DIARY OF R. Mcgregor Watson.

(c. 1873).
NOTICE TO ACCOMPANY "DAIRY OF R.M. WATSON".

This account of settlement in the Gulf Country, specifically on Gregory Downs Station south of Burketown, was written by one of the Watson brothers who made the trek up from the south with cattle. The Watson family is a well known pioneering family in north Queensland; another branch of this family took up land in the Coen-Laura District of Cape York Peninsula in the 1880's (Merluna Station).

It should be noted that this was not the original settlement of Gregory Downs Country. This country was first taken up by J.C. MacDonald in the early 1860's, but was abandoned, as Watson says, because of distance from markets. This Journal came to me on loan from Mr. L.K. Blackmore of "Chester", Clandulla, New South Wales, who is a nephew of one of the Watsons. He noted that there should be more records somewhere but that they were left with Burns Philp Trust Company and he does not know what became of them. He does have a Ledger of the Gregory Downs Station dating back to 1902 but it is in poor repair. The Gregory Downs property has thus been in the one family for over 80 years; there would be few properties with a longer record of occupation by one family in northern Queensland. It should be noted, however, that for many years it has been in absentee ownership.

F.H. Bauer.
DIARY
OF
R. M. WATSON
About September 1873 Harry Deregus and I went from Melbourne to Rockhampton in the Florence Irving and Bronzewing and then went to Clermont where we bought horses and gear to travel out to Aramac and to Bowen Downs and Mt. Cornish. Mr. Kerr was managing Bowen Downs and Mr. Edkins Mt. Cornish. We were looking for country and we followed the Western River to the junction of Diamantina.

When staying a few days at Mt. Cornish, I noticed that Mrs. Edkins kept several white coats hanging in the entrance to the house for visitors to use when at meals, coats being little used by men in the back of beyond. Also her two baby sons were put into calico bags at night to keep the mosquitoes off.

Mr. Edkins told us about a wonderful running river up North in the Gulf Country called "The Gregory", but we went and had a look at the Upper Diamantina country.

When following down the Western River, which runs into the Diamantina at Conn's Hole we came to a camp where Wallace had settled to form Elderslie Station. We were told here that when the men who came out with the teams which brought rations and general goods camped here, they saw several blacks in the timber, and the men in charge caught their horses and cleared for Mt. Cornish miles away. The blacks then gradually approached and not being disturbed, pulled the loading about and made little heaps of flour, sugar, salt etc., all about the camp - not knowing what these things were.

It was reported to the Native Police at Aramac, when an
Inspector Carrol and black troopers came out and slaughtered all the males they came across.

We went down the Western River to the junction of Wokingham Creek and the Diamantina River and on to a large waterhole called Conn's Hole, where we came to Messrs. Crosthwaite and Tetley, who were camped here with cattle on their way to stock and take up Rocklands Station on the Georgina River, Barkley Tableland, within 5 miles of where the Township of Camooweal was afterwards started and now stands. (One of the party died near, and was buried here). A Mr. Nat Buchanan (commonly called "Bluey") was piloting this party out to the Barkley Tableland country. When camped with Crosthwaite and party the dingoes were very plentiful and we poisoned a good many and noticed that a number of black gins who had lost their menfolk who do the hunting for food, were very hard up for food, so they used to collect the poisoned dingoes and take them to their camp.

From this camp we went down to the Lower Diamantina and spent Christmas on Brighton Downs with the Manager, Mr. Hopkins. We found the country very promising and a very fine waterhole or lake at the homestead.

I think we paid a deposit on this Station, but afterwards found this fine waterhole was lost as the survey showed it was 5 miles from the Brighton Downs boundary on Cork Station, so the deposit was forfeited.

We then went up the River to the Upper Diamantina and found it all splendid open country, but badly watered; although we found
several fairly good waterholes in the many branches of the river, none was permanent.

From Brighton Downs to the head of the Diamantina River there was no settlement or stock of any kind and we were told we were the fifth whites on it.

We decided to occupy a big scope of this country, but I think a Mr. Rankin had taken it up, and we got it from him. We then started back to Mt. Cornish. We stayed a day or two at the camp at Elderslie on the Western River, where a Mr. Owen was in charge, and we saw the grave of one of Crosthwaite's party who was killed here. There were no roads in this land in those days, so we were glad to follow the wheel tracks made by the teams that came from Mt. Cornish to this Elderslie Station camp.

