

CHASER OF FAR HORIZONS



Coming to Australia as a boy in 1844, John Atherton pioneered with cattle in many parts before finally settling on the Atherton Tableland.

INLAND from Cairns 86 years ago, bullock-waggons of pioneer settler John Atherton struggled over rough terrain and through dense jungle on to the tableland which now bears his name.

When Atherton died some 35 years later, towns had grown from rich mineral deposits he found and farms and orchards prospered on deep, volcanic soil where once marauding natives gorged on speared cattle.

Atherton was a boy of seven when he arrived in Port Jackson in 1844 with his farming family from Lanca-

shire. They had come to try their luck in N.S.W. They made their way to Armidale, miles north of Sydney, and settled on the sheep property, Bald Blair.

As a young man, Atherton heard reports of even better pastures being opened in Queensland. The reports appealed to his youthful imagination and drive—qualities he never lost—and at the age of 20 he and his elder brother James moved north with sheep in search of new fields. Months of travelling took them to the Rockhampton district, where they set up Rosewood station. The rest of the family followed, carting possessions in three bullock-waggons and driving 2,000 head of cattle.

This was the first of many moves Atherton was to make in search of ideal pastures. Always the path led north. His marriage at 25 to Catherine Grainger, daughter of a police inspector, did not deter him from his questing for she was the right mate for a venturesome man.

In the early seventies, Atherton absorbed the reports of explorer James Mulligan after he had completed one of several expeditions he made in the southern portion of Cape York Peninsula. When diggers rushed the gold-bearing district of the Palmer River, which Mulligan had discovered, Atherton went along too to assess the stock-bearing capabilities of the country for himself. He went with cattle, for diggers must eat. Though he always tested the sands of any creek by which he camped, minerals were a secondary interest to him.

As a result of the Palmer River trip Atherton became interested in the Upper Burdekin district. However, he eventually decided against it and established a property, Basalt Downs, on the Herbert River. Then, in 1876, there was another goldrush, this time to the Hodgkinson River, south of the Palmer. A town began to take shape and soon, with thousands of meat-hungry men, a steady market was assured for the stock of any settler within reasonable distance.

Basalt Downs was sold, and the Athertons moved for the last time. The cattle were driven by Atherton and his two eldest sons, Edmund, 15, and William, 11. Catherine, driving a buggy, led two bullock waggons loaded with goods and five younger children.

Slowly the party went north along the Wild River over the Herberton Range. Aggressive natives barred the way, but drawing the vehicles closer and guarding the cattle, Atherton and

Moving ever further north in quest of new pastures he eventually found the tableland now named after him

his two young sons fought them off.

The second major barrier was Atherton scrub—impenetrable jungle around which they had to find a way. They found one at the foot of the Walsh Bluff Range, and then turned east to the Barron River.

Long weeks of hardship had brought them to a place of well-grassed river-flats and open forest, with a wealth of giant walnut trees, cedars, pine and several other valuable timbers.

Crossing to the east bank of the Barron, the Athertons pitched camp near the junction with Emerald Creek. There at long last, the wanderer stayed. He was 41.

The property, which he named Emerald End, consisted of five parts which together made up 170 square miles. Its focal point was the solid homestead Atherton built where he first camped. Of sawn cedar and logs, with a large chimney of bricks made from ant-bed clay and kitchen quarters of stone slabs and mud bricks, it withstood the cyclone which came soon afterwards and flattened year-old Cairns. Apart from galvanised iron, which has replaced the original shingled roof, the house still stands as Atherton built it with the help of Chinese labour.

The family needed its protection, for the natives were dangerous. Atherton was often away working stock and in his absence Catherine and the children slept in one room with firearms, and the windows tightly shuttered. Many a sleepless night she spent, rifle in hand, listening tensely to the small sounds of prowling natives stealthily, but vainly trying to find a way in. Atherton had built well.

He himself was forced to constant vigilance when he had cattle in the Barron and Clohsey valleys, for the native threat was always present. His cattle were speared at a rate of one a day, which was more than he could afford, and for that reason Emerald End at first did not prosper.

