree, and every adult man is a feast giver on some scale. Often descent groups have several leaders of co-ordinate importance or none active in feasting.... 172

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171. Sahlins, 'Poor man, rich man, big man, chief: political types in Melanesia and Polynesia' in Harding and Wallace, *Cultures of the Pacific*, 205-6.

172 Keesing, *Kwaio Descent Groups*, 39.

In a later article, after depicting Malaitan political organisation as a triumvirate of powers, Keesing also sounded a warning that in practice

these type-roles were realized only in partial degree, if at all, in many descent groups. They represented idealized styles of personality and leadership that in reality were seldom fully expressed. In some language groups they could be enacted by the same person, simultaneously or at different phases in the life cycle. 173

Sahlins' model has been criticized because it is too much of a stereo-type. Although leadership in Melanesia is usually achieved rather than inherited, its forms are much more varied and dynamic than Sahlins depicted,<sup>174</sup> and as Keesing suggests, Bigmanship is an idealized style of personality and leadership seldom fully expressed in reality. Probably the other most important criticism is that the leadership models stress only male power. Increasingly research is showing that Melanesian women share power with males, in manners which have often escaped the attention of earlier, male, anthropologists.<sup>175</sup> In the context of colonial Queensland, with not one but dozens of possible variations on leadership patterns all in the one locality, and the added dimension of social change, leadership and power becomes an even more complex issue. Because of the tremendous changes undergone by Melanesians in Queensland over more than a century, the question is best discussed in several periods: the 1860s to the 1880s; the 1880s to 1907; and 1907 until the Second World World.

#### 1860s to 1880s

Earlier sections of this chapter have stressed that geographic, cultural and linguistic divisions from Melanesia remained important at Mackay. Each sub-group had its own leaders. In the early decades these were likely to have some traditional claim to prominence, but no doubt

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173. Keesing 'Politico-Religious Movements', 246.

174. Douglas, 'Rank, Power, Authority'. Sahlins himself does not hold to this 1963 view.

175. Weiner, *Women of Value, Men of Renown*; Rogers, 'Woman's place: a critical review of anthropological theory'.

leadership status could have been achieved on the plantations, as in Melanesia through personal attributes and attainments. Each leader's power base would have been small, depending on the number of *wantoks* or kin the person had in the district. As in Melanesia there were different styles of traditional leader in Queensland; but, as Keesing points out, the several styles may have been combined into one. Kwailiu, the Malaitan whose funeral was described in Section 4.B., was a Fataleka *aofia* - the secular Bigman type common throughout north Malaita. Others among these early Melanesian immigrants are remembered as sorcerers and possessors of magic. Also present were people more like the Malaitan *ramo* type - war leaders and professional killers.

Power and authority in the nineteenth century Queensland Melanesian community would have been based on reciprocity and exchanges of wealth far beyond the limited reciprocal relationships in island small-scale societies. Relationships were formed between individuals from different dialect or language groups from any one island, and between individuals from different islands; these extended into non-traditional spheres, those with money, paying fines and expenses for others who had none. In this period power and authority were based on much smaller territories than in later decades - plantations rather than the entire valley. As the membership and relative size of groups changed frequently as a result of circular-migration, leadership must also have been very unstable. As New Hebrideans predominated in number,<sup>176</sup> leadership might be expected to have been most clearly defined among them, but it would be rash to relate intangible qualities of power and leadership directly to numbers.

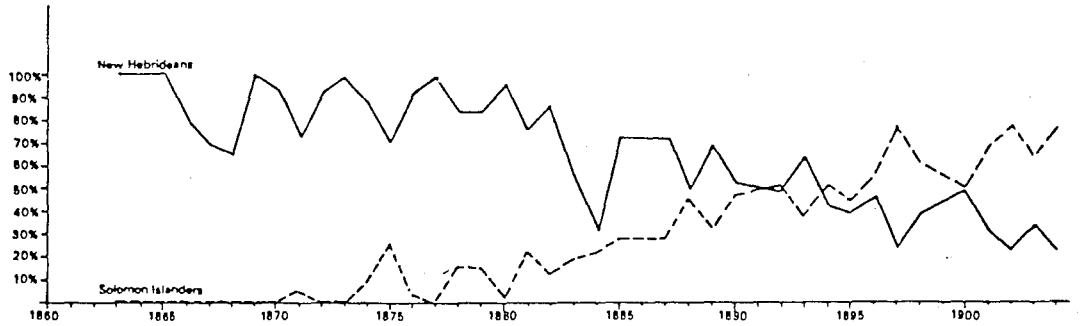
#### 1880s to 1907

This is the period in which a Melanesian community developed in Queensland. Most Melanesians maintained a close to traditional outlook and life-style, but all were undergoing subtle changes, and a few were developing the ability to operate as leaders recognizable by Europeans. As illustrated in Graph One, the origins of the Melanesians in the colony changed dramatically during this time. After the mid-

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176. Particularity those from Epi, Tana and Ambrym.

