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Duty, Debt and Picket Lines: the Queensland Railway Department during the First World War

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The Queensland Railway Department, also known as the Queensland Government Railways or QGR, was one of the state's largest civil contributors to Queensland's war effort. The department's resources would be utilised by both the Queensland and Commonwealth Governments to meet the demands of enlistment quotas, armaments production and moving military personnel and equipment across the state. Throughout the war years QGR would be impacted by falling revenues due to the state's expectation of network expansion, skyrocketing prices for essential goods, Royal Commissions and the strengthening of trade unions. The Railway Department's experience of war was challenging in that so much of their operation and business assets became an integral part to the nation's war effort virtually overnight. On an individual level, one sixth of the department's workforce enlisted to fight in the war and although at times different groups within the railways were working towards different agendas, the department as a whole came together to support their railway brothers through extensive fundraising initiatives such as the Railway Patriotic Fund.

□ railway, workshops, munitions, patriotic fund, war, union

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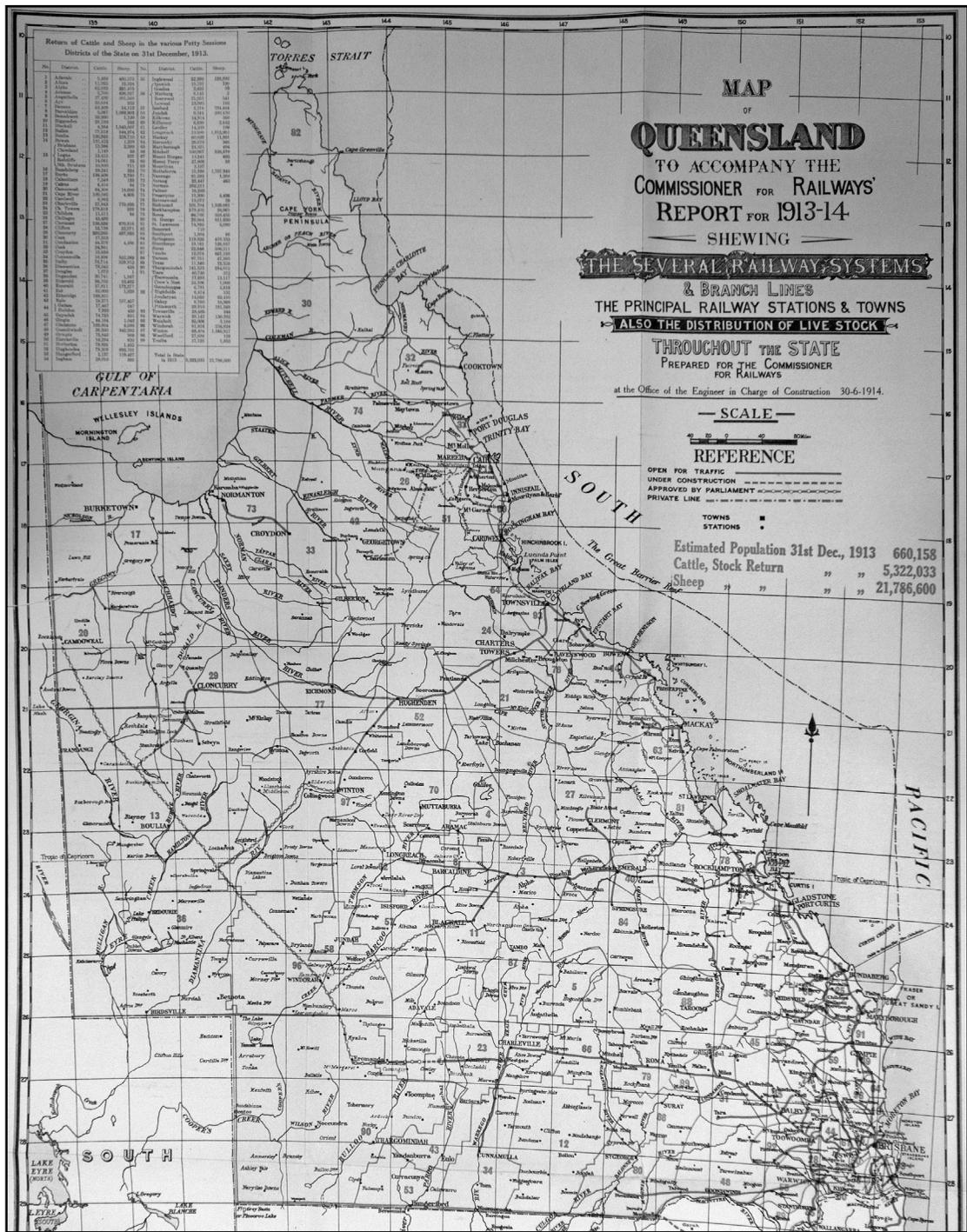


FIG. 1. The railway network in Queensland prior to the outbreak of war in 1914 (Queensland Railways 1914 Report of the Commissioner for Railways).

At the outbreak of the First World War the Queensland Railway Department (also referred to as Queensland Government Railways or QGR) was one of the largest employers in the state. The department's resources would be vital to Queensland's overall ability to contribute to the war effort. Through encouraging enlistment to its employees, allowing their workshops to manufacture armaments, providing rolling stock to the defence force to move troops and supplies and providing recruitment trains, the railways in Queensland greatly helped the state to contribute to the war effort.

Yet in 1914 QGR was not merely a railway that provided transport for the movement of people, produce and goods. QGR operated an extensive telegraph and postal network which became not only a key instrument in the nation's ability to conduct war, but also a resource that had to be protected from both internal and external enemies.

This paper will look at QGR during the war years and the contribution the organisation made to the state and the nation. Fundraising efforts and initiatives such as the Railway Patriotic Fund will be examined as well as other public drives. In addition, lesser known activities such as participating in censorship and monitoring employees will be discussed.

In August 1914 the Queensland Railway Department had 11254 permanent staff members, with a further 3000 casual employees engaged in line construction (QR 1914). The state was divided into three operating and administrative divisions: the Northern, Central and Southern Divisions. QGR was also constructing two vast railways during this time: The Great Western and North Coast Railways (figure 1). The total size of the network in 1914 was 4838 miles (QR 1914) and prior to the war the railways were moving more than 12 million passengers and at least 3.8 million tonnes of goods, 1.7 million sheep and 200 000 pigs annually (QR 1915). At the time the railways were not only moving people and produce, they were an all-encompassing government department which had great influence across the state. Both their physical railway network and their immense bureaucratic network would be integral to the war effort.

