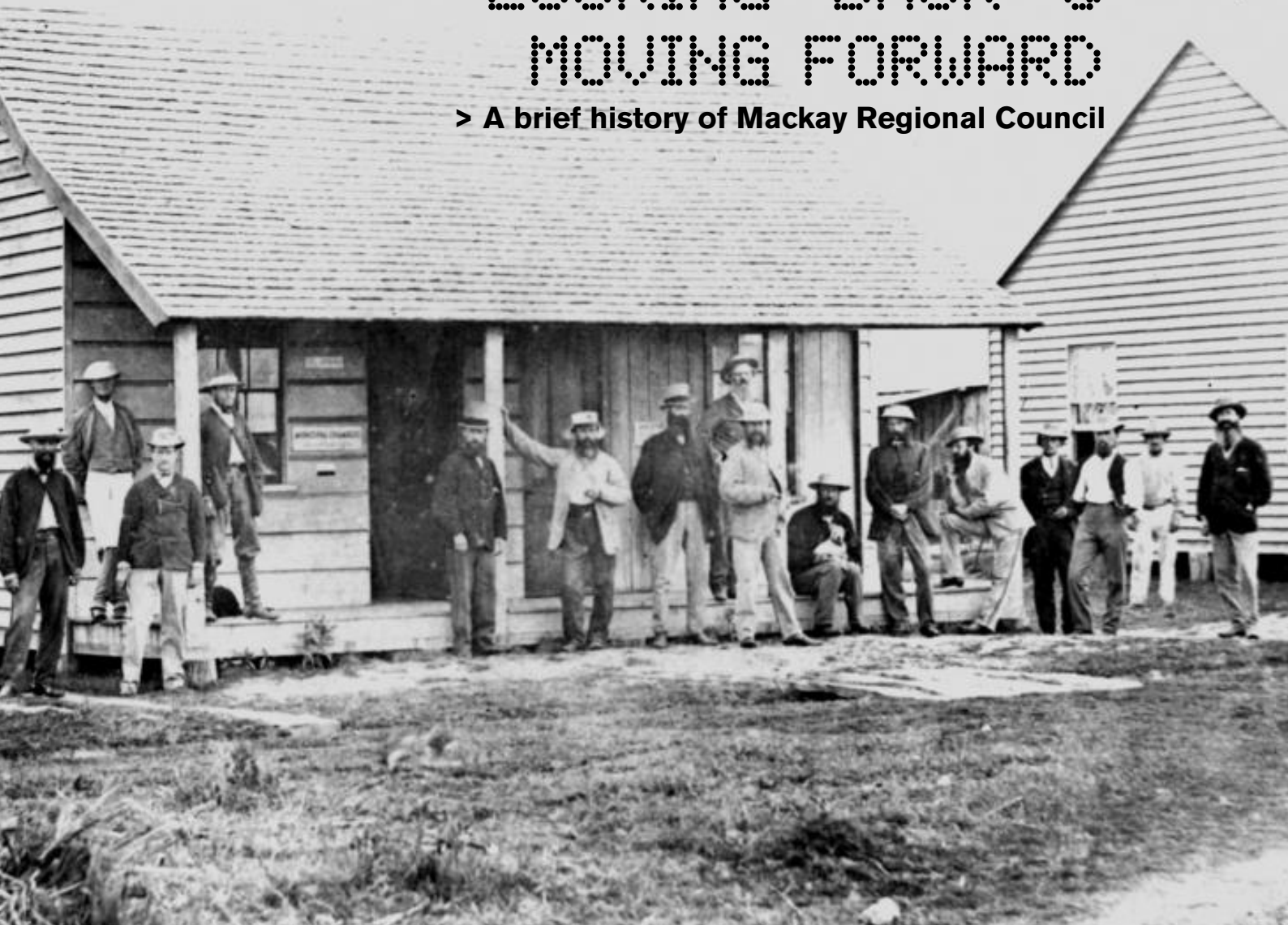




LOOKING BACK & MOVING FORWARD

> A brief history of Mackay Regional Council



A new port in Queensland

> Potential of the area recognised

Prior to European settlement, an estimated 2000 Indigenous people lived in the Pioneer Valley.

