

CHAPTER FIVE

Women in Overalls: Women's Work in Industry

Queensland difference, as outlined in Chapter One, applied equally in Central Queensland as elsewhere in the State. It was also augmented by other considerations which were unique to this region because of the historical and economic background of the three towns which are the focus of the thesis. The Second World War brought changes, in some instances, to work performed by women throughout Australia. This also applied to women in Central Queensland but in this region the change was in an increase in the numbers employed in existing industry, as few new employment opportunities became available to women. In 1940 gender differences were still ideologically defined in terms of man as the breadwinner, while women's place was in the home. It was not surprising therefore, that little attention was paid to providing work for women in other than traditional employment, until a shortage of manpower during the war years forced a change of attitude.

Because of the government policy of decentralisation very few manufacturing industries were established in the region. In fact, in the whole of Queensland the emphasis was on primary production, as is shown in the Bureau of Industry ninth annual report, presented to parliament in 1942 by Colin Clark. He reported that:

In 1939-40, out of a total of 381,900 in work in Queensland, 120,400 were engaged in agricultural and pastoral production 55,541 in manufacture, 16,132 in transport, and 8,555 in mining. The remaining 181,272, or 48 per cent of the whole working population, were engaged in service and distributive industries and building. During the next twenty years it is anticipated that there will be no substantial change from the 1939-40 level in the numbers engaged in agricultural production, or in manufacture, or in transport..¹

These figures clearly show the effects of decentralisation in Queensland. Thus employment and the development of the ports of Rockhampton, Gladstone and Bundaberg, were dependent on primary production in the hinterlands. Primary industry was male orientated, and as demonstrated in Chapter One, the geographical position of Queensland was not conducive to the development of manufacturing industry which might have employed women during World War Two.

Even in those secondary industries not related to primary industry in Central Queensland very few were seen to be suited to the employment of women. That this was the case post-war is supported by listings in the Directory of Queensland Manufactures which appears in the 1948 *Queensland Chamber of Manufactures Year Book*.² The Directory lists only ten manufacturing industries each for Rockhampton and Bundaberg, and one only for Gladstone.³ The policy of decentralisation with emphasis on primary industry remained in force throughout

¹ Bureau of Industry ninth annual report presented to parliament, 1942. QPP.

² L. Taylor, (Ed.), *The Queensland Chamber of Manufactures Year Book*, V01.2, 1948, Brisbane, Strand Press, pp.231-260.

³ Of those listed the only industries in Rockhampton which might have employed women were a canvas goods manufacturing workshop, a dressmaking establishment, a menswear and a Masonic Lodge Regalia manufacturing establishment, a soap making factory and one tailoring establishment. In Gladstone the one listing in which women might have worked was a printing works, while in Bundaberg there was a dry cleaning establishment, a men's clothing manufacturer, a printing and a tailoring establishment listed.

the period of the thesis, and even after 1965. Gladstone was the exception with the commencement of operations of the Alumina Refinery by Comalco in that year.

In Central Queensland the policy of decentralisation played a major role in the expansion of transport and communication networks and consequently in the development of ports on this part of the Queensland coast. Nevertheless, port development in Queensland did not immediately lead to direct employment of women. This did not occur until during the 1940s and 1950s, when due to manpower shortages caused by World War Two, a few women were employed in minor capacities as typists or clerks by the Harbour Board. As pointed out in Chapter One women were employed in the meat industry in Rockhampton and Gladstone, while during the war years a small female labour force was employed by the sugar industry in Bundaberg. Women were also engaged in Gladstone in the fishing industry and Queensland railways had a female workforce. Women's roles within industries in which they were employed will be the focal points of the discussion in this chapter. Historical events, and the growth of the primary industries established in the towns of Bundaberg, Gladstone and Rockhampton during the 1940-1965, period show there were regional differences, but there were also parallels in social developments. Additionally, there were similarities and differences in gender and class attitudes in Central Queensland towns and that of Brisbane. These variations will be referred to throughout the chapter.

At the outset of World War Two many regional centres throughout Australia,

including Central Queensland were far removed from capital cities in a number of respects. Distance was accentuated by slow transport by rail due to the use of steam trains which required frequent refuelling and water replenishment stops. According to a report in *Living on the line* the train took nine hours to travel between Rockhampton and Mackay, a distance of 201 miles (335 kms).⁴ Based on present day rail mileages this relates to fifteen hours for the journey from Brisbane to Rockhampton. However, it is quite well known that trains during the 1940s and 1950s frequently ran behind time. The state of Queensland roads, which were often narrow and in poor condition, was a deterrent to fast and efficient road transport. Additionally, road vehicles were not capable of travelling at the same speed as in the latter half of the twentieth century and during the war petrol rationing was a restraint to road travel and affected, an as yet underdeveloped, air transport system.

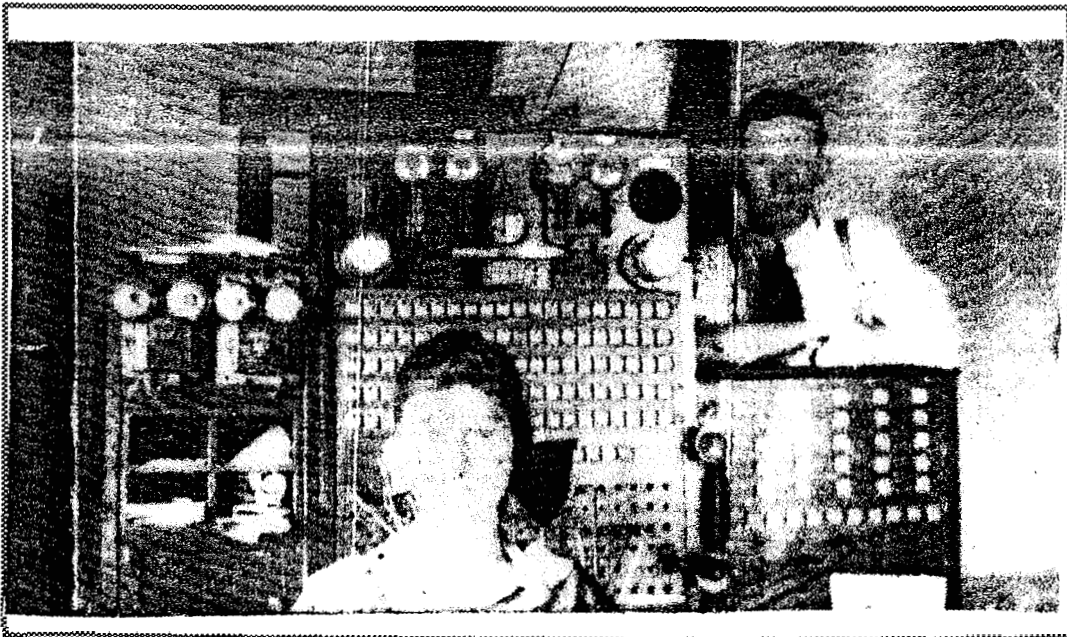
Telegraphic communication was well established in capital cities and provincial towns, but delivery of messages was dependent on the “telegram boy”, or “girl”, on his/her bicycle.⁵ Young women were employed as switchboard operators in Post Offices and in small country towns they were also responsible for the delivery of the telegrams. One interviewee was employed at the Emu Park Post Office in Central Queensland in 1941. She explained that as the switchboard operator she received the telegrams over the phone, wrote them out and delivered them on a push bike so long as the distance from the Post Office was not greater

⁴ M. Bitomsky & L. Mylne, *Living on the Line*, Brisbane, Copyright Publishing, 1995, p. 124. There appears to be some discrepancies in times cited for this journey.

⁵ Interview conducted by Grace Johansen with J.C., at Rockhampton on 22 April, 1998.

than three miles (5 kms).⁶ Telephones were widely used by business by 1939. The operation of switchboards was seen as a job for middle class girls following the employment of the first female telephonist Isabella Cliff, at the Melbourne Exchange in 1880.⁷ However, service was unpredictable, interference was common, and “there was much irritable waiting on the line for the operator’s connection”.⁸ Distance, slow communication systems, smaller populations and lack of industry all contributed to a difference in social development and community awareness between regional towns and capital cities and created differences between country towns.

Illustration 5.1: Gladstone Telephone Exchange, 1923



Source: Courtesy Gladstone City Council

In a recent interview, the President of the Bundaberg Branch of the QCWA, highlighted differences caused by distance and time between that town and Brisbane. This Branch of the Association completed the largest numbers of

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ A. Moyal, *Clear Across Australia: A History of Telecommunications*, Melbourne, Nelson, 1984, p.83.

⁸ Ibid.

camouflage nets during the war period in the whole of Queensland outside of the metropolitan area, an achievement of which they are justifiably proud. This was largely due to the fact that women from outlying farms who might have to visit the town for medical, dental, or business purposes would have to travel by the one daily train to Bundaberg. Their business completed they would then frequently make their way to the QCWA rooms, have a cup of tea, and work on the nets while they chatted with other Branch members until such time as they had to leave in the late afternoon to catch the return train home.⁹ Their visit to town thus served a threefold purpose. They were able to attend to whatever business it was that had necessitated the visit, they helped with the war effort and they had social intercourse with other women which relieved the isolation of their rural life style. Not only did city women have additional alternative means of transport available, it was available at much more frequent intervals. Thus, in the context of time and situation, this one instance exemplifies what is an important aspect of difference in the life style and subsequently their contribution to the war effort, by women in different environments.

