

LOCAL HISTORY FEATURE



Paramount Theatre, 1930
Picture Bundaberg Collection: bun01218

PARAMOUNT THEATRE

The Paramount Theatre was situated on the northern side of Bourbong Street between Tantitha and Walla Streets and operated as a movie theatre from 1911 to 1965. The Theatre had several owners and incarnations but was owned from 1927-1965 by local identity, 'Mr Motion Pictures'¹, Doug Rattray.

Pre-Theatre

Before the land housed a theatre in any form, it was the site of the Church of England Rectory built in 1876 - the Church itself was in Quay Street at the time.^{2,3,4} (For more information on the Anglican Church in Bundaberg see *Arts Bundaberg* vol. 2 no. 1 (http://bundaberg.qld.gov.au/library/ab_vol_2.php).

By 1910 it was the site of an open-air skating rink built by Mr John Fleming, or a consortium including Mr Fleming, owner of the Bundaberg Gasworks.^{2,3}



Jubilee Picture Gardens

During 1910 sometime it was used as a movie theatre, as the *Bundaberg Daily News* on 17 August 1911 mentions:

*"The Jubilee Picture Gardens, so popular last year, will reopen on Saturday next under the direction of Mr. S. Fowler, the manager being the popular Roy R. Bosisto, who held the same position last year."*⁵

A full programme was planned for opening night on 19 August 1911, with at least 11 pictures to be shown, as well as a 'documentary' of the local sugar strike. The 'documentary' was filmed in Bundaberg and Childers especially for Fowler's Pictures.⁵

Birch and Carrol

In early November 1911 it was announced that the firm Birch and Carrol, who had been showing their pictures in the Queen's Theatre under the management of Mr R. Naumann, would no longer show pictures in this venue.

On Saturday 3 November bad weather meant the pictures couldn't be shown in the open-air Jubilee theatre, and tickets were given out by management for any performance during the upcoming week.⁶ On 6 November 1911 advertisements for the Jubilee Picture Gardens were still advertising 'Fowler's Pictures'.⁷

However, between 6 November and 15 November no mention of Jubilee or Fowler's was to be found in the *Daily News*. On 15 November 1911 there was an announcement that the "Jubilee Picture Gardens will be re-opened at an early date...", and also an advertisement informing that the theatre was under new management.⁸

Towards the end of November it was announced that Olympia Pictures which had previously been shown at the Queen's Theatre under the direction of Birch and Carrol, would now be shown at the Jubilee Gardens, still under the direction of Birch and Carrol:

*The management of the uniformly excellent Olympia Pictures...in the Queen's Theatre, have completed arrangements with the proprietors of the Jubilee Gardens to exhibit their programmes at this popular open-air entertainment resort..."*⁹

Marre and Turner - Jubilee to Paramount

Mr M. Marre (sometimes seen as Mr Maree in other sources) became manager of the venue in early 1918 and the lease of the

Jubilee Gardens was finalised by 23 March.¹⁰

In the *Bundaberg Mail* on Saturday 25 May 1918 under the heading "Paramount Pictures"

*Messrs Turner and Marre announce the opening of the Paramount Picture Palace, late Jubilee Gardens, on Tuesday evening next...*¹¹

The grand opening would take place on Tuesday 28 May 1918 and featured, among others, the picture "The Hostage" starring Wallace Reid - the first time that picture was shown in Queensland.¹²

Marre and Turner extensively refurbished the theatre and opened a couple of days before the finishing touches were added. The screen was situated at the northern end and terraces of seats and steps rose back towards Bourbong Street. More terraced seating was provided on either side of the theatre, and patrons could also choose to take advantage of seats on the concrete floor. All up the Paramount could hold around 3000 people.¹³ The orchestra (these were the days before 'talkies') was housed in an enclosure in the centre of the seating at the Bourbong Street end of the theatre.¹⁴



Interior of the Paramount Theatre while it was an open air cinema, 1926
Picture Bundaberg Collection: bun01219