MILITARY PLANNING AND THE RAILWAY

Unlike their British counterparts, the Australian state railways were not put under direct control of the Defence Department at the outbreak of the war. The formation of the Railway Executive Committee in 1912 allowed the British Government to give the numerous railway companies binding instructions and forced the companies to work together in times of war if required (Jackson 2013). After the outbreak of war in August 1914, the Railway Executive Committee announced to the British public what control of the railways meant:

The control of the railways has been taken over by the Government for the purpose of ensuring that the railways, locomotives, rolling-stock and staff shall be used as one complete unit in the best interests of the State for the movement of troops, stores and food supplies... The staff of each railway will remain under the same control as heretofore, and will receive their instructions through the same channels as in the past. (Jackson 2013)

The Queensland Commissioner for Railways, Charles Evans, happened to be in Europe on a study tour at the outbreak of hostilities and witnessed firsthand this historic event in Britain. Writing a letter to the Minister for Railways, the Hon. W. T. Paget, a summary was published in *The Queensland Times* describing the situation:

Evans says that the English railways had been taken over by the Imperial Government, and although to an outsider everything might appear to be normal, to a railwayman it was quite apparent that a change had taken place. Mr. Evans refers to the great activity in the transport of troops, and the remarkable and pathetic scenes at railway stations. (*The Queensland Times*, 7 October 1914, p. 6)

In Australia, greatly influenced by a nationwide defence review by Lord Kitchener in 1910, much

thought had gone into the use of railways for military uses prior to 1914. Administratively the state railways were open to coordination even if the physical railway network was not.

Kitchener's review on Australia's defence capabilities highlighted organisation above all else for military success (*The Brisbane Courier*, 21 February 1910, p. 4). The railway gauge differences within the Australian states were a mammoth hurdle to overcome in terms of moving men and supplies. At the time of Kitchener's visit, troops could not be sent any further north than Rockhampton by rail nor could any of the northern part of the Australian continent be accessed by rail (*The Brisbane Courier*, 21 February 1910, p. 4). Although everyone was acutely aware of the difficulties of national railway coordination in Australia, nothing beyond discussing – and arguing about – standardised gauges was undertaken between Kitchener's report and the outbreak of the First World War. The vast distances and astronomical economic investment made it an easy issue for the young nation to ignore or, at best, delay. A more realistic goal was coordinating, at least bureaucratically, the individual state railways through the creation of a national council.

In direct response to Kitchener's recommendations, the Commonwealth Government established the Railway War Council in February 1911 (*The Register* 16 March, p. 10). Comprised of the Commissioners for Railways from the states and Chief Military Officers representing the Commonwealth, the Railway War Council was created to advise and make recommendations on railway matters to the Federal Minister for Defence. Early meetings of the council discussed what uniform size gauge to install (they decided that Fremantle should be connected to Brisbane via the southern states with standard 4 ft 8 ½ inches gauge) and the possible need for the Commonwealth Government to assume control of the state railways in times of war (*The Register* 16 March, p. 10). However, at the outbreak of hostilities in August 1914 Queensland remained in control of its own railways, although measures were taken to move the railway department to a war footing.

In response to public speculation about Commonwealth control of the railways in August 1914, the Queensland Minister for Railways W. T. Paget announced that nothing radical would be done and that the Commonwealth would not be controlling the railway (*The Queensland Times*, 12 August 1914, p. 5). It was announced that:

At the request of the Commonwealth Military Authorities, the Deputy Commissioner for Railways (Col. W. Pagan) yesterday appointed an assistant director of railway transport, in connection with the possible movement of troops, & c., in any part of Queensland. Mr Pagan selected for the position, Mr. G. R. Steer (General Traffic Superintendent), who already holds the military rank of lieutenant-colonel. (*The Queensland Times*, 6 August 1914, p. 6)

The *Defence Act* 1903–1915 enabled officials in Commonwealth and state government railways to hold commissions in the Engineer and Railway Staff Corps. Railway officials were not subject to age limitations or medical examinations usually conducted by the Defence Force. Railway Commissioners and General Managers were ranked as Colonels while deputy officials such as Assistant Directors, Deputy Commissioners and Locomotive Branch Managers were ranked Lieutenant Colonels or Majors (Gray 1962).

Therefore, if Steer in his capacity as a military officer was given orders he would, as the Assistant Director of Railway Transport, be able to supervise the fulfilling of those orders on behalf of the railways. QGR was confident that it would be able to meet the expectations of the Commonwealth Government with regards to moving troops and supplies on its network in August 1914 (*The Queensland Times*, 5 August 1914, p. 6). It quickly became clear that QGR would not just be providing transport for the war effort; nearly all aspects of its business would be pulled into the war drive along with the men who worked for the department.

THE RAILWAY MOBILISES QUEENSLAND

The two most immediate contributions QGR would make to the war effort were movement and men. When war was declared in August 1914, Steer announced that although the Federal Defence Department had not requested specific numbers relating to traffic capacity, QGR had provided them with statistics 'some time ago'. Steer also told Queenslanders that the railways had been experimenting with entraining and detraining troops for 'some time' (*The Queensland Times*, 5 August 1914, p. 6). For QGR, the initial mobilisation of men enlisting throughout the state for the Australian Expeditionary Force (AEF) would be focused on getting them to camps at Enoggera in Brisbane.

The Queensland contingent for the AEF was quickly filled by mid-September 1914 (*The Brisbane Courier*, 25 August 1914, p. 8). Along with special trains, hundreds of men travelled on mail, goods and passenger services to the Enoggera Concentration Camp where the force was being organised. Troops were often given a hearty cheer by civilian passengers when they were passing through stations on their way to camp. This public enthusiasm for the war also led to many civilians visiting the Enoggera camp (a mile's walk from Enoggera Station) to view the spectacle of mass military mustering. On Sunday 13th September 1914, QGR moved an estimated 6000 visitors on the Enoggera line on a combination of regular and special services (*The Brisbane Courier*, 14 September 1914, p. 7), while the camp itself housed only a little over 2100 men.

The railways also moved the soldiers the other way from Enoggera when their units were summoned to the southern states for overseas departure. Soldiers would usually leave Brisbane via the Sydney Mail service or by special service to Pinkenba where they would leave via ship. Along with moving both the enthusiastic enlistees and their mass of supporters in the early days of

the war, the men of the railways themselves were engulfed in this patriotic excitement.