Queensland Rail

The emphasis of the policies for the development of Queensland railways in the latter part of the nineteenth century was on regionalism and as a result the rail line from the North linking the coastal ports and Brisbane was not complete until early in the twentieth century. Convinced of the necessity of this policy in a state as large as Queensland, governments promoted the development of western rail lines to connect inland centres to coastal areas with port facilities.¹⁰ Subsequently, this

⁹ Interview conducted by Grace Johansen with JB & ES, at Bundaberg on 11 May, 1998.

¹⁰ W.R. Johnston, *The Call of the Land*, Milton, Jacaranda Press, 1982, p.83.

centralised regionalism resulted in competition for population and capital investment.¹¹ It also led to a protracted dispute regarding their ports between Rockhampton and Gladstone. Similarly there was competition between Bundaberg and Maryborough concerning port developments. As Fitzgerald points out developments placed Rockhampton in a position of supremacy over Gladstone in what was known as the “battle of the ports.”¹²

Railway construction is primarily a male orientated industry and there were no employment opportunities for women. However, because no provision was made to transport men over longer distances to visit their families, many women with their children lived in camps along the line. Home for these women meant tents, or sometimes bark humpies, with dirt floors. Cooking was done over open fires and for the most part the washing was boiled in kerosene tins. An interviewee with a large family who lived in camps at Miriam Vale and Midgee, spoke of living in a “big long tent” and having a wood stove which was placed in an old piece of rainwater tank.¹³ She thought this might have been to prevent the children getting burnt or may be to keep it dry in wet weather. These camps were often many miles from towns and supplies were brought by rail each week. As was the case with Gwen at Miriam Vale and Midgee all water was transported to the camps by rail. Life for these women was harsh with few conveniences. It was also isolated, and as pointed out by Connell and Irving¹⁴ such living conditions

¹¹ Ibid. p.64-65.

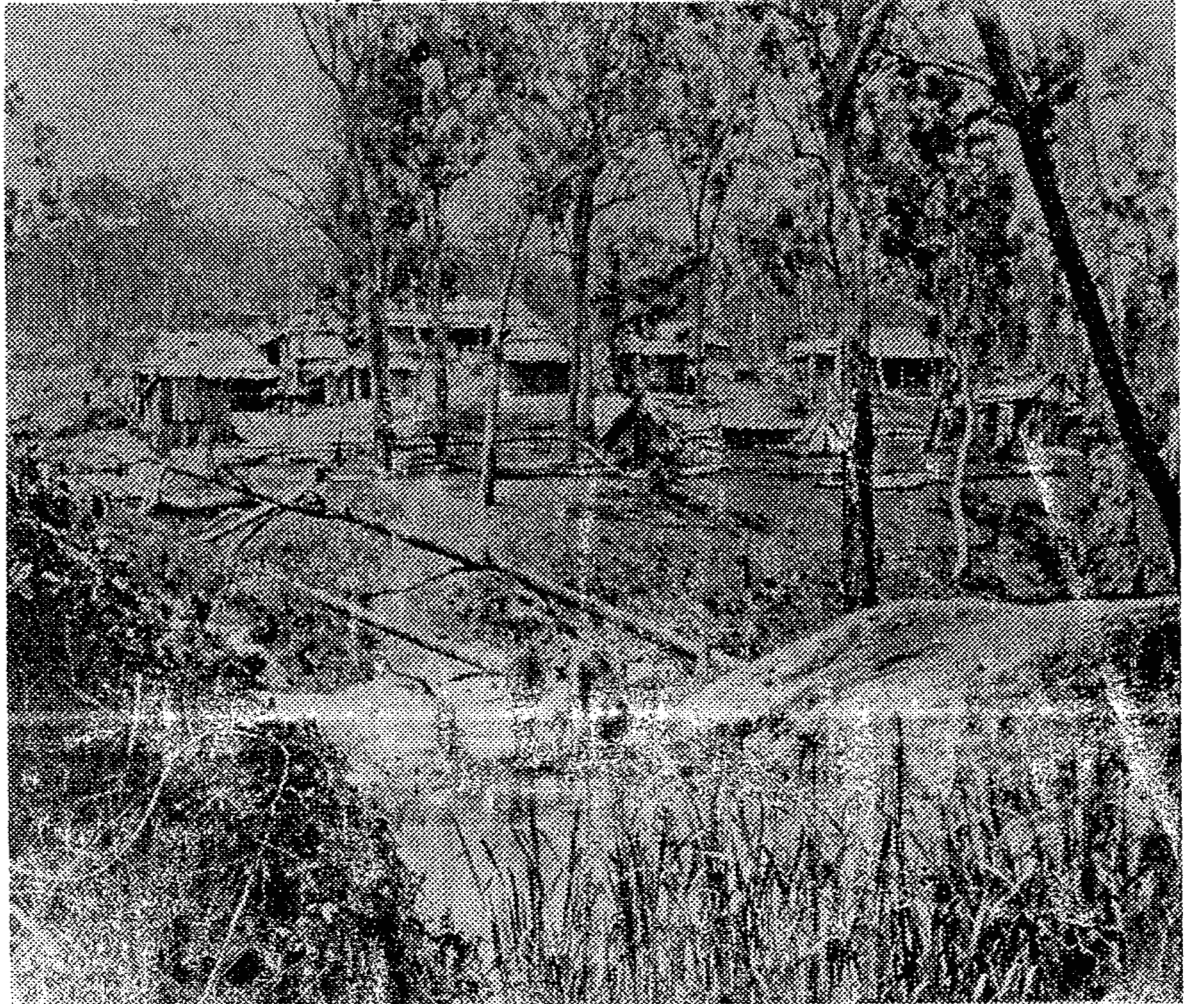
¹² R. Fitzgerald, *A History of Queensland: From the Dreaming to 1915*. St. Lucia, UQP, p.280.

¹³ Interview by G. Johansen with GB at Rockhampton on 22 February, 1998.

¹⁴ R.W. Connell and T.H. Irving, *Class Structure in Australian History*, Melbourne, Longman Cheshire, p. 127.

relegated these women to the lowest strata of the working class, and the appellation “housewives” was inexact to say the least. Very often the only means of transport were the trains. These camps were still used in the 1940s and 1950s.

Illustration 5.2: Queensland Rail Flying Gang Camp 1940/1950



Source: Courtesy Queensland Railways Historical Centre

Gwen spoke of how during the war her children would stand beside the line when the troop trains went through calling out for lollies, chocolate, books, and papers.¹⁵ As stated by Bitomsky and Mylne, Norm Dwyer of Wockhampton remembered the 1948 railway strikes.¹⁶ He recalled that on the western lines workers and their families were stranded and it was only under pressure from the

¹⁵ Interview by G. Johansen with GB at Rockhampton on 22 February, 1998.

¹⁶ M. Bitomsky & L. Mylne, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

Union, that the railway department provided relief trains to provide them with food and water. He was cited as stating that:

Conditions for these workers were very rough. They lived in unlined huts, many with dirt floors, backyard toilets - emptied by the fettlers in their own time. Showers were by bucket hauled up by a piece of rope. There was no electricity, no running water, no ice or refrigerators, no schools in most cases.¹⁷

In time railway workshops were established in numerous towns including Gladstone and Rockhampton.

Queensland railways also provided work for women in refreshment rooms situated at railway stations, usually at places where it was necessary to stop the train to replenish water and refuel. On the northern line stops were made at Bundaberg, Gladstone and Rockhampton. John Kerr vividly describes refreshment room activity after the arrival of passenger trains:

Only the theatre cafe at interval faces a problem like that of the traditional railway refreshment room. But railway passengers, often a hundred or more, crushing against the counter were a hungry group, and they had to be back on board the train before it left. Halts had to be short to avoid delaying the train unduly; 20 minutes was the minimum allowance for passenger trains at meal time and five minutes for light refreshments, even if it was running late. From 1950, 25 and 8 minutes [respectively] were commonly allowed."

