

Mining the CQ Collection and Discovering Rockhampton's Trades Hall

Barbara Webster

b.webster@cqu.edu.au

Lecturer in History, School of Humanities
Central Queensland University

My research on the history of the trade union movement in Rockhampton from 1907 to 1957, undertaken for my doctoral dissertation during the 1990s, drew extensively on the documentary and photographic resources of Central Queensland University's Capricornia Central Queensland Collection, especially in relation to Rockhampton Trades Hall. The minute books of the Trades Hall Board of Management from 1921 were my initial point of investigation into the building, its supporting organisation and occupants. Originally these materials were in the possession of Mr Evan Schwarten, a local union stalwart and former trustee of Trades Hall until deteriorating physical condition forced a sale in 1986. Mr Schwarten kindly donated these to the CQ Collection for safe-keeping and ease of access to labour historians. Unfortunately, the first minute book from the peak union body's inception in 1913 had been lost but those from 1921 provided great insight into the daily operations of Trades Hall and of the exciting political goings-on at that venue over the years.



Fig. 1: Trades Hall, Fitzroy Street, Rockhampton, 1914
CCQC

From its opening, in a converted wool store at the corner of Fitzroy and Bolsover Streets which was purchased in 1914 for £2,425, the hall housed the offices of several of the major trade unions – the Australasian Meat Industry Employees' Union (AMIEU), Waterside Workers' Federation (WWF) and the Transport Workers' Union (TWU) in particular. The large upstairs meeting room known as the 'Big Room' was the venue for meetings for those and other large unions, such as the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) and Australian Railways Union (ARU), as well as up to 40 smaller union bodies. Many of the photographs of the Trades Hall Board, an annual ritual in which workingmen donned their Sunday-best, which once lined the walls of Trades Hall are now in the CQ Collection.

CONTRACT.

the undersigned _____ as
Agent for the Vendors THE QUEENSLAND NATIONAL BANK LIMITED do hereby
acknowledge to have this day sold to The Trades Hall Board
of Rockhampton the property in the County of Springstone
Parish of Rockhampton containing 1 rood 3 piches 29 sq
for the sum of Two thousand four hundred & twenty
five pounds - and to have received the sum of 200 -
by way of deposit and in part payment of the said purchase money AND I/we the
above-named Purchaser hereby acknowledge to have this day purchased the said
property for the sum first above stated and agree to fulfil in all respects on my/our part
the Conditions of Sale endorsed.

DATED this Twentieth day of March 1914

N. H. Robinson Vendors' Agent.

John Adamson Purchaser
John Ryan
Frederick Robert Goss Trustees
of the Trades Hall Board
Rockhampton

Witness John Wheeler

Fig. 2: Contract for Purchase of Trades Hall, Fitzroy Street, 1914. CCQC

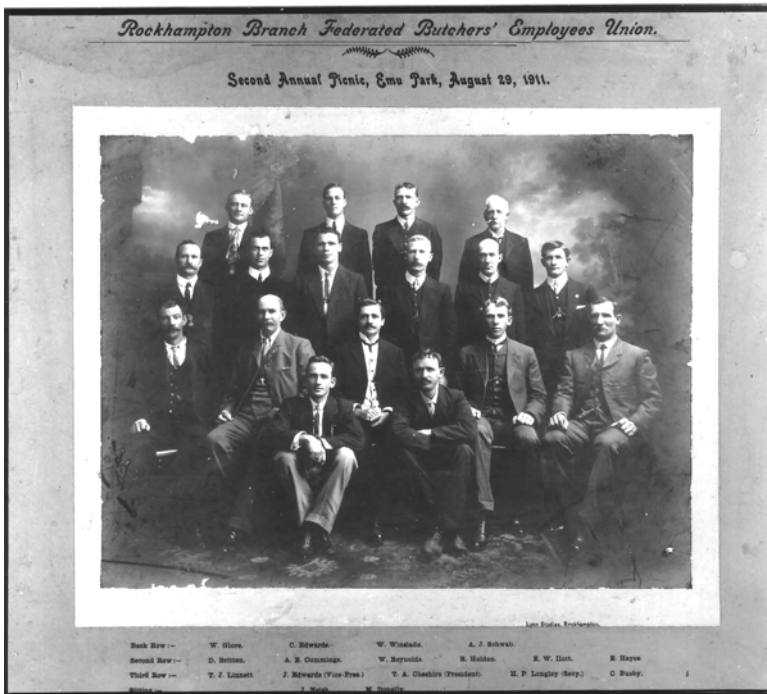


Fig. 3: Amalgamated Federated Butchers' Employees' Union 1911
(AMIEU from 1912) CCQC