Graph One



PERCENTAGES OF NEW HEBRIDEANS AND SOLOMON ISLANDERS IN QUEENSLAND 1863-1904

(Source: Dutton, *Queensland Canefields English*)

1890s New Hebrideans were outnumbered by Solomon Islanders, overwhelmingly from Malaita. Time-expired and ticket-holding Melanesians became steadily more prominent than their first-indentured counterparts, numerically, socially and politically. Pidgin English was entering a stable, complex period, which aided social cohesion amongst all Melanesians. Melanesians were increasingly affected by Christianity and literacy, and there was an ever increasing number of Australian-born members of the community. Improved European transport systems (particularly the tram and railways) allowed the Islanders mobility over a greater area. The focus of power was much wider: no longer limited to a single plantation, or a neighbourhood, it could permeate the whole valley; and with inter-district travel, messages could be passed from district to district (ie. Mackay to Maryborough, Bundaberg to Ingham). The climax of this development was the Pacific Islanders' Association with members at Mackay, Proserpine, Bowen, Bundaberg and Tweed Heads.

The Islanders who had the most direct dealings with Europeans had received some European education and were at least nominally Christian. Henry D. Tonga, leader of the 1906 Pacific Islanders' Association is typical. But alongside them were more traditional leaders and sources of power: men and women, like Kwailiu and the sorcerers, who provided wise counsel for the more public leaders. In Chapter Three Malaita was described as a cultural bastille, around the walls of which were a series of *porte-cochère* through which Malaitans left and returned, guarded by passage masters and interpreters, who negotiated with the European recruiters. Passage masters were the link between Malaita and the world beyond the "eight isles". In a similar manner in Queensland the Melanesians longest exposed to European culture and most capable of negotiating on behalf of their community were thrust prominently into view, but within the Melanesian community, even perhaps among their own *wantoks*, they were subservient to other leaders and subject to orders from the group. Worth mentioning here is the mysterious Tui Tonga who founded the 1901 Pacific Islanders' Association; his case alone makes it clear that Melanesian society in nineteenth century Queensland was much more complex than it was previously thought to have been.

Tui Tonga (alias Tui Thacambau) arrived in Queensland in 1872 and at Mackay in 1876. His name first appears in records from Mackay in March 1880: an overseer on *Pleystowe* plantation, he was described as well-educated and not at all like a "Polynesian"; he claimed to be a British subject and a son of Thacambau (Cakobau), King of Fiji.<sup>177</sup> In June he married another *Pleystowe* employee, Celia Myes, a twenty-one year old Melanesian.<sup>178</sup> By 1885 he was working as a wardsman at the government's Islander hospital and was well-regarded by the superintendent Dr Clarkson. Throughout 1884 and 1885 Tui Tonga acted as an *agent provocateur* for the police, attempting to secure convictions against publicans selling alcohol to Melanesians. He would buy the alcohol, then report the publican to the police.<sup>179</sup> In 1884 when one of these prosecutions failed, the publican concerned charged Tonga with perjury.<sup>180</sup> The case went to the Northern Supreme Court at Bowen but was dismissed because the Attorney-General, presumably acting on advice from the Mackay police, refused to file the bill. In 1885 Tonga married a second time, twenty-three year old Fanny from Aoba island. In 1890 he was once more involved with Court proceedings, this time as interpreter.<sup>181</sup>

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177. In Fiji, Cakobau, chief of Bau, rose to prominence in the years preceeding the establishment of British control. During the 1840s and 1850s Cakobau began to call himself Tui Viti, King of Fiji. With the assistance of King George of Tonga, Cakobau won a battle over his main rival in 1855. (The Tu'i Tonga is the senior lineage on the island of Tonga.)

The Fijian royal family's archives do not contain any information on Mackay's Tui Tonga. He may have been an illegitimate son of Cakobau, or perhaps just an opportunist Fijian vagabond relying on the distance from Mackay to Fiji to safeguard his royal claims.

Scarr, *Fragments of Empire*, 3-4; Legge, *Britain in Fiji*, 11-3. Together with information provided by Dr D. Scarr and Prof. M.D. Sahlins, Martindale Hall, May 1980.

178. *MM* 27 March 1880; *Printout C* : 1 (2206). Celia Myes claimed to be from Myes island, which may be Emae (Mai) in the central New Hebrides.
179. *MM* 27 March, 22 May 1880, 21 May, 4 June 1884, 4 April 1885; *MCH* : Deposition book, 3, 5, 16, 17 May, 11 June, 2 September 1884, 31 March, 1 April 1885.
180. *MM* 16 June, 27 August 1884.
181. *Printout C* : 1 (2207); *MM* 24 April 1890.

Tonga appears to have married a third time. On 21 January 1892 he murdered his wife, Lillian from Malaita: he shot her with a revolver before attempting to cut his own throat. The *Mackay Mercury* reports of the incident state that he was still working at the Islander hospital, in the dispensary. Found guilty, he was sentenced to death, but petitioned to commute the sentence, the Executive Council commuted his sentence to fifteen years imprisonment. Tui Tonga was admitted to St Helena prison on 12 July 1892, where he remained until 18 June 1897 when he received special remission and was discharged.<sup>182</sup> He returned to Mackay, opened a boarding house in China Town, and in 1901 founded the Pacific Islanders' Association. When he died in late 1905 the *Mackay Mercury* described him as Tui Tonga "the farmer".<sup>183</sup> Whatever the truth over his claims to be the son of Cakabau, Tonga was an important Melanesian leader at Mackay between 1876 and 1905. Tonga's life was very different from that of a first-indenture labourer fresh from the islands and illustrates the divergence in leadership styles within Melanesian society in nineteenth century Queensland.