An interviewee who had been employed as a waitress at the Stanley Street refreshment room in Rockhampton after World War Two spoke about the conditions under which she worked. She said it was "just waitress work" but she enjoyed it and the hours were good. They worked broken shifts, waitressing when the trains came in and in between trains the rooms had to be cleaned. They

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ J. Kerr, *Triumph of the Narrow Gauge*, Brisbane, Boolarong, 1990, p.130.

received a weekly pay and if overtime was worked they received extra. Additionally they were provided with a uniform and received free board and residence in quarters which at Rockhampton were situated above the tea room. Furthermore as railway employees they were provided with a free pass for travel anywhere in Queensland. Selena's husband was also a railways employee at the time of her employment. She said that marriage did not bar her from working for the railways and that a number of other women were also married.¹⁹

Selena also worked as a waitress in the dining cars on the Rockhampton to Mackay run. She testified that sometimes there would be between 300-400 passengers for meals which meant there would be 4-5 sittings. Most of the cooking would be done at Stanley Street, and the meals would be put in a large electric range on the train to be kept hot. All passengers irrespective of whether they were travelling first or second class had the same menu. During the 1940s and 1950s wine was served with meals in small bottles. Beer, scotch and other spirits were available but had to be consumed in the dining car. This job was not without mishaps. She spoke of one occasion :

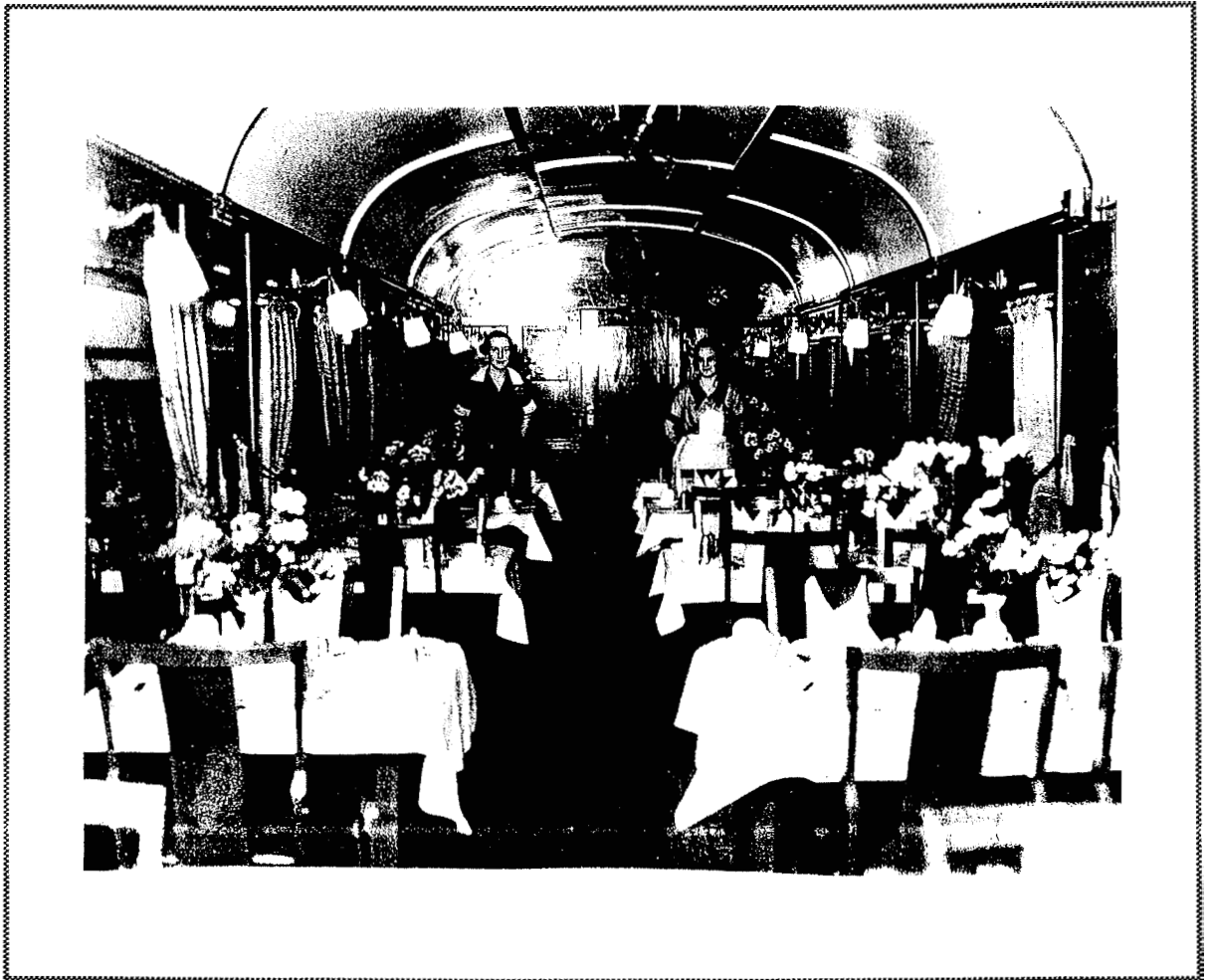
When I was first on the dining car I used to wear high heeled shoes and I had a tray of soup and on a rough part of the track a plate of soup slipped off the tray all over a chap in a beautiful suit, and I was so embarrassed. I apologised and went up to my room to get some money and I said to him when you get to Mackay take this and get your suit drycleaned". He said "No dear, that was an accident" and he left me a 2 pounds [\$4.00] tip.²⁰

Selena also asserted that it was a part of the waitresses' job to clean the silver and reset the tables for each sitting.

¹⁹ Interview conducted by B. Cosgrove with S.J. at Rockhampton, 8 August, 1994.

²⁰ Ibid.

Illustration 5.3: Queensland Rail Dining Car, 1940s, 1950s.



Source: Courtesy Queensland Railways Historical Centre

The parents of another interviewee were employed as a husband and wife team in refreshment rooms from the time of his birth until after he left school so he was well acquainted with the routine. They moved from town to town so that they could gain promotion, and in the Central Queensland region worked both at the tea rooms at Rosedale, situated on the northern line between Bundaberg and Gladstone, and at Gladstone. Rodney testified that in 1942 they managed the Gladstone refreshment rooms and that it was their job to organise everything including the supplies. He said:

My mum used to sit at the register...at the door. They got soup main course and sweets,..for 2 shillings [40 cents]. They all got a ticket when they went in...[and] they paid **as** they went out. They had silver cutlery and they had china plates. The railway was known for their cups and saucers because they were so thick. But they had nice jugs of cold water put out on serving trays with ice in them and they had a silver fruit stand with a sort of vase on the top and they used to put that Byfield fern from Rockhampton in them.²¹

He also commented on the size of the trays the waitresses had to carry. To the best of his memory, he said, there were eight people seated at a table and the waitresses would carry a big tray with six large dinner plates, with another plate on their arm and another in the other hand.

During the Second World War women were also employed as ticket sellers and porters and in trades such as white metal workers, power hacksaw operators, crane drivers and other occupations. These women had signed on “for the duration” and many lost their jobs at the end of the war.²² The application (No. 304 of 1943) by the Commissioner of Railways, Queensland, under the Regulation 8 of the Women’s Employment Regulations, for permission to employ females came before the Women’s Employment Board, WEB, headed by Judge Foster in 1943²³. The decision handed down on 26 November 1943 provided for rates of 90% and 100% of the male rate to be paid to women while they were employed by Queensland railways during the period of World War Two. In 1948 women working in clerical grades became permanent staff members. During the latter part of the twentieth century women were able to become Station Masters and take over other work in the railways previously performed by men only.²⁴

²¹ Interview conducted by Grace Johansen with R.A. at Gladstone on 1 August, 1998.

²² M. Bitomsky & L. Mylne, *op. cit.*, p.47.

²³ MS, Decision and Schedule of an application by the Commissioner of Railways, Queensland. Justice Foster Papers, Manuscript section of the National Library, Canberra.

²⁴ M. Bitomsky & L. Milne, *op. cit.*, p.44.

This provided greater work opportunities for women in Queensland towns and cities.

The concentration of railway lines linking the west to ports situated at various points along the Eastern seaboard led to regional rivalries. As stated by Lewis,

the ports competed for the trade of their own regional hinterlands and, wherever possible for the trade of hinterlands served by other ports as well”.²⁵

These rivalries between towns, as in the case of Gladstone, were in part responsible for a lack of expansion of the harbour facilities for many years. The rail lines brought economic development not only of the western centres but also of the ports to which they were linked. There were also demographic and social outcomes. Ross Johnston signposts the locomotive building industry started by Walkers Limited of Maryborough in 1880 as an example of the advances in technology which were initiated as a result of the installation of rail lines throughout the State.²⁶

With the need for a new deep water port for Rockhampton there was controversy as to where a new port should be built at Port Alma or Broadmount. The decision was made in 1896 to erect a new wharf at Broadmount on the North side of the river, where the Lakes Creek Meatworks was situated across the river from the town of Rockhampton on the South side. Rail lines to service the new wharf at Broadmount, where it was argued there was suitable land for a

²⁵ G. Lewis, *A History of the Ports of Queensland*, St. Lucia, UQP, 1973, p.64.

²⁶ W.R. Johnston, *op. cit.*, p.83.

housing development to provide homes for meatworkers, were also laid. The establishment of both the port and rail link thus favoured Central Queensland Meat Works, QCME.²⁷ Lakes Creek Meatworks provided work for women from the 1930s onwards, although the Meatworks at Gladstone did not employ females until during the Second World War. Railways also played an important role in the development of Bundaberg. Among other things it promoted further settlement and gave employment to unemployed miners at Mt. Perry after the failure of the copper mines, thus enabling them to provide for their families.²⁸ Each of the three towns which are the focus of the thesis are coastal, so the development of the railways, and the growth of the port facilities form an integral part of the history of each centre.