Fig. 4: Waterside Workers' Federation, 1908 CCQC

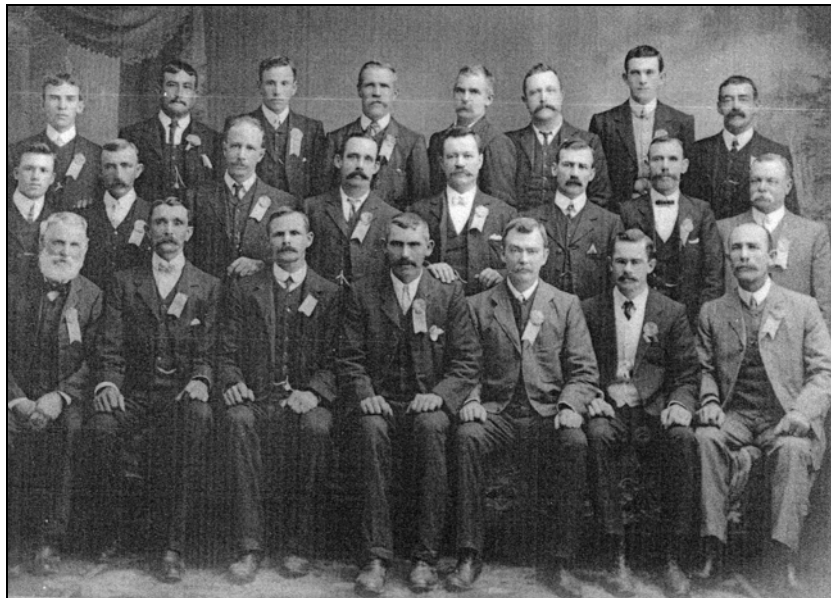


Fig. 5: Eight-Hour Day Celebration Committee, 1909 CCQC



Fig. 6: Labour Day Celebration Committee, 1921 CCQC

By perusing the minutes – not an easy task owing to handwriting which is illegible in places – I ascertained that funding for the purchase of the building in 1914, and for the construction of an adjoining theatre in the mid-1920s, came partly from moneys raised by the Eight-Hour Day Celebration Committee (later known as the Labour Day Committee). The records of that body from its inception in 1909 are also in the collection. Each year on the first Monday in May, the committee organised a day of family novelty events and competitive sports and horse racing (with bookmakers and publicans!). The peak body also conducted an annual art union with much sought-after and fashionable prizes on offer. The Eight-Hour Day records contain programmes and ticket books illustrating the range of activities and prizes associated with the celebration. Two-thirds of the profits of the day went to the Trades Hall Board's building fund and, like the board itself, the celebration committee routinely posed for an annual photograph, some of which are also in the collection.

Rockhampton 8-Hour Celebration Union.		Rockhampton 8-Hour Celebration Union.	
ART UNION.		THIRD ART UNION	
No 1638	ONE SHILLING	£160.	PRIZES £160.
NAME	No 1638	1st Prize—Beal & Co., Australian Made Piano, Value £65.	
ADDRESS		2nd Prize—Sulky (Rubber Tyre) Value £30.	
		3rd Prize—Suite of Sitting-Room Furniture... Value £25.	
		4th Prize—Red Bird Bicycle (Lady's or Gents) Value £19.	
		5th Prize—Phonograph and 25 Records Value £12.	
		6th Prize—Goat Cart and Harness Value £9.	
IMPORTANT—Butts, Unsold Tickets and Cash to be returned to the Secretary by SATURDAY MAY 13th, 1910, to the port in the drawing.		TICKETS, ONE SHILLING EACH.	
		Profits to Assist the Great 8-Hour Movement.	
		TO BE DRAWN ON SATURDAY, MAY 27, 1910, in the Old Masonic Hall, East Street, under Public Supervision.	
		F. B. PURNELL, Secretary.	

