

OLD BROOME: FIVE GREAT STORIES THAT BRING BROOME'S HISTORY TO LIFE

On 7 February 2007, the feature of our first meeting of the year was a showing of the DVD produced by the Broome Historical Society. The DVD features five stories of historical significance gathered from places of interest in the town, and is available from the Historical Society for \$25.00. The Broome Historical Society was able to produce this collection of stories with the aid of a grant from the WA Lotteries Commission (Lotterywest).

The first story features the area known as Winyirr Park. The park surrounds the town of Broome and is a very important area to the local indigenous people as it forms part of a song cycle. The meaning of Winyirr is "birthplace" or "creation place". The park includes the area from Willie Creek, north of Broome, the Broome peninsula area of town taking in Cable Beach, the Turf Club, Golf Course and extends east as far as Crab Creek. Young indigenous people are being trained as tourist guides for the walk trails through the various areas so that they can learn about their own heritage and to keep the knowledge for the coming generations. The segment included interviews with a number of Broome's indigenous residents.

The second story is about the Chinese stores (once known as Jap Town) situated between Carnarvon Street and the foreshore. Originally known for its Japanese residents, the precinct became known as Chinatown after Chinese migrants settled into the area and quickly became very successful business people. The stories were recounted by a number of the descendants of the original families who operated the stores and restaurants in Chinatown, and they were accompanied by historical photos and movie footage of Old Broome. At the outbreak of World War II many of the European population left Broome and moved south and the Asian population far outnumbered the Europeans until after the war when the pearling industry picked up again.

The Broome Court House is the third story. Built in 1889 as Cable House it was the first north west link to the rest of the world, the cable entering the ocean at Cable Beach. The building was pre-fabricated in Britain and shipped to Singapore and then to Broome. The labourers brought from Singapore had to drag the prefabricated sections across the mud flats to the building site where it was reassembled. It served as the Cable Station for 25 years before closing in 1914. The cast iron work was manufactured in Glasgow. The story of the building was told by a number of speakers including Kathy Watson JP, Antoine Bloeman (a court judge) and Tim Willing who was the gardener at one time and who also started the Botanical Society. Again there were historical photos together with more recent ones showing the damage done by cyclone Rosita in 1984. Also shown were the

Courthouse Markets. At the time of inception, when stalls were run by locals and the monies went back to the community groups, the event was the only one of its kind and the concept was adopted by a number of other towns.

The next story was about Streeters Jetty. Neil McKenzie, Doug Fong, Stephen Albert and others related stories of its history accompanied by old photos and film footage. Built in the 1890s to service the pearling industry, which, at its peak, had up to 400 luggers anchored offshore, the jetty accommodated numerous dinghies that took on water from the nearby fresh water wells and off-loaded pearl shell that went on trolleys to the sorting sheds. The Indigenous and Asian residents used the jetty for swimming and fishing as this was the only town area they could use for this purpose. World War II had a devastating impact on the pearling industry, which had to shut down, and many of the luggers were confiscated. The industry did not start again until the 1950s when new crews of Kopanger, Chinese and Japanese divers arrived to work.

The last story is about the Sun Picture Theatre. This theatre has been in operation since 1916 when it was built on the site of the old Japanese Emporium by Ted Hunter and introduced a new entertainment to the residents of Broome. With the screen situated outside in the gardens, it was a three sided structure made of corrugated iron with jarrah floorboards. The seating was segregated with the Europeans sitting in cane chairs with cushions and the Asian/Indigenous population seated in a separate section without the comfortable seating. In the 1980s, with the introduction of TV and VCR's, the picture theatre was forced to close and fell into neglect. More recently the theatre has been restored, taking three months to complete. Unfortunately the 45-year-old projector "died" but happily an exact match was found to replace it. The major problem now is that the theatre is under the flight path of the Broome airport and the sound is ruined by jets passing overhead! Once again the stories are told by descendents of the families involved and with the addition of old footage and photos it adds life to the history of Broome.

Susan Clarkson