Conclusion

In exploring the dichotomies of life at Mount Morgan this thesis has sought to discover the local blanketing of realities that created an attractive image of the town. Such investigation required an attempt to comprehend an innate local pride in place and community rather than in the space that was an ugly townscape. Mount Morgan was not simply an area of used land, or necessarily a resident's birthplace. It was a place of human endeavour and survival, the comfort of mateship, social and familial bondage in networks of association or kin, and the reassurance of natural and fabricated landmarks, memorials and a definitive local lore.

The background to this work reveals a profile of Aboriginal habitation and dispossession in the area studied. The thesis includes a brief discussion of indigenous settlement from the late nineteenth century in the hinterland south of Mount Morgan, where at least than six families at Crows Nest, Box Flat, Wura and Walmul shared a mixed heritage of Aboriginal and European or Malay.

The thesis argues that Mount Morgan was not a 'typical' mining town. Some mining towns were 'different' rather than 'typical'; perhaps distinctly urban places and supporting many individual mines, others became company towns, but Mount Morgan was a town established for a single company mine. An instant mining population provided the seeds of an urban, working-class town character. Over years, native-born and European immigrants imprinted their culture on emergent Mount Morgan tradition and mores, and through employment, domestic and social hegemony, nurtured an essence of their former place. Moreover, in newspapers and mail from the south or

'Home', native-born and immigrants retained a cultural dependence on their own heritage.[1]

Most significant to the thesis was an attempt to collapse time to understand the attitudes, action and dialogue and at times, denouement in the play of Mount Morgan life. The people of Mount Morgan were at once actors and victims, whether their stage was the mine, the town centre, or village-suburbs. Disparate characters provided the cast for a holistic schema set against the perennial backdrop of a devastated environment. Timbercutting and pollution of waterways at Mount Morgan was rampant by 1900, transforming a landscape where a few decades earlier, Aboriginal campsites of the Gangulu and Balili might locate near territorial boundaries on the Dee River.[2]

Within thirty years, pollution of the river and its tributaries was a fact of Mount Morgan life. Unsanitary conditions were similar in any urban development of the 1880s, but for each place, the problem was singularly critical. At Mount Morgan, the real problems of hygiene and disease and consequential detriment to health in a place deprived of reticulated water challenged an outside image of the Company - implanted by the board and management - that amenities were provided for the town. The high incidence of infectious disease in town was inexorably linked to the devastation of natural waterways, a problem that assumed psychological significance for many residents. In comparison with settlements that had poor natural water; this town was settled on the banks of the river. Residents were aware that the Company's numerous dams limited water flow, and that less than two kilometres north-east of the town and up-river from the mine, the huge No. 7. Dam across the Dee had the proportions of a vast, freshwater lake set in a natural environment. Yet, management provided several small diameter standpipes in the town as a mere token water supply. Other mining

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1 George Haswell, A Tyneside worthy, 1896, typescript, Haswell papers, F642, Fryer Memorial Library.

2 William Toby, interview, 9 May 1993, Mount Morgan Oral History (MMOH).

towns suffered similarly in receiving only slight benefit from capitalist operations, but at Mount Morgan, the cavalier attitude rather than the paternalism claimed by management towards miners and their well being caused simmering if guarded town resentment.

The bourgeois materialism of the mine directors, management and outsiders ignored the lack-lustre existence of the mining town. Board, shareholders and management promoted the golden image of Mount Morgan, while hundreds of miners were as ants toiling in and out great underground chambers to dig vast tonnages of ore amid the dust, grime and smoke that polluted and obscured the town. However neither miners nor town received financial benefit from the wealth in ingots transported under escort directly from the mine to the port of Rockhampton and beyond. As the largest regional centre outside Brisbane, Rockhampton was also in close proximity to Mount Morgan, with the resultant if typical social dissension between the towns.