From the early days the port facilities in Rockhampton, along with those of Gladstone and Bundaberg were, like the railways, very much focused on male employment. Women had no part in the decisions made in regard to their development. It was not until the post World War Two period when female fishers who had an interest in the establishment of facilities for the fishing industry, in all three ports, were involved in the use of port resources. However, they did play an important role in women's lives through the development of the infrastructure of the towns and districts and through employment opportunities in the industries served by the ports. With the growth of population in the port cities came better shopping facilities, the provision of more schools and churches, and better roads. This happened coincidentally with economic growth in other areas in

²⁷ G. Lewis, *op. cit.*, p.108.

²⁸ J. Kerr, *op. cit.*, p.225.

Rockhampton and Bundaberg, but in Gladstone it was only in the mid **1960s** with the establishment of greater industrial growth, that the port expanded its activities.

Meatworks

From the time of settlement until its emergence as an industrial city dating from **1965**, Gladstone had been slow to make any appreciable economic growth. Despite early speculation in land sales prior to separation, backing from southerners was withdrawn and interest in the settlement declined. Lewis points out that a report in the local paper could have been at least partly responsible for the diminished interest in the mid **1880s**:

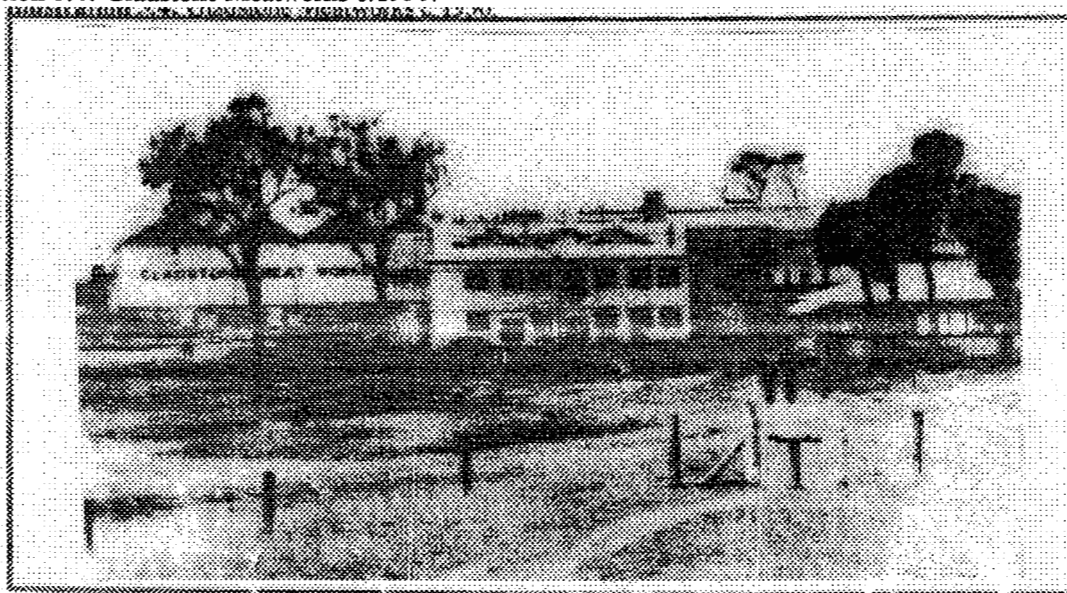
Truth is truth and fiction is fiction and Gladstone is Gladstone, and a barren country behind, a barren country. Yes, my fellow residents, you bought your land...with the idea that the township of Gladstone must advance, and all of you in a few years become wealthy proprietors. The idea is truly ridiculous...do the citizens think this is going to be a second Melbourne?...in a place where water is so scarce, where a back country is composed of nothing else but a series of rocky ridges and where on all sides it is very evident that the Great Creator never intended but for the eagle to build her eyrie.²⁹

This meant of course, that notwithstanding its undoubtedly fine harbour, without the backing of industrial growth in the hinterland the port would not advance. This is shown to have been the case with the economic growth of Gladstone in the latter part of the twentieth century after the establishment of the alumina refinery which was the forerunner of substantial industrial growth. **As** a result during the period of interest to the thesis, until the alumina refinery was built and production commenced, the town's economy had rested on Swift's Meatworks at Parson's Point with some additional input from Queensland Rail, the fishing industry, Port Curtis Dairy Co-operative, PCD and the small port development which coped with the needs of these industries.

²⁹ G. Lewis, *op. cit.*, p.12.

In 1896 the Gladstone Meatworks came into being as the direct result of government policy of promotion of primary industry. Low interest loans were provided to establish such industries throughout the State, to encourage expansion of the cattle industry. It was believed the sheep and cattle industry would continue to be the backbone of the economy.³⁰ Not only did the Meatworks provide a source of employment for people in Gladstone, it also had a favourable impact on the economy of Maryborough where Walkers Ltd. supplied the plant for the project.

Illustration 5.4: Gladstone Meatworks c.1950.



Source: Courtesy Rockhampton and District Historical Society

This Meatworks was subsequently purchased by Swift Australia Co. Ltd. in 1934.³¹ Only men were employed until the outbreak of war and consequent shortage of manpower forced the ~~firm~~ to employ women in its prepack department in the cannery.³² From that time until its closure in 1963 the Meatworks was the largest single employer of women in Gladstone. The 1961

³⁰ L. McDonald, (b) *Gladstone: City that Waited*, Brisbane, Boolarong, 1988, p. 165.

³¹ *Ibid*, p.168.

³² Interview conducted by G. Johansen with P.L. at Gladstone, on 27 April, 1998.

census figures showed that 18.9% of the female population of Gladstone in the labour force worked in the manufacturing industry. In 1966, after the closure of Swifts Meatworks in 1963, this had dropped to 8.5%.³³ This emphasises not only the lack of industries in which women might have been employed after 1963, it is also symptomatic of the weaknesses inherent in decentralisation when employment, in this case particularly for women, is reliant on one form of industry.

Kerr states that after Swifts purchased the meatworks the Company announced that it planned to handle chilled beef. Equipment was installed and the plant was modernised. In 1937 a canning section was opened. This later resulted in the export of new products, and the importation of tinsplate at the Auckland Point jetty after a demand for canned meat for the troops was created during the war years. During World War Two these developments provided a new venue for employment of women. Canned meat was also a popular substitute for fresh meat in the post-war years, as most homes were still without refrigerators. This contributed to the continued employment of women in the post-war years. According to Lorna McDonald the Gladstone Meatworks in 1952 was described in an article in the *Courier Mail* as being one of the most important in Queensland.³⁴ Of importance to the thesis, is that it was also described as having one of the largest can-making plants on the east coast. This indicates that the canning department of the industry was of primary importance. It was this section

³³ C.P. Harris, *An Analysis of the Finances of the Gladstone City Council since 1971*, Townsville, James Cook University, February, 1977, p.5.

³⁴ L. MacDonald (b), op. cit. p. 169.

of the Meatworks which employed quite large numbers of women in both Gladstone and Rockhampton, during and following World War Two.

Use of the Auckland Point Jetty commenced in 1944, when Swifts were faced with a 45,000 pounds (\$90,000) expenditure to extend its Parson's Point Jetty, so it could handle the new larger meat ships. These ships facilitated the transport of large quantities of canned meat shipped to the armed forces, from the Port of Gladstone during World War Two. Interviewees who had worked in the cannery testified that some of the women scratched their names and addresses on the tins.

Mabel said:

That was forbidden because the tins could rust where you scratched it and they didn't want the Japs to know where it came from but they still wrote their names and address on it. One couple kept writing and got married after the war and they're still together.³⁵

Patsy was a stacker in the Cannery. She said there was a little bench about one metre high and the cans would be stacked on this ceiling high. They would come off a belt and as a stacker she would pick them up, eight at a time, and add them to the stack. The tins were hot and painted with lacquer to preserve them so it was not possible to wear gloves. Consequently she said she would always go home with her hands covered in blisters.³⁶ However in other areas the conditions were quite good. Women were not permitted to lift anything heavy. Amenities, although very basic, were clean and adequate for their needs. Betty did not start work at Swift's until 1952 and by then a small goods section was in operation.³⁷

³⁵ Interview conducted by Grace Johansen with M.P. on 28 October, 1997.

³⁶ Interview conducted by G. Johansen with P.L. at Gladstone on 27 April, 1998.

³⁷ Interview conducted by G. Johansen with B.J. at Gladstone on 4 May, 1998.

She described how small cans were packed with sausages:

You put them [sausages] into a machine. They were long pieces and you would lay them along and feed them in and they'd all come out in little short pieces. Then you put them in the cans and they were sealed and went along [to the stackers].³⁸

She said there was also the podger³⁹ where they packed the bully beef. All cans would be held on the stacks for some time to ensure there were no leaks, and would then be loaded on to the conveyor belt and taken to another area where they were inspected before being packed for export. Inspectors were given a small stick with which to tap the tins. If the tins sounded hollow they were immediately discarded as this was a sign that they were not completely full and the contents would go bad. A more boring job would be very hard to find. Interviewees who had been employed at Lakes Creek testified that the same procedures were followed in the cannery there.