Within only a matter of weeks of war being declared, the Queensland Government announced that some departments had suffered heavy withdrawals due to men leaving to enlist. The police department and the railways were specifically noted as being 'denuded' in this rush (*The Brisbane Courier*, 25 August 1914, p. 8). The men were given assurances by the Government that their positions would be kept open and their seniority would be preserved while they served. The leave would be without pay which necessitated the establishment of the Railway Patriotic Fund so men whose railway salary was not matched by their new military pay could receive a top-up from the fund and their families would be no worse off because they served.

Initial enlistment standards for the AEF were quite strict. Men were required to be 19–38 years old and have a minimum height of 5ft 6in and in these early days of the war nearly one third of men who were inspected were rejected (Australian War Memorial n.d.). Yet as the war progressed and began to take shape these standards were loosened as enlistment rates started to drop. The railways would assist to overcome this shortage of men in two ways; the running of recruitment trains and the publishing of 'call-to-arms' announcements in their staff notices.

RECRUITMENT TRAINS

Queensland Government Railways experienced three distinct phases in recruitment during the war years: the initial enthusiasm for enlisting in 1914, the falloff in enlistments in the second half of 1915 that necessitated the relaxing of enlistment standards and the need to run recruitment trains; and then from late 1916 onwards, as a result of British War Office policy changes, when railway workers were specifically targeted for the running of broad and narrow gauge military railways overseas.

In contrast to 1914, when men would travel of their own initiative to enlist in the AEF, the second half of 1915 required more targeted ways of recruitment to meet the enlistee quota that the federal government demanded. One example involved the running of recruitment trains so that military officials and medical staff could examine men at their nearest railway station (figure 2).

In late July 1915 the Queensland Government offered five recruitment trains that could operate throughout the state to the Queensland Recruiting Committee (*The Brisbane Courier*, 30 July 1915, p. 8). Each of the trains was fitted out as a mobile recruiting depot consisting of two politicians (for giving speeches), a representative of the recruitment committee, a Defence Department doctor and a recruiting sergeant. Local Mayors were expected to drum up crowds and local schools were given a holiday on the day the train arrived (*The Brisbane Courier*, 2 August 1915, p. 10).

Although the trains were considered successful, the financial cost to the railways must have been significant as, on a number of occasions, requests by the Recruiting Council for more services after August 1915 were rejected due to 'the present financial position (of the railway)' (*The Queensland Times*, 27 August 1915, p. 4).

THE MEN OF THE RAILWAYS ARE ENCOURAGED TO ENLIST

Mirroring the wider community from 1915 up until the end of the war, QGR was active in encouraging those considered eligible within its workforce to enlist to serve. The railways allowed pro-enlistment supporters to speak to their workforce, including at the Ipswich Railway Workshops, as well as publishing 'call-to-arms' proclamations in their widely circulated regular staff bulletin,

The Weekly Notices. Even though Australia did not have conscription, single men and widowers without children aged between 21–35 years old were expected to present for military service. Societal pressures and the stigma of 'eligible' men not being enrolled in the armed forces meant that railway staff could apply for exemptions if their absence was deemed to 'seriously inconvenience the Department' and these applications were sent to the Railway Commissioner for his support.

The British War Office's decision to embrace light railways as a way to more efficiently supply their forces on the shell-ravaged Western Front after two years of persisting with motorised transport meant that railway workers throughout the Commonwealth were specifically target for recruitment from late 1916 onwards. From early 1917 QGR began publishing the federal government's call for men to fill the Railway Units in *The Weekly Notices*. The Officer in Charge of the Queensland Railway Unit was Hardy Eustace, Assistant Foreman at the Roma Street Running Shed. During a recruiting visit to the workforce at the Ipswich Railway Workshops Eustace announced that fitters, fitters' assistants, boilermakers, boilermakers' assistants, Westinghouse brake fitters, blacksmiths and strikers were required to complete the Queensland Unit (figure 3). He received 30 Workshops volunteers that afternoon (*The Queensland Times*, 7 February 1917, p. 5).

The Railways continued to publish requests for reinforcements for the Railway Units in *The Weekly Notices* right up until the end of hostilities in 1918. Highly skilled railway workers were in great demand during the war; they were needed at home to run a railway that was experiencing the demands of both civilian and military traffic, to produce munitions in railway workshops and were vital to the war effort overseas where their expertise was utilised to feed and supply front line forces.



FIG. 2. Queensland Recruitment train at Emerald 1915 (The Workshops Rail Museum/Queensland Rail Collection, PG416).

Reinforcements for Railway Unit Abroad.

With reference to Circular Memo. dated 9th instant, advising that 14 Guards, 11 Shunters, 3 Firemen, and 1 Examiner were required to complete the Queensland Quota of the Railway Unit (Reinforcements)—

The A.A.G., Military Headquarters, Brisbane, now advises that, in addition thereto, Queensland has been asked to provide for a Special Draft Reinforcement for the Railway Unit as follows:—

- 1 Driver (Loco.), with rank of 2nd Corporal.
- 1 Driver (Internal Combustion), with rank of 2nd Corporal.
- 2 Guards—one with rank of 2nd Corporal, and 1 Private.
- 1 Shunter, with rank of Private.

(Secty's S.L. 18-89—1A.)

FIG. 3. Railway employees asked to enlist in the Railway Units overseas (Queensland Government Railways Weekly Notices, 6 May 1918).

MUNITION WORK AND THE RAILWAY WORKSHOPS

By 1915 it was decided that the Queensland Government would put in a tender to produce shell cases to the Federal Defence Department. The Government's contribution would primarily be met through QGR with the work to be conducted in the three major workshops: Ipswich, Rockhampton and Townsville.

Queensland Government Railway's enthusiasm for producing munitions was admirable. At the Ipswich Railway Workshops a new shop known as the Munitions Shop was built (figure 4). Special lathes were procured or leased in order to produce the cases and existing machinery was heavily modified to complete the work. With this investment, the shop hoped to produce 2500 18lb shell cases per week, with the ultimate aim of producing up to 5000 cases per day (*The Brisbane Courier*, 30 October 1915, p. 5). However, not a lot went to plan for QGR between September 1915, when the work and planning began, and July 1916 when the work was called off.

Initially the railway department expected all three shops to produce shell cases. Townsville turned out their first shell case on 15 September 1915 (*The Brisbane Courier*, 16 September 1915, p. 10). Yet once their tender to manufacture the shells was accepted QGR decided to focus production at the Ipswich and Rockhampton shops. The terms of the contract required the delivery of 2500 shells by 18 December 1915 with a further 2500 shell cases per week until a total of 50000 were delivered (*The Queensland Times*, 22 October 1915, p. 7). With this deadline looming it was decided to focus initial production mainly at the Ipswich Railway Workshops in order to begin fulfilling the order while the Rockhampton shops began preparations to produce their own shell cases in the future.

