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'ONCE A JOLLY FLAGMAN': THE 1901 TOWNSVILLE FLAG CONTROVERSY

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A highlight of Townsville's Centenary of Federation celebrations was the re-enactment of a flag-raising ceremony by the Governor-General. One hundred years earlier, Australia's first Governor-General, Lord Hopetoun, had unfurled a facsimile of the winning design of a national flag competition during a brief visit to the northern city. Over the decades there was perpetuated a myth that the Hopetoun ceremony was the first occasion upon which the Australian flag was officially raised. Through careful gleaning of Townsville City Council files, contact with individuals associated with the Jubilee of Federation Committee and patient vexillologist investigation, the myth of 1901 was exposed and a revised, authoritative account presented, upon which the August 2001 re-enactment was based. □ *Australian Flag; Federation; Townsville 1901; Jubilee of Federation celebrations; vexillology.*

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In September 1951, a bronze plaque was fixed at the entrance to Townsville's Municipal Chambers. It commemorated 50 years of Federation and was inscribed as follows:

16th September 1951

This flagpole commemorates the raising, for the first time in Australia, of the Commonwealth Flag. The ceremony was performed in Townsville, by the first Governor General of Australia, The Right Honourable, The Earl of Hopetoun, K.T., G.C.M.G., G.C.V.O., on 16th September 1901, when the design of the flag was first proclaimed.

When the old Town Hall was demolished in 1977 the plaque was removed and set in concrete at the base of a flagpole in the City Mall, only metres distant. For three generations, Townsvilleans and countless thousands of visitors to the city have taken for granted the historical accuracy of the events of 1901 which the inscription implies. Several histories of the flag have accepted, *prima facie*, the veracity of the Townsville episode. But was this claim accurate, or was it another example of north Queensland mythology which found its way into the legend of the Australian flag?

On 8 August 2001 His Excellency Dr Peter Hollingworth, AC, OBE, Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, unveiled a new plaque at the Townsville Strand to mark the Centenary of Federation. It was inscribed with less effusive wording:

This plaque commemorates the 100th anniversary of the first vice-regal unfurling of the national flag of Australia in Townsville on 16 September 1901. The flag was made by Townsville sailmaker William McKenzie and was raised by Australia's first Governor-General Lord Hopetoun.

The change in emphasis, the dispelling of the long-cherished myth was the result of research by the authors on behalf of Federation North. It was not a case of re-writing history to cater for fashionable Republican sentiments in changing times, but an empirical exercise in analysing the legend, its genesis and the events of 16 September 1901, when in Townsville there was 'Once a Jolly Flagman ...'.

THE FLAG COMPETITION

In April 1901, the Commonwealth Government decided to launch a national competition for a flag design. The *Gazette* of 29 April 1901 invited competitive designs for a 'Federal Flag', entries to be submitted by 31 May. For a country with a small population, the competition attracted a surprising 32,823 designs. The prize, however, was attractive. *Review of Reviews for Australasia* combined its £75 with the Commonwealth Government's £75 and the Havelock Tobacco Company added another £50. It took two months to assemble the entries for the judges' scrutiny. The judging panel numbered seven. It comprised two naval officers and three merchant sea-captains (Clare, Edie, Mitchell, Evans and Thompson), an expert in heraldry named Stewart and J.S. Blackham as the government's executive officer. They took six weeks to sift the entries, many of which were disqualified for not meeting the 'guidelines'. Some designs were ridiculous.

The judges' verdict was conveyed, in confidence, sometime in August and the government secretly commissioned the



FIG. 1. The 7th Earl of Hopetoun, Australia's first Governor-General. (John Oxley Library, Brisbane, neg. no. 68196)

manufacture of a 36 feet by 18 feet flag for unfurling on the dome of Melbourne's Exhibition Building to coincide with the public announcement of the result of the competition. On 3 September 1901, Prime Minister Edmund Barton unfurled the winning design. He announced the judges' verdict that five almost identical entries would share the prize. They were: Annie Dorrington from Perth, who became a quite well-known artist; Ivor Evans from Melbourne, a 14-year-old schoolboy whose father owned a flag-making business; Leslie Hawkins, a trainee optician from Leichhardt in New South Wales; Egbert Nuttall, an architect from Prahran in Victoria; and William Stevens, an employee of the Union Steamship Company of New Zealand. In the absence of Lord Hopetoun, who (as we shall see) was in north Queensland, the Countess of Hopetoun was invited to declare the flag exhibition open for public viewing. Over the following weeks, illustrations and descriptions of the prize-winning design were published in newspapers throughout Australia, while flag replicas were observed in Melbourne and Sydney.