We rode south by Tambo, Blackall and Roma to Dalby and sold our horses and outfit there, and took train to Brisbane and boat to Melbourne. I think the coastal boats in those days were about 500 tons. Anyway, they rolled and dived about most awfully. Their funnels were nearly always white with dried spray.

(Some of these A.S.N. boats were "Florence Irving", "Ranelagh" "You Yongs" and "Victoria").

On returning to our old home "Walwa" on the Upper Murray, Victoria, Mr. Derepas left the proposition, so my father, S.G. Watson, of Walwa and Tiltaldra Stations got a Mr. Price Fletcher, brother to the Chancellor of the Adelaide University, to take charge
of the expedition to the Upper Diamantina, and we three brothers - P.S., H.F., and R.M.W., left Melbourne by A.S.N. boat to Townsville, North Queensland, where we made our start for the Gulf and Diamantina in 1876. We bought horses here, mostly rejects from mobs that had been sold during many months. We stayed several days in Townsville at a wooden pub called the Queen's Hotel till we got things ready for the trip. The Bank of N.S.W. was opposite, where the Customs House now stands. Flinders Street was mostly a track then through scrub to a pub called "The Rising Sun" Hotel, where we got our horses together and put the different packs and saddles on them. Some of the horses were very troublesome, bucking off the packs and sometimes a saddle or two. Luckily the yard of "The Rising Sun" was substantially built. Of course a crowd of young fellows congregated around the yard to see how the Victorian "new chums" would shape with all these outlaws of horses. Anyway, we had brought our own saddles which we used in Victoria, with us, so were able to deal with most horses, and some of the lookers on must have been disappointed, for they made nasty remarks and nearly caused a riot, but our boss, Fletcher, turned it into a joke by telling one of us to bring Jesus Christ along and put a pack on him, so I went and caught a horse, being the worst-looking one in the mob. He had long hair, lop ears, and a hanging under-lip, and so caused quite a sensation when led into the yard and turned the bad feeling to fun. We travelled out across the range to Dotswood Station,
where we met the owner, Mr. O'Rourke, who told us the lizards where we were going were a foot between the eyes. We bought from him 900 odd mixed cattle (DOT brand) which had been started out to Rockwood Station, also belonging to Mr. O'Rourke. We took delivery of this mob and started out for the Upper Diamantina.

Before starting the cattle, Fletcher and I went over to a Station called Tower Hill and bought some bulls, and when returning with them to Rockwood, Mr. Thornton, owner of Tower Hill, came too, and we had a dry camp the first night. I remember that when going on watch I kicked the quartpot of tea over, and Mr. Thornton flew off the handle and told me I would never be any good in the bush, and many other things, so next day we had to do a perish until evening when we came to some water in a little hole.

Shortly after leaving Rockwood Station with the cattle we saw waterholes covered with ice till 9 a.m., a thing none of us had ever seen before, even in Victoria in winter.

From Rockwood we went to Colloden Creek, (very fine country) and followed it for some days to where Wokingham Creek junctioned. There was very good green feed and bluebush at Wokingham Creek and a fine large lagoon, so we camped therefor three or four days. Thousands of flock pigeons used to come in for a drink (they would fly into shallow water and drink) and we shot many of them. We also got lots of young galahs and found them good eating after living on salt beef for months. The green feed seemed to bring pleura out in the cattle so we started up the Diamantina to take up
country afterwards called "Kynuna".

H. F. Watson was sent down to Cork on Lower Diamantina, to buy a dray and horses, and as there was no road, and the river had a dozen little channels, he crossed the river without knowing it and got bushed for ten days and nearly perished.

We went up river to where a Mr. Miles had taken up country, and a Mr. Urquhart, and Paddy the horse and a halfcaste boy had formed a camp. They called the place "Dagworth" Station. We formed a camp and called our country "Xenephon Downs". It was afterwards called "Kynuna". At our camp there was a good waterhole, but after the cattle had been watering at it it became very muddy and undrinkable, then another small hole we kept for camp use got spoilt by hundreds of dingoes and pelicans going into it. The dingoes took little notice of us, unless the wind blew from us to them, when they would stop suddenly and turn and run away. The dingoes were so numerous that when a bullock got bogged one evening and we went next morning to cut some beef off him, we found just the bones of his legs sticking out of the mud and the skull ten to twelve yards away.

Mr. Fletcher was a wonderful man for travelling single-handed through the unknown bush by compass, and was most of his time exploring the country ahead of us away from the rivers and creeks.

