

**Business Hours**

MONDAY TO FRIDAY

9.00AM TO 2:30PM

ENTRY ADULT \$5

CHILD \$2

**Membership Fees**

SINGLE \$15.00

FAMILY \$30.00

CORPORATE \$32.50

**Contact details**

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**this issue**President's Message **P.1**McKimmin & Richardson **P.2**John Melton Black, First Mayor of  
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The Museum recently received 10 framed photographs of early Supreme & District Court Judges from a retiring Solicitor. This collection will be added to the significant photographic collection the Museum preserves.

During July the Museum hosted a student from Pimlico High School and her choice of subject was the life of John Melton Black, the founder of Townsville and our first Mayor. Evie's project is featured in this newsletter.

We recently received a request from an inmate of the Townsville Correctional Centre for information on its history. Although we were not

able to provide the information requested, we donated 10 history books relating to Townsville's history for their library.

The new Chemist display is now complete and showcases chemist bottles, scales, an early 1900's chemist ledger and the story of William Herbert Green. Green the Chemist later became Green and Rawkins. This new display is worth viewing.

Until next time,

Regards,

*Trish Cronin*



## Community News

### Urgent



Townsville Museum and Historical Society is urgently seeking volunteers to assist with the daily operation of the museum.

Tasks and roles can vary from guiding guests through the museum to photography, data entry or maintenance and cleaning of museum displays and exhibits. If you are interested, please send us an email at

[admin@townsvillemuseum.com.au](mailto:admin@townsvillemuseum.com.au)

or call us on 4775 7838.

### Save the dates!

40<sup>th</sup> birthday party of the Townsville Museum & Historical Society date 15 September 2025.

### Books available in the shop

Geoff Hansen and Diane Menghetti, *Townsville in War and Peace 1942-1946* \$40

Helga Griffin, *Frontier Town, A history of Early Townsville and Hinterland 1864-1884*, \$30



Image:  
Victory Parade 1945  
Townsville Museum  
Collection

In 1888 Robert McKimmin and James Richardson entered a partnership that lasted long after the death of one of the partners. Both were migrants from County Tyrone in the north of Ireland and were both experienced drapers.

They commenced business in smaller premises in Flinders Street on the site of what was the Savoy Café. Later the partners acquired further land at the corner of Flinders and Stokes Streets, where they built their commanding department store. On James Richardson's death in Sydney 1911, McKimmin acquired his partner's share in the property and became governing director of McKimmin and Richardsons. In 1932 the internal structure of building was gutted leaving only a skeleton of the external facade. The building was rebuilt, and McKimmin & Richardson continued to operate to become the largest and best-known store in north Queensland with 60 employees and more than 3200 customers. On the eve of World War II, an aerial beacon was erected on corner roof of the building in 1937. It was part of a scheme of the Civil Aviation Board to erect beacons in major centres along the eastern seaboard.



Image: CityLibraries Picture Townsville

When Robert McKimmon died in 1939, the name of the business then changed to McKimmin Pty Ltd. He had devoted his life to the business and actively supported projects that would benefit the city and its residents. In his free time he was an avid game shooter. Apparently he loved shooting over Cromarty and the Town Common! McKimmins was sold to Dalgety & Co in 1949 and the name remained for a several years until it was sold again. In 1960 David Jones purchased the premises and is now the Cowboys Leagues Club.



# John Melton Black, First Mayor of Townsville

## Before Townsville

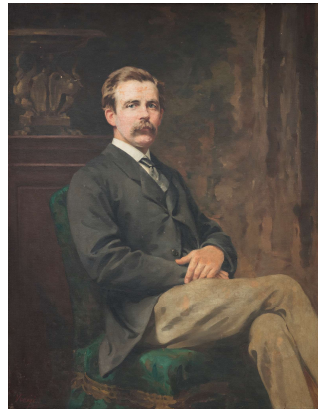
On the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 1831, John Melton Black was born in Lancashire, England. John worked as a bespoke tailor's apprentice in Manchester until he was 16. At 16 he left England, as an assisted passenger, to work for a bespoke tailor in Melbourne, and became his partner the next year.

In 1849 they sold their tailoring business to become a wine and spirit merchant. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of August 1851 gold was discovered in payable quantities in Victoria, so in the same month John Black began running a carrier business to the Bendigo goldfields and operated three stores there. He then built a large stable establishment in Collingwood while still running stores and goods to the Bendigo goldfields. In 1853 he built Tattersalls horse bazaar in Melbourne. He later sold it and with investors' money renovated the Theatre Royal in 1854, renaming it to the "New theatre Royal". By mid-1855 the Theatre Royal was fully opened to the public. John Black then went insolvent to prevent paying his investors and returned to England to bring a theatre group back to Australia. He returned with the group in 1856. On his return, he renovated and opened the Princess's Theatre in Melbourne, which he ran successfully until 1859. He toured around the colony with an actress until 1860, when he was residing in Sydney.