The physical facade of Mount Morgan was not of iron walled cottages, the prolonged use of bark dwellings, miners' dugouts or stone terraces. Mount Morgan became a timber town and progressively, boasted miners' cottages of varying sizes, and later, the 'high-set' dwelling.[3] This was not to be confused with the larger verandahed Queenslander, some examples of which at Mount Morgan survive or remain sharp in memory. For this working class town, polarisation of housing style reflected urban characteristics. Petty bourgeoisie at Mount Morgan perceived their living standards as superior to working class and many denied knowledge of or contact with the original settlement area of Tipperary Point, a location seen as the social equivalent to the remnant of any early settlement. Thus, Mount Morgan was a microcosm of the large urban city.[4]

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[3] Peter Bell, *Timber and iron, houses in North Queensland mining settlements*, St. Lucia, 1984, p. 113.
[4] Graeme Davison, *The rise and fall of 'Marvellous Melbourne'*, Melbourne, 1978, pp. 238, 239.

Near the centre of town was the capitalist icon Carlton House, a Company mansion that proclaimed wealth and power in its quality architecture and lavish functions provided for visiting dignitaries from vice-regal personages to Anglican bishops and shareholders. The town was excluded from the place, but locals assumed status from its prestigious image. Company residences constructed on the mine range across the river and in town were for upper management and some senior staff. As a group apart from miners and townspeople, management from the general manager to lower staff occupied residences at moderate rents and on a scale of size and quality that defined status in the Company. These circumstances that shaped existence and occurred in the shadow of the mine engendered staff obligation, while the board that perceived a limited life for the mine had no interest in the future of the town or its people. By 1927, the Company in liquidation offered for sale no less than 17 houses previously occupied by staff[5], while the town lost claim to an image of vice-regal patronage when Carlton House was sold and removed.

Women maintained social morality and were the spindle of family life. The division of labour was as marked as elsewhere, and women had a measure of control within the 'cult of domesticity'. In suburban communities, or perhaps streets, social networks of local women monitored the conduct of neighbourhood residents.[6] Suspect attitudes and behaviour challenged moral standards and reputations suffered in the name of respectability. Although women engaged in outside work as waged employees who included a limited number of mine office employees by the 1920s few local women were unionists or politically active.[7] Those who were union members were domestics and hotel workers, shop assistants and clothing workroom employees.[8] Women engaged in private enterprise from preference or necessity, but their efforts did not bring upward mobility, a situation this thesis contends was exacerbated by the

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5 Mount Morgan Gold Mining Company Limited, Liquidation list, 1929, R.F. Boyle private papers.

6 Shani D'Cruze and Jean Turnbull, 'Fellowship and family: Oddfellows' lodges in Preston and Lancaster c.1830-c.1890', *Urban History*, vol. 22, pt, 1, May 1995 p. 41.

7 *MB*, 31 October 1905.

8 Australian Workers' Union, Membership Rolls, Southern District, 1916-1928, Australian Workers' Union Archives, Bundaberg.

town's masculine 'presence'. Successful male traders and professionals took office on committees, community associations and in local authority. If, in the event, they acquired bourgeois status, this extended to their families.

Mount Morgan was a town for the thrill of contact sport, membership of fraternal and benefit associations, and the outpouring of spiritual faith. Moreover, residents existed to the regular timing of mine whistles and hooter blast, yet, on occasion, the sound that crossed every barrier - music - instrumental and choral, sacred or profane, drowned the thump of stampers and the scream of saws. Local lodges and societies that provided some relief in cash or kind in a pre-welfare era were a panacea for the fear of poverty, death or injury. The seeming anchor of membership might offer subsistence, but was a step higher than the destitution that threatened until legislation for unemployed workers' insurance and workers compensation provided a degree of financial relief. In terms of congregations, the Christian churches were typically polarised. The Anglican parish was substantial and Catholic obedience to the Mass complemented a sense of Irishness so strong that 'outsiders' avoided Tipperary Point on St. Patrick's Day.[9] Whilst Methodist and Presbyterian churches maintained their influence and promoted Sabbath Schools, some Protestant churches struggled to increase traditionally small congregations whose zeal was undiminished by limited numbers.