THE 1901 CEREMONY: ENTER LORD HOPETOUN

John Adrian Louis Hope, 7th Earl of Hopetoun, later 1st Marquess of Linlithgow (Fig. 1), was born in 1860. Educated at Eton and later at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, his health precluded him from active service. Instead Hopetoun became an *apparatchik* of Queen Victoria and her calculating advisors. At twenty-three, he was Conservative Whip in the House of Lords; at twenty-five, Lord-in-Waiting to the Queen, and thereafter held a host of favoured positions. In 1889, he was appointed Governor of Victoria, having recently married Hersey Alice Eveleigh-de-Moleyns, daughter of the 4th Baron Ventry. He was honoured with a GCMG, which suggests he probably fell from the Queen's favour or from Prime Minister Salisbury's. Hopetoun endured his colonial exile for six years, returning to England in 1895 and was immediately appointed Paymaster-General in the Liberal government. By 1898, he was Lord Chamberlain, having declined the governor-generalship of Canada. Again it seems Hopetoun wearied his patrons. He was advised that further service abroad would best serve the government's interests. He was appointed Governor-General designate on 13 July 1900 at the age of forty, only days after the *Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act* had been approved by the British Parliament. As a solace he was made Knight of the Thistle and GCVO.

Hopetoun, however, had no heart for his role as Australia's first Governor-General. He was afflicted by typhoid in India on his way to the Antipodes, where he arrived in December 1900. Hopetoun carried out his gubernatorial duties through January 1901, and in May was the perfect host to the Duke of York who opened the first session of the Commonwealth Parliament. Subsequently he pleaded ill health and headed north to the Cairns hinterland, leaving his family in Melbourne. His decision was somewhat perverse: The Cairns hinterland at that time had the highest incidence of fever in north Australia; in reality he was avoiding the southern winter and seeking respite from the demands of office. He spent his time with his brother-in-law, Edward Eveleigh-de-Moleyns, who had properties at Hambledon (sugar cane) and Millville (coffee) which he purchased in 1893.¹ Hopetoun's sojourn at Hambledon was enjoyable. He cabled Barton in September 1901 on the eve of leaving Cairns:

Am just leaving for the south, much improved in health by my stay in this favoured locality ... If the Federal

Parliament persists in sitting during the winter no better climate or more charming place could be selected for its session than Cairns.²

Hopetoun was able to escape Cairns without ceremony, but he could not avoid Townsville, Mackay and Brisbane as SS *Wodonga* steamed him down the coast, 'homeward' to Melbourne.

Coastal shipping often over-nighted at various Queensland ports. Hopetoun decided he would take the opportunity to briefly visit Townsville and Mackay. Accordingly his Assistant Private Secretary, C. Savile Gore, telegraphed 'His Worship the Mayor' on 30 August:

His Excellency the Governor General will travel South in the *Wodonga* reaching Townsville on the evening of Sunday fifteenth and leaving again before noon on Monday fifteenth [sic.] he will be happy to meet your worship and the Town Council if you so desire before leaving but as his time is strictly limited any proceedings which you may suggest must need be of the briefest possible nature.³

Savile Gore's telegram inadvertently created confusion. It stated that Hopetoun would arrive on 'the fifteenth' and leave the following day, 'Monday fifteenth'. This was particularly evident in the response from the Mayor and arrangements he suggested for the 15th, and the salutations and invitation to attend a service from the Commissary of the Anglican Church.⁴

Five days later Mayor Murdo Cameron formally replied, the text worthy of faithful reproduction as it relates the parameters of the Council's ceremonial welcome, with no mention of a flag. (Cameron misspelled Hopetoun's name 'Hopeton' and addressed Savile Gore as C. Savile Esq.)

4th September 1901
Townsville

C Savile Esq
Assistant Private Secretary
Cairns

The Citizens of Townsville are deeply gratified at your intimation that His Excellency will be pleased to meet the Town Council on his return trip south in the *Wodonga*. It is contemplated requesting His Excellency to perform the function of formally opening the New Municipal Chambers just completed but any arrangements which will be made will be brief and will not greatly encroach on the time at Lord Hopetons disposal. Am desirous, in conjunction with the Chairman Ayr Tramway Board of forming small excursion party of say five (5) to visit Ayr, the Burdekin Delta, a distance of about forty (40) miles two (2) hours journey, on Sunday fifteenth (15) instant returning in time for dinner A special train will await at the ships side on His Excellencys arrival. Will esteem it a favour if you will ascertain if Lord Hopeton is favorable to such a proposal. I think this short trip into the country will break the monotony of waiting on board the steamer.

Murdo Cameron
Mayor⁵

It should be noted that Cameron's reply to Savile Gore was written approximately 24 hours after

Prime Minister Barton had unfurled the winning design of the 'Australian Flag' in Melbourne.

A FLURRY OF PREPARATIONS

News of Hopetoun's impending arrival was released to the local press. The weekly *North Queensland Herald* of Saturday 7 September not only announced Hopetoun's imminent visit but also published an account of the Melbourne ceremony: 'A flag, 18 ft by 36 ft, was made according to the prize design, and run up a mast above the dome'. It provided a full account of Barton's announcement of the winners and the design of the successful entries. Simultaneously, the Townsville Council arranged for the curator of its Botanical Gardens to prepare suitable greenery and potted plants to decorate the Town Hall. It also engaged William McKenzie, described in the trade directory of the *North Queensland Herald* as 'Ship Chandler, Sail-maker, Tent, Tarpaulin, Water-bag, and Flag-maker', of Flinders Street, Townsville to prepare bunting for the occasion.