European discovery of what is now known as the Pioneer Valley occurred when John Mackay, a Scottish pastoralist explorer, led a party from northern New South Wales in search of new grazing lands. The group headed out from Uralla and after a journey of five months discovered the Pioneer River valley in May 1860.

The explorers immediately recognised the potential of the area and applied for pastoral runs. Mackay returned to the Pioneer Valley region in 1862 with 1200 cattle and established Green Mount station.

Between 1860 and 1862 various applications were made for cattle runs in the Pioneer Valley and cattlemen began arriving to take up land. The properties changed hands frequently until the late 1860s, by which time consolidation had taken place. Among those who followed Mackay were Robert and James Martin, Hamilton Station; C.C. and E.S. Rawson, Abington, which became Shamrock Vale and was known as The Hollow; Cook and Ross, Balnagowan; Macartney and Graham, St. Helen's Runs; and Gilchrist and Young, Cape Palmerston and Homebush.

At the same time, Henry Bell settled at Plain Creek (later the township of Sarina); and Edmund Atherton took up a selection at Cliftonville.

A port at Mackay was established to service the pastoral runs of the Pioneer River valley and its hinterland. The port was superior to that at Broadsound in that there was sufficient water at low tide to berth vessels of 100 to 150 tons, and there was a more gradual road to the inland.

The Mackay settlement was surveyed in 1863 and on October 13 the first sales of Crown lands took place at Bowen.



John Mackay

The township of Plane Creek (formerly Plain Creek) began to develop at Michelmore's Hill, north of the present town of Sarina, probably in the 1880s and by the time the Plane Creek Sugar Mill was built in 1895, a hotel, store and blacksmith shop formed the settlement.



Unloading sugar mill equipment at the wharf in River Street, Mackay, ca. 1880.

Sugar boom

> Pioneers cultivate industry

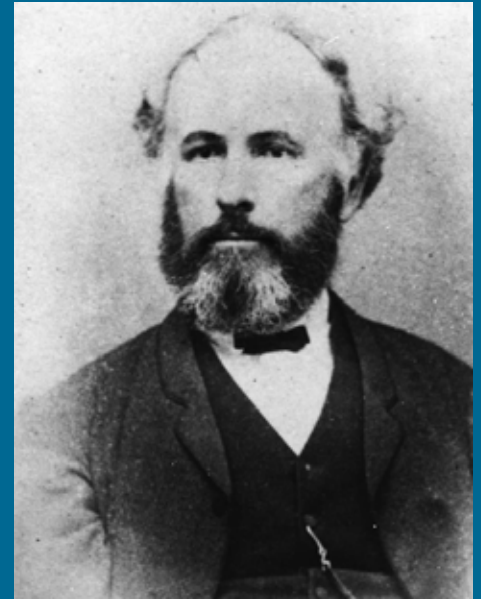
When Mackay was settled in 1862, Queensland was only three years old. Agriculture was a minor industry compared with the value of sheep and cattle on the large grazing runs.

Mackay was established as a pastoral area but within a few years sugar became the dominant industry due to the enterprising efforts of pioneers John Spiller, T.H. FitzGerald and John Ewen Davidson.

The Sugar and Coffee Regulations Act of 1864 provided easy terms for those contemplating the cultivation of sugar cane. The Crown Lands Alienation Act also enabled pioneers to take areas for townships, small farming and plantations.

In mid-1865 John Spiller had planted sugar cane on his Pioneer Plantation up river from the Mackay settlement, followed soon after by Thomas Henry FitzGerald who planted cane on an allotment in River Street. Although Spiller crushed cane experimentally in his small mill with wooden rollers in 1867, it was FitzGerald and his partner John Ewen Davidson who produced the first commercial crushing of sugar at Alexandra plantation in September 1868. The excitement generated by these earliest planters gave rise to the development of many plantations along the Pioneer River and beyond.