Alert as he was, the natives almost killed him one morning. Unsuspectingly he rode into an ambush. Spurring his mount and drawing a pistol he raced a hail of flying spears from the suddenly yelling mob. Not until too late did he see a stone axe spinning toward him. It struck him with a stunning blow, wounding him in the head. Dazed, and blinded by blood, Atherton fought the natives off. He carried the scar of this wound for the rest of his life.

Shortly after he had settled at Emerald End, Atherton discovered



Impenetrable rain forests forced Atherton to make lengthy detours on his way to the tableland named after him. He made the journey with bullock waggons.

August 11th 1957.
Cut & hits by Green, & now reads jerkily.

● TODAY'S GENERATION, WHICH OWES HIM SO MUCH, PREPARES TO HONOR THE MEMORY AND THE DEEDS OF

Founder of Mareeba.

John Atherton, Pioneer And Nation Builder

When a memorial to the late Mr. John Atherton, Australian pioneer and founder of Mareeba is unveiled at the old Granite creek crossing next Saturday, the plaque will be very suitably attached to a large granite block.

Famous in his own lifetime as an experienced bushman and overlander, John Atherton, who usually attired himself in turkey-red twill shirts, left behind him a name for courage and unflinching good humor.

(Specially written for The Sunday Australian)

By L. A.

● ONE of nine children, John Atherton landed in Sydney with his parents in 1844.

His father, Edmund Atherton, came from Lancashire, where he was a successful farmer.

They prospered, too, in the new land.

The year 1860 saw Edmund Atherton the owner of some farms and a station named "Bald Blair," near Armidale.

in Game 1867,
James and John Atherton drove sheep to the newly discovered Fitzroy country, following in the steps of the Archers.

The Athertons stayed with the Archers at what was known then as "The Cattle Station," about 15 miles from Rockhampton.

After spending nearly 12 months at what is still known as "Athertons Camp," the brothers then took up Rosewood.

ANSWERED THE CALL OF THE NORTH

● THEIR father travelled north to see how they were doing.

Liking the country so much, he sold his interests in the New England district in 1869 and came overland with 2000 head of cattle.

He took up Mount Headloo (now known as Headlow) in the Yeppoon district.

The journey extended over four months, *and*

There were very dry stages. Three bullock and one horse teams were required to transport the family, in addition to riding and pack horses.

The father died in 1863, but the family kept on at Mount Headloo.

They branched out, forming new stations in many localities. Among these were West Hill, Plane Creek, Cliftonville, Woodnon, Kelvin Grove, Belmore, Pretty Bend, Leyton and Bamoyea in the Mackay and Bowen districts, Midlothian in the Gulf and, more familiar to northerners, Cashmere, Emerald End, Chillagoe and Nyeuchum.

THE PATHWAY OF THE PIONEER

● JOHN ATHERTON and his brothers were foundation settlers and were the first to find a route to the coast and build a holiday home at what is now thriving Yeppoon.

The descendants of Edmund and his six sons are numerous. All have played their part in the development of Queensland.

John Atherton made many droving trips, *and*

We hear of him in Townsville in 1873.

Sir Robert Philp, when relating his memoirs, mentions meeting John Atherton as he was setting out in his search for land in the Cook district.

Atherton made his purchases at Philp's store.

He was loading them into a dray, when some bullocks bolted down the street, causing considerable havoc.

Philp mentions visiting Emerald End many years later.

But Cashmere was the first northern home of the family.

John took up land there before returning home to get together a few thousand head to stock that property.

He travelled north with his sons Edmund and William, who were boys at the time.

The head of the Burdekin watershed was reached in 1875.

NOBLE EFFORTS OF EARLY-DAY WOMEN

● WHEN Mrs. Atherton and the household arrived in Townsville by boat, they were delayed by the illness of one of the children.

Thus caught by the wet season, they were camped on the Sea View Range for over a month.