#### 1907 until the Second World War

After 1907 the most visible leaders were the lay preachers at St Mary's and the Elders of the Seventh Day Adventist churches. But there were others: several powerful New Hebrideans used sorcery to maintain their authority in the Homebush-Sunnyside area;<sup>184</sup> a group of Solomon elders lived alongside a hut commonly known as the Tarunga hut near Farleigh in the Miclere hills, making decisions in important matters affecting Islanders in that district;<sup>185</sup> male and female herb-

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182. *MM* 23 January, 4 February 1892; letter to the author from Ms L. McGregor, Assistant State Archivist, Queensland State Archives, 12 May 1981 (Ref. M173.4213/49), including information from PRI/19, No. 499 and PRI 2/7 p. 369 and A/18577.
183. *MM* 23 March, 16 November 1901, 18 January 1906; *BOHC* 33Bb : 3 (ONF).
184. *BOHC* 9Ba : 1 (NS & ONF); *BOHC* 8Ba : 3 (NS); *BOHC* 7Ba : 1 (JV & TA); *BOHC* 2Bb : 1 (NS); *BOHC* 80Bb : 2 (ONF).
185. *BOHC* 40Bb : 1-2 (WT); *BOHC* 37Bb : 1 (S & FB); *BOHC* 49Ba : 1 (NJF); *BOHC* 28Ba : 1 (ONF & AS); *BOHC* 30Bb : 1 (JV); *BOHC* 33Ba : 2 (HSQ & ONF); *BOHC* 1Bb : 1-2 (HSQ & ONF); *BOHC* 4Ba : 1 (WM); *BOHC* 36Ba : 3 (ONF).

alists, experts in traditional medicine and Islander midwives were also widely respected. Many of these men and women, particularly the New Hebridean sorcerers, are still spoken of with fear and reverence today;<sup>186</sup> Islanders will not go close to the Tarunga hut and strange happenings are still reported in its vicinity. Almost all of these old people were dead by the end of the 1930s, and it seems that with their passing went the last semblance of unity and traditional power amongst Mackay's Melanesians. The beginning of the Second World War, when descendants of Melanesian warriors were sent overseas to fight for Australia, marked the end of the era. More recently the large interlocking extended families have been the base of all political and social activity.<sup>187</sup>

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186. Mercer and Moore, 'Melanesians in North Queensland: the retention of indigenous religious and magical practices'. Also refer to the two footnotes directly above. Out of respect for informants I have not directly named them or the sorcerers.

187. For general descriptions of the Australian Melanesian community in the twentieth century refer to: Mercer and Moore, 'Australia's Pacific Islanders, 1906-1977'; Moore, *The Forgotten People: a history of the Australian South Sea Island Community*; Dutton, *Queensland Canefields English*; and P.M. Mercer's study of the Pacific Islander population in North Queensland from 1900 to 1940, due to be submitted as a PhD. thesis at the Australian National University in 1981.

EPILOGUE

655 - 671

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|------------------------|-----|
| 1. Melanesian Farmers  | 656 |
| 2. The Kidnapping myth | 664 |

## Epilogue

This is an epilogue - a brief concluding section - and makes no pretence at being anything more. Every chapter of this thesis has touched on issues which concern the twentieth century Melanesian community in Australia. Here, all that is intended is a sketching in of a few more blank sections of the picture, concentrating on the Islander cane farmers in the first half of this century and the self-image of the Islander community today - their own perception of their history, as opposed to that provided for them by historians.

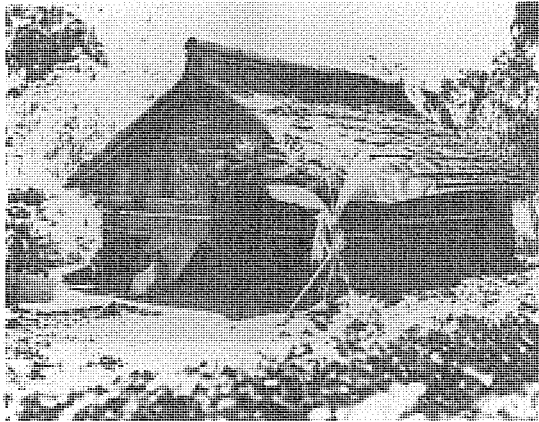
### 1. Melanesian farmers

After the furore surrounding deportation the remaining Melanesians continued to live much as before but with one big difference: all immigrant members of the community were considered "aliens" and by 1919 were totally excluded from the sugar industry. Their Australian-born children, though legally entitled to continue working in the industry, were strongly discouraged from so doing.<sup>1</sup> As illustrated by Map One of Chapter Nine the few hundred who remained lived scattered around the old plantation area on leased land: New Hebrideans at Homebush, Sunnyside and Baker's creek; Solomon Islanders in the Pioneer-Ashburton and Miclere areas between Hill-End (Glenella) and Farleigh. Many were single men living alone or in small groups in a quiet, almost traditional, style. The government had allowed them to remain in Australia, but that was as far as its humanitarian concern went. In every other way they were treated with disdain, in a manner altogether similar to that in which Europeans treated the depleted Aboriginal population.<sup>2</sup> By 1920 many of these ageing Melanesians were

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1. Refer to Chapter Six, Section Three.
  2. In December 1920 Jimmy Porter and Andrew, the last two Aborigines living at Mackay were transported to Palm island reserve off Townsville. The 1919 influenza epidemic had been responsible for the deaths of the few others who had survived the seventy years of European settlement in their valley. When the last two were shipped away the city Health Inspector  
 visited the camp, and destroyed the pack of mangy dogs and burnt up the gunyahs, the last vestige of an unsightly abode.  
 The *Mackay Mercury* added:  
 In all probability action will be taken to prevent aboriginals from other centres creating similar camps in the future, or even reside in the city area.