By Christmas 1915 serious stumbling blocks had presented themselves. The 18 December deadline had been missed although it was stated that '2000 shells had been turned out to date [23/12/1915], and complete with the exception of some necessary parts, the steel for which is being awaited from

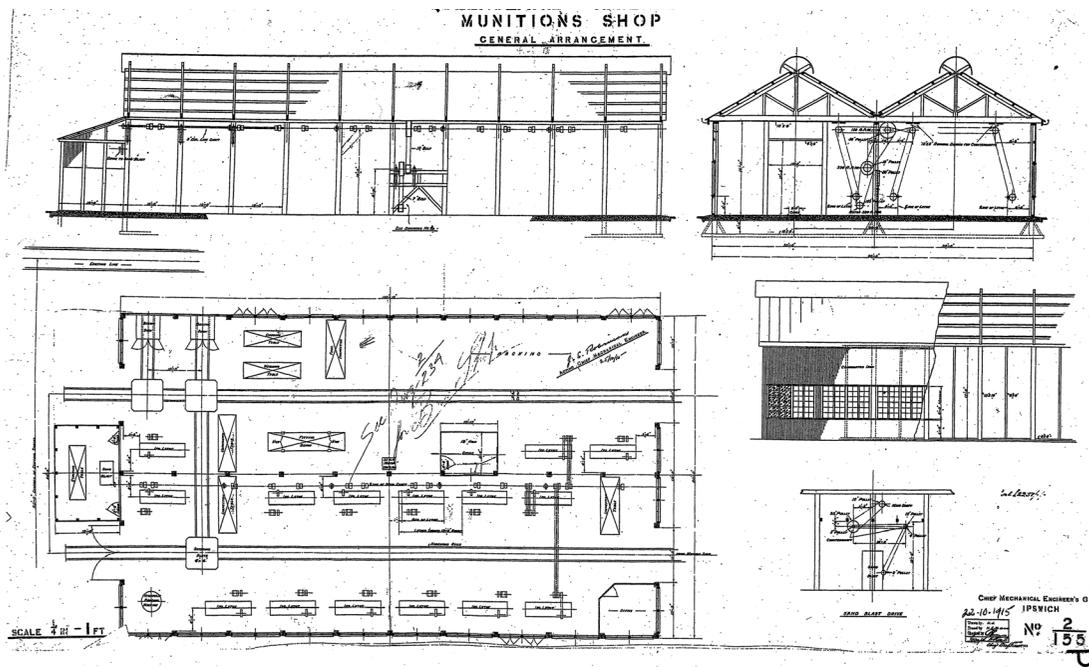


FIG. 4. General Arrangement drawing for the Queensland Railways Munitions Shop built at the Ipswich Railway Workshops behind the Machine Shop in 1915. Image courtesy of Keith McDonald.

Newcastle' (*The Queensland Times*, 24 December 1915, p. 10). Ultimately QGR found themselves with two very large issues when it came to producing shells: they could not find enough trained staff and they had problems with the steel they purchased.

A huge issue that would hinder QGR for virtually all the war years was unionism. In regards to munitions work, the railways attempted to convince the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (the union for the turners who worked the lathes) that in order to produce more shells they should hire labourers to do some of the lesser technical work required to make the shell cases. It was stated to the society that 'women are doing the same work in the Old Country' as an argument for the relaxing of the union's position (*The Queensland Times*, 24 December 1915, p. 10). At a meeting of the society at the Ipswich Railway Workshops Dining Hall, the motion to allow labourers to work the lathes was defeated even though the railways need another 30 turners to operate the lathes (*The Queensland Times*, 24 December 1915, p. 10).

By March 1916, at least in Ipswich, production had increased and differences with the unions and the railway had been set aside so that mechanics (skilled tradesmen) and skilled labourers were now working together, with production now requiring three eight hour shifts (*The Queensland Times*, 21 March 1916, p. 6). Yet this increase still only amounted to around 500 shell cases per week and the railways were drastically behind in their quota for the contract. In Rockhampton they were hamstrung in their abilities to produce shells due to the effects of the 1915–1916 summer floods.

By mid-1916 munition work had virtually stopped as the Federal Munitions Committee requested QGR cease production. In his 1916 report the Commissioner for Railways blamed 'serious trouble with defective steel' which hampered and delayed production. Ultimately the railways produced 4 157 complete shell cases with a further 15 800 in various stages of completion (QR 1916). Unfortunately for the railways the steel they had purchased from Newcastle was considered defective and

not suitable for producing shell cases. In 1917 the findings of Queensland's Auditor-General were published where he 'gave details of the state's sorry experiment in the making of munitions'. The Auditor-General expected an overall loss of £10 000 to the railways (of which £6 699–£5 153 at Ipswich and £1 546 at Rockhampton – was due to defective steel) (*Morning Bulletin*, 29 November 1917, p. 6).

The decision to cease production was likely demoralising for QGR and all the men who had put so much effort into producing the shell cases. From mid-1916 onwards the railways would only contribute to munitions work by granting leave to their employees to work in munitions factories in the United Kingdom (*The Queensland Times*, 6 March 1917, p. 6).

Although ultimately it was the decision of the Commonwealth Government to cease munitions production, action from the Amalgamated Society of Engineers had impacted on QGR's ability to increase production. Unionism and striking would have an immense impact on the department, not only with regards to munition work, but in virtually all aspects of railway business.

UNIONISM

Throughout Australia during the war years the trade unions flexed their muscles. Services and production had never been more in need than in wartime and it was a chance for the unions and their members to seek advantage. The railways nationally were a hotbed of disputes and strikes and caused great concern to the state governments and railway administrators due to the negative publicity that was generated. QGR was no exception and worker disputes and threats of strikes were a source of constant annoyance to the administration during the war. Yet the smaller disputes that involved one union, one location or one particular job would pale in comparison to the Northern Queensland Railway Strike of 1917.

Spurred on by the actions of 6 000 of their railway colleagues in New South Wales who went on strike on 2 August 1917 in protest to the introduction of a

job checking card system (this strike would be taken up by other industries and eventually spread to 76 000 workmen and last 82 days), the railwaymen of the Northern Division walked out three days later on 5 August (Murphy 1983, p. 132).