Raymond, our new chum, left here and rode back by himself to find a track for us to Mt. Cornish and we thought he would never be seen again. A good chap. When calling one to go on watch he
would say - "Arise, and watch the timid cows repose"

After we had decided to leave the Upper Diamantina, Fletcher set off to discover a way over to the Flinders River and after some days he returned and told us he had struck a creek, afterwards called "Rupert's Creek", and came on to a large water-hole, I think about 20 miles from the Diamantina. Fletcher discovered this Hole through correllas, as a silvery cloud formed by them settled down on the creek, and Fletcher rode to them to see what they were.

We left the Diamantina at 4 p.m. one day and drove the cattle till 8 p.m., when Fletcher, Harry Watson, Nixon, Raymond and Tolfree took on the horses to the newly-discovered creek to pitch a camp, have tea, and then come back to cattle and let Sidney Watson and me go in and camp till morning, as it was our turn for a night in. Well they could not find the waterhole till morning so Sid and I had a night's watching to ourselves.

In making for the Flinders we came onto some very fine country with two waterholes near each other at the junction of two creeks. We camped here and reckoned we would take this country up but after being there for some days a party came along with a mob of cattle and told us they had applied for this country, afterwards called "Maxwellton". Their names were Gordon & Scott.

As one had to declare country stocked before taking it up,
these people really had no right to it. They reported good country down Alex Creek, where we made for, and on the way came to a camp belonging to Bundock and Hayes and run by Tom Brady as an Outstation to Richmond Downs. Fletcher then rode on to Normanton to the Lands Office to apply for this Alex Creek country, called "Nelia Ponds"; and we three stayed with the cattle. It was here we first saw blacks in the Gulf country - a lot of gins and one big boy who continually called out piccaninny. From here we sent a man called Nixon back to Cork on Lower Diamantina for a dray and 3 draught horses - also our bullock dray come with our loading from Townsville driven by Ned Tolfree and Nixon.

We crossed Alex Creek after passing a wonderful waterhole called Minimere, and went on to the Flinders River, found it a very dry river, with waterholes along the bed sometimes many miles apart. When following down this river we got our first rains, being heavy thunderstorms with plenty of wind, the latter splitting up our tent and everything getting wet. We had storms for three nights and as only three of us were with the cattle and horses we were too tired to watch on the third night, so let the cattle go, and to our surprise at daylight next morning we saw the whole mob about a quarter of a mile out on the plain. From this we learnt that it was only necessary to watch the cattle till 1 a.m., as they stayed on camp without being watched after that hour till daylight.

One night a traveller came to our camp on bank of Flinders, a Mr. Cuthbert, who had taken up country on the Saxby River called
"Saxby Downs". He gave us some sugar and flour as we had run out of tucker, excepting beef, which would only keep one day. Cuthbert told us he had put a Mr. Marks on to country lower down the Saxby now called "Bunda Bunda".

While at Nelia Ponds our cattle fattened. We built a yard and hut and settled down for 12 months. The road from Richmond Downs to Cloncurry went through our country and a mail once a month was run by Pat Brady from Richmond to Cloncurry. We were always glad to see him, mostly to hear what the date was.

After being at Nelia Ponds some months Mr. Fletcher decided that we should move on to the Gregory River. He brought some strychnine back from Normanton with him and we poisoned a heifer that had died and during the night some 70 dingoes were poisoned. They kept coming near the cattle on camp and some of the cattle would come to the edge of the mob and horn the dying dogs.

In the morning our narrow waterhole was full of dead dogs, so we had to shift camp up the creek. After cutting out the cows with calves too young to travel, Fletcher, Sidney and Harry started the main mob North to the Gregory, and J.B. Spencer and I stayed at the camp to look after these cattle that were not fit to travel. Whilst here, Mr. Harry Shadforth and his son Bob passed through with 900 WY heifers from our birth place "Walwa" on the Upper Murray in Victoria, and has been on the roads for 10 months. They kept along the bank of the Flinders River, 4 miles away from my camp on
Alicks Creek, and I didn't know they had passed until one day I saw a cow branded WY (our old home brand of Walwa).

My first dose of fever and ague found me without any medicine, and I knew nothing about the disease. Took nothing for weeks till G.J. Scrutton came along and gave me quinine and salts. C.J. Scrutton went with the Jardines to Cape York from Rockhampton in 1865. He was a partner with Gibson in Taldora but being of a very restless nature, took 500 heifers as his share, and he and Courtney took up some country on Julia Creek on Dalgonally Station.