Cashmere was soon sold to William McDowell, *and*

The family continued its migration north.

Mrs. Atherton gave birth to

her second daughter—now Mrs. Harte, of Mareeba—while on a visit to Mount Headlow in 1869.

The endurance of such pioneer women is astonishing.

Their capacity to settle into harsh surroundings without losing anything of their graciousness and refinement is worthy of our admiration.

Catherine Atherton was the daughter of Captain Grainger, for many years Superintendent of Police in Belfast.

Married in 1862, she was the mother of nine children, and died in 1902

THE EMERALD END CHAPTER OPENS

JOHN ATHERTON took up new country in 1876.

The following year he began building his homestead at Emerald End on the banks of the Barron River.

John Frazer, who took up Mitchell Vale, and after whom Mount Frazer is named, fell in with him en route, *and*

They continued their journey together.

The blacks were very bad at this time and stock losses were heavy.

As many as one a day were killed by the marauding natives for the first few years, so that the herd did not increase and the owner suffered heavy losses.

Emerald End homestead was built by pigtailed Chinamen, *and*

The house was originally surrounded by a stockade.

A sawpit was made, *and*

The timber, mainly cedar and Leichhardt, was sawn on the spot.

Mud bricks and stone slabs built the kitchen and ovens; and the house boasted two fireplaces.

The family had many blacks who had been with them since Rockhampton days.

But the natives about the district were very fierce in the beginning, *and*

The factions did not trust each other.

● EMERALD END was once raided by the blacks. Luckily the owner had had years of experience and many narrow escapes.

Hearing bird calls drawing closer and closer to the homestead, he had the lamps extinguished, and, before the rush came, Mr. Atherton was lying across the doorway, firing at the sounds.

The blacks retreated, leaving one of their company behind them.

Firearms were always close to hand.

Atherton carried a scar all his life—the result of a head wound from a stone tomahawk, thrown from ambush as he passed beneath a tree.

Drawing water at the river and dragging it up to the house on a wooden sledge was a risky operation at times.

On many occasions Mrs. Atherton stood guard while the men filled the casks.

There are instances of travellers who, less vigilant, left the homestead with directions and good wishes, but failed to reach their destinations.

THE DAWN OF MAREEBA

● AS THE North opened up, more and more strangers were passing through the station and even the hospitality of John Atherton was taxed.

He built a dwelling some distance from the homestead, on the bank of Granite creek, *and*

He gave it to the first man who declared himself willing to operate a hostelry there.

The place became a stop for Cobb and Co.'s coaches.

From this beginning, the town of Mareeba grew.

John Atherton discovered tin some miles from the homestead, hence the name, "Tin! Haroo!"

He held a mineral lease with McCord and Robson, who was later buried there.

So the tinfield of Tinaroo was opened.

Prospecting casually when out looking for cattle, he discovered

workable tin on the Wild River, the site of Herberton.

Later, he told some miners of his find and took them to the spot.

On returning to Emerald End and doing some assaying in the forge there, John Newell records that he asked Mr. Atherton to have an equal share with them.

But he refused, saying: "You stick to your tin and I'll stick to my bullocks, something I know something about."

His mining venture at Tinaroo had not been a great financial success.

So the lease was taken out in the names Jack, Newell, Brandon and Brown.

Within a week the famous Great Northern Tin Mine came into being.

HE BLAZED THE TRAILS

● MANY roads about the north follow Atherton's tracks. As a younger man, with his brothers Edmund and Richard and their brother-in-law, Henry Bell, he opened up the coast road from Broadsound to Mackay in 1864.

In later years, with his old friend, James Robson, he used his knowledge to blaze a trail for the much-needed track connecting Cairns and Herberton.

Port Douglas was getting the trade at that time.

Robson opened up this path; and the Gillies Highway roughly follows "Robson's Track."

Mr. Atherton's tendency to give humorous names is well known.

He took up Chillagoe and Nyeuchum, finding copper there which eventually resulted in the township and smelters.