Local government, the court of petty sessions, police and schools at Mount Morgan controlled, disciplined, and educated the town. Most residents lived within the boundaries of law and order, settling verbal argument by legal or court action. In the late nineteenth century, misdemeanour and crime relating to alcohol, physical violence and abuse, petty larceny and offences of moral turpitude demonstrated larrikin style. However, law enforcement typified a generally urban environment and most saw lawbreakers as the poor or under class, and the 'other' as including Chinese. Many

[9] Ray Boyle, Interview 7 May 1993, MMOH.

Chinese were the town's market gardeners, their cultural difference prompting discrimination and their activities targeted frequently under law until the early 1900s. Oral reminiscences confirmed the notoriety of place where small dwellings and stores on small unsurveyed lots fronted narrow lanes where dwellings and stores were adjacent to saloons and hotels.[10] Legal contracts and licensing provided court revenue, but this thesis suggests that in the 1890s, the ethics of some judgements within the walls of the court were lost to public comprehension. From the outset, charges of murder, embezzlement and moral crime heard initially at the Mount Morgan Court of Petty Sessions were decided by the higher authority of the Rockhampton District, Supreme and Circuit Courts, a system that aggravated inter-town dissension. Gold theft was a common crime in early Central Queensland, but from the 1890s, theft of gold at Mount Morgan mine was thwarted or generally overcome. Offenders were dealt with through the legal and economic power of a Company that assiduously avoided contact with the press, particularly in relation to any negative detail of the mine. At late as 1925, whilst some striking miners watched from their backyards as fire destroyed the underground workings, speculation abounded as to the source of the blaze. However, no official inquiry occurred, and no charges were laid.

Unlawful activity and crime at Mount Morgan did not abate through the early 1900s; rather, law legislation became more powerful and complex. The press was a monitor of town action and attitudes, at times adopting a high moral tone in assumption of a social guardianship role. Conversely, local journalism was litigious on occasion. Such assumed license in reportage against the under class and ethnic 'other' seemed to pass scrutiny, but astute town professionals had no compunction in challenging the press. Politicians and the press served the Company and their own interests. The general manager's public declaration in 1910 that the mine did not experience strikes or industrial conflict was misleading. The union movement gained strength at the mine

[10] Gertrude Marcombe, interview, 4 March 1998, OH; Daphne McCabe, 10 September 1998, OH; *Queensland Government Gazette*, 2 January 1900, no. 1, vol. LXXIII, p. 109; Clerk of Petty Sessions Mount Mogan, Deposition Book, CPS 7B/P1, QSA.

from 1908, and a strike in 1912 was the forerunner of intermittent stoppages and union militancy that led to strikes. Management manipulation of the mine labour force to vote conservative was successful in some Queensland elections until 1915, when Labor won government and retained office for the remaining life of the Company. A local union organiser who gained the Mount Morgan seat for Labor, served the working class town through more than a decade of industrial conflict and unresolved bitterness.

The thesis acknowledges that with poor living conditions in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the 1900s, the loss of a breadwinner might spell disaster for any family. However, the high rate of death and injury from mine accident at Mount Morgan was an extreme occupational hazard. Multiple death from underground disaster shattered and halted the town and closed the mine. Quaint funeral posts that bore advertisements of forthcoming interments heralded the emotive theatre of the mass funeral and communal grief that unified town and mine.

For miners, the mateship that crossed social boundaries was intrinsic to their lifestyle until the threat to their economic base was realised each time the mine closed. The men did not proclaim their mateship, neither did they announce their hidden fears: of mine accident, or the slow, awful death from miner's phthisis, the insidious and terminal disease that hastened slowly. Although this malady was seemingly metamorphosed in the lingering demise of the Company, the nonchalant attitude of miners to safety and health issues was for many their own undoing. Yet, the threat of fatal accident that struck without warning was intrinsic to mining life, and, to all intents, 'they lived with it.'