Until 1875, when the rust



T.H. FitzGerald



John Spiller's first steam engine, ca. 1878 - 1879.

epidemic struck the cane after an intensive wet season, 23 sugar mills had been built. No further mills were built until 1880 when the second sugar boom extended the number of sugar mills throughout the district by 12. A series of unfavourable factors including drought, low world sugar prices and the threat of the withdrawal of Islander labour (on which the planters had relied so heavily from May 1867) caused stagnation within the industry.

During the second sugar boom

(1879 – 1884), the population of the district increased by 3000. Many of these migrants worked in the sugar industry, having come from northern Europe to settle their families in a more favourable economic climate, and were intent on establishing themselves as small farmers. This resulted in a move towards government-sponsored central mills, the first of which opened at North Eton in 1888, and Racecourse in 1889. After this the decline of the plantation system accelerated.

Depression fuels changes

> Agriculture and roads vital to region



A Queensland-wide depression, especially in the pastoral industry, in 1867 demonstrated how the prosperity of Mackay depended on the increase of agricultural settlement. Of particular importance was the need for a good road network.

The citizens of Mackay were aware of the economic contribution the sugar industry was making to the colony of Queensland and agitated for a return on its investment, namely, the development of a local authority, so that rates collected could be matched by an equal government endowment.

In late 1868, 178 householders, freeholders and residents of Mackay petitioned the Governor to grant municipality status. This was granted on September 22, 1869, and the first council met on December 1, 1869.

Mackay's boundary at that time extended beyond the Hospital Reserve to the lagoons and ran south in line with Broadsound Road excluding the Racecourse Reserve.

The southern boundary was later extended to what became Boundary Road, while the northern boundary was the Pioneer River and the eastern boundary, the coast.

One of the earliest Mackay council undertakings was the construction of principal streets within the municipality. Road Trusts



Sarina Shire Council, ca. 1912.

were established in 1871 (Mackay) and 1872 (North Mackay); the two were later amalgamated. The most urgent work was to bridge the Pioneer River which was achieved in 1877.

In 1879 the Queensland Government passed the Divisional Boards Act to give autonomy to local divisions. Thus, the Pioneer Division embraced the area which would later be occupied by the Mirani and Sarina shires. The Pioneer Division (declared 1879) extended from the O'Connell and Andromache Rivers to Cape Palmerston and west to the Clarke Range, exclusive of the Mackay Municipality.

As a shire from 1903, Pioneer was truncated by the excision of

the Shire of Sarina in 1912 and the Shire of Mirani in 1913. The remainder was the responsibility of the Pioneer Shire Council.



Above photo: Pioneer Shire Council, ca. 1912.

Top photo: Construction of Pioneer Bridge, 1876.

Footsteps retraced

> A brief history of regional councils

Mackay

Mackay was proclaimed a municipality on September 22, 1869. The first meeting of the Mackay Municipal Council was held in the Court House (North Street) on December 1, 1869.

The first Mayor of Mackay Municipal Council was Alderman David Hay Dalrymple and his fellow Aldermen were Messrs Charles Keeley, Patrick McKenney, John Duffy, John Allen and William McBryde. The Town Clerk was Mr. Thomas Purves.

In 1903, Mackay became a Town, under the Mayoralty of C.P. Ready. On August 17, 1918, the Mackay Town Council became the Mackay City Council.

Pioneer

The Pioneer Divisional Board was proclaimed on November 11, 1879, and met for the first time on March 9, 1880 in the Mackay School of Arts, Wood Street.