Fig. 7: Eight-Hour Day Art Union Ticket, 1910 CCQC

TIME SHEET.				First Prize—Sulky, Horse and Harness in Monster Art Union, on view here to-day. Purchase a Ticket at 1/- each. 35 other Prizes.	
SPRINT HANDICAP				PROGRAMME.	
First Heat	...	...	10.10 a.m.	INDUSTRIAL DISPLAYS.	
Second Heat	...	...	10.15 "	1. Best Industrial Trade Union Display, £15.	
Third Heat	...	...	10.20 "	First prize ... £7 10 0	
ONE MILE BICYCLE HANDICAP				Second prize ... £5 10 0	
First Heat	...	...	10.30 "	2. Best Fancy Dress Costume ... £2 2 0	
Second Heat	...	...	10.45 "	3. Best Decorated Bicycle ... £2 2 0	
ALL SCHOOLS' COMPETITION				4. Best Worst Turnout, £3/3/-	
RELAY RACE	...	...	11.0 "	First prize ... £2 2 0	
EIGHT-HOUR HANDICAP				Second prize ... £1 1 0	
First Heat	...	...	11.10 "	1. SPRINT HANDICAP, 75 yds., £3. First	
Second Heat	...	...	11.20 "	price, £2; second, 15/-; third, 5/-.	
Third Heat	...	...	11.30 "	1. P. Walker ... 2 yds.	
Fourth Heat	...	...	11.40 "	2. W. Marrinan ... 6 1/2 "	
ONE MILE WALKING MATCH				3. W. F. Black ... 7 "	
COACHBUILDERS' WHEEL RACE				4. V. R. Browning ... 7 1/2 "	
SEMI-FINAL SPRINT HANDICAP				5. K. V. Considine ... 8 "	
ONE MILE BICYCLE RELAY RACE				6. J. Conaghan ... 8 "	
SEMI-FINAL EIGHT-HOUR HANDICAP				7. F. H. Hughes ... 8 "	
BILLY GOAT RACE				8. D. J. C. McGrath ... 8 1/2 "	
FINAL SPRINT HANDICAP				9. A. Godbold ... 8 1/2 "	
FINAL MILE BICYCLE RACE				10. F. Chase ... 10 yds.	
FINAL EIGHT-HOUR HANDICAP				11. A. Hughes ... 10 "	
FIRST HORSE EVENT STARTS 2.15 p.m.				12. K. Humphries ... 10 "	
				13. R. A. Boyes ... 12 "	
				14. W. Harris ... 12 "	
				15. R. D. Kennedy ... 13 "	
				16. J. Austin ... 13 1/2 "	
				17. J. Collins ... 13 1/2 "	
				First Heat, 10.10 a.m.	
				W. Marrinan 6 1/2 F. Chase 9	
				J. Conaghan 8 R. A. Boyes 12	
				F. H. Hughes 8 J. Austin 13	
				1st. Boyes ... 2nd. Austin ... 3rd. ...	
				Time ... 7.5 ...	