I could not get rid of the fever and ague and hearing that Donald Macintyre of Dalgonally had some pills that would cure fever, I rode across country 60 or 70 miles, over beautiful rolling downs covered with Mitchell grass to Lower Julia creek, and followed it down to Dalgonally. A Mr. Ferguson was Manager and he gave me some of the pills (podophylin) and they were effective. Anyway, I was able to ride back again after four days. Afterwards a Mr. Colliss who went through with cattle to take up country on Li Creek - afterwards called "Inverleigh" - had the fever so I gave him my little bag of pills to take a few.

Mr. Price Fletcher, P.S. Watson, H.F. Watson and 2 other men had a tedious trip to the Gregory River, having no roads to follow and always having to look ahead to find water and camping places.

On arrival at The Gregory River they were surprised at the
cleanness of the running water and the lovely Cabbage Palms, Leichhardt pines, and huge ti-trees. They chose a camp on high land near a good crossing place on the River and turned the cattle across the river on the Western side.

After six months on Alicks Creek, J.B. Spencer and I started our mob for the Gregory. We went down Alex Creek to the Flinders River and through Manfred Downs and Taldora. At Manfred we had to go through a fence to get water for the cattle and a manager called Knipe and his black stockmen came and tried to hunt the cattle away from the waterhole, but they could not get them away from the nice shady trees along the hole as the sun was scorching hot.

Some years ago this man was in charge of my step-brother's expedition up in the Cape York Peninsula (Grandie, Leo, and Eddy Watson) where he took up some worthless country which was deserted later on and they went further North of the Coen and Archer Rivers and settled on some country they called "Kerluna".

After leaving Millungera we went through Taldora Station afterwards managed by a Mr. Menzies... (They were one Station owned by Gibson at that time) and on to Spear Creek, through Iffley Station, owned by Percy Walsh. A man with Scrutton, with a dray and team - called Sweeney - joined us here as he was going to Normanton. At one camp on Spear Creek an old man came to the camp. He was starving, and as I had a wild turkey boiling in the beef
billy, I gave him a meal of it, but during the night he got up and drank a lot of the water the turkey was boiled in, which made him sick and the poor old chap died before breakfast, so we buried him in a lonely grave.

We went on to a big waterhole called the 15-mile, from Normanton, and camped till I went to Normanton and returned with pack horses loaded with flour, tea, sugar, and one tin of fruit, which cost 4/-. The 15-mile hole from Normanton is where a pioneer called Courtney, who owned Telemon Station at one time, and took up some country on Dalgonally, Julia Cree, with C.J. Scrutton - got drowned. He and some others were having a jolly night of it over a case of whisky which one of them had brought out from Normanton. They went in for a moonlight swim, and in the early morning Weatherley saw what he thought was a dead calf floating on the far side of the hole, so they all got out their old brass-mounted snieder rifles and made a target of the object, but luckily they were too shaky to hit it, as whilst shooting, the blackboy who was after the horses came cantering over and told them that the target they were firing at was the boss, Mr. Courtney. At the enquiry held at Normanton afterwards all was satisfactorily settled as there were no bullet holes in the body.

We went from here to Magoura Station owned by Mr. Hetzer a very fine old man.

At our camp on Spear Creek two travellers camped with us,
and at night a fire sprang up across the creek. Of course we all thought it was blacks. Anyway, the two travellers caught their horses, packed up and cleared. It was about 9 p.m. Then a black-boy belonging to Sweeney sneaked over towards the fire and found it was a log that had been smouldering and the breeze had started up a little flame.

The Flinders and Boyne rivers which we crossed where the road was from Normanton to Rocklands, and afterwards Camooweal. It was here I met an old police inspector of black police, called Poindestre. He had a camp on the Byno River and patrolled as far out west as Point Parker. He was afterwards camped on the Gregory 6-mile, and then up on Carl Creek on Riversleigh. These police were kept simply to shoot blacks, not only when called to a Station where the blacks had been killing cattle, but further out where there was no settlement and the blacks were so much easier to get on to as they did not know the danger of rifles, nor what these black police were after.