The first members of the Pioneer Divisional Board were John Ewen Davidson (chairman) and councillors

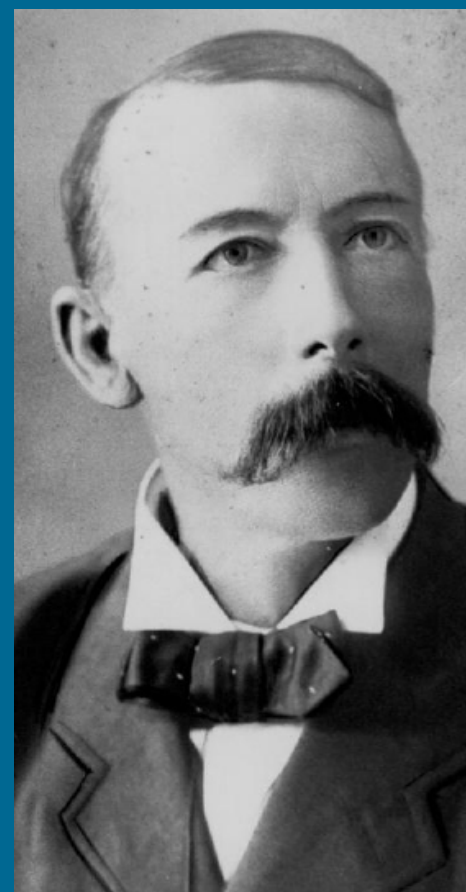
Maurice Hume Black, Robert Martin, Edward Maitland Long, William Hyne, Arthur Kemmis, David Hay Dalrymple, Dyson Lacy and Edmund Stansfeld Rawson. The first board clerk was W.J. McIlroy.

Under the 1902 Local Authorities Act the Pioneer Divisional Board ceased to exist and its functions were transferred to Pioneer Shire Council which came into being on April 1, 1903. On April 8, 1994, Pioneer Shire was abolished to create a new area of the City of Mackay.

Mirani

The Shire of Mirani was gazetted on September 4, 1913. George Johnson was the first Chairman of the Mirani Shire Council. Councillors were J.R. Smith, M.F. McMahon, P.J. Goldston, T. Hodgett, C.H. Webster and E. Hannan.

Pioneer Shire Clerk, Mr. Fred Clark acted as Shire Clerk until the appointment of Mr. George Morley. Discussions between the Pioneer and Mirani Shire Councils were being held from February 1914 and by June 1914, the Mirani Shire Council was meeting independently.



David Hay Dalrymple

In October 1915, the council met for the first time in Mirani at the Oddfellows Hall (Shire Hall).

Sarina

Sarina Shire Council commenced on January 1, 1912, having being gazetted late in 1911. The first meeting of the Sarina Shire Council was held in Nolan's Hall, Sarina on Saturday, March 2, 1912.

Councillor Alex Innes was elected as Chair. Other Councillors present were W.H. Nolan, W.R. Williams, J.C. Nicholson and A.E. Atherton. Mr. J.H. Nicol was appointed as the first Shire Clerk and Clerk of Works in July 1912.

Mackay keeps pace with times



The Sydney Street Bridge, built in 1887, was placed under the control of the Mackay Bridges Board but did not become usable until 1889 due to a natural widening of the river.

The first reticulated water supply was provided in 1899 powered by a steam-driven plant at the present water works site. In 1968 water was first pumped from Dumbleton for artificial recharge and then for raw water supply. This was followed by Dumbleton Weir Stage 1 in 1982 and Stage 2 (by the Water Resources Commission) in 1992. Mackay became one of the first cities in Queensland to be fully sewered from 1936.



Mackay City Council Precinct, Gordon Street, ca. 1988.

The City Council electricity powerhouse at Tennyson Street began operation on April 9, 1924. Mackay was the first city in Australia to be town planned by a Local Authority, the initial plan being prepared in 1933 by Mr. R.A. McInnis.

In the 1960s and 1970s extensive flood drainage of Mackay was undertaken. Prior to this, open drains existed throughout the Central Business District and suburbs and flooding was common in large areas of the city even with low-intensity storms.