The main cause of the strike stemmed from decisions the railway administration made in February 1917 to grant 'dirt money' (an extra allowance for dirty work) to striking Boilermaker Society members at the Townsville Workshops so that their pay matched colleagues in private industry (Murphy 1983, p. 134). Following on, the Amalgamated Society of Engineers requested that their fitters receive the same allowance and this was granted. Excluded from receiving the allowance were non-union tradesmen and semi-skilled and unskilled labourers of those two unions as well as men who did 'dirty work' outside the railway workshop. After months of conferences between the railway administration, union representatives and members of the Queensland arbitration court, a railway-wide (across the three divisions) award was created on 4 July 1917 for the 12000 railway employees which would provide

extra payment and thus rid 'dirt money' allowances (i.e. if an employee did dirty work his new pay would allow for that) (Murphy 1983, p. 135). Although the 'dirt money' issue had seemingly been resolved, the issue of when to backdate the payment would be the catalyst for the wide-reaching strike (figure 5).

The unions believed that their members would be back paid the new rate from 19 February 1917 as this was the date that the Amalgamated Society of Engineers were granted their allowance and the railway workers of the north expected to be paid from this date. When it was announced that the back pay would only commence from 1 July 1917 the unions were outraged. Throughout July negotiations between the government, unions and the railways were conducted and even though the government claimed that back paying to February across the three divisions would cost the railways £170 000, the unions would not budge on the issue. Although the strike 'was not a strike against an employer (in this case the railway department), but against an award of the industrial court around which

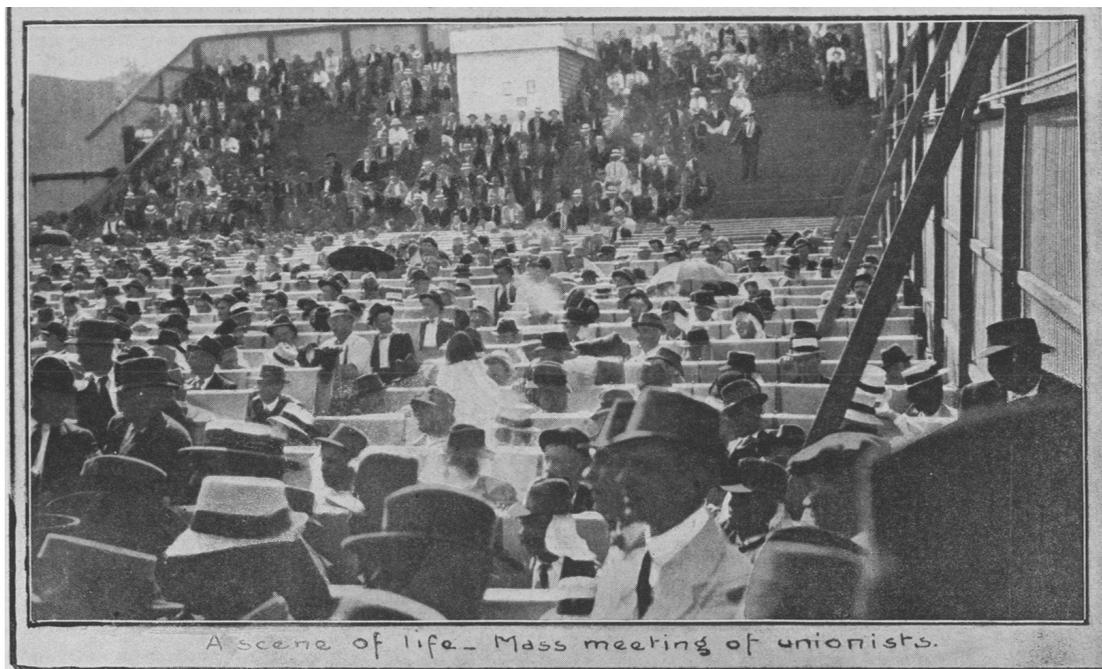


FIG. 5. 'Where Labour Reigns Supreme' a meeting of striking unionists during the Northern Railway Strike (Queenslander Pictorial 1 September 1917, p. 28. Image courtesy of the State Library of Queensland).

the whole system of conciliation and arbitration revolved', the railways would suffer financially from the action (Murphy 1983, p. 136). The strike would last three weeks with the men agreeing to go back to work if they were paid for the time they were striking and if the back pay to February would be considered at a later date. Public outrage at the strikers was immense given the sacrifices people were being asked to undertake for the war effort and the Queensland Government was seen to be weak by not crushing the movement. The railways had become a battlefield on the home front.

At the start of the strike, the Brisbane Courier outlined its effect on the region:

This decision involves the stoppage of all the railway systems from Mackay northwards, which will mean that at least 2000 railway employees will be idle... The number of men at present affected will be nothing to the numbers thrown out of employment if the strike continues for any length of time, as the meatworks must stop, and cane cutting and crushing at the mills, and mining operations in the Cloncurry district will be suspended. (*The Brisbane Courier* 6 August 1917, p. 6)

The knock-on effect of the strike in Northern Queensland was acute. It occurred during the busiest period in the sugar crushing season and mills were forced to stop crushing once their stores became full (Hunt 2010, p. 145). The meatworks industry, unable to transport their products to the wharves, was also forced to close down resulting in thousands of men becoming unemployed. There were also very real concerns about food shortages and starvation due to the actions of the railwaymen (Hunt 2010, p. 145–146).

Strikers in Cairns were addressed two weeks into the strike by a returned railway signaller, Tom Skeyhill, who had been blinded in the war [it is now widely believed that Skeyhill was faking his blindness]. Skeyhill told the men that their actions were having a 'detrimental influence on the progress of the war' (*The Brisbane Courier* 20 August 1917, p. 6). He used the example of soldiers from different nations to appeal to the men:

He said that in the firing line the Anzac got 6/ per day, the British troops ½, and the French a halfpenny. All were doing the same work, yet none struck. In conclusion, he said, "For God, King and Country, return to work. Open up transportation and allow all grievances to rest until the war is finished." (*The Brisbane Courier* 20 August 1917, p. 6)

When the men returned to work in late August and a conservative estimate of a loss of £200 000 to the railway department and local industry was published, resentment towards the strikers and their abandonment of the judicial arbitration system was strong (*Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 28 August 1917, p. 5). An opinion piece in the Brisbane Courier published after the strikers declared that they would return to work painted the strikers as criminals:

Queensland is to pay for these railway strikers for violating the law... So it seems that while, under our civil law, a man who wilfully offends against it is punished, under our industrial law he shall not only be paid for the offence out of the public purse, but also have the right to have the law questioned outside of any constitutional means provided. The position is a remarkable and a particularly humiliating one for the people of the State. The strikers have not shown themselves to be penitent in any way. Rather they have been truculent and domineering... (*The Brisbane Courier* 24 August 1917, p. 6)

The railwaymen would never receive their back pay to February. By the time the war ended too much time had passed between negotiations and new, more pressing issues had arisen for the unions. The 1917 strike, along with the promised increased wages across the whole department, cost QGR financially at a time when their revenues were unpredictable and the supplies they needed to operate a railway were skyrocketing in price due to the war. Prior to the strike, rising prices and the inability to acquire loans had already forced the department to undertake 'economies' in an attempt to curtail out of control expenses.