> I entered the cage for the Number Nine,
> A trucker paused at the brace to say,
> As he left the depths of the gloomy mine,
> 'A man was killed in the mine today.'
> There is clatter and crash in the dusty stopes,
> As the rock drills dash at the good grey ore.
> There is labour and sweat, for the company hopes
> For a quote in the share-list of one point more.
> There is wealth to grasp: there are divs. to pay;

> And what is a labourer more or less?
> 'Mid the din and the clamour now who would guess
> That a man was killed in the mine today! [11]
> 'A man was killed at the mine today', 12 May 1907

Ironically, the men were instrumental in ultimate closure of the mine, many treating the industrial situation with larrikin confidence, a notion framed probably from years of management threat to close the mine. In the 1920s, the Company struggled to retain a dominant image, but increasingly, union led miners demonstrated solidarity and militancy. Now the actions of the men were the source of threat at the mine, which ultimately closed, leaving the labour force unemployed and unemployable locally:

> Between the steps of the swinging bridge and the railway bridge, there was an acacia tree with an elevated rock nearby where men from the area gathered and played cards for matches. They had no money; a round cardboard box of wax matches then was one penny. And in the evening after sundown…in the late 1920s…men sat on either side of the bridge and told yarns.[12]

From the earliest years, the leisure experience embraced the town ethos, from the pivotal pastime of drinking alcohol to the intellectual stimulation of music, a plebian taste in theatre hall and film entertainment, and an obsession with outdoor sport. All these helped to ameliorate the soulless appearance of the place. Closure of the Company left the town services far below the customary disadvantages. Infrastructure became minimal with town post office, one bank, closure of most primary schools - and several churches. Many women found spiritual comfort in religion, fellowship in church societies, and some found social contact in a duty of care for charity and benefit associations. By 1927, unemployed females joined the domestic ranks of unseen family women, for whom daily work barely diminished. As mine women faced the closure of town stores, the end of gainful employment of the breadwinner that brought the threat of hunger for those without funds replaced the fear of mine accident. Yet, residents who

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[11] Tom 'Crosscut' Wilson, *The Boulder and other verses*, Sorrento, WA, Hovea Press, 1997, p. 11.
[12] Colin Heberlein, interview, 21 October 1992, MMOH.

remained in the town of diminishing numbers clung with parochial fervour to an image of normality, a panacea of sorts for a town's misery.

> The town would impress a visiting stranger as being at the height of prosperity. But quiet investigation - a talk to the grocer, baker, landlord - would reveal the supposed prosperity as a myth.[13]

Sport, local events at the School of Arts, one cinema and surviving hotels continued to provide outlets for enforced leisure as:

> Balls, concerts, evenings, pictures, art unions, and trying to 'pick 'em' shows no sign of abatement at Mount Morgan, a town thought by the outside world to be on its deathbed.'[14]

Spectacular scenes in the town included concerts, parades, funerals, bonfires and effigy burning, or perhaps carnivals at the Big Dam. However, no display compared with the phenomenon of a mine that never slept. For decades, people who used unlit roads and tracks at night moved to the incessant noise and rhythm of the mills, aware that across the river, miners were working deep underground. Moreover, the heaving mass of production in the name of wealth and progress provided Central Queensland's most dramatic display that was free to all: the lights of the mine and the fiery slag dumped perpetually at the end of a vast, ever expanding plateau of overburden which, when cold, set as a concrete symbol of a capitalist ethic:

> The copper works at night were worth seeing, the dancing, leaping, rainbow-hued flames enough to thrill the heart. We loved to watch the red-hot molten slag being dumped. The little slag train would be silhouetted against the sky, moving slowly towards the slag heap, which had gradually extended far out from the slope down which the original slag had been tipped. The train would stop on the very edge and in a few moments, with a swishing, crackling noise, down would flow the slag making a hill of fire and lighting up the whole scene with a lurid glare. For a few seconds it was a wonderful, picturesque sight, then gradually the light would fade and back would go the little train for the next load.[15]

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[13] *Critic*, 1 November 1927.
[14] *Critic*, 22 October 1927.
[15] *Evening News*, 15 June 1927.