The 14 September issue of that newspaper divulged officially that 'Arrangements have been made with Mr McKenzie for a display of bunting.' It also disclosed the full text of the welcoming speech to be read from the balcony of the Town Hall on Hopetoun's arrival, now clarified as the following Monday, which was declared a public holiday in Townsville. Even more significantly, its supplement contained a description of the Melbourne design, a copy of which had been received mid-week.

McKENZIE'S GESTURE

Little is known about William McKenzie in Townsville today. Registrar-General's records show he was born at Greenock, Renfrewshire, in Scotland's western lowlands. His father was Duncan McKenzie, also a sailmaker, who brought his family to Queensland in 1883. William McKenzie married aged thirty-two in 1891 (Fig. 2) in Brisbane but the precise date of opening his business in Townsville is uncertain. His obituary in the *Queenslander* related that he was 'ever esteemed as a man of strict integrity and punctuality ... one of the foundation members of the Baptist Church in Townsville'.⁶

Clearly McKenzie would have taken a keen interest in the outcome of the flag competition. It seems he personally came up with the idea, as an addition to his contract, that Townsville should honour Lord Hopetoun's visit by unfurling a replica of the winning design which he himself



FIG. 2. Flag maker William McKenzie and his wife Mary, nee Brown, on their wedding day in 1890. McKenzie was known throughout the north as manufacturer of 'Swagman' tents and camping gear. (Courtesy of Jean Kitchen)

would manufacture. On 14 September 1901 McKenzie wrote to the Mayor:

Will you kindly receive as a present at my hands, the first Commonwealth Flag, to be hoisted by the first Governor General of Australasia (Lord Hopetoun) on the new Market Reserve Buildings on Monday the 16th instant. The said flag to become the property of the Council, and the present and succeeding Mayors, to have the right to fly it at their private residence, or on any public building according to their pleasure.⁷

McKenzie's unexpected offer was a godsend for the aldermen. No civic leader had thought of the Governor-General hoisting the 'Commonwealth Flag' in Townsville as a publicity event, and probably none noticed McKenzie's wording 'the first Commonwealth Flag'.

There is no evidence whatsoever to suggest that the Council commissioned McKenzie's flag. Equally, the suggestion that McKenzie was either in Melbourne or visited Melbourne to view the winning entry belies logic. The nature of communications in Australia in 1901, and especially north Queensland's reliance on shipping, renders this lore an impossibility. And the newspaper reports of the day confirm that he was ensconced in Townsville, busy with his

bunting. Most likely McKenzie either requested details through a Melbourne vexillographer and received a description of the winning entry by electric telegraph, or he took the design from the newspaper descriptions telegraphed to Townsville. Either way, because the lexicon of flag-makers is specific, and accurately refined, McKenzie would have had no difficulty in reproducing a facsimile. There is no other plausible explanation.

'A HEARTY WELCOME'

The Government launch *Teal* conveyed Hopetoun and his party from the *Wodonga*, berthing at 11.05 a.m., at which time his visit to Townsville formally commenced. A comprehensive account of the landing, the procession to the Town Hall, the various addresses and the departure in the early afternoon is contained in the *North Queensland Herald* of 21 September 1901 (Figs 3 & 4). Only the aspects mentioning flags are pertinent. The following paragraphs have been extracted from the newspaper:

The route of the procession was richly adorned with flags. From the new Custom House to the Queen's Hotel stretched a line of national flags, and as the Governor-General's carriage passed the crowded balconies gave forth shouts of welcome...

Several of the business places were decorated with his Excellency's colors, purple and gold, and in every direction flags and pennons fluttered in the breeze. Standards of other nations and multi-colored streamers testified to the desire of the people to fitly receive their Sovereign's representative, but it was noticeable that the brave old Jack was strongly in the ascendant.

And ever upon our topmost tower
The banner of England flew ...

The facade of the Town Hall was gay with bunting and the verandah uprights were framed with ferns and palms. From Denham street to Stokes street festoons of flags of all nations stretched from rooftop to rooftop, the 'Jack' and Australian flag predominating, while at the summit of the Town Hall flagpole the Federal flag rested with its bravery concealed until his Excellency released the symbol of Australian unity. This was greeted with an outburst of cheering, which was swelled to throaty eloquence as the populace recognised the significance of the six-pointed star shining beneath the Union Jack. The guard of honor presented arms as the flag was unfurled ...

After Lord Hopetoun had suitably replied he hoisted the Federal flag which bore on the far side of the luff the inscription 'The first Commonwealth flag hoisted by the first Governor-General of Australia, Lord Hopetoun,' and on the reverse side 'Murdo Cameron, Mayor, September 16, 1901', and the maker's name ...

