

Comet Tales & Walking Trails



COMET RIVER HOTEL 1911

SITE 11

A NEW HOTEL

With the demise of the original Comet Hotel in 1903, Frederick Flood Carrington and Henry McKinlay saw a need for a new hotel in the town. Transfer of the land from the Union trustee Company of Australia, comprising of four allotments to Frederick Flood Carrington took place on the 22nd February 1911. A timber building was constructed on the same site of the old 1877 Comet Hotel. A butcher shop was constructed beside the hotel building. The hotel area covered four town allotments.

The Capricornian newspaper reported that Henry McKinlay applied for a hotel licence on the 15th April 1911.

In 1914, Frederick Flood Carrington built and operated a grocery store on the opposite corner across Adams Street.

In March 1919, Henry McKinlay was injured as a result of an accidental shooting. He spent a considerable amount of time in the Rockhampton Hospital and left the running of the hotel to Frederick Carrington.

The Morning Bulletin dated 17th December 1920, states that James Christopher Hall of the Coronation Hotel, Rockhampton, applied to have his Victualler's License transferred to Henry McKinlay. It would appear that Henry upon recovery, went into business in Rockhampton.

The next owner of the Comet hotel was James Alexander Black Parker who purchased the hotel on the 26th August 1921.

A COUNTRY HOTEL

An excerpt from “Home Sweet Hotel”(1926. page24) by Jessica Inga Bloxsom, tells us that “the original building had verandas all round with a detached kitchen. At the rear of the hotel were various storerooms, a laundry, shower room for men, and lavatories. Guests’ sulkies were housed in a shed in the yard. The washing was hung to dry on the long clothes lines in the large yard. Forked poles propped the lines up in the air, so the washing didn’t have contact with the ground. Rain replenished several water tanks around the building”.

Former residents tell of a well at the back of the building. It is not known whether this well was sunk by the new owners or if it was already there before they built the new hotel. I do know, however that there was a bore at the rear of the hotel on allotment No 3 bordering Shakespeare Street. The hotel was situated on allotment No 2.



COMET HOTEL 1950 (BUILT 1911)