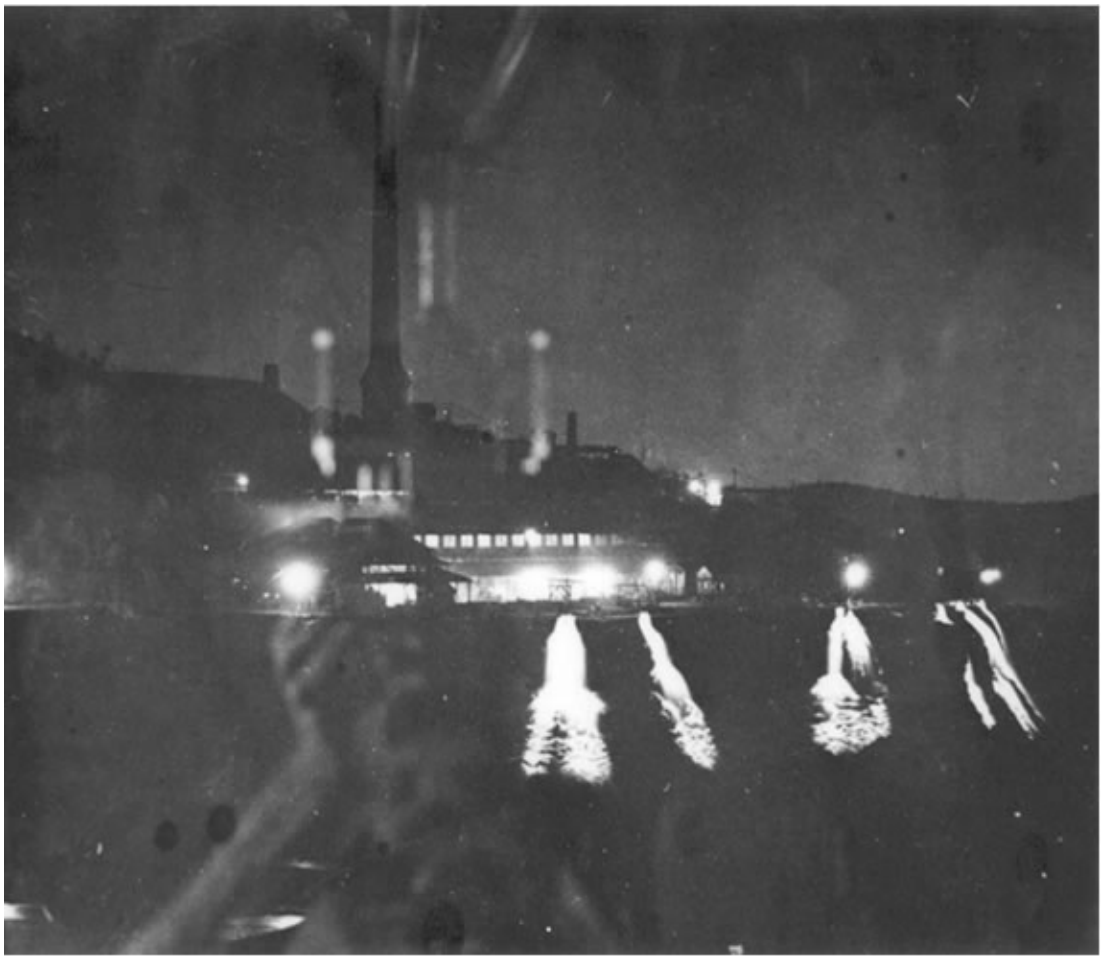

Fig. 49. Mount Morgan mine by moonlight, looking northwest from the town c. 1920. Molten slag pours over the edge of the vast dump.

In a metaphor of the dynamics of town life at Mount Morgan where public glare sank into the reality of grim oblivion, many preferred to remember the mine as the 'light' of an entire town, until the fires were drawn, the smelter closed, and the guttering flame of Mount Morgan, once a blaze of gold that turned copper red, was extinguished.