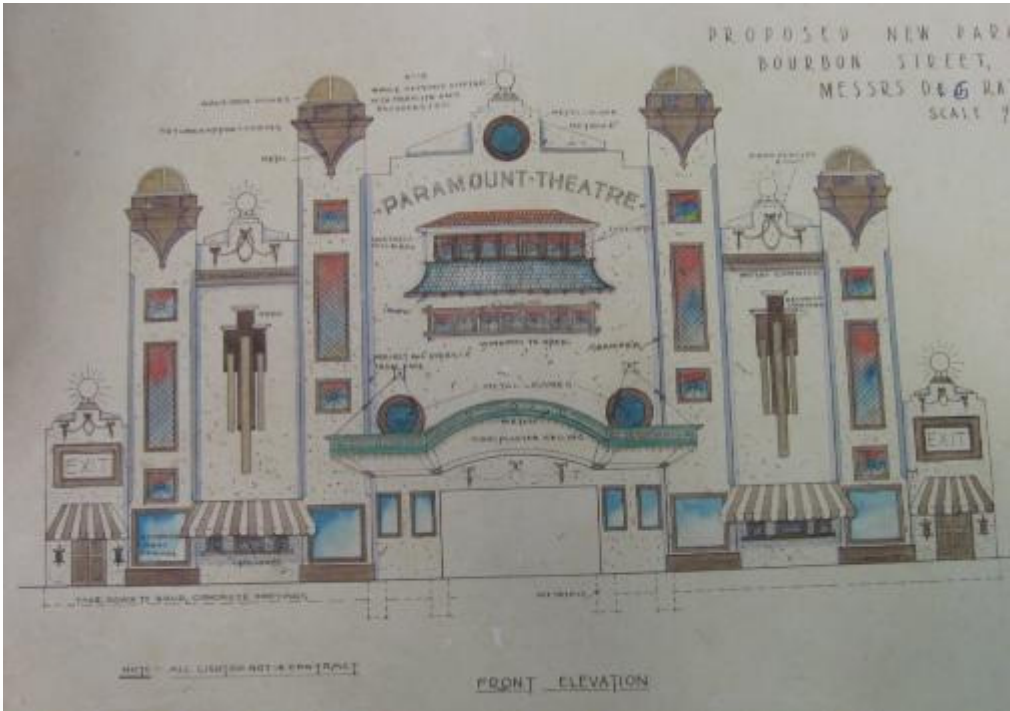




Doug Rattray - Paramount Theatre

Marre and Turner had sold the theatre to the Walters Bros - who had a cordial factory in Toonburra Street² - in late 1922.¹⁵ In 1926 Doug Rattray leased the theatre from Walters Bros, for whom he had worked in the operating box¹⁶, and in 1927 he purchased it outright.^{1,15} It then became the Paramount Theatre which Mr Rattray would enlarge and enclose with a roof.²

A Brisbane architect, Mr Claude E. Humphreys, was commissioned by Doug Rattray to design the new Paramount Theatre.¹⁶ Mr Humphreys designed it in an Eastern style in plans dated 14 November 1928.^{16,17} It would accommodate 2300 (or 3000 according to another source¹⁶) patrons and there would be no posts impeding the view of the movie-going public. It would also feature a lighting scheme unique in Queensland, a café downstairs and wide exits to "...enable the theatre to be emptied within three minutes...".¹⁸ At the time it was the largest theatre in the Southern hemisphere.¹⁶



Original plan of Claude E. Humphreys, showing the front façade of the Paramount Theatre
Picture Bundaberg Collection

The roof, which Mr Rattray himself constructed, would take 17-18 years to finish. This was also in part due to the introduction of 'talkies' not long after construction began. Readying the theatre for talking pictures involved a significant expenditure. The ceiling when it was in place had to be lined with special acoustic material.²

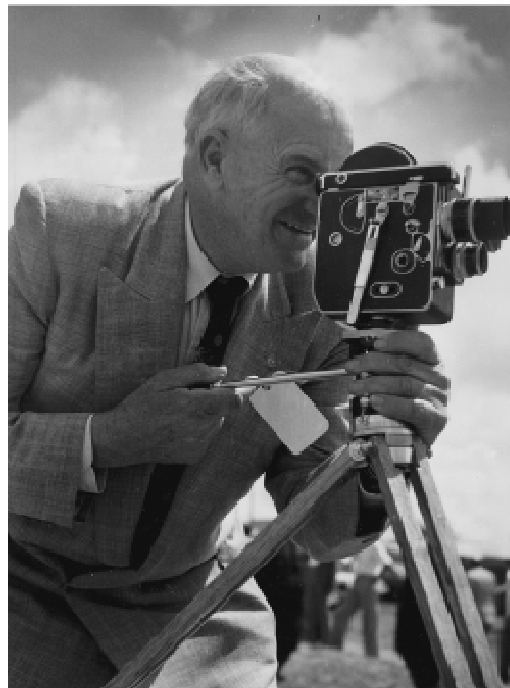
The first talkie shown at the Paramount Theatre was *The Vagabond Lover* starring Rudy Vallee.^{1,3} It was shown on 8 October 1930.^{3, 16}

Mr Rattray didn't just show movies at the Paramount Theatre. He also catered for many other events. He supplied roller skates and the theatre was sometimes used as a skating venue; a ring was set up to showcase boxing events; and the Paramount also played host to a session of "Amateur Hour", an Australia-wide radio programme.¹⁶