In the 1970s the Civic Centre was acquired as an accumulation of reserves and freehold land parcels. The Sir Albert Abbott Administration Centre was officially opened on Saturday, October 11, 1975. Mackay Memorial Swimming Centre,



**Above photo: Sydney Street Bridge was built in 1887.
Top photo: Looking down Sydney Street from the bridge.**

Mackay's first Olympic-size pool, was opened in 1963, the City Library replaced the School of Arts Library in 1980 and the Mackay Entertainment Centre (a joint venture with Pioneer Shire Council) opened as the major bi-centennial project for the region in 1988.

A new library facility, the Gordon

White Library was built at Mount Pleasant in 2000 and Mackay's regional gallery facility, Artspace opened in 2003. Mackay Regional Botanic Gardens has operated at the Lagoons since May 24, 2003. Walkways along the Pioneer River and Sandfly Creek have proved popular with Mackay residents in recent times.

Mirani moves ahead

Sugar-cane growing has been the principal industry in the Mirani district since the late 1800s. Two sugar mills were established in the shire area – one at Marian, (1895) and the other at Finch Hatton (Cattle Creek Sugar Mill, 1906). The latter closed down and was removed in 1990 and the Marian Mill was expanded to become a super mill, taking in all the sugar cane grown in the Pioneer Valley.

Other industries within the region included:

- > Mining (Eungella – gold, and Pinevale – copper, late 1880s), timber (Clarke Range 1904-1994); and
- > Dairying (Eungella tableland from the mid-1930s)
- > The beef cattle industry has continued since the early 1900s

An extensive network of roads and bridges existed in the shire. The railway from Mackay to Mirani was completed in 1885 and a high-level railway bridge in 1897. Extensions to Pinnacle, Finch Hatton and finally Netherdale were completed in 1911. Branch lines ran to Kungurri and Owens Creek. Major floods played havoc with rail and road bridges especially in the 1950s.

Eungella National Park (encompassing Finch Hatton Gorge) was declared a National Park in 1941. There was a strong focus on the development of tourism within the area.

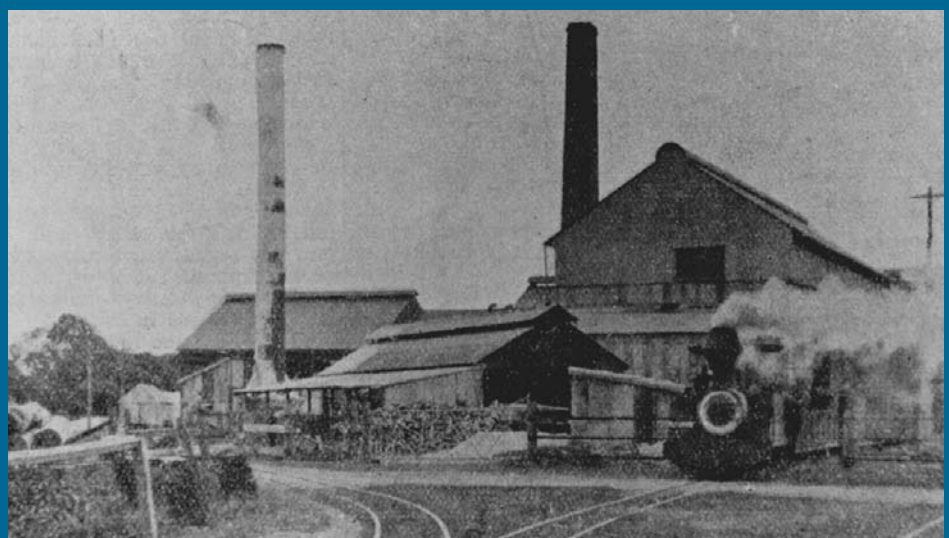
The Mirani swimming pool opened in September 1977 and the Mirani Shire Library and Museum complex officially opened in 1988.



High-level railway bridge at Mirani, ca. 1897.



Cane farmer with a team of plough horses in the 1930s.



Marian Mill, ca. 1934.