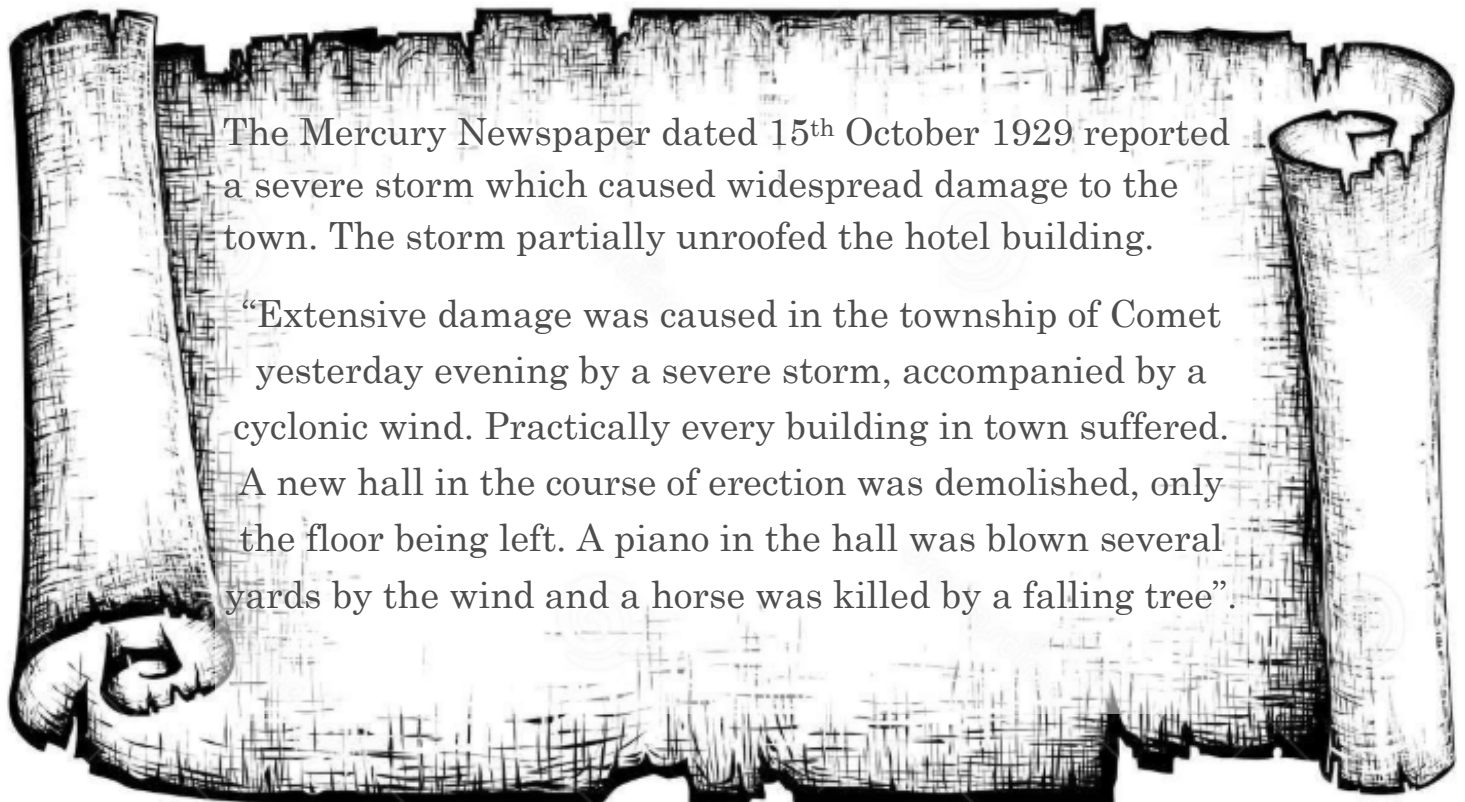
FINANCIAL PROBLEMS

In 1925 the Comet hotel was leased Patrick Joseph Ryan.

On the 1st February 1929, the hotel was leased to Ernest Fawkes. However, he had financial difficulties and the lease was taken over by Lamberton and Co. This company also had financial difficulties and went into receivership.

The hotel was still owned by J A B Parker, but the Lamberton affair took several years to wind up. However, there were several licensees keeping the hotel operating; these were Lilian Christie, Ethel Righetti, Jean Duke and Emma Murphy.

H0TEL BUILDING DAMAGED IN SEVERE STORM



In the past the Comet schoolteacher was housed at the hotel until a single man's residence was built on the school reserve; and later a house for a married teacher.




JAMES TAKES OVER

James Alexander Black Parker took over running the hotel again on the 26th January 1935. That year saw the hotel unroofed once again in a severe storm.

Unfortunately, James became unwell and died on 1st August 1943 after a long illness. He was laid to rest in the Comet Cemetery. His wife Florence became the new owner of the Comet Hotel.