*MM* 27 December 1920.

## PLATE 32



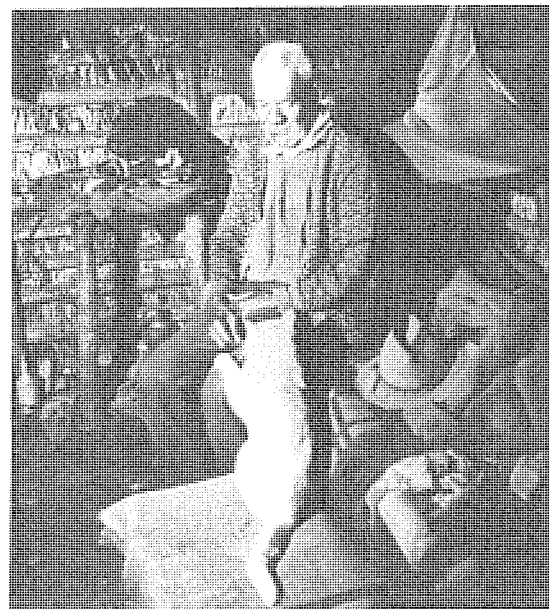
a.



b.



c.  
 Willie Willie from Guadalcanal, at Mackay in the 1930s, living in traditional style. Note his home-grown tobacco: b. by the side of the house, and c. drying inside. (Photo by courtesy of the Mackay Cane Growers' Executive and P.M. Mercer)



d.

wishing that they had had the good sense to allow themselves to be deported in 1906-07.

Natural catastrophes in 1918 and 1919 sapped strength from the Islander community. In February 1918 a terrible cyclone hit Mackay, causing loss of life, destroying many of the Islanders' flimsy houses as well as their churches at Sandiford and Pioneer.<sup>3</sup> No sooner had the district begun to recover when the Spanish influenza epidemic struck in the middle of the next year. In Queensland 600 deaths were attributed to the epidemic, some dozens of them at Mackay. Doctors and hospitals could not cope with the number of sick. Schools were pressed into service as isolation hospitals, and those still healthy were left to nurse their neighbours. Many prominent Islanders were among the dead, including several of the Malaitans whose recruitment and life histories have formed the backbone of this thesis: Logomier, Orrani, Fiukwandi, Kwaitaka, Sippie and Kissier.<sup>4</sup>

In July 1919, with the epidemic in full swing, the Queensland Industrial Court brought down an Award, which ended two decades of tightening restrictions on employment available to "alien" Melanesians: they were henceforth denied work on European farms. The effect of this heartless move on the already depressed Melanesian community can readily be imagined. Early in 1920 a petition was presented to Queensland parliament from more than one hundred of the 200 Melanesians in the Mackay district, island and Australian-born:

We the undersigned Polynesians living in Mackay district Petition the Queensland Parliament to repatriate us to our homes or find some place and establish us so we can live and give us a genuine Market for our goods as we are debared (*Sic*) by act from working in sugar farms grown by white labour or white Farmers and beg your early reply.

We also desire respectfully to point out that in the first instance we were brought to Queensland through legislation passed by this Parliament and recruited in ships under government control.

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3. MM 2, 9, 12 February 1918.
  4. Reports on the epidemic can be found continuously in the *Mackay Mercury* between May and August 1919. Also refer to BOHC 33Ba : 1 (HSQ); Moore, 'Luke Logomier'.

That we in its initiatory stages did a great deal of the rough pioneering work of the sugar industry so assisting to make it the valuable industry it is today.

Further we are perfectly willing to work, preferably in some productive industry, if permitted to do so. In any case it seems a fair plea to make that for the sake of its own good name the State after bringing us here can not allow us to starve. 5

The government chose to ignore their pleas. Their only remaining means of livelihood was work as labourers on farms cultivating less than seventy-five acres of cane; which meant that they were limited to working on their own small farms or as labourers for other Melanesian farmers. In April 1920 A.H. Tideman, an Elder in the Walkerston Presbyterian church who had assisted McIntyre with his mission, addressed a meeting of the United Cane Growers' Association on their behalf. Tideman told the meeting that the approximately 200 Melanesians in the district had managed fairly well until 1918, and had erected houses on the land they were leasing from mills, but almost all of these houses had been destroyed by the cyclone. Since the cyclone and the influenza epidemic

very few of them had the energy to re-erect the houses, and they became practically labourers, trying to get work where ever they could ....

The children, many of whom had been attending state schools, were well-educated and felt their predicament more so than their parents.<sup>6</sup>

The Islanders' farms were on small areas of unwanted hill land leased to them by the last of the plantation mills, *Homebush*, *Palms* and *Farleigh*. More than fifty such farms ranging in size from twenty to one hundred acres were occupied by these last Kanakas during

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5. QSA PRE/A662, In letter 5241 of 1920.