Mr Motion Pictures - Douglas Garland Rattray

Doug was born 15 May 1897.¹⁶ His hobby was photography, and later also movie making. He photographed many historic Bundaberg events including the Distillery fire and the Railway Picnics. Later he would film local events/scenes on his movie camera.¹⁶

He also enjoyed music and formed Rattray's Dance & Picture Orchestra. This orchestra played at balls and dances, and accompanied silent movies.¹⁶ Doug played the drums, xylophone, songbells, and double bass, while Johanne Elizabeth Stewart, his wife to be, played piano.¹⁶



Doug Rattray, 1955
Picture Bundaberg Collection: bun01182

For 18 years while he built the roof over the theatre Doug Rattray worked seven days a week. He would be carrying out construction work during the day and operating the movies at night.²

He served on the Bundaberg Ambulance Committee from 1939 to 1981 - as deputy chairman from 1952 and chairman from 1965. He served on Bundaberg City Council for 27 years and was Deputy Mayor from 1946-49 and from 1952-55.¹⁹

A distinguished Rotarian Doug Rattray was also made a Member of the Order of the British Empire in 1979. He was involved in many other service, sporting and hobby clubs in Bundaberg.¹⁹



Doug married Johanne on 31 October 1933 in St Andrew's Presbyterian Church. As befitting Mr Rattray's interests and profession,

A moving picture of the arrival and departure of the bridal party from the Church, and the large crowd was taken for screening at the Paramount Picture Theatre, of which the groom was manager. The staff of the theatre officiated as ushers.²⁰

He was known for his generosity and was remembered by many for not refusing entry to persons without tickets during the depression years.² Douglas Garland Rattray died 15 December 1982.¹⁹



Paramount Theatre, [no date], c1950s
Picture Bundaberg Collection: bun00406

End of an Era

The Paramount Theatre would show its last film on 30 October 1965.² Mr Rattray said that

...he regretted making the decision but felt he had reached the time of retirement.²

He was 68 years of age and had operated the Paramount Theatre for 40 years.^{2,19}

The Paramount was apparently dismantled around 1973³ and the land sold in March 1977¹⁵ to Austral Motors Holdings. The land became part of a used car yard¹⁵ and is today still used as a car sales yard, with Bundaberg Motor Group utilising the land which once housed this historic building.

Peta Browne Bundaberg Library

Man in goat-drawn cart distributing
flyers for *The Big Parade* showing at the
Paramount Theatre in 1925

Picture Bundaberg Collection: bun01046



References:

- ¹ Gammon, Sue. 'Doug Rattray', *Arts Bundaberg* vol. 4 no. 2 2007-2008, http://bundaberg.qld.gov.au/library/ab_vol_4.php.
- ² *Bundaberg News Mail*, Sat 30 Oct 1965, p3.
- ³ Cullen, Enid (comp.). 2000. *Bundaberg Institutes - 'The History of Bundaberg Theatres, Book 2 of 10'*.
- ⁴ Henry, Oswald (ed). *100 Years of Service and Witness, 1878-1978 - Parish of Christ Church, Bundaberg*.
- ⁵ *Bundaberg Daily News*, Thu 17 Aug 1911, p3.
- ⁶ *Bundaberg Mail*, Fri 3 Nov 1911, p3.
- ⁷ *Bundaberg Daily News*, Mon 6 Nov 1911, pp3-4.
- ⁸ *Bundaberg Daily News*, Wed 15 Nov 1911, pp3-4.
- ⁹ *Bundaberg Daily News*, Sat 25 Nov 1911, p5.
- ¹⁰ *Bundaberg Mail*, Sat 23 Mar 1918, p2.
- ¹¹ *Bundaberg Mail*, Sat 25 May 1918, p2.
- ¹² *Bundaberg Mail*, Mon 27 May 1918, p2.
- ¹³ *Bundaberg Mail*, Tue 28 May 1918, p2.
- ¹⁴ *Bundaberg Mail*, Wed 29 May 1918, p2.
- ¹⁵ Rackemann, Neville. 1992. *Bundaberg: from pioneers to prosperity*, Bundaberg City Council.
- ¹⁶ Covey, Joy. *Life and Times of Douglas Garland Rattray*. (notes donated to Bundaberg Regional Library Service, c2008; Joy Covey is a niece of Doug Rattray).
- ¹⁷ Original plans of the new paramount theatre by Claude E. Humphreys AQIA, T & G Building Brisbane, 14 November 1928. (Donated to Bundaberg Regional Library Service by Joy Covey).
- ¹⁸ *The Brisbane Courier*, Tue 12 Feb 1929, p9. (<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/home>).
- ¹⁹ *Bundaberg News Mail*, Thu 16 Dec 1982, p2.
- ²⁰ *Bundaberg Daily News & Mail*, Tue 31 Oct 1933, p4.