At the request of the Mayor the Governor-General then unfurled the flag which, as it unfurled, was greeted with round of hearty cheering. His Excellency said: 'It has afforded me very great pleasure indeed to unfurl this grand new flag, and I feel highly honored that the first time



FIG. 3. Lord Hopetoun (seated on the ornamental chair in the middle row) and Aldermen of the Townsville Council. Mayor Murdo Cameron, white-bearded, is seated next to Hopetoun. (Courtesy of Townsville City Council)

I have been present at its unfurling should have been in Townsville, the Queen City of the north.' (Cheers)

His Excellency, continuing, said, 'In accordance with a request of his Worship the Mayor I have great pleasure now in declaring the new Town Hall open ...'

There are several points to be made about the ceremony. First, Flinders Street was adorned with 'festoons of flags ..., the Jack and Australian flag predominating'. This 'Australian flag' was the Federation Flag, the unofficial national flag, which had been raised at the intersection of Flinders and Denham Streets on 1 January 1901. Second, in the Mayor's official welcoming address and Hopetoun's reply, and in the address from the Diocese of North Queensland to which Hopetoun also replied, there was no mention of a flag. Third, only when Hopetoun unfurled McKenzie's replica and spoke briefly of 'this grand new flag' was there a reference to the new 'Federal flag', this description being the journalist's, not Hopetoun's. Fourth, what Hopetoun then said is crucial to the later controversy. His words were: 'I feel highly honored that the first time I have been present at its unfurling should have been in Townsville ...'. It is implicit that Hopetoun was fully conscious that it was not the first occasion on which the new design had been unfurled, but acknowledged it was the first time that he, in his Vice-Regal capacity, had the honour of performing this deed. Fifth, there was the inscription on the luff: 'The first Commonwealth flag hoisted by the first Governor-General of Australasia'. This was clearly McKenzie's embellishment as his name

as manufacturer along with that of the Mayor was attached to the reverse of the luff.

McKENZIE'S FLAG GOES SOUTH

McKenzie's flag became the property of the Townsville Council following a meeting on 24 September 1901. The Minute read:

Resolved unanimously on the motion of Alderman Smyth and seconded by Alderman Hayes that the Federal Flag presented by Mr William McKenzie to the Municipality be accepted with thanks.⁸

How the flag was used and on how many occasions it was flown over subsequent years are not known. In 1922 the Council resolved to send it south, where it would remain for another 29 years. The circumstances are not fully clear, but it seems the Sydney-based Royal Australian Historical Society contacted William McKenzie in June 1922 as to the whereabouts of his flag. They were mounting an Exhibition of Historical Pictures and Relics. The Society subsequently wrote to the Mayor, Alderman W.H. Green, on 29 June 1922, formally requesting 'whether it would be possible to induce you and the Aldermen of Townsville to donate this flag to the Royal Australian Historical Society', adding that 'Mr McKenzie agrees with me that as the flag has historical associations the Museum of the Historical Society would be a most fitting home for it.'⁹ At a meeting of 18 July 1922, Deputy Mayor Spencer Hopkins, who was acting Chairman, having consulted McKenzie (but how is not known), proposed that the flag and two