Sarina looks to the future



Plane Creek (later Sarina) was established as a pastoral run by Henry Bell in 1864. Two years later, Bell took his brother-in-law, Edmund Atherton, into partnership; and Atherton also formed Cliftonville station. Plane Creek homestead stood on the eastern side of the main Sarina-Mackay Road near Bells Creek.

Plane Creek Sugar Mill started crushing in 1896. The township which had formed near Bells Creek was transferred to a site which was closer to the mill.

After Sarina became a shire in its own right in 1912, two representatives from Sarina Shire Council were included on the Mackay Joint Hospitals Board in 1918.

The Australian National Power Alcohol Company Pty Ltd opened in 1926 and the production of alcohol began in 1928. Essential services including electricity and water were provided in the 1930s. The sewerage system proposed in 1935 came to fruition in 1972-73. An enhanced water supply from Middle Creek Dam was completed in 1958.

The Premier of Queensland, G.F.R. Nicklin, opened a new Shire Chambers and Library in 1960. Australia Day 1988 marked the official opening of the Sarina Cultural Hall and in 2002 the Sarina District Historical Centre began operating. The commencement of coal mining at Goonyella in the Bowen Basin provided the impetus for major



development within the Sarina shire. Construction of the Hay Point coal facilities began in 1969, along with major associated rail facilities at Yukan and Oonooie. The construction of Dalrymple Bay Coal Terminal started in 1981.

Above photo: The Plane Creek Sugar Mill, ca. 1912.

Top photo: Sarina, ca. 1912.

Middle photo: Sarina Distillery.

Timeline of the Mackay region: 1860-1960

> **1860:** John Mackay and his party discover the Pioneer River

> **1862:** Mackay settles at Greenmount

> **1865:** First sugar grown at Mackay by John Spiller

> **1869:** Establishment of the Mackay Municipal Council

> **1872:** First sugar manufactured at Pleystowe Mill

> **1875:** Rust disease sweeps through local cane fields

> **1880:** Pioneer Divisional Board proclaimed

> **1885:** First railway line from Mackay to Mirani constructed

> **1885:** Township of Hamilton renamed Mirani

> **1888:** Gold discovered on the Eungella tableland

> **1901:** Mackay celebrates federation

> **1904:** Logging industry began on Clark Range

> **1907:** Township of Plane Creek changes its name to Sarina



Barnes Creek during the 1958 flood.

> **1912:** First meeting of the Sarina Shire Council held

> **1913:** Mirani Shire Council gazetted

> **1918:** Mackay Region devastated during the cyclone of 1918

> **1928:** Production of Power Alcohol at Australian National Power Alcohol Company Pty Ltd commenced (opened in 1926)