OUT OF CONTROL EXPENSES AND 'ECONOMIES'

In November 1916 QGR announced that they aimed to save £12 000 through practicing economies in the administrative branch of the railways. The Minister for Railways at the time, J. H. Coyne, announced that the measures would be conducted without 'interfering with the efficiencies of the railway' and that 'not one employee would be dismissed' (*The Queensland Times* 1916, p. 5).

Despite the Minister's claims, as early as late December 1916 dismissals had begun. The draftsman's office at the Ipswich Railway Workshops was affected and staff were let go (likely single men in the first instance). Commissioner Colonel Evans claimed that as there was no money for new rolling stock it was futile to retain the men who prepared the plans and drawings (*The Queensland Times* 29 December 1916, p. 5). Foreshadowing further retrenchments, QGR's financial reality was laid bare in July 1917 when it was announced that the department had a deficit of £742 000 which was considered a dire amount of debt (*The Queensland Times* 20 July 1917, p. 20). Retrenchments and reduced hours for staff would continue during the rest of the war years, affecting not only administrative branches, but trades such as tin-smithing, saw-milling and boiler making. Although claimed otherwise by Minister Coyne, it was inevitable that the department's need for reducing costs would affect train services.

The November 1916 general coal strike had understandably led to the reduction of railway services throughout Australia. Once the strike finished, services were expected to return to normal, but combined with their 'economies' drive, QGR continued with the reduced number of trains. Public criticism of the department ensued:

When Australia had the misfortune to have her commerce held up by the recent coal strike the travelling public of Queensland was compelled to put up with a very much reduced railway service, and generally

submitted with a good grace, quite satisfied that when supplies of coal came forward they would get restored... . (*The Brisbane Courier* 9 January 1917, p. 5)

Queenslanders would also experience reductions in the number of mail train services. One such service was the Longreach mail train which by May 1917 had been reduced from two services per week down to one. On a visit to western Queensland, Colonel Evans once again explained that the need for 'strict economy' during the war meant that services would be reduced. He blamed the lack of readily available resources to keep locomotives in good running order and stated that the public could fully expect further reductions (*The Brisbane Courier* 24 May 1917, p. 6).

Running a railway during wartime was a difficult financial undertaking for a department that had such a vast network to maintain and was simultaneously expected to increase this network through expansion. QGR in 1913–1914 was making (after expenses) 2s 3¼d per mile of track, but by 1917–1918 a mile was only earning the railways 1s 2¼d. Passenger numbers grew every year from 1914–1918 and produce, wool and livestock haulage amounts were reasonably high, although totals could be affected by seasonal flooding and droughts (QR 1918). Although QGR was moving goods and running extra services for the military, special rates were agreed to and concessions were granted, particularly regarding the movement of personnel and horses (*The Queensland Times* 11 May 2015, p. 2). The unfortunate reality was that many of the goods the railways needed to run services for were the same goods that the military needed to wage war, meaning that QGR had to cope with sharp increases in the prices of goods.

Understandably unaware of just how long a conflict the declaration of war between Austria and Serbia would develop into, Railway Minister Paget announced in late July 1914 that:

Railway construction is certainly carried out with loan money... but as we have enough money out of the last £2 000 000

loan, to provide for the railway construction requirements of the present financial year, I do not think the war will have any effect on Queensland railways for the next 12 months at least. (*The Queensland Times* 29 July 1914, p. 5)

The Minister's words could not have been any more inaccurate. The price of indispensable items to a railway increased drastically during the war years; Carbide increased 471.43%, fencing wire 372.09%, sponge cloths 386.9%, wire nails 333.9% and most acutely, steel plates increased 538.31% (QR 1918). War conditions created a situation where the railway department was not earning enough revenue to pay off the interest on their substantial loans. Falling revenues, increase in expenses, rising debt levels and employee unrest lead the Queensland Government to announce in mid-1917 that the railway administration in Queensland would be subject to a Royal Commission Review.

THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON ADMINISTRATION OF THE RAILWAYS IN QUEENSLAND

The Royal Commission began its investigations into the administration in August 1917 and delivered its findings in June 1918. The report from the Commission acknowledged that the railways had suffered significant increases in running costs in recent times:

All these increases in cost wages and salaries, of fuel, and of material and stores, are to a very large extent beyond the control of the Commissioner and his officers, being forced upon him by conditions prevailing in the outside world.

The exhaustive inquiry also shed some light on how the Government's expectation of expanding network sizes was counter-productive to revenue raising:

In 1903 there were 190 persons for each mile of railway in operation, each contributing, either directly or indirectly, his quota to the traffic of the railway. By the extension of the

railways into the sparsely populated parts of the State, this has been a constantly diminishing figure until in 1917 there was a mile of railway to every 128 persons in the State. A great number of extensions of lines have been to parts of the State where the population for each mile of the extension is so very much less than even that small number that a payable volume of traffic can hardly be expected from them. We do not wish even to suggest that it is a wrong policy to develop the State by running railways into suitable parts somewhat in advance of population as a matter of public policy, but the constant tendency in that direction makes it more difficult for the administration to pay interest on capital. (Queensland Government 1918)

The Commission made recommendations on where it believed QGR could improve efficiency. The report from the Commission was not overly negative; it acknowledged that the railways were vital to the economic expansion of the state and that factors beyond QGR's control had hampered its abilities to stop revenue levels from falling during the war. The inquiry provided an exhaustive snapshot of the railway department's business during the first three years of the war; a business that did not just involve movement of goods and people, but also the movement of communication.

POSTAL AND TELEGRAPH SERVICES IN WAR TIME

Queensland Government Railways was a vital cog in the postal and telegraphy service through an agreement with the Postmaster-General of the Commonwealth Government. The railways provided mail sorting vans, ran mail trains, provided space in stations for post offices and operated and maintained the Railway Department's telegraph network in agreement with the Commonwealth Government. These particular services would prove integral to the war effort and were assets that needed to be protected from the Empire's enemies at all costs.