As testified by an interviewee in Rockhampton and another in Gladstone, there was some evidence of class distinction in both towns between female employees at the Meatworks and those employed in the retail trade and other occupations. Betty remarked that when they went to town to shop, “you had a very strong feeling that the girls working in the shops thought you were really only a meatworks woman and looked down on you.”⁴⁰ This was a traditional view of factory workers and it can be assumed it originated during the pre-war years when these workers were very low paid. Additionally, shop assistants were required to be better dressed, and this contributed to the feeling that they were part of a

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ This term referred to the machine which actually filled the tins. Interviewees believed it was a term used by the trade.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

higher stratum of working class society. However, the meatworks paid good wages and plenty of overtime was available. Moreover in places like Gladstone other work opportunities for women were not plentiful. Bonnie at Rockhampton was more explicit. She said that she had been worried about going to Lakes Creek to work because the women had a bad name for being loose, “as a lot of rough women worked there”. When questioned about this she replied that it would only have been a small percentage, but that it had been thrown out of all proportion by other people.

Bonnie also remarked that it was at about the time that the “Yanks” were in Rockhampton and some of the female employees at the cannery had followed them up from Melbourne. About 10 per cent of the “rough women” were in this group.⁴¹ This is borne out by Cissie who was a Union delegate. She said delegates had the power to take action if a worker stepped out of line, and on one occasion a small group of women were smoking marijuana:

A woman came down to me and said, “Cissie there are women over there and they’re all smoking. I’m sure they’re smoking marijuana.” So I went down and I knew there was something strange so I said, “are you people smoking marijuana” and they said “what’s it got to do with you”. I said, “I’m the delegate here and if you smoke marijuana here you’re out”. They just kept smoking so I just went to the foreman and I said to him, ‘We’ve got four or five...women here do you know where they came from.’ He said they were from out of town.⁴²

She continued on to say that she then proceeded to tell the foreman about the drug smoking and told him they were not wanted. Consequently the next day they were gone. This action reflected current attitudes, particularly in relation to the moral ideology of the period, when activities of a few women in particular groups

⁴¹ Interview conducted by G. Johansen with B.S. at Rockhampton, 15 June, 1998.

were singled out as being “bad girls”, the whole group was then condemned as being bad. This type of stereotyping was frequently applied to servicewomen whose actions were conspicuous because of their uniforms. This was accentuated if any members of the targeted groups were known to have been keeping company with “Yanks” as indicated by Cissie’s statement.

Illustration 5.5: Women at work in the Lakes Creek Packing Department.



Source: Courtesy Rockhampton Municipal Library

Despite the difficulties associated with Rockhampton’s port on the Fitzroy River a small meatworks commenced operations at Lakes Creek in 1871.⁴² This first venture was short lived due to drought conditions resulting in a shortage of cattle and high prices. At the same time the limited London market was glutted thus forcing the closure of the works in 1874. It was re-opened in 1877 when it was

⁴² Interview conducted by G. Johansen with C.B. at Rockhampton, 3 June, 1998.

⁴³ Herman, Unpublished typescript, Vol. 1, pp.41-47. Held in CQU Collection, Rockhampton.

taken over by Whitehead and Company who installed new plant and erected dwellings for employees. This company operated the business until forced into liquidation in 1880. From these small beginnings the Meatworks at Lakes Creek changed hands a number of times until the Vestey organisation purchased the Australia wide organisation of W. Angliss and Company in 1934.⁴⁴ Despite changes of ownership the business seems to have always been known locally as just “The Meatworks” or “Lakes Creek”.

The Vestey Organisation decided to keep the Works open all year round. It was the first export works outside the metropolitan area not to restrict operations to seasonal killings.⁴⁵ Improvements and extensions to its operations were undertaken by Vesteys and these included a large canning plant. This ~~firm~~ must have employed women very soon after the completion of the cannery, for according to one interviewee women were already working in the cannery when he started work at the Meatworks in 1935.⁴⁶ He did state however, that they were only employed in the packing department. He further stated that women were not employed in the cannery until World War Two when due to the shortage of shipping meat was canned to meet requirements for the armed forces. At this time they continued to work in the packing department. This is supported by other oral evidence.

⁴⁴ L. McDonald (a), *Rockhampton: A History of City and District*, (2nd Edition), Rockhampton City Council, 1995, p. 231.

⁴⁵ G.W. Westacott, *Chronological History of the Lakes Creek Meat Works* from records maintained by A.H. Paterson. No publication details. Pages unnumbered. Held in author's private collection.

⁴⁶ Interview conducted by G. Johansen with AR at Rockhampton on 9 April, 1998.

In a short history of Lakes Creek Cannery J. Bloxom stated that prior to 1941 the cannery was working to full capacity during the day and a second shift had been introduced to work on some lines.⁴⁷ Early in 1941 an agreement was reached by the Company with the Amalgamated Meat Industry Employees Union, AMIEU, to introduce shift work. It was agreed that ordinary rates of pay would be paid for day shifts, rate and one half for afternoon shifts, and double rate for night shifts. At this time the State Award under which employees worked only allowed for the employment of males in the cannery, “except to pack fancy meats such as small tongues”. Bloxom stated that when this work was required to be done, it was performed by females transferred from the can labelling section. Because of the shortage of labour the Union altered its stance and agreed to the employment of females in all canning processing line work.

Women were also employed as laboratory assistants and were accepted as union delegates. Cissie, interviewed in Rockhampton, stated that she was the first woman delegate and held the job for about 20 years.⁴⁸ She was also the first woman delegate to the Central District Queensland AMIEU Conference. She pointed out that the Board of Control of the Meatworks would meet with delegates from all sections. The delegates would keep the workers and Union officials informed about proposed events in the work place. Delegates from each section also had discussions with management if there were problems in their particular section.

⁴⁷ Typescript, J. Bloxom, History of the Lakes Creek Cannery, 1996. Held in the CQU collection, p.p. 15-16.

⁴⁸ Interview conducted by G. Johansen with C.B. at Rockhampton 3 June, 1998.

In an interview Alan mentioned that both Aboriginal and South Seas Islander descendants were employed at Lakes Creek, **He** said there were “a fair few but only a small percentage. “Some of their descendants are still working down there”.⁴⁹ During the war trades union resistance to membership of South Sea(s) Islanders collapsed.⁵⁰ Norma, an interviewee of South Seas Islander descent had been employed at Lakes Creek. She also testified that there were a number of both Islander and Aboriginal women included in the workforce.⁵¹ Additionally, Norma said that they all worked under the same pay and conditions as women of European origin. A number of female ex-employees spoke of the camaraderie which existed among women working together at Lakes Creek, regardless of creed or colour. They asserted that friendships made all those years ago have continued until the present time.⁵² Mabel, Patsy and Betty also affirmed that Aboriginal and South Seas Islander descendants were employed at Swift’s Meatworks in Gladstone.⁵³

In **1938** a new Cannery Superintendent was appointed. Described by Bloxom as a “morale booster” the new superintendent organised lunch time concerts in the men’s amenities. Bloxom goes on to say that:

From these concerts emerged a group called the Cannery Revue which later performed regularly at the Rex Theatre in Yamba Road, North Rockhampton.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Interview conducted by G. Johansen with A.R. at Rockhampton, 9 April, 1998.

⁵⁰ C. Gstitin, “South **Sea** Islander Women and World War Two”, B. Henson (Ed.), *Queensland Women in War*, Brisbane, Queensland Government Emergency Services, 1995, p.21.

⁵¹ Interview conducted by G. Johansen with N.D. on 22 April, 1998 at North Rockhampton

⁵² Interviews conducted by G. Johansen with BS and SJ on 15 June, 1998 at Rockhampton.

⁵³ Interviews conducted by **G.**Johansen at Gladstone, with M.P. 28 October. 1998, P.L.27 April, 1998 and B.J. 4 May, 1998.

⁵⁴ J. Bloxom, **op. cit.**, p.16.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, Alan also testified about the activities of the Cannery Revue, calling it the Lakes Creek Cannery Revue Show. The money raised was donated to Patriotic Funds.

He also stated that both male and female employees at Lakes Creek formed what was called the “Cannery Committee”. This Committee raised money to provide gala entertainment days for the children at both Neerkol (Roman Catholic) and St. George’s (Anglican, then Church of England) orphanages in Rockhampton.⁵⁵ He stated that to raise money for this purpose soft drink bottles would be collected and stored in cartons which would be collected by the soft drink manufacturers and the proceeds would be given to the Committee Secretary.

Although slightly prior to the time frame for the thesis a report of the annual meatworkers picnic in 1938 is representative of other such picnics during the 1940s and 1950s. The popularity of these entertainments is evidenced by the report that 2,700 adults and children were conveyed in four trains from Rockhampton to Emu Park.⁵⁶ The report also makes mention that bush children from the Leslie Wilson Home were welcomed to the picnic. The Sports Programme demonstrates that women were well catered for in the sporting events.

S.Nord raised the problem between the AMIEU and married women seeking

⁵⁵ Interview conducted by Grace Johansen with AR, at Rockhampton, 9 April, 1998.