The station was named after a popular song of the day, *and*

It is not an aboriginal name.

The song runs . . .

Jimpsy Dru Majibitty Hoy,

Jobbitty Hory Porty,

Hilkey Pikey Psyche Crikey,

Chillagoe Wobaredory!

Tyeuchum creek was pronounced Tyeuchum, and Cobra creek was originally Coborra, as a skull was found there.

Places named by the Atherton family are too numerous to mention.

But Mount Uncle and Mount Aunt appeal to children today as much as they did to an earlier generation.

Kate's Sugarloaf was officially named by Gwynne, the surveyor.

One can see John Atherton's hand in this.

It is a conical hill, sprinkled with basalt, resembling the sugar cake popular at the time.

NAME LIVES ON

● JOHN ATHERTON, squire of Emerald End, was unfailing in his help to old timers less fortunate than himself.

Through good seasons and bad, he remained on his property, and was buried in the family graveyard in 1913.

He never made anything worthwhile out of his mineral finds.

But his ponies were famous throughout Eastern Australia, as was the EE2 brand and his fine mules.

Two years before Queensland became a separate State in 1859, Atherton and his brother were settling in the Central district, the second family to do so.

He was taking cattle to the Hodgkinson and Palmer goldfields, and anywhere he could dispose of them, long before Smithfield erected its tents.

The Atherton Tableland was called after him.

The memorial placed close to where he made the first settlement is an appropriate tribute to a man who was, in every sense of the word . . . a nation builder.

The Clear Tracks, later Kulara

The Athertons of Queensland

HISTORICAL FEATURE

EARLY in 1860 the Athertons of Armidale, one of the district's pioneer grazing families, began assembling a mighty cavalcade that was to drive thousands of miles north in one of the great pastoral movements of Australian history.

Week after week great herds of cattle poured into the paddocks near the homestead. By early June more than 2000 Shorthorns packed the surrounding acres.

Meanwhile, the wagons, pack-horses and hacks were being prepared — three bullock wagons, a horse wagon, a string of pack-horses and dozens of re-mounts. The historic day came in July.

Edmund Atherton, his wife and their seven children set off at the head of the mighty parade for their new holding on the Fitzroy River about 50 miles north of Rockhampton.

Thus began one of the great pastoral epics of our history — an epic in which a single family, driven by sheer determination, hacked holdings from the wilderness, created the prosperous town of Mareeba and gave its name to the famous Atherton Tablelands.

The story of the remarkable Athertons began in 1844 when the Leicestershire farmer Edmund Atherton, his wife and family landed in Sydney intent on exploiting the colony's pastoral prospects.

Although burdened with seven young children Atherton wasted no time equipping an expedition and setting out for Armidale on the rich New England Tablelands.

There Atherton established a sheep run which he called Bald Blair. And it was there two more children were born bringing his total family to six sons and two daughters.

TOO SMALL

Although the sheep run prospered, Edmund could see, by 1857, that his holding was becoming too small for his growing family.

He must expand, he decided. And tropical Queensland seemed to offer alluring prospects.

Nevertheless, refusing to throw away the substance of Bald Blair for an illusory dreamland, Edmund decided that his two elder sons, James and John, should take 1500 sheep and test the pastoral richness of North Queensland.

After a trek lasting several months the brothers settled on a Fitzroy River property named Rosewood and got to work building a homestead big enough to accommodate the rest of the family.