6. MM 15 April 1920.

the first three decades of the new century.<sup>7</sup> By the 1930s these men and women were between sixty and eighty years of age. Forced out of the sugar industry, not trained for any other type of money-producing work and too old for strenuous labour, they subsisted by fishing in the ocean, rivers and creeks and cultivating small patches of taro, yams and vegetables.

A few of these farmers managed to keep their farms until the 1930s, but usually only those with families. One was Andrew Bobongie, who arrived in Queensland from Malaita in the 1890s, working first at Innisfail and Cairns before Mackay. He was living at Mackay when he was baptised in 1895.<sup>8</sup> Over the next few decades he worked as both labourer and farmer in various areas of the valley. In 1906 he married Joy, daughter of Malaitans Kwailiu and Orrani; their first child was born at Summer Hill near Farleigh in 1908, where they and other Islanders had small hill-side farms. The next two children were born at The Ridges near Conningsby in 1909 and 1911.<sup>9</sup> In 1912 Joy died, and Bobongie appears to have moved with his family and several other Islanders including his mother-in-law Orrani, and Kwaitaka to Finch-Hatton at the western end of the valley, where they grew cane

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7. The following Melanesians, either immigrants or first generation Australians all either owned or leased cane land at Mackay in the first three decades of the twentieth century: Luke Logomier, Con Santo, Jos and Jimmie Sippie, Dick Manish, Jack Marrow, Pilis, Gowseeha, George Bii, Henry, William and George Tonga, C. Tass, Peter Bolo, Noah Sabbo, Makalico Api, Bob Boah, Joseph Sa, Robert Toloa, Billy Santo, Johnny Mangway, Phillip Choppy, Jimmie Zimmie, Elizabeth and Matthew Malachai, Jimmy Go Go, Lizzie and Robert Kia, Peter Bickey, W. Arrow-Oba, Moses Kissier, Jimmy Langwe, Charlie Marlow, Dick Suva, Harry Andrew, John Makelo, Henry Netoka, Tom Renola, Johnny Moona, Peter and Himmy Gow, Jimmy Langwe, Dick Suva, Harry Tarryango, Fred Guyah, Sam Lowatta, Dick Satavi, Sarah Rufy, Harry Querro, Jack Manjack, Simon, Ivy and Bill Thomas, and Andrew Bobongie.  
MCH : Liens on crops; and information elsewhere in this chapter.
8. Bobongie was one of the recruits described in Chapter Three, Section Six.  
BOHC 41Ba : 2 (HB); BOHC 37Ba : 1 (S & FB); *Printout* C : 1 (249).
9. *Printout* C : 1 (253); BOHC 37Ba : 1 (S & FB); MCH : Liens : Bobongie, part port. 499 Bassett to *Farleigh*, 2 March 1912.

for *Cattle Creek* mill.<sup>10</sup> Bobongie shifted back to Kangaroo Hill in 1917 and re-married, to Emma, daughter of Malaitans Kivisi Fiukwandi<sup>11</sup> and Annie Myterrafear. Over the next decade they reared eight children and lived at Kangaroo Hill, Conningsby and Habana. By 1924 Bobongie had a small farm at Habana. He borrowed money from Kissing Singh a Cingalese money-lender; money which he was unable to repay for several years.<sup>12</sup> In the mid-1930s, Bobongie, by then well over sixty, was having increasing difficulty working his farm. His oldest sons had left some years earlier and his wife and younger children were left to manage the farm. Eventually they were no longer able to pay the rates and forfeited the land. Bobongie died in 1946.<sup>13</sup>

The main reason for exempting Melanesians from deportation had been that they had arrived in Queensland more than twenty years prior to 1906, so many of the other farmers were twenty years Bobongie's senior. Eventually they all became too old to farm their steep hill slopes. Matthew and Elizabeth Malachai had one of the farms.<sup>14</sup> Matthew died in 1932, leaving his wife in her mid-sixties with the farm to tend until her death in 1942. One of her grandchildren who stayed with her in the 1930s remembers the old women sitting on the ground digging holes amongst the rocks to plant her few sticks of cane.<sup>15</sup> In the 1930s there were forty-five of these elderly Islanders in the Mackay district receiving an "Indigence Allowance" of £1.1.8 a month from the government. In 1942 the Labor government converted this into the old age pension.<sup>16</sup> Most of the Solomon Islanders were living on

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10. Kwaitaka was another of the recruits described in Chapter Three. Also refer to *BOHC* 37Ba : 2 (S & FB); *MCH* : Liens : Marrow, port. 13v of Pelion to Hodget, 13 January 1913.
  11. Fiukwandi was another of the recruits described in Chapter Three. *Printout C* : 1 (254-5).
  12. *MCH* : Liens : Bobongie to Singh, 7 January 1924, 6 January 1927, 3 January 1930.
  13. *BOHC* 41Bb : 1 (HB).
  14. *MCH* : Liens : Malachai, part port. 158 and 420 Bassett to Singh, 19 April 1929, 3 February 1931; Malachai, part. port. 16 Bassett to Brooks, 11 May 1927.
  15. *BOHC* 43Bb : 1-3 (WT); *Printout C* : 1 (393-4, 1137-9).
  16. *QSA* COL/71, Home Office Correspondence and Papers re South Sea Islanders in receipt of Indigence Allowance, c. 1932-8: list completed 28 February 1937; *ABC* 9a : 1 (SC).

land owned by *Farleigh* mill. The mill wanted to sell the land but was in something of a quandary over what to do with its elderly unproductive tenants. Edward Denman knew them well - he had lived in the district since the 1870s and had employed many of them in past years. Denman invited them all to come to live on "Etowrie", his property near Habana, for the remainder of their lives. Thirty or forty of the single men accepted his offer and made "Etowrie" their final home.<sup>17</sup>

Life was marginally easier for the first generation born in Australia. A few owned farms,<sup>18</sup> but most remained rural labourers like their parents, the third generation following their lead. From the information contained in this and previous chapters concerning their depressed position within the wider society of the Pioneer valley it is obvious why. Put simply, the continual discrimination against Melanesians throughout the twentieth century has meant that today in the Pioneer valley, Australia's largest cane growing district, there are no Melanesian farmers.