Fig. 8: Page from Labour Day Celebration Programme, 1921 CCQC

Rockhampton Labour Day Celebration Union		21st Birthday Annual Art Union.	
No 13759		Name	
Address		PLEASE NOTE—All Buns, Unsold Tickets and Cash must be returned to the Secy.	
I. H. Shackleton, c/o Trades Hall NOT LATER than SATURDAY, June 29th, 1929.		To be drawn on Monday 15th July, 1929, at Trades Hall, Rockhampton, at 8.15 p.m.	
First Six Prize Winners of 1928 Art Union		1st Prize—CHEVROLET NATIONAL TOURING CAR, complete £235-9-6	
2nd Prize—A SILKY OAK DINING ROOM SUITE, comprising 1 Table and 6 Chairs (2 Carvers 4 diners)		2nd Prize—A SILKY OAK SIDEBOARD	
3rd Prize—A 44 PIECE DINNER SET (including Cups and Saucers 10 match)		4th Prize—A PORTABLE "REXOPORT" GRAMOPHONE	
5th Prize—A SEAGRAMS CAME LOUNGE		6th Prize—A YEAR'S SUBSCRIPTION "MORNING BULLETIN" (donated by The Morning Bulletin Ltd.)	
7th Prize—A COSY HAMMOCK (donated by D. Gillinder, Esq.)		8th Prize—TROPHY (donated by H. V. Hinton, Esq.)	
9th Prize—TROPHY (donated by H. D. Peers, Esq.)		10th Prize—TROPHY (donated by W. M. Pattinson, Esq.)	
11th Prize—TROPHY (donated by Charlie Murphy, Esq.)		12th Prize—TROPHY (donated by J. W. Jones, Limited)	
13th Prize—A HAT (donated by J. W. Jones, Limited)		14th Prize—OPEN ORDER	
15th Prize—OPEN ORDER		16th Prize—OPEN ORDER	
17th Prize—OPEN ORDER		18th Prize—OPEN ORDER	
19th Prize—OPEN ORDER		20th Prize—OPEN ORDER	
21st Prize—OPEN ORDER		22nd Prize—OPEN ORDER	
23rd Prize—OPEN ORDER		24th Prize—TROPHY (donated by W. Franks, Esq.)	
25th Prize—TROPHY (donated by Baxter Bros.)		26th Prize—TROPHY (donated by Mrs. M. Lyons)	
27th Prize—TROPHY (donated by Mrs. J. Kelly)		28th Prize—TROPHY (donated by a wallahiser)	
29th Prize—TROPHY (donated by a wallahiser)		Tickets: One Shilling Each.	
No 13759		Prizes 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 will be frequently on view in Williams' Ltd. Furniture Department Windows, East Street, until date of drawing.	
[SEE OTHER SIDE.]		I. H. SHACKLETON, Secretary	

Fig. 9: Labour Day Art Union Ticket, 1929. CCQC

The other major source of funding for Trades Hall, particularly when the board decided to build a modern Trades Hall Theatre (later the Liberty Theatre) to be a 'cultural home' for Rockhampton workers, was the union levy. Among the books of the Federated Carters and Drivers' Industrial Union (FCDIU, later TWU), there are levy lists showing contributions by FCDIU members towards Trades Hall. One of these shows the

contributions of my paternal grandfather, Frank Cole, who was union president during the 1930s and a trustee of Trades Hall in the 1950s. The FCDIU/TWU minutes, which date from 1911, also contain much important information about the Trades Hall Board because Frank Conlon was secretary of both the transport union and of the hall for over 40 years until his death in 1954. The records of the AMIEU contain similar levy tickets.