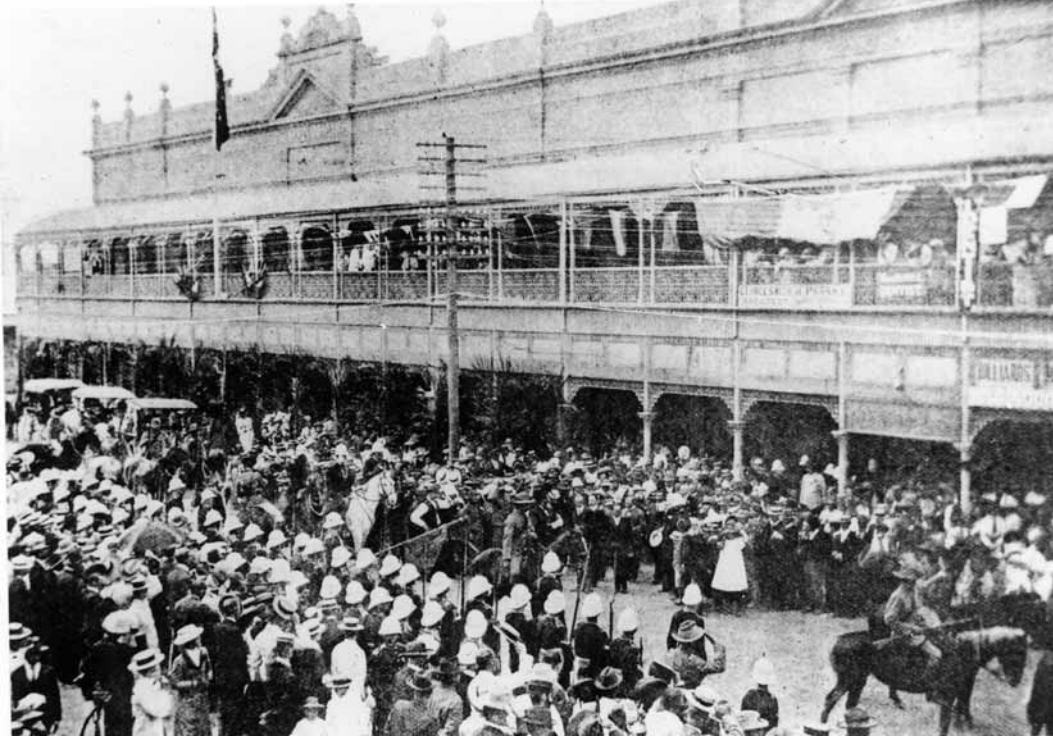


FIG. 4. Flag-raising ceremony in Townsville on 16 September 1901. The flag was flown from the new Municipal Chambers opened by Lord Hopetoun on the day. Soon afterwards, the flag was lowered to half-mast for President McKinley of the United States, who had died two days earlier at the hand of an assassin. (North Queensland Photographic Collection, James Cook University, Townsville)

framed photographs of Hopetoun's visit be donated to the Society.¹⁰

Missing from the correspondence are the Society's initial approach to McKenzie and McKenzie's response, the latter critical to the myth, as the Society's letter to Green of 29 June commenced:

I have been informed by Mr. William McKenzie of Townsville that the first flag of the Commonwealth was flown at Townsville, on 16th September, 1901, being unfurled by the first Governor-General, and that the flag is now in the possession of the Town Council.

(It might have been, however, that McKenzie and the Society's secretary spoke informally in Sydney as McKenzie's obituary states that 'since leaving the North he had divided his time between Sydney and Brisbane'.) This was the first occasion in official correspondence on which the expression 'first flag of the Commonwealth' was used. Was it McKenzie himself who claimed in 1922 that his flag was the one flown for the first time in 1901, or was the Secretary of the Society referring to the first flag

of the Commonwealth being the design current from 1901 to 1903? The latter is more likely, as McKenzie had inscribed the luff in September 1901 before presenting his flag to the Council. Indeed this is the semantic issue. McKenzie presented his flag as 'the first Commonwealth Flag', a replica he had made for the visit of 'the first Governor-General of Australasia'. There is no evidence whatsoever prior to this date, 1922, of an official claim that McKenzie's flag was the first occasion of the 'unfurling of the flag'.

The Society acknowledged 'receipt of the first Commonwealth flag which was hoisted in Townsville in 1901', which would be 'treated with respect and honour', on 22 August 1922. However the Secretary raised a curious question:

Will you kindly let me know how it happens that the large star has seven points? The original Commonwealth flag had but six points and the change to seven points came later.¹¹

The Town Clerk, H.C. Johnson, replied that he was unable to answer precisely as he had only

been appointed in 1910.¹² Strangely there was no mention about the number of points on the stars of the Southern Cross, whether or not they had been altered. As this was not raised it suggests they remained in McKenzie's original configuration. But if this was the case, and it was postulated many years later by another Town Clerk that it was most likely the Commonwealth Star was altered in 1909 to conform with the official gazetting of seven points,¹³ then why would not McKenzie, who presumably performed the work, have altered the stars of the Southern Cross at the same time? Or indeed had this already been done previously? The evidence is silent. And that seemed to conclude the matter; the question remained unanswered and McKenzie's flag was with the Royal Australian Historical Society, 'treated with respect and honour'. The expression 'first flag' was now in semantic limbo, unresolved and equally forgotten.

THE 1951 CELEBRATIONS: RECLAIMING THE ICON

Alan Sherriff, a young alderman elected to the City Council in 1949, was appointed Chairman of the Jubilee of Federation celebrations. One proposal advanced was a re-enactment of the Hopetoun ceremony, but the records were scant. Sherriff eventually discovered the whereabouts of McKenzie's flag and photographs. As he wrote several years later:

... the Town Clerk at the request of my Committee wrote to that Society on 27th March 1951, seeking their temporary return for our planned re-enactment. Initially the Society refused to grant our request 'owing to the dangers involved', but following support from the Commonwealth and State Jubilee Committees, they later reversed that decision to make the flag and photographs available to us. I seem to recall that they had eventually been located in a tea chest in the Society store room.¹⁴

Surviving correspondence verifies the accuracy of Sherriff's recollections. It also resurrects the 'first flag' issue. On 27 March 1951, the Town Clerk wrote to the Royal Australian Historical Society in the following terms:

The Local Committee set up for the purpose of Jubilee Celebrations desires to obtain as much information as possible relating to the first Australian Flag which was unfurled at Townsville by the Governor General on 16th September, 1901.

The Society's General Secretary, C. Price Conigrave, replied:

Receipt is acknowledged of your letter of March 27th last having reference to the first Australian flag unfurled at Townsville by the Governor-General on September 16th 1901.¹⁵

I have by direction to inform you that my Council regrets that it cannot accede to your request to return the flag in question owing to the dangers involved.

On 31 July 1951 however, Price Conigrave relented. As he wrote:

Reverting to our previous correspondence, I have to advise you, by direction of Council, that the first flag of the Commonwealth unfurled by the first Governor General on September 16, 1901, is being forwarded to you by registered post.