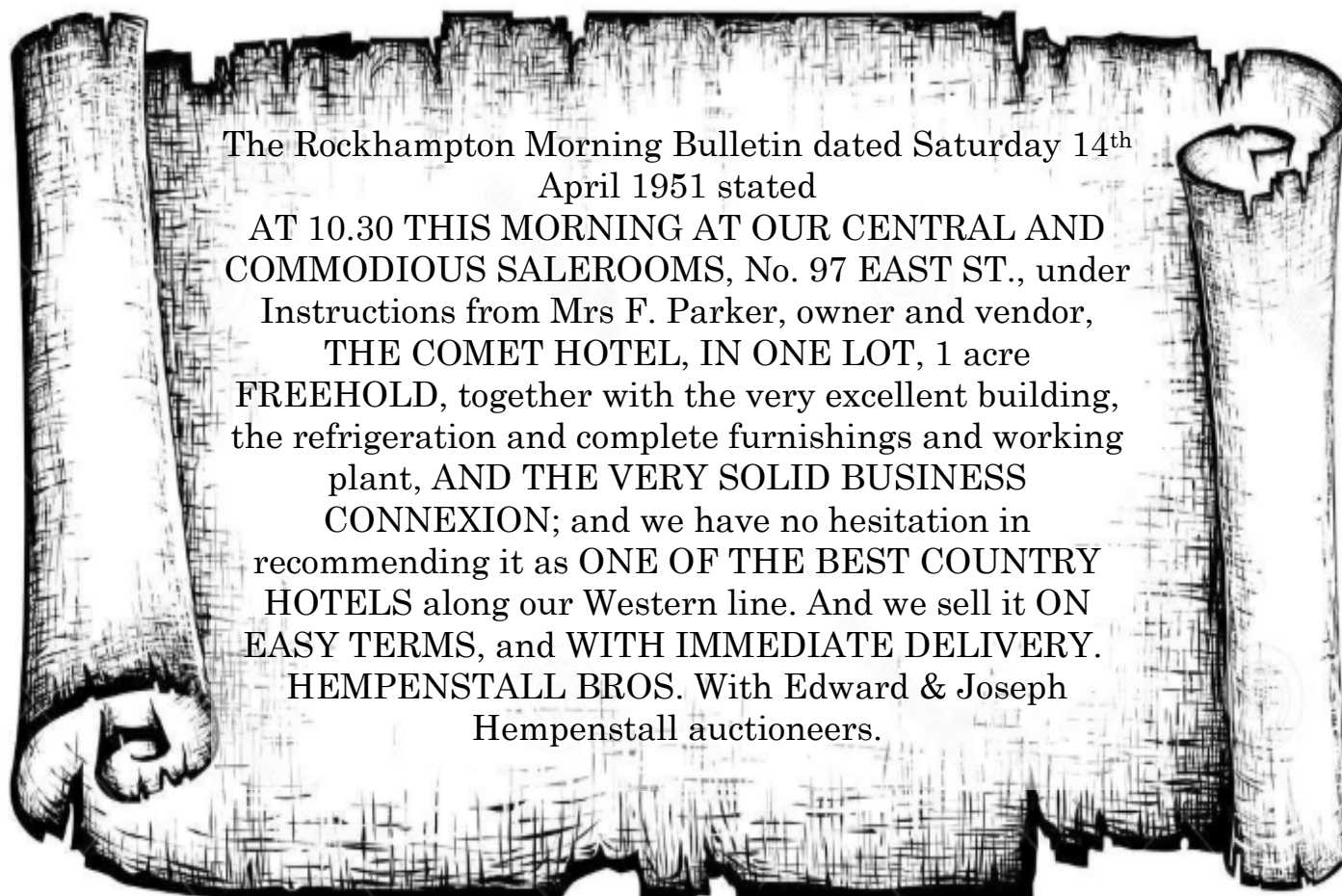
It was wartime, and apparently Mrs Parker was having a difficult time. Previously, she had advertised the hotel for sale, as this advertisement appeared in the newspaper.



The Rockhampton Morning Bulletin reported on
Wednesday 24th January 1951 that:
I WITHDRAW sale of Comet Hotel, Comet,
from all Agents hands.

However, the hotel was again advertised -

SALE OF THE COMET HOTEL



The Rockhampton Morning Bulletin dated Saturday 14th
April 1951 stated

AT 10.30 THIS MORNING AT OUR CENTRAL AND
COMMODIOUS SALEROOMS, No. 97 EAST ST., under

Instructions from Mrs F. Parker, owner and vendor,

THE COMET HOTEL, IN ONE LOT, 1 acre

FREEHOLD, together with the very excellent building,
the refrigeration and complete furnishings and working

plant, AND THE VERY SOLID BUSINESS

CONNEXION; and we have no hesitation in

recommending it as ONE OF THE BEST COUNTRY

HOTELS along our Western line. And we sell it ON

EASY TERMS, and WITH IMMEDIATE DELIVERY.

HEMPENSTALL BROS. With Edward & Joseph

Hempenstall auctioneers.