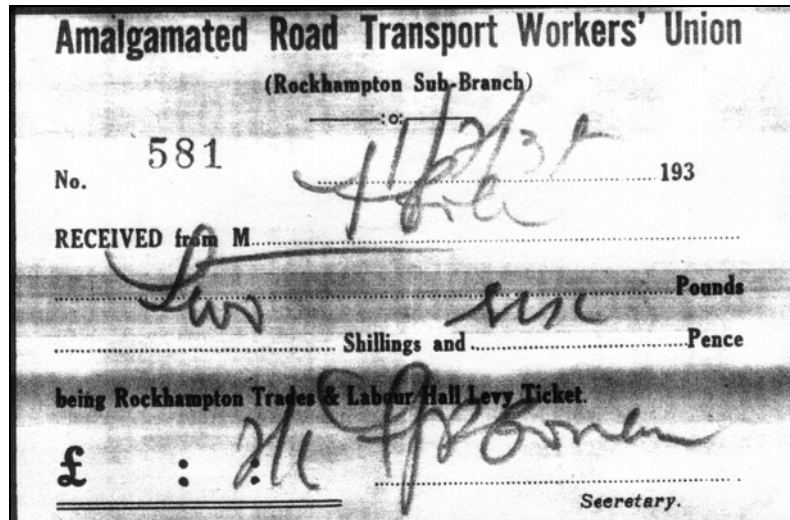


Fig. 10: Frank Cole's Trades Hall Levy Ticket, signed by Frank Conlon CCQC

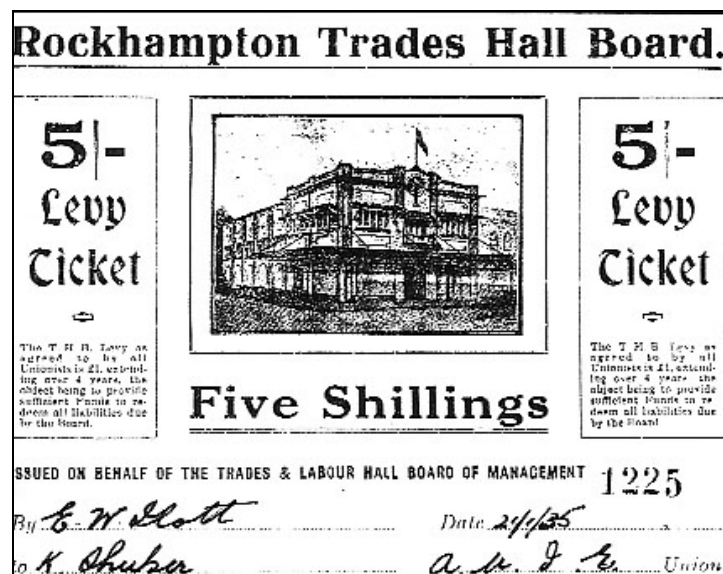


Fig. 11: AMIEU Trades Hall Levy Ticket, showing Trades Hall Theatre on corner of Bolsover and Fitzroy Streets. CCQC

When the Depression deepened in the late 1920s and early 1930s, union funds and Eight-Hour Day takings declined as a result of increased unemployment and decreased union membership. Consequently, the Trades Hall Board faced near bankruptcy and the loss of both the hall and the theatre which were on the one land title. Unions banded together to fend off financial disaster and, among other measures, launched a concerted

'Monster Drive' to raise rescue funds. The illustrated pamphlet promoting the event was found tucked into the back of one of the FCDIU minute books.



Fig. 12: Pamphlet to raise funds for Trades Hall.

CCQC

Fortunately, these efforts proved successful, with the result that the Trades Hall property remained in the board's hands until sold in the mid-1980s. Later minute books reveal, however, that from the 1960s, with the termination of Birch, Carroll and Coyle's lease on the Liberty Theatre due to competition from television, the board was keen to sell both properties because of decreased income and increased outflows on repairs and maintenance. In 1986, after many false hopes were dashed, the Trades Hall board finally sold both premises for \$260,000 and, with financial help from the Queensland Trades and Labour Council, erected a modern building in Campbell Street which serves as the local headquarters for unions today. With that sale and the demise of the Trades Hall Board of Management went a slice of early union movement history even though memorial plaques and some large photographs of past union and political luminaries were transferred to the new premises.

These records pertaining to Trades Hall are but a small part of the extensive range of trade union records in Central Queensland University's Capricornia Central Queensland collection. Union and peak union body minutes and other documents reveal the words and deeds of local unionists as they strived, through collective action, to better the lot of their fellow workers in an age when most workers toiled under low rates of pay, long hours and appalling physical conditions. They have proved invaluable in my

research to better understand the local union movement and allow me to convey more accurately its history to the public of today.

Trades Hall Board (Rockhampton, Qld) [Records] [manuscripts], 1914-1987.

Broken runs of minutes, annual reports, correspondence and financial statements; rent records; miscellaneous papers relating to administration.

MS U14/2063-2065

Eight-Hour Day Celebration Committee (Rockhampton, Qld)

Labour Day Celebrations Committee (Rockhampton, Qld) [Papers and records] [manuscript]/[by and relating to the Labour Day Celebrations Committee].

MS D9/260-262

Transport Workers' Union of Australia. Rockhampton Sub-branch. [Records] [manuscript]

The evolution of the Union from such earlier organisations as the Carters and Storemen's Union, the Federated Carters and Drivers' Industrial Union of Australia and the Amalgamated Road Transport Workers' Union is reflected in these records.

MS P16/1952-1958

Australasian Meat Industry Employees' Union. Rockhampton Sub-Branch [Records] [manuscript]

Contents: Rockhampton Sub-branch and Central District minute books, cutting books and membership rolls (1910-1967).

MS J19/940-947