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17. *BOHC* 33Bb : 2 (HSQ); *BOHC* 37Ba :2 (S & FB); *BOHC* 49Ba : 1 (NJF):  
*CRM* 5a : 4 (A & RD).
18. William and Ivy Thomas operated several cane farms between 1933 and 1966. The Tonga family had a cane farm until recent decades. *BOHC* Typescript Three; *BOHC* 30B (PT).



a. Matthew and Harry, sons of Harry Norman Fatnowna and Grace Kwasi, and their dog Caesar. The photo was taken in front of the Fatnowna's house at Eulbertie, Eimeo, via Mackay. (Photo: *JCUNQ*: History)



b. Cricket at Eulbertie. L. to R. (top): Des Moonie, Harry Fatnowna, Matty Fatnowna, Ed Tass, Ned Tass, Tibby Motto. L. to R. (bottom): Olly Motto, Valroy (?) Fatnowna, Harold Tass, and Noel Fatnowna. (Photo: *JCUNQ*: History)

## 2. The Kidnapping myth

Given what has been outlined in this thesis of the recruiting process and the lives led by Melanesians in Queensland, the most pertinent point on which to end is the attitude of the present-day Islander community to the recruitment of their forebears from the islands. The great majority of oral testimony accounts of recruiting indicate the use of force and fraud - they are accounts of kidnappings. This runs contrary to what historians believe actually happened: a transition from a relatively short period of blatant kidnapping to a long period of voluntary enlistment. Although this thesis has somewhat modified the argument by introducing the idea of "cultural kidnapping", basically it supports the work of other historians. Why then are the Islanders so opposed to the reasoned views of historians?

It is conceivable that individual instances of kidnapping occurred as long as the labour trade lasted, leaving no trace in the documentary sources. There is also evidence to suggest that in part the discrepancy exists because the forebears of a number of Australia's Melanesians truly were kidnapped and for them kidnapping is not a myth.<sup>19</sup> The transfer system which operated in varying

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19. A large number of their forebears were recruited in the period in which kidnapping was most prevalent. 600 of the Melanesians still in Australia in 1906 had arrived before the mid-1880s. Some labour recruits from the 1870s did remain in Australia, and at least one of the Malaitan families in Queensland now (the Reid-Kulijeris), can trace its connection with the colony from before 1876. Recruiting only began at Malaita in 1871; the first half-decade was marred by several verifiable cases of kidnapping.

Oral testimony from Australian Pacific Islanders has so far been recorded predominantly in four areas: Ayr and Ingham, both areas established in the 1880s; Bowen, an early *entrepôt* and pastoral area; and Mackay, an original base of Melanesian settlement from the mid-1860s. In 1906, there were 648 Islanders of more than twenty years residence in Queensland; 216 of them lived in these four areas. Islanders with Certificates of Exemption from deportation were allowed to stay in Australia, and 691 of these certificates had been issued by 1906, mostly to Islanders of over twenty years residence. Because such a large number of those who stayed in Australia had arrived before the mid-1880s, the date historians have given as the end of the kidnapping period, there could have been a disproportionately high percentage of Islanders remaining, who had been kidnapped.

1906 *Sugar Industry Royal Commission*, App. XVII.

degrees throughout the trade also made the dockside scene look remarkably like a slave auction, which may account for some of the Islanders' claims that their forebears were sold at the dockside as slaves.<sup>20</sup> Again, Melanesians, bounded by their island world, had a very limited cosmology that may have continued to colour their perceptions of the circular-migratory process in which they participated. No matter how thoroughly new recruits going to Queensland had the trip to Australia and life on the plantations explained to them, by their fathers, brothers, cousins or uncles who may have preceded them, much in the new experience must have been quite shattering: the length of the voyage to Queensland; the frightening experience of being confined below decks among total strangers, even women - with the fearful risk of pollution from their menstrual discharge; the inconceivable vastness of Australia; and the endless acres of sugar cane, a plant which they grew in Melanesia, but only in small quantities. The explanations that they gave to their children, many years after their arrival in Australia, seem to contain a note of incomprehension, and may have further complicated the oral testimony currently available.<sup>21</sup> There are however two more major reasons which have so far not been covered in this thesis. Firstly, the influence of the media, the education system, and the problem of feedback in the oral testimony. Secondly, that present day Melanesians, seeing themselves increasingly victimised by society, seek and find explanations for their plight in the treatment of their forebears.

All Pacific Islanders interviewed have received some education in ordinary Queensland and New South Wales schools, most are or have been, active Christians; all frequently have contact with press and radio, and now with television as well. It is idle to expect them to be uninfluenced by these persuasive European sources of information. School textbooks, Sunday school literature, popular writers, newspapers, radio and television have always stressed that the Islanders were kidnapped. The more dramatic elements of the labour trade capture the

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20. Refer to Chapter Six, Section 4.B.