Unfortunately with the passage of the years the fabric of the flag is decaying, but nevertheless I have no doubt that it will form an important feature in your forthcoming celebrations in September.

To a further request for additional photographs of the original ceremony, beyond the two framed ones, the Society replied by telegram:

Regret despite diligent search all available Queensland papers covering period Mitchell Library elsewhere no trace illustrations covering unveiling ceremony.

TOWNSVILLE, 16 SEPTEMBER 1951

Townsville's Jubilee of Federation Committee spent nearly a year organising a range of commemorative activities, from the Australia Day program in Anzac Park with its strong military theme, to sporting events and tree planting at various schools. The flag-raising ceremony of 16 September was to be the culmination of the Committee's efforts (Fig. 5). In contrast to 1901 when the organisers had only a fortnight to arrange Hopetoun's welcome, the 1951 Committee had months and months. It was even debated at Council meetings. The Committee's enthusiasm was apparent from contemporary newspaper reports. The *Townsville Daily Bulletin* of 25 May reported angry words at the Council meeting over the Royal Australian Historical Society's initial refusal to return McKenzie's flag. Sherriff emotively exaggerated that 'the first Australian flag ever flown in the world was unfurled by Lord Hopetoun and flown over the Town Hall'. It was this meeting which resolved to strike a 'suitable memorial' to the Hopetoun ceremony, and subsequently commissioned the plaque which is today located in the City Mall.

Having decided on a flag-raising re-enactment after the return of 'the flag', the Committee had only two issues to resolve: who would perform the unfurling, and how much publicity for the city would the occasion generate? On the first, an approach was made to the Governor-General by letter on 17 August only thirty days prior to the event. A fortnight later the Town Clerk was advised: 'His Excellency wishes me to say he appreciates your Council's kind invitation but that, unfortunately, he will not be able to be in Townsville on the day in question, due to other



FIG. 5. Re-enactment ceremony in Townsville on 16 September 1951. (North Queensland Photographic Collection, James Cook University, Townsville)

engagements.’ With only days remaining the committee then invited 89-year-old William Morris Hughes, former Prime Minister and the sole remaining Federal politician from the 1901 elections. Hughes courteously telegraphed at 5.15pm on 11 September: ‘Regret unable attend ceremony 16th owing to prior engagement regards.’ With only a few days remaining it was agreed that the Deputy Mayor, Angus Smith,

would perform the unfurling. On the second issue, the Committee approached the Australian Broadcasting Commission, and Cinesound and Movietone News. All declined to come to Townsville to cover the event.

Sherriff’s committee arranged for the flag to be repaired in order that it could be flown on the day. This was performed at Clarrie Ede’s in South Townsville by Abby Kinging, a skilled craftsman

of Chinese descent. Watching on was a young apprentice, Raymond Campbell.¹⁶ This was at least the third overhaul of McKenzie's work, the first presumably in 1909, the second most likely in 1922 when repairs were made before it was sent south. When the crowd assembled in Flinders Street at 2.00 p.m. on Sunday 16 September 1951 the ceremony was re-enacted. As the local newspaper reported:

At the unfurling of the original flag, an RAAF Dakota, flying overhead, dipped in salute.

As the guard stood at the present and the original flag was broken at the mast head, there was applause from the crowd, which, according to the confessions of many, was accompanied by a thrill and gooseflesh.

As Townsville's own flag hung rather limply from the masthead, the Citizens Band struck up 'Advance Australia Fair'.¹⁷

Midway through the ceremony, which lasted only thirty minutes, Brigadier Frank North, Chairman of the Townsville and District Patriotic Fund, handed over a 'new silken Australian flag, which had been made for the fund in the early stages of World War II'. He said the trustees believed 'the banner should be held by the Townsville City Council and flown on all public occasions.' As Alderman Sherriff accepted North's flag the old McKenzie flag 'was quietly lowered'. The new flag was raised to the masthead while the band played the national anthem, 'God Save the King'. McKenzie's flag was subsequently returned to Sydney.

THE MYTH LIVES ON

A few vexillologists picked up on Townsville's Jubilee of Federation celebrations, one in particular was F.G. Phillips of 'Somersby', Chatswood, New South Wales. He made several enquiries of the Townsville Council and then communicated with the Prime Minister's Department in Canberra about McKenzie's flag. He wrote to the Town Clerk on 3 June 1952. Again this letter merits reproduction and is self explanatory:

I have examined carefully the Townsville Flag at the rooms of the Royal Australian Historical Society in Sydney and noted the repairs to which you referred in your note.

There is, however, a marked variation from the original approved design in that the Commonwealth Star is of seven points and the Stars of the Southern Cross are 7.7.7.7.5 points. This design was not authorised till 1908. (The latter aspect was gazetted in 1903.)

I quote now from a letter received from the Prime Minister's Dept and signed by the Acting Secretary 'Townsville Flag. As indicated in my letter of 6th May, 1952, my Department was not aware of the existence of the Townsville Flag and its history until the announcement of the jubilee of the unfurling of that flag.