## Finding Townsville

**The colony of Queensland was founded in 1859 as does the squatter business in the Kennedy district of north Queensland.**

In 1861, with an interest in squatting, John Melton Black travelled by sea to Bowen with W. A. Ross, C. S. Rowe, Peter Longshaw, and Robert Warner in 1861 on the "BUONAPARTE". He remained there for a week before leaving, in June 1861, with W. Longshaw, Robert Warner and an aborigine 1861 to scout the country. They returned to Bowen after six weeks, lodged their paperwork and later returned with all their stores and the rest of the group and established Fanning River station in July 1861.



The squatters in the Kennedy district ran sheep by the thousands but they were plagued by disease. Cattle were a side industry.

On 1<sup>st</sup> January 1863 John Black along with 8 other squatters are made Magistrates of the Kennedy district.

**John Melton Black did not spend much time in the Kennedy district, spending much of his time in Sydney.**

In August 1863, he took up land for his pastoral venture named, Woodstock. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 1864 John Black forms a partnership with Capt. Robert Towns, J M Black and Co. Capt. R Towns owns and operates R Towns and Co and is the richest man in Australia. Black sold Towns half of his properties yet remained as the overseer of the operations. John Black still had many other properties which were not part of the J M Black and Co. partnership. Andrew Ball was the superintendent of the runs for J M Black and Co.

The thought of swollen rivers during the wet season made transport of goods difficult and plagued early settlement for many years. In February 1864 Andrew Ball, Mark Reid and an Aborigine were out looking for cattle and ventured into the southern reaches of Cleveland Bay where there was a large river, later to be known as the Ross River. They then discovered the flat lands between mount Stuart and High range and the possibility of a new road for the northern squatters.

John Melton Black and W. A. Ross then followed and found the site for a boiling down works and a port. Under the firm of J M Black and Co. and with Capt. Robert Towns' money the new settlement at Cleveland Bay begins in October of 1864.

## Townsville Beginnings

**Within twelve months it became a gazetted port and town and was the only private port in the colony of Queensland.**

Over the next three years J M Black and Co. developed the boiling down works, port and the Cleveland Bay settlement. The boiling down works was in full operation by 1866, the same year John Melton Black became Townsville's first Mayor, serving for 8 months before leaving for England.

In March 1867 a cyclone hit from Cardwell to Bowen, and extensive damage was felt in Townsville and the boiling down works was flattened along with many other buildings but by May of 1867 it was all rebuilt.

## After Townsville

John Black left Townsville in 1866 and returned after the cyclone to rebuild the boiling down works, only to leave again with Marion O'Dowd in May, never to return. He married her in England in 1869 and had 6 children. In 1884 he became the CEO of the Bell Punch Company, now known as IBM. John Black died in September 1919 at age 88 in Hampstead.



## Evie's Piece

## Evie Burnett

## Pimlico State High School Work Experience Student

Evie spent a week at the Museum in June. She is a delightful year 11 student with an interest in studying history. During the week she researched and wrote this piece on John Melton Black.

Thank you to Bob Bakkers for his guidance.



# Nick's History Bites

## Capt. John Marlow



On the northwestern side of Pallarenda and the Town Commons is Mt Marlow (Many Peaks), named after Captain John Marlow of the Queensland Native Police.

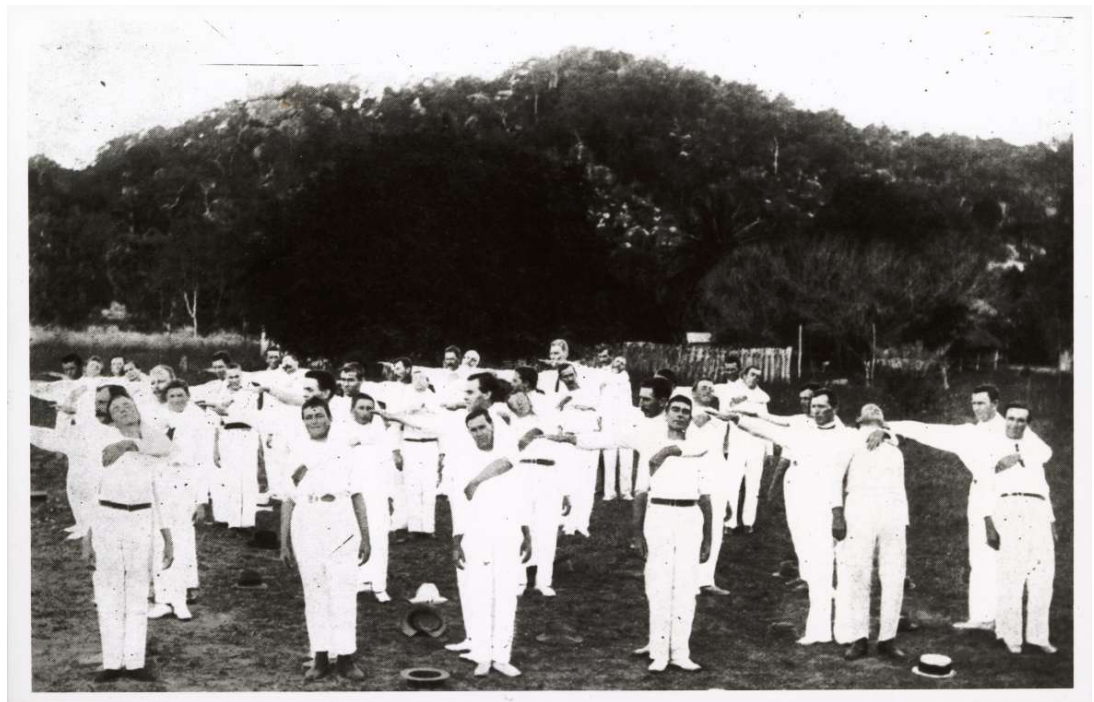
He joined the police force on the 5<sup>th</sup> October 1860, transferring to the Native Mounted Police in February 1863. He was subsequently promoted to Lieutenant and Magistrate. He later served in the Dalrymple and Burketown areas.