I have seen these police in a scrubby place strip off all their clothes and only carry their brass-mounted sneider rifles and a belt of cartridges so that the wild blacks would not be scared. On one occasion the white Inspector saw a black crawling across a little clear patch in the scrib, and thinking it was a wild black, levelled his rifle at him and fired, killing him first shot. After the blacks had all disappeared, and the Inspector collected his
troopers, we found that the black Corporal was missing and dis­covered that he was the black the Inspector had shot when he fired at the blackfellow crawling across a clearing in the scrub.

After crossing the Flinders and Byno Rivers we kept on West crossed Armstrong Creek, M. Lagoon, L. Creek, and Lagoon Creek on to the Leichhardt River. None of this country was occupied, from Magoura to the Gregory River. The Leichhardt was a fine big river with high banks but only big waterholes along its bed. The place where we crossed was known as Floraville, where there was a post office and pub many years afterwards, and a road went across to the Albert River to Burketown (50 miles) and Messrs. Robert and James Doyle took up country from the crossing up and named it "Pomerania", and stocked it with sheep. Some miles up the Leichhardt above this crossing there are some wonderful Falls. It is where the Landsborough Creek junctions. These falls are of brown rock in a semi-circle and half a mile long with a fall all round of about 100 feet. The saltwater crocodile comes up into the fresh water beneath these falls. (These reptiles are erroneously called "Aligators")

After this we went a few miles up a creek called "Fiery Creek", where there was a permanent rocky waterhole, known later as the Rocky Hole. It is 75 miles from where I had to strike the Gregory River, and no water between, as I found to my cost, for after leaving the Rocky at 3.30 one afternoon and travelling the cattle till 1 a.m. next morning to a waterhole that was supposed to
be permanent, I found it dry. As the horses were in a bad way I let the cattle go and made on to the Gregory, where I found my two brothers had a log hut near a good crossing of the Gregory River - the site where Fletcher decided to form the Station.

After a week's rest I went back to the Rocky Waterhole, 75 miles, and found all my cattle thereabouts. I then made another attempt to get them across this 75 mile dry stage. We made a start at 3 p.m. one very hot day, and kept going till 2 a.m., when the leader of the mob was making a lot of noise. On going to the lead I found there had been a heavy local thunderstorm and the plain was all bog and puddle holes. We then unpacked the horses and hobbled them across for the night, and being tired and worn out ourselves we just put our swags down for pillows and lay in the mud until morning, not even having a meal or pannikin of tea. In the morning all the cattle were in sight, also the horses, so we started them on again for The Gregory, which we reached late that night, not having lost a single beast on the journey or a single horse. On arrival we found that Mr. Fletcher had left for the south to report to our father that he had landed us on the Gregory. He then sold out of his one fourth share of the enterprise for £1,200 (I think) so we three Watsons were left to our own to sink or swim.

I found that the brothers, and a relation of Fletchers - George Cooper, and Walker, had built a log hut of one big room on
the site of the present Gregory Downs Hotel, and Walker was building a stockyard on the west side of the River, where present yard now stands. We also built a log hut there.

All the cattle were turned on to the west side of the river and gave little trouble as the feed was good and we only had to look after the top end and lower part of the river. Mr. Harry Shadforth and his son Bob had delivered the mob of heifers (900 out of 1000 started) from Victoria. They drove right through from Tintaldra and Walwa on the Murray River in Victoria. This mob was put down the river 20 miles on the Western side and we formed an outstation there called the 20-mile. All the stock became so fat that it was difficult to get one suitable for beef. A few blacks paid a visit to this 20-mile camp one night. They sneaked up to the camp and stole beef. Our bullock driver, Bill Davis, who was camped near the fire, saw one crawling on his hands and knees, thought it was a dingo and fired his revolver at it. All hands jumped up and ran to the fire and saw that it was a blackfellow that was shot, but at daylight when we went to examine things we found that the black had been dragged away by some of his mates. Years afterwards I saw the man near Burketown. He was very frightened and had an awful scar on his ribs.

We found we had a neighbour 50 miles to the West. It was Frank Hann. He and Mr. R. Edkins had taken up Lawn Hill Station that had been deserted about 12 years before by Page and Mitten,
with all the real pioneers of that time, had left the country from Burketown to the Barkley Tableland and Georgina River on account of distance from markets for wool, and no markets for cattle; also Burketown, their port, was wiped out by some Eastern disease called Yellow Jack - brought by a schooner that arrived there. Those who escaped sickness went to Sweers Island and Normanton.