21. Refer to Chapters One to Three and to my article 'Kanakas, kidnapping and slavery: myths from the nineteenth century labour trade and their relevance to Australian Melanesians'.

imagination of the general public: Captain Bully Hayes, blackbirder and bigamist. Or the case of the mad Dr Patrick Murray on the brigantine *Carl* in 1871, widely shooting into a hold of terrified Melanesians, while singing "Marching through Georgia".<sup>22</sup> History books currently used in Queensland schools certainly bear out this contention. The following quotations are taken from text books used by children in grades eight and ten in Townsville schools. Whenever the recruiting trade is mentioned kidnapping is emphasised and the explanation is always in terms of slavery:

Grade Ten:

These Kanakas, as they were called, were frequently lured to Australia under false pretences. In many instances they were given a status little better than slaves.

Grade Ten:

because the demand for labour was so great, abuses developed. In fact, many labourers were simply kidnapped in raids on their villages. This slave trade was given the name of "Black-birding"; and it was often carried out with great cruelty.

Grade Eight:

These kidnappers of Kanaka labour were known as blackbirders. Most blackbirders made large sums of money selling Kanakas to Queensland sugar planters. 23

Sunday school teachers and the clergy are also to blame in giving special emphasis to the murder of Bishop Patteson, killed in the Santa Cruz island group, allegedly in retaliation for kidnapping of labour recruits, and generally to the valiant fights by missionaries against

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22. F. Clune, *Captain Bully Hayes: blackbirder and bigamist* (Sydney, 1970); A.H. Markham, *The Cruise of the "Rosario" amongst the New Hebrides and Santa Cruz Islands, exposing the recent atrocities connected with the kidnapping of natives in the South Seas* (London, 1970 (orig. pub. 1875) ), 117.
23. P.T. Bland (*et al.*), *Heritage 2: Australia and the modern world* (Melbourne, 1975), 193; C. Muns (*et al.*), *The Way We Were*, v. 3 (Brisbane, n.d.), 413; B. Hoeppe (*et al.*), *The Way We Were*, v. 1 (Brisbane, n.d.), 232.

predatory recruiters.<sup>24</sup> Even the Australian Broadcasting Commission has been guilty of indefensible distortion: in December 1978 on ABC television's *Big Country*, recruiting was described as "not quite slavery, more a sophisticated form of kidnapping"; equally tendentious expressions were scattered throughout ABC Broadband's *The Forgotten People*. Having accepted an invitation to edit the transcript for publication I carefully deleted all such references in the commentary (naturally, without tempering in any way with the words of Melaneseans), only to find that the ABC Publication Department had the last say: on the back cover of the book appear the words: "the amazing story of Australia's own slave trade". School and municipal libraries usually hold sensationalist books on the labour trade (such as *Cannibal Cargoes* and *The Blackbirders*),<sup>25</sup> but not the more reliable historical accounts. Various Australian Melanesians have read or own copies of the Holthouse/Docker genre of recruiting trade literature. Although on occasions it is possible to verify that informants told the same testimony to their children many years before reading these secondary sources,<sup>26</sup> there is still the disturbing feeling that it is no longer possible to separate reliable oral testimony from that which has been influenced by the media and printed presentations. I believe that on this point much Islander testimony is tainted - quite unconsciously - by European writing of little historical accuracy.

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24. Fox, *Lord of the Southern Isles*; Gutch, *Martyr of the Islands*; A. Griffiths, *Fire in the Islands: the acts of the Holy Spirit in the Solomons* (Wheaton, Illinois, 1977); Miller, *Live*.

25. Docker, *The Blackbirders*; H. Holthouse, *Cannibal Cargoes* (Adelaide, 1969).

26. Some Islanders have even read Peter Corris' edition of W.T. Wawn's *The South Sea Islanders and the Queensland Labour Trade*. Esther Henaway said of Corris' edition of Wawn:

Most of those things that are written in there are exactly what my parents told me happened; almost to the letter.

Her daughter Shireen Malamoo says that her mother told exactly the same stories to her as a child, long before she had read any secondary accounts. BOHC 19Ba : 1.

This is confirmed by the unanimity with which Islanders declare that their forebears were paid only "two and sixpence a week". Although this is close to the weekly equivalent of the statutory six pounds a year paid to first-indenture labourers, it is best only half-true. The wage rates for re-recruiting labourers varied: from six pounds to twelve pounds, the amount increasing as the century progressed. Wage rates for time-expired labourers varied depending on the nature of the contract, as well as the previous experience and negotiating skill of the Melanesian concerned. Based on Maryborough statistics for time-expired labourers over the years 1884 until 1903, for twelve month contracts taken up after three years in the colony Melanesian males could expect to be paid between £13.9.0 and £22.5.0. Those with more than three years work experience - the forebears of the present day Melanesian community - could expect commensurably more: between £16.1.0. and £23.3.0. For contracts of less than twelve months, wage rates varied seasonally: averaging £16.3.0 and £24.6.0 during the crushing season and £13.7.0 to £23.9.0 during the slack season. <sup>27</sup>

The last reason suggested for the divergence between the views of historians and the Islander community is that they are using the kidnapping myth as a psychological balm. Pacific Islanders in Australia have always been treated at best as second class citizens. Most of them remain living in rural North Queensland, an area long the butt of jokes about its backwardness and conservatism. In the nineteenth century the Islanders were indentured servants with few rights; they were expected to be servile labourers within the capital-intensive sugar industry. In the early twentieth century they were ignored; locked out of the sugar industry and the trade unions, they existed as fringe-dwellers to European society. Surveys into housing, employment and education in North Queensland show that Aborigines, Torres Strait Islanders and Pacific Islanders are treated in a prejudicial

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27. Two examples of this "2/6 a week" story can be found in: Moore, *The Forgotten People*, p. 33 and Helen Frizell, 'A Kanaka's daughter goes home', *MM* 18 July 1974.