In 1864, he was in the first landing party at the site of what is now the town of Cardwell. In 1870 while stationed at the township of Dalrymple on the banks of the Keelbottom and Burdekin rivers, he and his family survived a flood.

He left the police force in 1874.



## Wendy's Pic



Teachers practicing Surf Lifesaving drill, Magnetic Island, c.1912

## Sue's Spot

### TOWNSVILLE IMAX THEATRE

Built in 1987 as part of the Great Barrier Reef Wonderland, the Omnimax Theatre (later called the Imax Dome Theatre) operated until December 2012. The complex was opened with great ceremony by then Prime Minister Bob Hawke and Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen.

It was the first of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere and used a 25mm fisheye lens to screen movies 180 degrees horizontally and 130 degrees vertically on a domed screen 3 stories high.



The films had separate soundtracks, so the same film could be screened in multiple languages. Our original soundtrack for the signature film "The Great Barrier Reef" was voiced by an American.

This didn't sit well with the theatre's management company, so Mr. Ken Robbins asked a favour of his friend Leonard Teal, a well-known actor at the time, to re-record the soundtrack. Thus, we had an Australian voiceover for our Australian film.

The theatre screened 80 films during the 25 years of operation including a very loud Rolling Stones concert commissioned in Imax format by Mick Jagger himself.

The Imax Theatre was innovative for its time but technology has advanced, and the remaining worldwide theatres are now digital. There is no more manual threading of the projector and synchronizing the soundtrack before every screening.

I'm sure many people have fond memories of the theatre.



## Imperial Airways

Starting in 1938 Empire flying boats flew between Britain and Australia via India and the Middle East.

In March 1939 Short Empire flying boats left Southampton for Australia, reaching Sydney after ten days of flying and nine overnight stops. Three more left for South Africa, taking six flying days to Durban. These small aircraft carried fewer than 20 passengers.

By the beginning of WWII Imperial Airways was part of British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC) and administered by a statutory department of the Air Ministry.

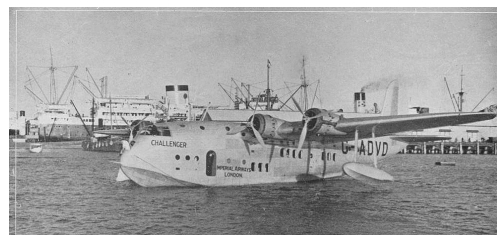


Image: "Challenger" moored in Townsville's outer harbour

Townsville was a port of call in the thrice weekly service between Sydney and London.

# AGM News

The AGM of the Townsville Museum and Historical Society was held on 11 August in the Museum's Breezeway. The following members were elected to the Committee for 2025/2026.

Trish Cronin	President
John McDonald	Vice President
Sue Fox	Secretary
Nick Shailer	Treasurer
Fay Jones	Ordinary Member
Terry Thompson	Ordinary Member

Other points to note from the meeting:

On Monday 15<sup>th</sup> September 2025 the Museum will be having a morning tea and celebration for our 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Invitations will be sent to past and present members, the acting Mayor, Councillors, the Federal member for Herbert and the State Members for Townsville, Thuringowa and Mundingburra.

Geoff Hansen highlighted sections of his report on the publication program from 2004 to July 2025. He highlighted that 274 books were sold to Queensland Museum Tropics including 40 sales of War and Peace 1942-1946. Grand Secret Books in Charters Towers had purchased 229 books from 2018 to July 2024.

Townsville Museum & Historical Society Issue August 2025

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