

Workers' dwellings

**In the past the simple worker's dwelling
was the basic house for most of the
workers in Townsville**



Tent house on The Strand, about 1866

Townsville was the main port and transport centre, of north Queensland, as well as the major industrial and administrative centre.

Before the age of mechanisation, many more labourers were required to 'lump' [=carry] cargo on the wharves than are now required. Hundreds of men were employed as labourers to build the early railways and the harbour works. Road building and repair required very large gangs of men. Others worked as labourers and clerks in warehouses and shops, as cooks and servants in hotels, restaurants and private houses, in meatworks, foundries, breweries, soap works, tanneries, shipbuilding yards, and in the building, transport and service industries.

So most of the men in Townsville in the 19th and early 20th centuries were labourers.

The earliest workers' houses

At first, when Townsville was founded in 1864, many of the workers lived in tents. Some, though, lived in small houses we now call workers' dwellings or workers' cottages. If they were on the old goldfields, they were called miners' cottages.

The earliest cottages had only one room. They were built directly on the ground, with wide horizontal boards on the outside, covering a timber frame. Roofs were of corrugated iron or bark. They had no verandahs. A central door was flanked with sash (push up) windows.

Some cottages had brick or rough stone fireplaces for cooking at one end. Others had no internal cooking facilities. Meals were cooked in the



Early worker's dwelling, North Ward, about 1870.



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A larger worker's dwelling designed by the architect W. H. Tunbridge, about 1890.

back yard, either over an open fire using a kettle, a skillet or frying pan, all of which were suspended above the flames, or in a Dutch oven, which was placed in the fire and covered with the hot coals.

By the early 1870s it was usual to raise workers' dwellings on low blocks or stumps of bush timber or brick. They still consisted mainly of a single room, but a front verandah and an enclosed rear skillion were added — and sometimes a detached kitchen. The roof was a simple gable shape, of iron or wooden shingles. By this time, larger two-roomed versions were appearing, the rooms divided by a narrow passage from front to rear

The second house on the left is the Worker's Dwelling on its original site in Carter St, North Ward, about 1887.



doors.

Workers' cottages were also built with four rooms. They are recognisable by their pyramid shaped roofs. In other details they resembled earlier forms, with front verandah, rear enclosed skillion (or sometimes a rear verandah), and a detached kitchen. They were also on low blocks and had sash windows.

All were of timber, but by the 1870s they were built mostly with the exposed framing technique, that is with the timber framing on the outside and the horizontal sheeting boards on the inside (see Sheet 8, Timber houses in Townsville).

The Heritage Centre worker's dwelling

The Worker's Dwelling at the Heritage Centre is a typical example of the simplest form.

It is set on low brick stumps with a 'tin' (actually corrugated iron) gable roof. The timber framing is exposed on the outside with the horizontal sheeting on the inside. The openings are filled with multiple-paned sash windows. The front door is in the centre of the front wall, exactly opposite the back door.

Originally the house had only one main room, with a verandah at the front. The rear skillion may originally have been an open verandah, but this is not necessarily so, as many of these tiny houses were actually built with an enclosed skillion at the rear of the main room.

The dividing wall in the main room was probably added about 1900. In the 1880s this house had a detached kitchen, but it disappeared long ago, perhaps blown away in a cyclone.

Mrs Irving



Captain Tutty and Mrs Tutty



Originally the cottage stood in Carter Street, North Ward. It was built in the early 1880s for Mrs Teresa Irving. She opened Townsville's first primary school in 1866 in a house that once stood in east Flinders Street, near the site of the present Hog's Breath restaurant. It was a private school. (The first state school did not open until 1869.) Among her pupils were children from the earliest families to arrive in Townsville — Hodels, Gordons, Fryers, and others.

Mrs Irving did not live in the house herself; it was rented. The earliest tenants are unknown, but we do know about a prominent later tenant — Captain William Tutty.



The Worker's Dwelling at the National Trust Heritage Centre

Captain and Mrs Tutty

Captain Tutty and his wife moved into the cottage in the 1890s. Tutty was later the master of the Townsville Harbour Board tug *Alert* (see Sheet 6, Captain Tutty and the Port of Townsville).

He purchased the house in 1905 and lived there until 1932. He was very well known in the seafaring world, and was one of the organisers of the search for the coastal passenger vessel *Yongala*, which disappeared off Cape Bowling Green in 1911.

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So the history of the house not only shows us how workers and their families lived, but it also tells us a little of the story of the first school in the city, and about some of the history of the harbour.

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The house was to be demolished in 1977. Knowing it to be one of the oldest houses remaining in Townsville, the Townsville/NQ Branch of National Trust of Queensland made determined efforts to preserve it on its original site. All failed, so the Branch in desperation removed it to the Castling Street Heritage Centre in 1978.