The telegraph network was vital in waging war. As a provider, QGR was to prioritise military communication over all other correspondence. The telegraph network also allowed soldiers to communicate with family back home; often, a wire would be sent when a soldier arrived or changed location. Likewise, if a soldier's family had news, an update – at a heavily discounted rate or sometimes free of charge – could be sent if the soldier's whereabouts was known. Any suspect incoming telegrams were to be referred to the censor. The postal service that the department helped run would also prove to be a highly valuable asset in wartime.

Throughout the war years, revenue from parcel and postal delivery grew each year. Fundraising initiatives saw people donating items for the war effort and this, along with the postage of care packages for the soldiers, helped to increase the amount of parcels moving throughout the state. Given QGR's large involvement in the communication capabilities of the state, it quickly became aware of the importance of this asset and the need to protect it from 'subversive forces'.

The Weekly Notices during the war were littered with examples of banned material that mail employees were required to look out for. Titles included, 'The Folly of Fighting to a Finish' and 'Shall the People Talk Peace?' – pamphlets produced by the Australian Peace Alliance. The adoption of the *Aliens Restriction Order 1915* gave authorities throughout Australia the power to restrict movement of people considered 'alien enemies', search vessels, restrict aliens from owning firearms and to ban all newspapers printed in enemy languages. After the Alien Restriction Order was enacted, railway mail sorters were asked to look out for, and hand to, the Dead Letter Office all copies of 'Deutsche Wacht (German Watch)' and 'Der Handelstand In Auslande (The Trade Abroad)' along with many other publications printed in Europe and North America. Along with protecting the public from the 'subversive forces' of 'alien enemies', QGR – given its employee size – was viewed with suspicion and, at times, as a refuge for Germans.

DID THE RAILWAY HARBOUR GERMANS?

Public concerns about aliens working for the railways were a nagging issue for the department. Even though the Queensland Cabinet decided that 'employment (in the service of the government) is not to be given to persons of German or Austrian birth by any Department while Britishers willing to be employed are available in any part of the state', the public felt differently. A letter by a concerned railway employee (under the pen name 'Disgusted'), who felt that loyal men were losing their jobs to Germans, was printed in the Brisbane Courier under the title *Is the Railway Department a German Refuge?*

It seemed, nay, rather it was a hard thing to get notice to quit on the very anniversary of the death of so many of our brave sons of Australia, which death was caused by the Germans, and here we have people of that same race kept fat while we Britishers have to roll up our swags and chance getting a job elsewhere. This is the sort of freedom (?) we enjoy in the railway employ – German gangers in the best billets, and Germans who are, I must say, exceedingly bitter against the British, and often sneer at the mention of a British success on the field of battle... Discontent is ever present among the men who work under Germans, and how could it be otherwise when we see reports daily of the murders committed by Germans and the foul treatment of helpless prisoners of war? (*The Brisbane Courier* 9 May 1916, p. 9)

The very next day, in direct reply to 'Disgusted', the Secretary of the Railway Department 'stated that when war broke out every man with a German name was noted and inquiries made regarding him, and as a matter of fact some men from the department were interned' (*The Brisbane Courier* 10 May 1916, p. 6). The railways, as requested by the Chief Secretary's Office of Queensland, presented the Queensland Government with a list of all known naturalised and unnaturalised Germans in the department's

permanent employment in January 1916. The list contained men from the three divisions and listed their names, position, division, department (traffic, maintenance, locomotive section) and their local area of work. This list contained the names of 210 railway employees. Although questions were raised about the men who worked for the railways, QGR was also practical when it came to requiring skilled employees, claiming publically after the Government's request for names that 'it would be a hardship to deny work to bearers of German names, whose parents were born in Queensland, and who were known to be loyal' (*The Queensland Times* 5 February 1916, p. 9).

At times it may have appeared that the men of the railways were turning on each other – Germans, unionists and those disloyal to the King may have been working amongst loyal Britishers. When examining the amount of fundraising activity within the railways and their workforce, however, it appeared for a majority of the time as though the whole railway system was pulling together for the war effort.

THE RAILWAY PATRIOTIC FUND

Within a few weeks of war being declared QGR announced that the General Railway Patriotic Fund was to be established. Employees could give one-off donations or could sign up for fortnightly or monthly subscription payments. The fund was established primarily to assist railway men who enlisted to fight but whose railway pay could not be matched by the Defence Department. The fund was established so the families of railway men who went to fight were no worse off financially because of their service. The second focus of the fund was to assist in raising money for a hospital (figure 6). Many social events such as concerts, boxing and wrestling matches between railway men, excursions and fetes were put on in aid of the Railway Patriotic Fund.

The fund was a great success. Along with providing financial assistance to soldiers' dependents, the fund raised enough money to construct a new ward at the Australian Military Hospital at Kangaroo Point in 1916 (the fund had already spent £400 in 1915 endowing 16 new beds in the existing ward). The