At this time we had a blackfellow called Drummer - (a Kalkadoon), an wonderful man, who was with us for many years, until he died. This boy and his mate were caught by the Native Police on the Leichhardt and they were to be shot, but luckily Mr. Fletcher and one of us came on to the police just as they had shot Drummer's mate, and he was told to walk out on to the plain to be shot, but we objected to the execution, and after a lot of argument the Sub-Inspector of Native Police handed the boy to us, but on condition that we took him out of the district.

The reason given for wanting to kill these two blacks was because they knew a few words of English so were likely to teach the wild blacks some villainy etc. This man Drummer was a wonderful chap. He could find anything lost from a horse to a pocket knife and never failed to do so. After some months Drummer wanted a wife, so we went down the river to near the Punjaub Station is now and found some gins in a lagoon getting waterlily roots and mussels. The poor things were so scared that they would not come out until they were nearly frozen or drowned.
Well, we had a look through them and told Drummer to pick one but to try and get one with curly hair and small feet (as they are the most intelligent). Drummer chose one, put her on his horse behind him, and we all returned to the 20 mile camp. This gin—Louie—was a good woman and settled down straight away. She afterwards had two children whom we christened Archie and Murray (after our two nephews, M. and A. Black of Tarwin, Gippsland).

Murray died quite young (about 14 to 20 years old). He was one of the most intelligent boys I ever saw. One time, P.S. Watson was driving a waggonette and had a little naked Murray with him on the seat. P.S. ran across a gutter instead of going round it, which gave a nasty jolt.

P.S. said to himself "Well, I am a damn fool"! Then little Murray looked up into his face and said—"Mine think it Boss"!

It was a great relief to us having these two blacks, Drummer and Louie. She did our washing and sweeping about the hut, and water-carrying, and Drummer did the horse-hunting.

Years afterwards P.S. took Drummer to Walwa, our old home on the Upper Murray, Victoria, where our father lived. Drummer had a good time there for some weeks but on his return trip to Gregory Downs the schooner from Thursday Island left him at Normanton, where he remained some months before we heard he was there, but we got him to the Gregory at last. The poor fellow had got a terrible disease
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and after 18 months suffering he died. We buried him about 200 yards from his camp at the homestead.

About 1865 C. J. Scrutton, Weatherley and Frank Walsh (Scrutton went to Cape York with the Jardine Bros., who took cattle from Rockhampton to Somerset, where their father was Governor of that new settlement, afterwards moved to Thursday Island) came to the Gregory with 400 Taldora bullocks, bound for Port Darwin to see if there was a market as none existed anywhere else within reach of us, so we Watson Bros., (3) put in another 300 and H.F. Watson joined the party to take them to Darwin. (Scrutton left the party here). They had Drummer and another boy belonging to Walsh, also a half more called George. They had a rough trip of 1000 miles and no roads, but eventually reached some of the outside diggings and on Yam Creek Goldfield found a great number of Chinese miners, but no sale for the bullocks, as Fisher and Lyons, the big men of Darwin, had the monopoly of the butchering, so the party came to the conclusion that they would butcher the bullocks and sell the meat to the miners. This they did, but were put to a lot of trouble on account of the Chinamen being afraid that if they bought other people Fisher & Lyons might refuse to sell to them later on. Anyway, all the bullocks were butchered and sold, mostly by the quarter, to Chinamen at the different diggings, and the Chinese paid up to the penny for the lot, mostly in gold dust and nuggets. The party had a very hard time, having fever and ague in the camp all the time.
one or two being laid up most of the time with it.

When Harry Watson left for Gregory Downs again it was by boat to Thursday Island at midnight. Next morning at daylight Drummer came to H.W. and said - "My word, big feller waterhole, no see um tree or land anywhere." Drummer could not understand where they were till in the Norman River he became quite delighted and drew H.F. Watson's attention to a clump of trees and said - "My word, we near Normanton, I see um trees where I been find em horses before."

After waiting at Thursday Island some weeks they got a chance of going to Normanton, nearly 500 miles, in an open boat that had to get there to get a telegraph station (at entrance of Norman- ton River known as Kimberley), about a horse-laden ship that got wrecked near Torres Strait, the "Rio Costa" (I think). They had an awful trip down the Gulf of Carpentaria to Normanton, 400 or 500 miles - it took a fortnight.