Subsequent enquiries have revealed that it was presented by the manufacturer, Mr William Mackenzie[sic.], to the Mayor of Townsville in 1901. In this connection it is interesting to note the photostat of the covering letter from Mr Mackenzie which appeared in the Townsville 'Daily Bulletin' on 15th September, 1951. Some historical significance might attach to the fact that a flag was unfurled by the first Governor-General in Townsville, 1901. It seems to me however, that the view is inescapable that the flag in its present state cannot be regarded as having been flown on September 16th, 1901.

It may well be therefore that the unfurling of the Townsville flag, whilst in itself an event of some historical interest, bears scant relation to the history of the authentic Australian flag.¹⁸

In September 1963, Frank Cayley was researching a book entitled *Flag of Stars* subsequently published by Rigby of Adelaide.¹⁹ He condescendingly wrote to the Town Clerk in the following words:

Quite naturally I shall devote some space to the story of the very new Australian flag flown in Townsville on September 16, 1901.

Though a large flag (made in bunting to show the winning design) was flown on a staff over the Exhibition Building in Melbourne when the flag competition was judged, that does not in my opinion alter the fact that the first ceremonial unfurling of the Commonwealth flag was that occasion in Townsville.

The raising of the flag in Melbourne was done before the competition winners had been announced, and it would seem that the flag was left on the flagstaff during the days in which the exhibition was open to the public.

Rest assured I shall pay tribute to Townsville in my book. Notwithstanding a four page typed reply, outlining the correspondence in the Townsville City Council's records, the Town Clerk, Colin Campbell, was unable to be of assistance but proffered with certainty: 'The Townsville Flag is the original flag hoisted in the presence of the Governor-General of the Commonwealth, the Earl of Hopetoun, on 16 September, 1901. It has since been repaired'. This provokes the question: how much of the original McKenzie flag remained by 1963?

Cayley's assertion that Barton's raising of the flag occurred before competition winners had been announced 'does not in my opinion alter the fact that the first ceremonial unfurling of the Commonwealth flag was that occasion in Townsville' was nonsensical, both at the time and in retrospect. It was subsequently addressed by Carol Foley. She wrote:

...The Governor General would not have sanctioned the raising of the new flag at Townsville had he not been aware that the approval of the Imperial Government was only a matter of form.

She continued:

In short, he would not have allowed the national flag to be raised unless he knew that, in truth, it was our 'official'

flag. This may well be true, but against this argument is the fact that 'unofficial' flags had been flown at official functions in Australia and even in the presence of visiting royalty as was the Australian Federation Flag during the visit of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York for the opening of the first Federal Parliament as a matter of common practice.²⁰

This also is contentious: Barton's government did not commend the design to the Admiralty until November 1901; Hopetoun's words were 'this grand new flag', nothing more, nothing less.

DEMOLITION OF THE TOWN HALL

In 1977 the old Town Hall made way for Kern Corporation's Northtown development and the building of the City Mall. City architect Nigel Daniels subsequently sought direction 'in the matter' of the 'plaque commemorating the first raising of the Australian flag [which] was fixed near the door of the former Town Hall'. In time it was reset in concrete at the base of a flagpole adjacent the former entrance to the demolished building. A replica of the 1901-03 design, reflecting the flag McKenzie had manufactured, was commissioned by Kern Corporation and presented to the City Council. It is currently mounted on display in the Civic Administration Building.

ANOTHER SEARCH, 1995

The *Townsville Bulletin* in September 1995 published a feature on the anniversary of Hopetoun's visit and sought to bring 'home' McKenzie's flag. Unfortunately it depicted the ceremony with the wrong photograph, using the 1901 hoisting of the Federation Flag, taken at the corner of Flinders and Denham Streets. Notwithstanding its *faux pas*, which provoked two substantial letters to the editor by Alan Sherriff, the newspaper was able to confirm that the Royal Australian Historical Society had closed its Museum in the early 1980s, that its collections were handed over to the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences at Pyrmont (NSW): 'This museum later became the Powerhouse at Darling Harbour and in the caverns of its storage area the flag lies'.²¹ However subsequent efforts to re-locate the Townsville Council's bequest of 1922, which would be 'treated with respect and honour', proved fruitless. Only then a local citizen came forward.

Raymond Campbell, the apprentice who observed Abby Kinging repairing the frail, faded flag in 1951, had salvaged some small portions, about 10 x 8 centimetres, from the cutting-room floor. He contacted the Council and presented them to Mayor Tony Mooney. Recently these

fragments which had been framed (but on acidic board) were sent to the Queensland Museum, Brisbane for conservation and treatment. They were re-mounted and formed part of the exhibition, *Queensland 1901*. John Vaughan, eminent vexillologist and vexillographer, has speculated that, aside from Campbell's remnants, McKenzie's flag is probably lost forever. He suggests that the materials used in bunting at the turn of last century were not as resilient as modern day fabrics. The woollen fibres would rot after prolonged exposure to weather and time, lanolin and tannin leached. Even in 1951, McKenzie's re-constituted flag was described as a 'very faded blue'. The few remnants now with the Queensland Museum are the only material links with the 1901 flag-raising controversy, and irrelevant to the issue of 'the raising, for the first time in Australia, of the Commonwealth Flag' as the plaque is worded.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE, POST 1901

The three principal actors in the flag ceremony of 1901 were Hopetoun, Cameron and McKenzie, all Scots by birthright. Their subsequent fates add an element of tragedy to that special day in Townsville in the first year of the twentieth century.