> **1930:** Arrival of 'Star of Cairns' at Mackay Airport

> **1935:** Construction of Mackay Harbour commences

> **1938:** Forgan Bridge was officially opened

> **1939:** Official opening of Mackay Harbour

> **1953:** Mackay Sugar Research Institute opens

> **1957:** Opening of Mackay Bulk Sugar Terminal

> **1957:** Construction of Middle Creek Dam begins

> **1958:** Mackay region suffers severe flooding

> **1960:** New Sarina Shire Council Chambers and Library officially opened



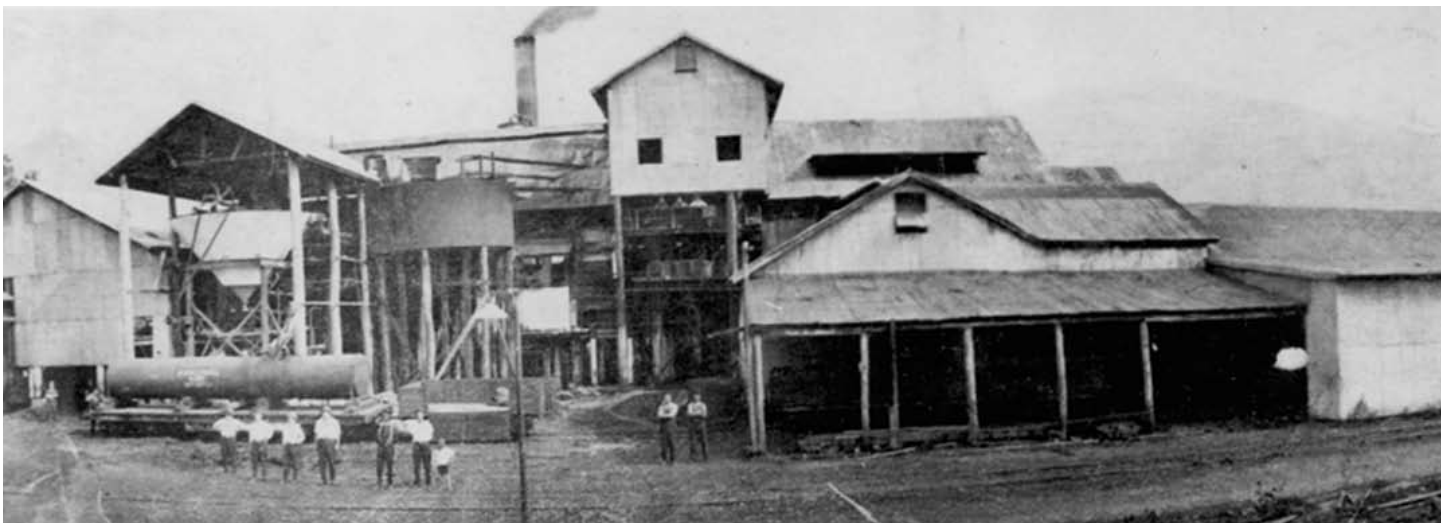
Residents on the verandah of Town Hall, Sydney Street, during the 1918 cyclone.



The view of Sarina from Plane Creek Mill, ca. 1920s.



Mackay Water Plant, ca. 1910.



Cattle Creek Mill, ca. 1908.

Timeline of the Mackay region: 1962-2008

- > **1962:** Mackay celebrates Centenary
- > **1963:** Mackay War Memorial Pool opened
- > **1969:** Construction of Hay Point Coal facility and Goonyella Mine
- > **1971:** Official opening of the Hay Point to Goonyella Railway line
- > **1975:** Opening of Sir Albert Abbott Administration Building
- > **1977:** Olympic-sized swimming pool opened at Mirani
- > **1980:** Official opening of the Ron Camm Bridge
- > **1981:** Construction of Dalrymple Bay Coal Terminal commenced
- > **1988:** Sarina Cultural Centre, Mirani Shire Library and Museum complex and Mackay Entertainment Centre officially opened
- > **1984:** Dalrymple Bay Coal Terminal declared open
- > **1990:** Cattle Creek Mill closes
- > **1994:** Pioneer Shire Council abolished to form the new



Sarina Tea Rooms, ca. 1930s.



Mackay War Memorial Pool opened in 1963.

Mackay City Council

- > **1996:** Opening of second stage of the Pinnacle Playhouse
- > **2000:** Construction of Gordon White Library completed
- > **2002:** Sarina District Historical



Construction of the road to Eungella, ca 1906-1907.

Centre opens its doors
 > **2003:** Artspace and Mackay Regional Botanic Gardens projects completed

> **2008:** Amalgamation of Mackay City, Mirani Shire and Sarina Shire councils to form Mackay Regional Council



Above photo: Mirani Shire Council, ca. 1935.

Front page photo: Mackay Municipal Council Chambers, Wood Street, Mackay, ca. 1870.

Looking Back and Moving Forward: A brief history of Mackay Regional Council

This publication has been compiled by historian Berenice Wright and Mackay Regional Council Local History Co-ordinator Lara Clarke and designed by Corporate Communications Officer Penne Kaddatz. Special thanks to Sarina District Historical Centre, Mackay Regional Council Youth Development Officer Neil Kempe, Mirani resident Malcolm Maclean and Alan Laskey and other members of the Friends of Mirani Museum Group for their assistance and information.

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