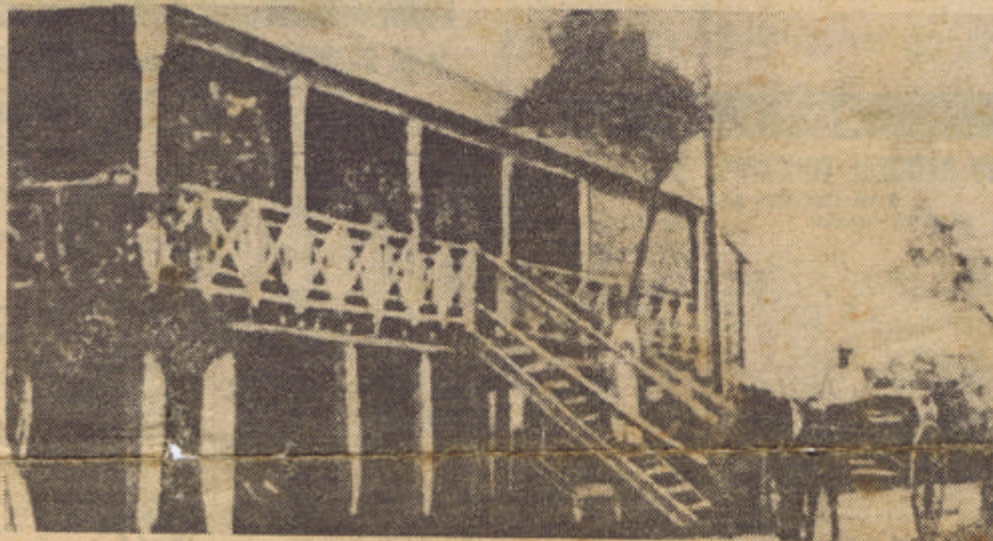
When preparations were nearing completion, John Atherton sent a message to his father saying the property was almost ready for the family.

In the letter John suggested that the land was better suited to cattle than sheep. And that was why Edmund Atherton got together the huge herd of 2000 Shorthorns.

With the family settled together again, Edmund be-

PASTORAL FAMILY THRIVED ON ADVERSITY

ON ADVERSITY



The homestead on Emerald End, the Atherton holding that has become part of Queensland's pastoral history. The prosperous town of Mareeba nearby was founded by John Atherton.

gan developing the rich holding while some of the boys, with their father's backing, moved on to adjoining land.

In 1862 when John Atherton was 25, he married a police inspector's daughter, Catherine Granger, and began raising his own family.

In 1873, just 10 years after old Edmund's death, James Venture Mulligan discovered gold on the Palmer River and the great rush began.

John Atherton found in the Cape York bonanza an opportunity to build his cattle business into what might become a pastoral empire.

Driving a huge cattle herd across country towards the Palmer River about 600 miles north of Rosewood, John Atherton pushed through unexplored territory teeming with cannibalistic Aborigines.

Reaching the gold-fields after one of the toughest treks in the State's history, Atherton sold his herd to the meat-starved prospectors at a big profit then moved towards the Burdekin and Herbert Rivers head-water searching for grazing land.

In the end he settled for an enormous property, Basalt Downs, between the Great Dividing Range and the formidable mountain background to Townsville and Rockingham Bay. The property had a frontage of about 120 miles.

Intent now on providing meat for the expanding Palmer River goldfields, John Atherton hurried back

to Rosewood to drive a fresh herd to his new selection.

But unwilling to expose his wife and young children to the hazards of a long trek through some of the roughest Australian terrain, with the constant danger of Aboriginal attack, he decided to send his family to Townsville by ship.

Leaving Rosewood in January 1875 Atherton pushed his stock north-west, left them at his new station and hurried back to Townsville hoping he would be able to get his young family into their new home before the wet season set in.

The wet had still not arrived when Atherton rode into Townsville. But it came down with a vengeance when he and his family were struggling along the ridges of the crescent-shaped Seaview Range.

HURRICANES

For the next two months the Athertons remained on the range. There they endured some of the most violent hurricanes of the decade.

Arriving finally at the homestead the family settled in only to find themselves caught up a year later in John Atherton's wanderlust and inherent shrewdness.

Anticipating the collapse of the Palmer River bonanza, Atherton decided to move even farther north towards the new Hodgkinson River goldfields.

Selling Basalt Downs to a district squatter, William McDowell, Atherton pre-

pared his cattle, horses and family for the 250 mile drive to a property he had selected inland from Cairns.