To get back to our Station doings again - we found great difficulty in getting supplies and Normanton was the only port in the Gulf at that time and cartage was up to £30 a ton, so we had a talk to Frank Hann, who had taken up Lawn Hill Station, and Mr. Harry Shadforth, whom Hann had put on to Lilydale country, 70 miles away up the Gregory River from our country, Gregory Downs, and as others were taking up country all round; Riversleigh by C.J. Scrutton, (and afterwards sold to James and Robert Doyle), and
Fiery Downs by Scott and Gibson, we decided to get a schooner to bring supplies from Townsville to where Burketown used to be. This we did, and when the schooner arrived the loading had to be put ashore on the bank of the River. As there were three of us Watsons, it was decided that one of us should stay by the loading till such time as teams from all the outlying stations should come and collect their portions. This led to Watsons building and starting a General Store, and so resuscitated Burketown again, which had been abandoned on account of an outbreak of yellow fever (supposed) for 12 years.

At the same time two men, Fookes and Sam Harris, were on the spot to start, but Fookes got killed (drowned) so Sam Harris did a bit of carrying from Burketown, but later on his big 5-horse dray ran over him with fatal results.

Watson Bros., decided to get a blacksmith and wheelwright to come to the new settlement, as many carriers were coming in from the surrounding country as far out at the Barkly Tableland. Some had teams of 30 horses and some had bullock teams, the wagons requiring attention, especially the wheels, on account of the hot dry climate. They had a Smithy shop erected, and got Michael Kelly (a wheelwright) to come. As there was little to do when the teams had all started out, Kelly reckoned a pub would be a good thing for him and the district, so P.S. Watson had an iron house put up and let Kelly have it free on condition that he attended to the mending of any wagons requiring his attention. This lasted about six months.
when Kelly found the hotel took up as much of his time as he wanted, to P.S.W. had to get rid of him and let the Pub and Blacksmith's shop to a man called Macinerney, who turned out to be a great success and was a great help to Burketown for many years afterwards.

Now that the country was all taken up to the Barkley Tableland, down to the Georgina River, up the Leichhardt to Kamilarlo Station and the Lawn Hill River and Gregory River (Burketown being the port) different business people became interested in the place and started businesses.

One man, Maurie Read and wife, settled down near the Store to start an Hotel and brought all the necessary requirements from Normanton by schooner. He had a German (Baedertcher) with him. Then a man called Tom Coffee sent a lot of stuff along to start another Pub, his wife coming by boat with the goods, and he came overland from Normanton with his horses.

Both these parties rigged up iron sheds and sold drink to the many carriers and drovers coming to get rations and loading.

When Tom Coffee arrived he found a most unfavourable state of affairs at his wife's shanty. He straightway tried to drown his cares in drink and became very unmanageable, started to destroy his property by using an axe on cases of whisky and other stores. He also smashed up any trunks belonging to his wife.

At this time I was looking after Watson Bros. Store, as P.S.W. had to go to Normanton to see a Doctor as he had been very
run down with fever and ague for months.

Coffee got so dangerous that I had to get a stockman, who happened to be sober, to give me a hand to chain him up. This we did, and I gave him a nip occasionally till he recovered. He then offered me all his goods that had not been destroyed, mainly corrugated iron, and a very good billiard table, which he had started to operate upon with the axe when we tied him up. This table was at the Commercial Hotel, Burketown, till 1934 and still showed the axe cuts on one side of it.

Just about the day I bought Coffee's goods, his wife made a claim on him, so I lent her 2 blacks and a dray to take what she wanted from her camp. She took what she wanted and told me we could do what we liked with the rest. I then started to collect what I had bought from Coffee, when she reckoned I was robbing a lone woman. She pointed a revolver at me, which was shaking so much I thought it might go off, so I ducked behind some sheets of iron and pulled out my big Colt revolver. This frightened her so much that she dropped her weapon and ran over to Read's shanty, where she had taken her goods.

I picked up her revolver, so things settled down for a time. The next day she was in the Store to get some cheese which she said she had overlooked when claiming her property the day before, when who should be seen approaching the Store but her husband. She at
once ran back to the storeroom and Coffee came in. He was relating to me a lot of history, not too favourable, about his wife. She heard the conversation and rushed from the back store with a tomahawk in her hand and made a chop at her husband's head, but I pushed her on to one side and the tomahawk hit Coffee on the shoulder. He then got into holds with her and I pushed the pair out of the door and they fell to the ground. Coffee got hold of her ear with his teeth, when I interfered, and told him he was eating the woman. He then bit the lobe of her ear off and swallowed it.

After this these parties left Burketown in different directions and I heard that the wife's brother shot Coffee dead, was arrested, and on being taken in the train from some Western township to Brisbane jumped out of the train and was killed.