⁵⁶ Cutting Book compiled by the AMIEU held in the CQU Collection. The rail link between Rockhampton and Emu Park is no longer in existence.

employment in the meat industry in the 1950s. She maintains that the Union in Queensland “discriminated against married women by denying them any right to seniority”.⁵⁷ She stated that this applied to her when she got a job with Swift’s Meat Packing Company in the Brisbane Abattoirs. However Alan, an employee at Lakes Creek Meatworks at that time, testified that despite the dictum that women working in what had previously been “men’s work” was for the duration of the war years only, women continued to work at Lakes Creek in the post-war period and continue to do so until this day. This was also the case at Swift’s Meatworks in Gladstone. Thus continuity of employment for women in the meat industry is suggested. Unless they left their jobs of their own volition, married women continued to work at Lakes Creek and until the closure of Swifts at Gladstone. This is another instance that points to regional differences between Central Queensland and Brisbane.

When Comalco bought the land for its operations at Parson’s Point from Swift’s Meatworks, the meatworks buildings were destroyed before construction of the Refinery began. Work in the Refinery, like primary production, was again, “men’s work”. In 1965 when operations commenced a few women were employed as typists and clerks. During this period fishing became a full time occupation for some men rather than an alternative part time employment for meatworks employees during the off season. For the women who had worked at the meatworks limited employment was available in the fishing industry. Some

⁵⁷ S. Nord, “Right-wing Union officials versus married women workers” E. Windschuttle (Ed.), *Women, class and history*, Melbourne, Fontana, 1980, p.431.

worked with their husbands as deck hands, others found employment shelling scallops.

Gladstone - Fishing Industry

Fishing was the second biggest industry in Gladstone in the 1940-1965 period and women also worked in fishing ventures operating from the port of Gladstone. In an interview Jim testified that both line and net fishing methods were used by the fishers, Pancake Creek being a favourite place for mackerel fishing. As stated by Kerr a local firm, Gladstone Fisheries and Cold Stores Limited, registered in 1926 set up a cold store on the old Howard Smith wharf. Local identities speak today of the “ice works on the wharf” and confirm the existence of the Gladstone Fisheries and Cold Stores Limited naming the directors as William Gold, Percy Friend, P.M. Jones, and E.P. Collier and stating that Joe Joseph was Secretary and Joe Rigby Manager.⁵⁸

According to Kerr a branch of the Fish Board was established in Gladstone in 1947 with Harbour Board approval. However, it was not until 1953 that the Fish Board wharf was erected.⁵⁹ Previously the fish had been packed in ice and sent by rail to Brisbane. As mentioned in the introduction the Queensland Government Fish Board **took** control of all fish caught in Queensland water in 1960. Jim stated that prawns were discovered about 1956 when a former Olympic sculler, Evan

⁵⁸ These are names of well-known identities of Gladstone at the time and the nature of their business interests endorses the probability of their involvement in the fishing industry. However with the exception of J. Kerr no secondary sources which deal with the fishing industry have been located and despite approaches to the Gladstone Harbour Board and other sources in the search for primary documents, nothing has been located.

⁵⁹ J. Kerr, *Going in Deep*, Gladstone Port Authority, 1988, p.p. 178-9.

Paddon, was commissioned by the State government to see if he could find prawns off the eastern seaboard.⁶⁰

Jim further asserted that the first catch of big prawns was found in the waters off Double Island Point followed by the location of good prawning grounds discovered off Tannum Sands and then Yeppoon. He reported that after the discovery of the prawns many fisherman converted their boats to prawn trawling, and that other boats came up from the South. He was of the opinion that:

from 1945 up until the prawns were discovered I'd say there would have been about 15-20 boats because when the meatworks closed down [for the off season] the blokes used to go fishing and when the meatworks started up again they'd all go back to the meatworks.⁶¹

He continued on to say that after the prawns were discovered there would have been about 40-50 boats operating and as mentioned in the Introduction this industry was of sufficient importance to warrant an item in a Cinesound Review.⁶²

While women may not have been given paid employment in this industry there were women who actively helped their husbands on the boats, and as Jim remarked, this was very much general practice on the prawn trawlers.

Most boat operators in the large prawning fleet were accompanied by their wives, who worked as their deck hands, or "deckies" as they were known. Usually it was the male half of the partnership who cleaned the sorting board and decks, and looked after the engine and equipment such as the paravane, while the woman was responsible for the living quarters on board and the cooking and washing. She

⁶⁰ Interview conducted by G. Johansen with J.H. at 64 Fisher St., Gladstone, on 14 July 1998.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² *Prawning - Big Industry for Home and Export: Gladstone*, 63632 Cinesound Review No. 1643, 1963, ScreenSound Australia, National Screen and Sound Archive.

also worked with her partner at the sorting trays and assisted with the packing.⁶³ Feminists have argued that this division of labour was based on perceived physical and mental characteristics of masculine status.⁶⁴ They correctly state that gender based division of labour was usually discriminatory. However 'it was often a matter of expediency. In the fishing industry most of the work performed by the male half of the partnership was too heavy for a woman to manage without some sort of lifting apparatus for which there would be no space on a fishing boat. Additionally it made sense for the physically stronger member of the partnership to undertake this work. Even if two men were working together the stronger would undertake the heaviest work, as if injuries were sustained while at sea it could be some time before medical aid could be sought. Moreover in the fishing industry interviewees indicated that this division of labour enabled both men and women to exercise their own particular skills. It was also very unusual for women to have any knowledge of engine maintenance at that time, and as far as is known there were no women in the whole fleet who could have repaired engines. However discrimination against women did occur as despite work sharing the boat was usually registered only in the man's name and the bank account was also usually in his name only.

Jim testified that one woman at least, owned and operated her own boat independently.⁶⁵ This woman, who will be referred to in the thesis as Daisy, was not only a fisher. Prior to her time in Gladstone she was a tug boat operator at

⁶³ The author can confirm this statement as she was at Weipa in the late 1960s when the prawning fleet visited the bauxite mining settlement,

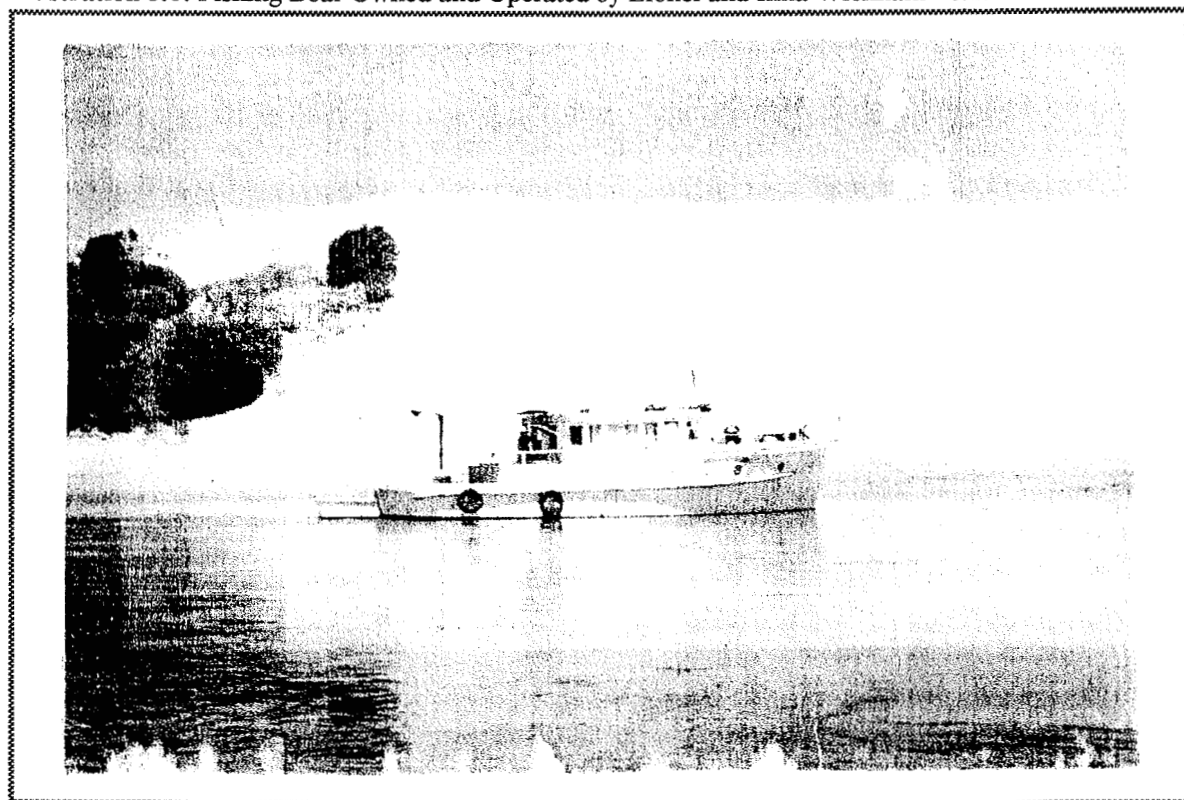
⁶⁴ M. Lake, "The War over Women's Work", V. Burgman and J. Lees, *A most valuable acquisition*, Fitzroy, McPhee Gribble, 1988, p.203.