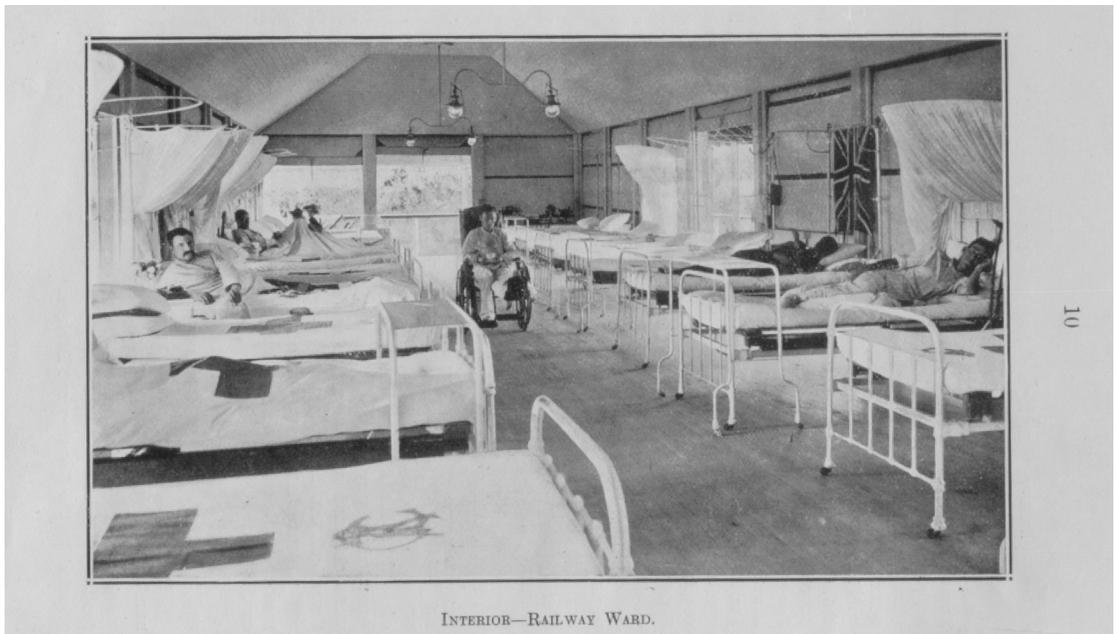


FIG. 6. The Interior of the Railway Ward funded by the Railway Patriotic Fund at the Kangaroo Point Military Hospital (Queensland Railways General Railway Patriotic Fund report, 1917. Courtesy of the Queensland State Archives QSA Item ID 289871).

fund spent £1150 on the new railway ward and was much praised for its care and generosity:

Only the best materials have been used. The material for the coverlets of the beds was supplied by the Red Cross Society, and each coverlet has worked on it a red cross and the initials "Q.G.R"... The ward would always be of immense use, and showed the kindly feelings of the railwaymen entertained for the soldiers at the Front. (*The Brisbane Courier* 28 January 1916, p. 8)

The Fund's Committee was comprised of QGR's top administrators. Along with hospital care, the committee was dedicated in providing employment opportunities for railwaymen who returned wounded from service and were unable to resume work in the railways. An example of this was the creation of a worker farm at Birkdale in Brisbane (figure 7). The concept of the farm was:

The intention with regard to this farm is that it shall be wholly for the benefit of returned railway soldiers who are unable to take up railway work... The farm is to be run on co-operative lines, and the proceeds to go to the railway soldiers in charge, to augment their pensions and so provide for them a good home and fair income. (*Queensland Railways* 1917, p 11)

Although fundraising events added to the fund, it was primarily through direct subscriptions from railway employees that it grew so successfully between 1914 and 1917. By March 1917 £23,754 from a total of £24,734 had been raised through subscriptions (QR 1917). Towards the end of the war, the Patriotic Fund having thus far received £40000 by Anzac Day 1918 from railway men and their families, the Committee decided to ask the public to contribute to the fund through street and railway station collections (figure 8). A new fundraising scheme aimed at capturing the public's imagination was the *10 Miles of Pennies* drive.

The scheme aimed to raise enough money to cover ten miles of railway track with pennies side by side. It was calculated that 519 877 pennies were needed to cover the distance which equated to £2166 3s 1d

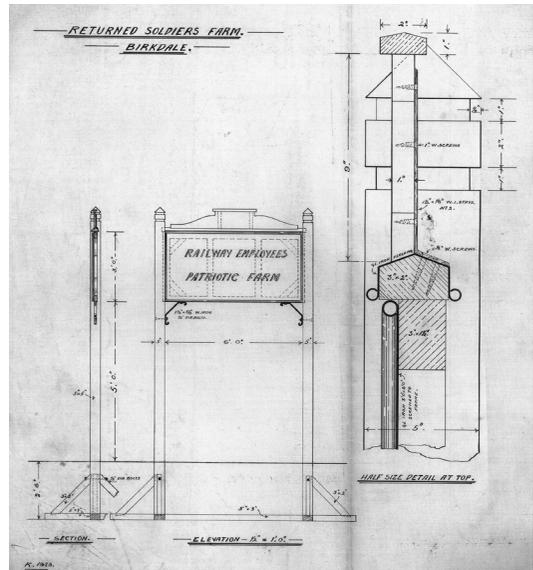


FIG. 7. An architectural drawing for the sign at the returned railway workers farm funded by the Railway Patriotic Fund (Queensland Rail Historical Archive).



FIG. 8. A ticket for a fundraising concert held in Brisbane on behalf of the Railway Patriotic Fund (Queensland Museum Collection, R6557).

(*The Armidale and New England General Advertiser* 19 April 1918, p. 3). The scheme ran from April to July 1918 and the donations totalled £3960 or 18 miles worth of pennies. Throughout the four years of war the men of the railways were always raising money. Even at strikes, a tin would often be passed around for Red Cross donations. Although the railway in Queensland appeared divided at numerous times during the war, the success of the General Railway Patriotic Fund is indicative of the universal brotherhood of working in the railways and the mentality that you looked after your own (figure 9).



FIG. 9. Roll of Honour for Queensland Government Railways Station Masters, Assistant Station Masters and Night Officers of the Australian Clerical Association who served in the First World War (Queensland Museum Collection, R21).

CONCLUSION

Operating a railway in a time of war was a new undertaking for the Queensland Railway Department. It claimed that it was ready for whatever the Defence Department required of it and although 'denuded' of employees in the initial rush to enlist, the railways very successfully brought together Queensland's quota for the Australian Expeditionary Force in September 1914. The next phase of the war would bring about the need for increased recruitment numbers and once again QGR was on hand to run recruiting trains to regional areas and to encourage those able to serve in their employment to enlist. The final phase of the recruitment drive became more personal from 1916 onwards when railway workers were specifically targeted to run military railways on the Western Front. Once again the men of the Railway Department went overseas and served in these units. Many men also worked hard producing munitions but ultimately the Railway Department's experience making shell cases was a major failure. Economic factors during the war made running a railway from a financial point of view extremely difficult. Price increases, in some cases over 500% for essential items, as well as falling revenues

meant that the department was not earning enough money to even pay off the interest on their loans.

Industrial disputes and a very major and public strike in the north would put further pressure on the Railway Department. Another hurdle during this time was the exhaustive Royal Commission announced to investigate the Railway Administration in mid-1917. The Royal Commission found that war conditions were not ideal for running a railway, especially one that was tasked with spreading the rail network into the vast reaches of the state at the same time. As an integral part of the postal and telegraphic service, the railways played a major role in military communication and as members of this important service were expected to police and censor unsuitable and subversive material. Finally, it was the railway workers' fundraising efforts to the Railway Patriotic Fund on behalf of their serving comrades that highlights the care and camaraderie that the railway workers of Queensland had for each other. By 30 June 1918, 2,452 railwaymen – about one sixth of the department's work force – had enlisted and of those 124 were killed. The railways, for the duration of the war effort, had a hand in everything Queensland produced for the war effort; they had literally driven Queensland to war.

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