After returning to Melbourne, Hopetoun grappled with two pieces of legislation, to which he assented but which troubled him. Both promoted 'White Australia'. First was that relating to Pacific Islanders in the sugar industry; second was the Immigration Restriction Bill. He would have preferred to send them to Whitehall for opinion, but gave way to local pressures. Another running sore was his expenses. Hosting the Duke and Duchess of York's visit had put him £25,000 out of pocket. When he requested an annual allowance of £8,000 over and above the vice-regal annual salary of £10,000, which was refused, and a token £10,000 was voted as compensation for the royal tour expenditure, Hopetoun asked to be recalled. Even before an official reply was received, he departed Australia from Brisbane on 17 July 1902. He had held office 'down under' for 563 days. Back in Britain, Hopetoun was appointed Secretary of State for Scotland, a sinecure for past services. By the winter of 1905-06, he was seriously ill. He died at a convalescent resort in France on 29 February 1908. His eldest son was offered the governor-generalship of Australia in 1935, but declined: Baron Gowrie came instead. The 8th

Earl of Hopetoun subsequently was appointed Viceroy of India (1936-43).

Murdo Cameron continued in local affairs when his annual term as Mayor expired. He served again in the office in 1905, his third stint. By 1908 ill health obliged him to transfer the Crown Hotel license to his wife's name. The veteran hotelier was buried in Townsville in 1918.

William McKenzie remained in business for several years, generously supporting his church and Sunday school as well as the British and Foreign Bible Society. If a highlight in his career was manufacturing 'the flag' and being introduced to Lord Hopetoun on 16 September 1901, there was to be a cruel irony in the date. Seventeen years later to the day, his wife of twenty seven years, Mary Ellen (nee Brown) passed away, aged only fifty one, and was interred at Belgian Gardens cemetery.²² In the early 1920s, McKenzie retired from business and moved to Brisbane where he had a brother living at Red Hill. He died on 14 February 1928, aged sixty nine, from arterio-sclerosis and cerebral thrombosis. The 'jolly flagman's' body was returned to Townsville; he was buried with his wife's remains three days later, survived by an only daughter Margaret Hunter Millett who was then thirty-five.

ENDNOTES

1. For Hopetoun's career, see Chris Cunnen's entry, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 9 (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1983); and Dorothy Jones, *Trinity Phoenix* (Cairns: Cairns & District Centenary Committee, 1976) for de-Moleyns, pp. 257, 365-66.
2. Reproduced in the *North Queensland Herald*, 7 September 1901.
3. C. Savile Gore to Mayor Murdo Cameron, 30 August 1901, Town Clerk's files, held at Administration Building, Townsville.
4. See *North Queensland Herald*, 7 September 1901 for the text of the Commissary's invitation.
5. See Murdo Cameron to C. Savile Esq., 4 September 1901, Town Clerk's files.
6. *The Queenslander*, 23 February 1928.
7. William McKenzie to the Mayor and Aldermen, 14 September 1901, Town Clerk's files.
8. Minutes of General Meeting, Townsville Municipal Council, 24 September 1901, held at Administration Building.
9. K.R. Camp, Hon. Secretary, Royal Australian Historical Society to Alderman W. H. Green, 29 June 1922, copy held in Town Clerk's files.
10. Minutes of General Meeting, Townsville City Council, 18 July 1922, held at Administration Building.
11. K.R. Camp to H.C. Johnson, 22 August 1922, Town Clerk's files.
12. Town Clerk to Hon. Secretary, Royal Historical Society, 28 August 1922.
13. See C. B. Campbell, Town Clerk, to Frank Caley, 6 December 1963, Town Clerk's files.
14. Alan Sherriff to the editor, *Townsville Bulletin*, 17 September 1995, copy held by School of Humanities, James Cook University, Townsville.
15. Correspondence relating to the 1951 Jubilee of Federation celebrations is contained in a hefty Town Clerk's file, J.1.
16. Oral information provided by the Ede family and Raymond Campbell, Townsville, February 2001.
17. *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 17 September 1951.
18. F.G. Phillips to Town Clerk, 3 June 1952, Town Clerk's file, J.1.
19. See Frank Cayley, *Flag of Stars* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1966).
20. Carol Foley, *The Australian Flag: Colonial Relic or Contemporary Icon* (Leichhardt: The Federation Press, 1996), p. 73.
21. See *Townsville Bulletin*, 16 September 1995.
22. Belgian Gardens Cemetery, Townsville, Grave 53, Section 1E (with headstone).