⁶⁵ Interview conducted by G. Johansen with J.H. at 64 Fisher St., Gladstone, on 14 July, 1998.

Cairns and also ran a lighthouse service from Mossman to Low Isles. In Gladstone she fished, and also operated her vessel as a line boat. After a ship had been brought to its moorings alongside the wharf, line boats would pick up the lines from the ship and take them to the wharf, where they would be fastened to the bollards. Another woman, Jim mentioned, assisted her husband with both net fishing at the Narrows, and line fishing in season, probably at Pancake Creek.⁶⁶

Interviewees, Lionel and Ilma, also fished commercially out of Gladstone.

Illustration 5.6: Fishing Boar Owned and Operated by Lionel and Ilma Wickham - c.1951



Source: Courtesy L. and I. Wickham.

They ventured among the inner, at that time uncharted, Swains reefs where they line fished for mackerel and sweet-lip.⁶⁷ Fish fillets fetched a better price than whole fish and, working as a team, Lionel went out in the dory while Ilma stayed on board and processed the fillets. As in the prawning industry the division of labour was a matter of expediency rather than being gender based. In the 1950s

⁶⁶ Ibid.

the fishing industry expanded further with the development of the processing of scallops which gave employment to numerous women in Gladstone.⁶⁸ After the closure of the meatworks Patsy decided to take on work shelling scallops. She said it was very hard:

They had damn big bins, seventy-five pound was in them in the shells. Bigger than garbage bins, the old time ones, and he wanted us to lift them. I said hang on a minute, I'm in the damn Union down here, I said, there's no way I'm going to lift them. So I got the Union man and I finished up. The Union was a bit weak in those days.⁶⁹

Like the meat industry prawning and scalloping was also seasonal, and numbers of women engaged in this industry, could not compare with those who had been employed in the meatworks. After the building of the new fish depot in the early 1970s a few women were employed in the retail section of the business

Sugar Industry

Between 1940 and 1965 Bundaberg was primarily the business centre for the sugar industry which was the mainstay of the town's economy. According to J. Nolan it was the only Australian centre where sugar was grown, milled into raw sugar and refined.⁷⁰ The alcoholic distillation process produced rum, syrups and methylated spirits. Cane farms were situated in areas surrounding the Central Business Area which by the 1990s have been sold to facilitate the development of suburban Bundaberg. Others were established as far North as Gin Gin and surrounding districts. However, in the early days of the development of the sugar industry maize was also very widely grown. The profitability of this crop stemmed

⁶⁷ Interview conducted by Grace Johansen with LW & IW at Gladstone, 8 October, 1998.

⁶⁸ J. Kerr, op. cit., p. 180.

⁶⁹ Interview conducted by G. Johansen with P.L. at Gladstone, 27 April, 1998.

⁷⁰ J. Nolan, op. cit., 1978, p. 196.

from the growth of the timber industry and the needs of miners at the gold fields in Gympie and the copper mine at Mt. Perry.⁷¹ Later large tracts were also devoted to the production of tobacco, although this industry later gave way to sugar as sugar quotas were increased. Tobacco was mostly grown and harvested by a migrant Italian community.⁷² The wives of the farmers worked alongside the men on the planting, chipping, and cutting as well as in the drying sheds. Bundaberg like most of Central Queensland was, as previously mentioned, based on a rural economy and like all sugar towns prior to Federation, used Pacific Islanders in the provision of labour requirements. Between 1864 and 1904 some 6 400 indentured labour contracts were effected with Pacific Islanders. Most of these were to supply labour for the Queensland sugar industry.⁷³ The Islanders were frequently referred to as Kanakas although in the 1990s there is some argument about the political correctness of this term.⁷⁴

At the Hummock, situated south-east of the city centre, are dry stone walls and a large mound built mostly by Melanesian labour in honour of the then Queensland Governor Anthony Musgrave on the occasion of his visit to Bundaberg in 1888. Now known as “Anthony’s Rest” the mound provides a legacy from the Islanders of their time in Bundaberg.⁷⁵ The stone walls stand to the south-east and in a small area to the north-east of the Hummock. The stones were spewed up out of

⁷¹ Ibid, p.68.

⁷² Interview conducted by G. Johansen with T.D. at Bundaberg on 12 May, 1998.

⁷³ C. Moore, “A Precious Few: Melanesian and Asian women in Northern Australia” K. Saunders & R. Evans (Eds.), *Gender Relations in Australia*, Marrickville, Harcourt Brace, 1992, p. 71.

⁷⁴ P.M. Mercer, “Pacific Islanders in Colonial Queensland 1863-1906” *Lectures on North Queensland History*, J.C.U., History Department, Townsville, 1974, p.119. Mercer asserts that Kanaka is an Hawaiian word meaning man.

⁷⁵ Bundaberg *News Mail*, 12 August, 1998, pp. 1 & 5.

the Hummock by volcanic action and had to be cleared from the surrounding area before the cane could be planted. The stone walls were erected by the Islanders to mark the boundaries of the various properties. Although the walls are now in a state of disrepair they still mark the contribution made by these Islanders to the success of the industry before they were unceremoniously expatriated as a result of the introduction of the Pacific Islanders Labourers Act, 1901.⁷⁶

Not all the Islanders to arrive in the North of Australia were men. Of the 62 475 calculated by Charles Price and Elizabeth Baker to have arrived in Queensland between 1863 and 1904, approximately 6.5 per cent were female.⁷⁷ Melanesian women were originally employed in Queensland as domestic labour but with the expansion of the sugar industry in the early 1880s rural landowners required an expanded work force. As a result they were put to work alongside their men, albeit in separate women's gangs, and except for the initial contract which was governed by law, were paid at a lower rate than the men.⁷⁸ It was forbidden by law to recruit single women, so to overcome this problem many marriages were hastily arranged on the ships transporting them to Queensland. Pregnant women were forced to continue field work right up until the time of the birth of their infants. Some who in fact actually gave birth in the cane fields were forced, through lack of alternative care facilities, to take them to work in the fields with them, or leave very young babies and toddlers unattended.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ F.K. Crowley, "1901-1914" F.K. Crowley (Ed.), *A New History of Australia*, Richmond, Heineman, 1974, p.274.

⁷⁷ K. Saunders, "Pacific Islander Women in Queensland", M. Bevage, et. al. (Eds.), *Worth Her Salt*, Sydney, Hale and Iremonger, 1982, p.17.

⁷⁸ C. Moore, *op. cit.*

⁷⁹ K. Saunders, "Pacific Islander Women in Queensland 1863-1907", *op. cit.*, p.25.

In the late 1950s it was not unknown for European women to also take their children with them into the fields when they were working with their husbands. However, in these cases provision was made for shelter, and care and attention to the child's needs was provided. During an interview Joy testified that when she and her husband first obtained a sugar quota in the late 1950s their property was just scrub which had to be cleared before any cane could be planted. She helped him with the clearing at the same time caring for her three children. After the cane was planted she would put her youngest child at the end of the row with some toy cars and go off chipping cane.⁸⁰

According to the testimony of Jason Aboriginal women were also employed in the cane fields.⁸¹ He stated that with his two female cousins and other family members he was employed at Fairymead in the 1940s, and although they were not gun cutters, the two women could cut and load cane as well as any man. He said that like the Melanesians in the earlier period they were not paid as much as the men, about two pounds a week but that in those days that was considered good money for a woman to earn. Both Melanesians and Aborigines were subjected to state control under special legislation before and during the period of the thesis and were considered by Europeans to be inferior members of the human race. Moore states that European men usually regarded Asian and Melanesian women as easy sexual conquests.⁸² This was also the case with Aboriginal women.

⁸⁰ Interview conducted by Grace Johansen with J.S. at Yandarin, on 1 September, 1998.

⁸¹ Interview conducted by Grace Johansen with J.B. at Bundaberg, 4 September, 1998.

⁸² C. Moore, *op. cit.*, p.77.

John Kerr in *Southern Sugar Saga* wrote that women employed in the sugar mill at Bingera during the war years was “something previously undreamed of”.⁸³ Contrary to Kerr’s statement, and also current beliefs, an article in the *Bundaberg News-Mail* in the issue of 4 September, 1935 lists the numbers of both men and women employees at the various mills prior to that year.⁸⁴ Although the numbers are small and their actual occupations are not included the lists include both white and black women as employees. It is reported that “information extracted from the files of the “News-Mail” states that forty different district mills had existed in the Bundaberg district, but that only four, Bingera, Fairy Mead, Qunaba and Millaquin still existed in 1935.”⁸⁵ For full details refer to Appendix V11.