Then Read started playing up, reckoned he would shoot Baedertcher (who was our bookkeeper in the Store) the flat-footed Dutchman. One night the German was to camp at the loading left on the bank of Albert River, in order to watch it. He made his bunk in against some cases of kerosene, but as I heard Read say he would get him that night, I would not let Baedertcher sleep there. It was just as well he took my advice for in the morning we found several bullet holes in the kerosene cases alongside where the bed was. The next night the German and I were sitting on some sawn timber alongside the store when Read walked past us and fired his
revolver at the German. The bullet went between our heads and through the corrugated iron wall. I pulled out my revolver and handed it to Baedertcher, but he would not use it.

The next day when I told Read he nearly shot me, instead of Baedertcher, he apologised, and said he would yet shoot the flat-footed German. I told him if he did it would be premeditated murder all right. He said "Lend me paper and pen and I will show you if it will be premeditated murder". He then wrote that he intended shooting the German and handed the letter to me.

I wrote to the Commissioner of Police, Brisbane, telling all that was going on and enclosed Read's note.

Some little time after this a sergeant, Mr. P. Synnott, and two policemen, were sent to Burketown. This was in 1882. Then Read left without having shot the German. I think he purchased a schooner and tried to do a bit of smuggling.

Burketown went ahead about this time and two Hotels were started; Kelly ran one. He was the man Watson Bros., put into the first pub built in Burketown at its second start, and Synnott and Macinerney had the other. Aplin & Brown started a big store, also Burns Philp, and Raff & Co.

We moved the goods out of our Store to Gregory Downs to the present site of the Gregory Downs Hotel and Store, and started a Pub and Store. It was the spot we first settled and built the homestead on when we arrived on the Gregory River, but travellers
became a nuisance so we moved the Homestead across the Gregory River, where it still remains.

We put Baedertcher (the aforementioned German) in charge of this pub and store, and he did a good trade, but "did" Watson Bros., too, to the amount of £3,000. We then sold the business to Mr. Clark, who took a partner, Mr. Campbell, who came as a Clerk to Burns Philp and Co., and afterwards had a business in Thursday Island.

They afterwards sold to Bill and Mrs. Barrett, the latter having run the business till her death in 1934.

In 1881 I went south for a holiday as I had suffered a great deal from fever and ague. I rode into Normanton and waited for a schooner called the Red Rover, which went to Thursday Island. We called at Sweers Island, where a family by the name of Mc had lived since old Burketown was deserted. The owner of the schooner Mr., or "Long" Brown, bought some sheep at Sweers Island and put them in the hold. Next morning he was awfully surprised to see a lamb that was born at night and had a long tail. I told him they always had long tails but he would not believe me and said that there were millions of sheep in Australia, and did I mean to say that all had to have their tails cut off.

On arrival at Thursday Island we stayed at Mr. Brown's house as there was no Hotel, and I think the only other place was
Burns Philp's Store. Mrs. Brown, many years later, took charge of the baby that was rescued from the wreck of the Quetta, and kept her till she grew up.

I still had the fever and ague (malarial) and was glad when a British India steamer called en route to Melbourne.

In those days everyone in the district would have this fever and ague, sometimes for six months. Quinine would not cure it but Berkley & Taylor's mixture would.

In 1884 there were great sounds from the North West like big explosions, then one day we saw about a dozen naked black gins approaching our house. They were waving branches. We told Drummer, our blackboy, to go and see what was the matter and he found that these blacks had been frightened by the loud explosions and had chanced coming to the whites' camp.

When they found that we were friendly to these gins, up came 7 or 8 blackmen. Drummer then got them to camp a little away from our place. He gave them some food and tobacco. The men got very sick trying to smoke the tobacco in new clay pipes.

These blacks were very helpful to us and gave no trouble at all. We have them names and pricked these names on little discs of tin and hung them round their necks and told them that if ever they were attacked by the Native Police to show these discs, which would stop the police shooting them, but some of them were shot all the same, and others we kept on the Station. One of them was
shot by a white cook we had when we were all away from the homestead at a place 20 miles down the river (called the 20-Mile Outstation).

The gin Louie walked from the Station and told us that Bob (the abo) been shoot em cook, meaning the cook had shot Bob.

We rode up to the station and found that the cook wanted Bob to lend him his gin. Bob objecting caused the trouble. We dealt with the cook, who cleared out and was never seen again.