Refer to Chapter Seven, Section One, particularly to Table One.

manner by white Australians.<sup>28</sup> It seems valid to suggest that Pacific Islanders may have incorporated into their conventional wisdom what amounts to European folk-lore about kidnapping, as a way of explaining their own low socio-economic position in Australia. Increasingly conscious of victimisation in contemporary Queensland, they would readily absorb a view of their forebears as the victims of white duplicity.

The problems involved in the discrepancy, between the views of historians and those of Australia's Pacific Islanders, go beyond those usually dealt with by historians. Perhaps, given traditional Melanesian cosmology and the persistent but inaccurate belief of Australia's Melanesians in kidnapping and slavery as a heritage, the problem is one of a different reality and of a different concept of the truth; the objective truth confronted by an emotional or psychological truth. Objective analysis of the Queensland labour trade, based on all available evidence, still fails to convince the descendants of the Queensland Melanesians. Is it possible that their alienation from Australian society has produced an historical myth; an alienation that needs the balm of psychological kidnapping? Two reviewers of *The Forgotten People* made perceptive comments relevant to the psychological and political basis of the kidnapping myth. Patricia Mercer suggested that

the view that their forbears did not come willingly is an essential component of contemporary Melanesians' attitudes to white Australia; so psychologically imperative is it that 'blackbirding', if it did not exist, would have had to be created. 29

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28. *Report on Inquiries by the Office of the Commissioner for Community Relations into the Existence of Racial Discrimination in Northern New South Wales and North Queensland and the Combat of that Discrimination* (Canberra, 1976); Knud Larsen (et al.), *Discrimination against Aborigines and Islanders in north Queensland. The case of Townsville* (Canberra, 1977).
29. P.M. Mercer reviewing the *The Forgotten People*, *Journal of Pacific History*, v. 15:2 (1980), 126.

Bob Reece went further in attributing the strength of the myth to political reasons:

the kanaka descendants have a strong vested interest in repeating the horror stories (and there are plenty of them) about blackbirding and plantation life. What they are providing is not the raw stuff of history but an interpretation of history appropriate to the political needs of the moment. Their case for special recognition and assistance will apparently be based on moral grounds (with a view to retrospective compensation) rather than socio-economic disadvantages. 30

Both Mercer and Reece are correct, but if historians demolish the Islanders' most basic and powerful argument in their claim for special assistance from Australian governments what is there to put in its place?

Australia's immigrant Melanesians certainly do have a valid case in claiming redress from the government, but in much wider terms than they have so far argued. In 1974 they formed the Australian South Sea Islanders United Council to seek recognition as a disadvantaged minority in Australia. Prompted by a delegation from the organisation which presented their case to the Australian government, in August 1975 an Inter-Departmental Committee was set up to investigate the situation.<sup>31</sup> The Committee's report was completed in July 1977 but was never tabled. One of its principal conclusions was that:

Their socio-economic status and conditions have generally been below those of the white community thus giving the group the appearance of being a deprived coloured minority. 32

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30. Bob Reece reviewing *The Forgotten People*, *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, No. 1 (1978-9), 116.
31. For further information refer to Mercer and Moore, 'Australia's Pacific Islanders 1906-1977', 98-101, and to Moore, *The Forgotten People*, 78-84.
32. Inter-departmental Report on South Sea Islanders, 4.

Table Four of Chapter Seven, taken from the 1977 report clearly shows the depressed economic conditions of the Islanders. In 1973 twelve and a half percent of the total Australian community lived below the poverty line, as defined by the 1975 federal *Commission of Inquiry into Poverty*. Thirty-seven percent of the total Islander community were in this category; a further twelve percent were living close to the poverty line.

Their low status is the result of almost twelve decades spent in Australia as second class citizens. Kidnapping, their high mortality rate, low wages, poor living conditions and racial discrimination are all part of their case. Further, although it is indisputable that the majority came to Australia of their own volition, the concept of "cultural kidnapping" remains valid. The conviction that their forebears were kidnapped, to which Islanders persist in clinging regardless of historians' views, has a seriously retarding effect on the community. Ironically, in dwelling upon the wrongs inflicted during the forty years the labour trade lasted, they have largely ignored those, in many cases more serious, of the eighty years since the traffic ceased.

Australia's immigrant Melanesians are the true founders of the sugar industry: it was their muscle and sweat which carved the cane fields out of the coastal scrub of the Australian east coast. They are no longer willing to be a forgotten people, used and discarded by capitalism. In the 1970s they began to insist upon their own identity as non-indigenous black Australians and started to speak out. Is it too much to hope that the 1980s will see the fruition of their claims?