In the absence of contradictory evidence, and based on the attitudes of the ruling male hegemony of the period prior to 1935, it is a reasonable assumption that work allotted to women would have been the most menial and lowest paid. This may have included such jobs as cush cush hands, filter hands or bag sewers. Some might have also been employed as laboratory assistants. It is also reasonable to assume, that in the 1930s their employment may have occurred due to the fact that during the economic depression women received lower wages and therefore their employment would have been more profitable for the mill owners during those years. During the depression there was a strong movement against women’s employment in the work place, especially married women, when so many men were out of work. As has been pointed out by Bremmer,⁸⁶ prejudice against

⁸³ J. Kerr, (b) *Southern Sugar Saga*, Bundaberg, Bundaberg Sugar Co. Ltd., 1983, p.111.

⁸⁴ Bundaberg *News-Mail*, 4 September, 1935, pp.9-10.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ J. Bremmer, “In the Cause of Equality” in M.Beavage, et. al., (Eds.), *Worth Her Salt*, Sydney, Hale and Iremonger, 1982, p.291.

women in the work place was a long established part of the conservative family ideology which relegated women to a secondary role to men who as the breadwinners were seen as the mainstay of the family. It is possible that because of this resentment against women's employment at that time that when the smaller mills ceased operation and sugar production was maintained by larger scale operations of four mills, Bingera, Fairymead, Qunaba, and Millaquin, their services were discontinued.

Eurocentric concepts of the time would have demanded that the employment of women as laboratory assistants during the war was limited to white women and it is a reasonable assumption that if women were employed in this capacity in the earlier period they were also women of European origin. **An** interview with a retired general manager of the Fairymead Mill confirms that all women employed at the Fairymead Mill during World War Two were of European origin.⁸⁷ Like the statement in the article in the *News-Mail* concerning mill work for women in the 1930s, the interviewee asserted that in this period that women were employed as cush cush hands, at the pan stage and as laboratory assistants. This to some degree sustains the credibility of the *News-Mail* report. The *News-Mail* report was published in **1935**, seven years before women were employed in the Mills during World War Two. Yet at that time they were employed doing the same work **as** that mentioned by the ex-general manager at Fairymead mill. However, the interviewee was of the opinion, that because it was sometimes necessary to drag the full bags of sugar for resewing, that this would have been beyond the

⁸⁷ Interview conducted by Grace Johansen with C.S. at Bundaberg, 3 September, 1998.

physical strength of women as their weight when filled was 160 lb (approx. 80 kgs).⁸⁸ He did say however that in the later period women were employed stamping the bags with the mill brand and handled the operation of the bag filling machines. Nevertheless, he stated that not only did he know nothing about what went on in 1935 but that he was only able to speak in respect of the Fairymead Mill. However he believed that women were never employed in the Mills prior to the war years, although he could not substantiate this. In further testimony he stated that women were not employed in the Mills in the post-war period, and this is endorsed by May who was employed by the Queensland Government as a sugar tester."⁸⁹

Illustration 5.7: Bundaberg Sugar Ready for Marketing.



Source: John Oxley Library, Neg. No. 157953

May asserted that her sister-in-law was the first woman in the Bundaberg area to be employed as a laboratory assistant and that would have been in the early 1940s.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Interview conducted by Grace Johansen with M.T. at Bundaberg, 2 September, 1998.

At the time May started work as a sugar tester in 1948 she was unaware of women being employed by any of the sugar mills in the region. As she commented, the men had “returned from the war” and were back working in their pre-war jobs.

In Brisbane and other cities in Australia during the twenty year period following the Second World War women were beginning to seek, and in increasing numbers find employment to an ever growing degree, in other than traditional fields. In Rockhampton their work was extended in the meatworks to the production of small goods, but in Bundaberg there was little development of secondary industry in which women might have been employed. The work they did there during the war years, particularly in the sugar mills, was again redefined as being “men’s work”. Harris reports that the Wide Bay-Burnett region of Central Queensland was economically dependant on primary industry in which male employment predominated until the 1980s.⁹⁰ As he demonstrates the proportion of the total labour force employed in primary industry for the Wide Bay-Burnett region in 1954, was thirty-three per cent against **19.3** per cent for the whole of Queensland. In Gladstone women continued to be employed by the Port Curtis Cooperative Dairy Association but only as office staff

⁹⁰ C.P. Harris, “The Wide Bay-Burnett region and the Bundaberg and Maryborough districts” in *Decentralisation Research Project No.2*, Dept. of Economics, James Cook University, **1983**. Harris maintains that continuing specialisation in agriculture in the Wide Bay-Burnett region after WWII was significant in a reduction in population growth and therefore a declining influence in both the economy and as a source of employment, p.31.

Port Curtis Dairy- Gladstone - Rockhampton

At its formation in 1904, “the objects of the Company were to erect a factory in Gladstone for the manufacture and storage of butter and other dairy products”.⁹¹

Operations commenced in 1906 in Gladstone and later this industry had branches in all three towns of interest to the thesis and also in Monto, Biloela and other Central Queensland towns. In 1946 Julia Elizabeth Hinds made history as the first ever woman director to be elected to the Board of Directors. As McDonald has stated “she was a remarkable woman”.⁹² Necessity had forced her to leave school at twelve years of age but she continued with self-education. She married Alexander Hinds and worked with him on their farm until his death. She then managed the property on her own, and at the same time raised her children and took part in community activities. For some time before being elected to the PCD Board of Directors she was secretary to the Boyne Valley branch of the Queensland Dairymen’s Organisation. In this capacity she was the only woman among the seven councillors. In 1952 she became the first woman to stand for the Country Party in the Port Curtis Electorate.

Notwithstanding the role played by Mrs. Hinds in the management of the PCD, women were only employed in subordinate situations in the offices as typists, and clerks. Some were also employed as laboratory assistants.⁹³ In the 1940s and 1950s and for some time afterwards a “glass ceiling” was in place over the heads

⁹¹ C.E. Butterworth, *History of the Port Curtis Dairy Assn. Ltd.* This small booklet is undated. The author was employed as accountant, March 1928-April 1942, Secretary, April 1942-April 1953 and Secretary/Administration Manager, April 1953-March, 1963. It was set up and printed at the City Printing Works, East St., Rockhampton.

⁹² L. McDonald (b), op. cit., p. 172.

⁹³ Interview conducted by G. Johansen with C.W. at Gladstone on 20 November, 1997.

of women employed in positions such as these. Thus, promotion to managerial or professional levels was effectively prevented. According to a former manager of this industry in Gladstone they may have been employed in the factory during the war after pasteurisation of milk was introduced.⁹⁴ However, no supporting evidence has yet been located.

In January 1945 the Board was informed that Paul's Ice Cream and Milk Ltd was giving consideration to the sale of its Rockhampton interests. After negotiations this business was taken over by PCD and in 1950 the production of ice cream was transferred to their Stanley Street premises.⁹⁵ However this venture was not viable due to various difficulties such as increased costs that when compared with selling prices set at pre-war levels, still controlled by the Commonwealth Prices Commissioner under regulations introduced as a war time measure, made production unprofitable. **An** agreement was reached with Queensland United Foods Ltd, "Peters" at an agreed price with the proviso that this firm purchase all their milk requirements from PCD.⁹⁶ No information has been located which would confirm that PCD employed women in the ice cream making section of their industry. However an interviewee⁹⁷ in Rockhampton said that she worked for a period of time at Peters' Ice-cream Factory, but left this employment because it was shift work which she did not like.

The government policies controlling the development of Queensland railways

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ C.E. Butterworth, *op. cit.*, p. 39-40.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Interview conducted by G Johansen with B.S. at Rockhampton on 15 June, 1998.

during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, were the determining factor in the decentralisation of industry of the State. As pointed out by Bulbeck, by the time of federation both New South Wales and Victoria had established manufacturing industries, a factor that was largely absent in the Central Queensland economy.⁹⁸ Her journal article looks at the role played by Colin Clark in the economic development in Queensland as Director of the Bureau of Industry 1938-1952, and State Statistician and Financial Adviser to the Treasury 1946-1952. Bulbeck maintains that as an economist he understood that an economy based entirely on primary industry had disadvantages. However, he did not see inefficient industries supported by government subsidies or tariffs, as an alternative and refused to support such initiatives. Instead, he promoted expansion in tertiary industry. This policy accounted to a large degree for the lack of secondary industry in regional centres which would have provided greater work opportunities for women. Ports were considered a more localised issue, but these too were developed to serve primary industry.

Of the three towns of concern to the thesis, only in Gladstone has secondary industry gained a substantial foothold, even towards the end of the twentieth century. Prior to the mid 1960s however, it was mostly heavy industry, so that like both Rockhampton and Bundaberg women in the workforce were marginalised, and forced to seek work in traditional areas of women's

⁹⁸ C. Bulbeck, "Colin Clark and the Greening of Queensland: the Influence of a Senior Public Servant on Queensland Economic Development 1938 to 1952" *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol.33, 1987.

employment. In the period of the thesis it was only during the period of the Second World War that restrictions on what was considered suitable work for women were lifted to some extent. Even so, as demonstrated in this chapter, opportunities for alternative employment for women in regional towns in Queensland were very limited although women were accepted into the workforce in greater numbers if not in a greater variety of occupations. However, in the post-war period doors were again closed, demonstrating that the ideology of “man as the breadwinner” and “women’s place is in the home” was alive and well.