After the sale of the hotel, Mrs Parker left Comet to live in Rockhampton. The family having owned the hotel for thirty years.

A NEW OWNER

William James Guley and Mervyn Charles Guley purchased the Comet hotel in October 1951 from Mrs Parker before selling it to Richard Henry Newman in October 1954.

The Comet hotel was then sold to Victor Charles Eyles and Alice Maud Eyles on 5th July 1957. The family, with their son Mason, resided in Comet for some ten years. Mason recalls that the hotel supplied electricity to the Comet Community Hall for night functions. The development of the Utah Coal mine at Blackwater in 1970 brought power to the Central Highlands with Comet being connected to the electricity grid.

SWAMPER - A STORY OF A PODDY CALF

Mason Eyles told me the story of the red poddy calf which had been given to him by Des Jeppesen of Olive Vale, a property some 8 km from town. The calf's mother had died, and I guess Des gave the calf away as it was better than putting it down.

The year was about 1959 and Mason's parents Victor and Alice owned the Comet Hotel at that time. The calf was fed on calf formula. The milk was put into a bottle with a hose attached to the neck of the bottle and the calf would drink from the hose. Mason called her Swamper because of the way she slurped up the milk from the feeding bottle. When the calf wanted milk, she would come to the side verandah stairs and bellow into the upstairs kitchen window.

Mason said that because the calf had been fed with its head up it would eat the leaves off the trees, but grass was "down there and we don't – or wouldn't touch that". However, eventually she learned to eat grass.

The calf thrived, and Mason tells me he would play hide and seek in the long grass at the back of the hotel. Hiding from the calf and calling out, "Swamper", the calf would eagerly seek him out.

The washing hanging on the long clothes lines at rear of the hotel was an attraction. The calf would suck and chew on the wet sheets leaving holes in the material.



Swamper would also wander into the downstairs ground level concreted area seeking company and when discovered would be put outside again. Mason also told me that the calf was “boisterous especially when Dad would push on her head with his hands. To her it was like getting a head butt and she would kick her hind legs out and jump around”. I imagine by this time she was getting into lots of mischief and becoming somewhat of a menace.

It was time to wean the growing heifer and Mason’s father, approached my husband Alan asking if she could be put in the paddock with his cattle. Alan said “yes”, and it was agreed that every second calf she had would be Alan’s.

Swamper did very well and produced a lovely calf every year. Then the big drought of 1969 hit, and Alan had to sell off cattle. Unfortunately, Swamper was one of those that had to go. This drought had an horrific impact on the country.

Mason told me that the money saved from the sale of Swamper’s yearling calves helped to buy the house he lives in today.

A NEW OWNER

MRS JANE EDWARDS

Jane Edwards bought the hotel from Victor and Alice Eyles on 26th April 1967. Jane was an avid gardener and certainly had a green thumb. Later, she bought the Comet Store and a small property on the Lurline Road, at Comet, where she ran cattle. Sometime later she purchased a block of land on the corner of Ballard and Corio Streets (on the site of the old 1878 North Australian Hotel), where she built a new store and caravan park.



ON A LIGHTER NOTE

A railway worker, Barry Hickson, was quite a character in the town and I'm told that he put up signs on the highway saying, "Die in comfort at the Comet Hotel". Barry was also responsible for the original "Boot Hill" at Yamala. This was a mound of soil displaying every type of footwear imaginable.

In 1972, Nicolas and Ann Kotzas took over the hotel. They became involved with the sporting events in town. The annual foot and horse sports and Melbourne Cup race day. These events were held on the Comet Railway reserve behind the railway station. However, the races discontinued when the Australian Wheat Board (GrainCorp) built a grain receiving shed on a portion of the racetrack.

The next owner was Norman James Reid in 1975, who along with his family contributed to the Comet community. He was followed by many more owners and licensees including Comet identities, Reg and Jan Hanrahan. A list is printed at the end of the story.

CHANGE OF NAME

Although known as the Comet Hotel for many years, it had a change of name in 2000 and is now known as the Comet River Hotel.