Atherton and his two eldest sons, the 13-year-old Edmund, and William, two years younger, took charge of the 1500 cattle and 100 horses leaving Catherine with the five remaining children, a buggy and two bullock wagons.

The advance was slow and agonising. Often Atherton, and the children who were physically capable of helping, had to hack tracks through dense scrub.

The Herberton Range seemed impassable until Atherton decided to winch the wagons over the obstacle with block and tackle.

But in the end the range was behind them and the family moved into the territory of the untamed, murderous Aborigines.

Then one day late in 1877 Atherton was riding at the head of his cattle when he entered a gorge. He looked carefully about him but could see nothing suspicious.

It happened suddenly — a mob of screaming natives charged out of the surrounding bush, spears raised. The first flight was in the air when Atherton fired his revolver.

Realising he had no hope of holding off the Aborigines, Atherton swung his mount around and spurred it straight at the cattle.

The beasts in turn, spun on their tracks and stampeded back along the gorge.

Nor was Catherine Atherton inactive. Alerted by the



John Atherton, driving vast herds of cattle ahead of him, trekked thousands of miles over North Queensland before finding his pastoral paradise.

pistol shot, she turned the wagon and buggies out of the stampeding cattle's path and formed the vehicles into a barricade.

When Atherton galloped up to the improvised fort Catherine and the children had already taken the rifles from the wagon and were loading them.

Atherton and his sons, Edmund and William, each grabbed a rifle and waited until the pursuing natives came into sight.

The first volley stopped the Aborigines in their tracks. The next dropped three and sent the rest fleeing back into the safety of the bush.

After that, the cavalcade continued its advance without further hindrance. Atherton felt sure he would make it now. Then he encountered the impenetrable jungle, later known as Atherton Scrub.

Yet the amazing pioneer refused to admit defeat.

Driving the herd ahead he somehow negotiated the hazardous country around the jungle below, Walsh Bluff Range, coming at last to the Barron River high above the new settlement of Cairns.

A river meant nothing to John Atherton by this. He spent days getting the cattle and vehicles over, resting only when he came to a tranquil creek.

It was the lush green banks of this creek that inspired Atherton to name his new homestead Emerald End.

Now at 41 years of age and after 20 restless years of searching, John Atherton had found his dream pasture in a vast 170-square-mile tropical garden.

Yet his troubles were not over for the local Aborigines, resenting the white intrusion into their hunting grounds, harried the family continuously.

When Atherton was away tending the property the rest of the family slept in the shuttered kitchen with Catherine Atherton standing by a window with a cocked rifle.

Atherton himself had many escapes from death at the hands of the natives, like the time he rode into

a defile on his property known as Clohesy Valley.

The settler did not suspect an ambush. At least he didn't until one of the Aborigines waiting in ambush betrayed the death trap by hefting his spear a few seconds too soon.

Blasting a revolver shot into the scrub Atherton rammed the spurs into his mount's flanks and rammed his way through a flight of spears.

He was almost clear when a stone axe smashed into the side of his head.

Reeling in the saddle and with blood blinding him, Atherton blasted off random shots from his revolver and gave the horse its head.

MAREEBA

Despite many similar attacks Atherton refused to budge from his holding. And he was still there when other settlers moved into the district to be followed by police patrols.

In the peaceful era that followed Atherton discovered tin at a place named Tin-aroo.

As a result of this discovery the Great Northern mine, the first lode tin ever discovered in Australia, came into being.

For the convenience of tin prospectors passing close to his homestead on their way to the field, Atherton built a store and shanty.

And from these two buildings sprang the thriving town of Mareeba, the hub of the Australian tobacco-growing industry.

In 1902 Catherine Atherton was killed when a buggy in which she was travelling turned turtle. John never really recovered from the tragedy.

Eleven years later when in his red shirt, cabbagetre hat and riding a small donkey he was one of Mareeba's best-known figures, John Atherton died suddenly. He was 76.

◆ When the American soprano, Geraldine Farrar, combined with Enrico Caruso, U.S. opera entered its golden era. The soprano's story appears on this page tomorrow.