

Joseph Downey Archive

The following statement was written by Mr Kerry Kendall and provided to the library at the time of the donation.

Joe Downey (1911 to 1986)

Joe came from the Mingela-Ravenswood area and his family had property at the Kirk River Diggings. His family also had hotels in Charters Towers, Mingela and the Kirk River Diggings area. His father was a Commission Agent or in today's language a Stock and Station Agent. Joe was born in 1911 and died in Townsville in 1986 and is buried in Charters Towers.

Joe was involved with stock all of his life: cattle, horses, pigs, goats and even poultry. His formal education was at Mingela, Ravenswood and Kirk River schools. The first jobs that he had apart from home, was on Stations. It's thought that he started cattle buying in 1941 for Swift Australia Pty Ltd who had the meatworks at Alligator Creek, outside Townsville.

High Street in Charters Towers was his home base and is where he reared his family. Warren, his son, was also a very keen bushman and stockman and they spent many hours together working in the bush and travelling around the stations. Warren was accidentally killed at Bently Station outside Townsville in 1973.

Joe became a renowned horseman and was very successful with racehorses, trotters and show horses, doing most of the work himself. That is, shoeing, clipping, and maintaining their teeth, exercising and whatever was needed.

He also had a terrific eye for cattle and the way that they would grow on the different types of country. Most times he would drive out to the stations, borrow a horse and ride through the mobs of cattle, estimating their dressed weight, from small mobs to up to 100 head. Other times he would ride through a mob in the paddock or just walk through small mobs in the yard.

An official statement from Swift Australian in 1956 states that Joe inspected, estimated and bought 6804 bullocks. He was down 3.78 pounds on the total mob. The same year he bought 2 087 fat cows and he was down 1.62 pounds on the cows, a great achievement.

Another good year was 1957 for numbers and weight. He bought 12 609 bullocks and was 7 pounds over. Of the 1 886 cows that he bought, he was 2.7 pounds under. Great estimating for a total of 14 495 head. Not all cattle stations were the same and most mobs weighed different depending on the type of country that they ran on.

Joe travelled thousands of miles throughout his buying career, mostly around the Charters Towers district but also down as far as Rockhampton and up to Mareeba in the North. The 1941 season saw Joe travel to and buy 82 different mobs of cattle from properties. He estimated and bought 4 910 bullocks and 2 520 fat cows. All of the properties and numbers meticulously recorded in his diaries.

Apart from buying cattle for Swifts, Joe also bought for private individuals or dealers. Robinson Brothers Butchers from Townsville killed a lot of cattle during the war years and Joe used his expertise to source cattle for the kill floor.

A bad year for weight was 1961. The Works killed 68 000 head. Joe was out 11 pounds from his overall estimating. This same year saw Joe involved with Pat Shaw and also George Lewis from Victoria River Downs in the Northern Territory, buying horses to send out there. They inspected and bought mobs of horses from around the north.

Even though Joe worked around the Towers, he had contacts all throughout the west. If there was ever a shortage of ringers or workers in the west, people would ring Joe to ask him to send men out. If ever Joe sent out a man he would be a top liner, or in bush language, a 'good man'.

When he retired from the Works, Swifts presented Joe with his car. He was always held in very high esteem with them. Joe was also known for his generosity, always helping out people and charities, from shoeing a horse for someone to painting a fence or a building for charity. He also came to the forefront at school speech nights by donating towards the prizes. Joe's water diving skills were always reliable and he was also in demand for that service.

Joe's legacy and work around the north will always be remembered.