There have been quite a number of changes in the structure of the building over time with the numerous bedrooms disappearing, making way for a larger dining room, bar area and a modern kitchen at the rear.



THE BUCK'S PARTY

This story of a buck's party was told to me by Russell and Jan Catip, who managed the Comet Hotel from 2003 until 2005. They were a very welcoming couple and lots of folk stopped at the hotel for a cool drink and a good meal.

An Emerald group, somewhere about fifteen or so young men, asked if they might hold a buck's night at the hotel. It was agreed to and the participants arrived in good form having driven their cars from Emerald.

In the dining room of the hotel, there were quite a few locals and visitors enjoying their meal and a quiet friendly night out.

Now things were going ok until the young men introduced a "shady lady" to the party and Mrs Catip decided that there would be none of "that" in her hotel. So, the "lady" was moved to a room of the rear of the building and the young men were told to get on with their celebrating.

The boys being fairly stoked by this time, had decided that having their "shady lady" locked away was simply not cricket. That's when the fights broke out. I guess they had to have some entertainment.

The folk enjoying their quiet meal thought that the fracas was a special show put on for their entertainment and sat and watched blokes being hurled across the floor and off the verandah. The cook even joined in the melee and did her share of clearing the floor of intoxicated revellers.

Things were getting out of hand, so the police were called to sort out the rabble. However, when they got there, they found that all the participants were over the limit. What to do. As the constabulary did not want to remain there all night, they decided to let the least affected drive their cars, taking the young men back to Emerald. However, the drivers were to park their vehicles in the main street and go home on foot. The police having followed the cars back to town.

Russell declared that this was the first and last time that there would be a buck's party held in the Comet Hotel, regardless of the fact that the locals had thoroughly enjoyed the free entertainment.

OWNERS AND LICENCEES

The building has had numerous colourful owners, managers and licensees over the years who have provided food, drink and entertainment to Comet residents and travellers.

I apologise for any errors or omissions which may appear in the list below.

Frederick flood Carrington, 22nd. February 1911.

H Henry McKinley applied for a hotel license on the 15th April 1911.

The Morning bulletin, dated 1st May 1913, reported that Alexander McKinlay was the licensee of the Comet Hotel.

Frederick Flood Carrington 1919

James Alexander Black Parker 1921.

Patrick Joseph Ryan 1925 leased from James Alexander Black Parker
Lamberton and Co. Ernest Fawkes

Lillian Christie 1929

Ethel Righetti

Jean Duke

Emma Murphy

James Alexander Black Parker 1935

Florence Parker 1943

Charles Bloxsom 1946

William James Guley and Mervyn Charles Guley 1951

Richard Henry Newman 1954

Victor and Alice Eyles 1957

Jane Edwards 1967

Nickolas and Ann Kotzas 1973

Norman Reid 1975

Reginald and Jan Hanrahan 1979

John Rhodes and Dell Peters 1981

Ray Anderson and Tony Harvey 1992

Bruce Currie 2year lease from Ray Anderson

Christine Molloy 1992

Paul James Kelly, tenant in common with Spicer Rai Briggs 2003

Paul James Kelly tenant in common with

Russell Phillip Catip and Jan Vaughan Catip 2004 – 2005

Paul James Kelly, 2.06.2005

Dannielle Rosemary Hutton trading as Nancini Pty Ltd. 25.02.2008



LADY COMET

She's entertained more gentlemen
Then any girl could boast
Some rich, some poor, some saddle sore
From Longreach to the coast

She's been their warmth in winter
And their shade in summer heat
And provided food and shelter
And a place for men to meet

Where they'd have their full of amber
And exchange a yarn or two
Of times of old or finding gold
Or someone that they knew

And how I'd love to hear the tales
That this old girl could tell
But the poor old Comet Pub can't talk
And I guess its just as well

I would like to thank everyone who contributed with information to bring this website together.

Compiled by Rosemary McLeod, 2018.

Acknowledgements:

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Photos:

National Library of Australia; State Library of Queensland; Rosemary McLeod collection; Trevor Kemp collection; Fred Carrington collection.