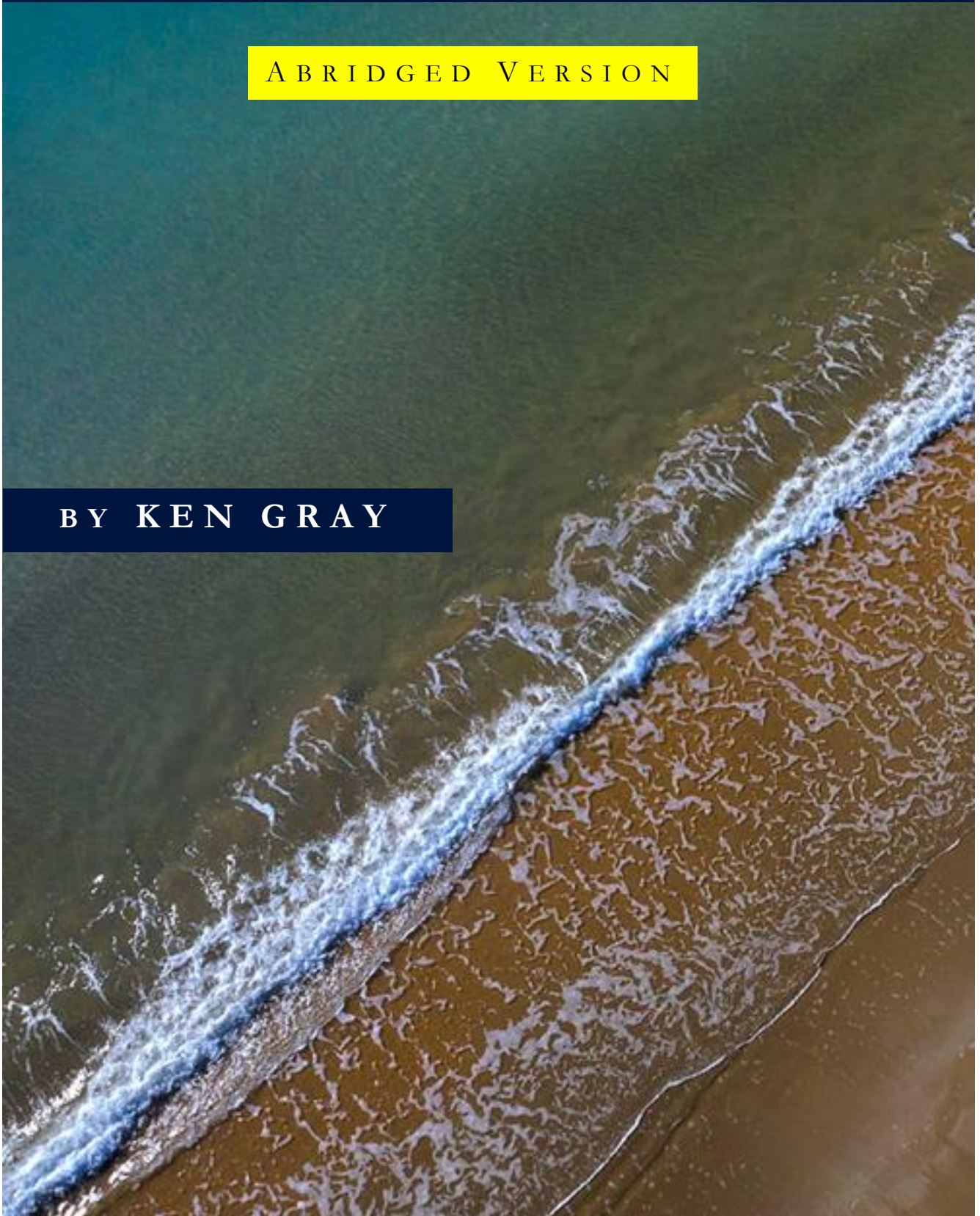


# LIVING LINKS

THE BERRY-PORTER FAMILY of MISSION BEACH

ABRIDGED VERSION

BY KEN GRAY



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At times we record the full story of a family and have it on record for research purposes yet publish an abbreviated version on the web page to make it more readable and relevant to our regular audience. This is an abridged version of the full story of the same name, H023 is also available on the web page. The full version includes a conversation with Ab Berry-Porter aged 90 and living at Lake Tinaroo.

Cover

The image is taken from a portion of a photo by Susan Kelly of *Natural Images* showing the beach near where Porters Creek crosses the sand and releases into the Coral Sea.

The Berry-Porter family history provides Mission Beach with unique living links to some of its earliest European settlers. Bill (William) and Dick (Richard) Porter first selected land here in 1901, 16 years after the Cuttens arrived to stay in 1885. The Porter brothers were probably the ninth family to settle here, after the Cuttens, Jack Unsworth at Narragon (1892), the Banfields at Dunk (1897) and five others who stayed a short time, most owning land beside the Hull River.

What makes the Porter link to the district's past even stronger is that Ab Berry-Porter, a grandson of Dick Porter, is living at Lake Tinaroo on the Atherton Tablelands in 2022 at the age of 91 years. He was able to recall the old days and knew both the original *Porter brothers* when he was young. Ab farmed bananas here for 35 years from 1956 to 1991 before relocating to Lake Tinaroo. Two of his children, Barbara and Phillip, stayed on at Mission Beach and remain there in 2022.

Richard Berry Porter was born in Hollybrook, Skibbereen, County Cork, Ireland in 1873 and lived in Sussex England in 1881 before migrating to Queensland in 1884. His older brother, William Thomas Berry Porter, was born in 1871. The two brothers came from a large family of 12 children and their father (Richard Berry Stephens Porter) and grandfather both came from Devon, England. The name 'Berry' was initially a given name and later became part of the family name. Some of the family called themselves 'Berry-Porter' and some preferred to be known as 'Porter.'

In 1900, Dick married Lily Good from Middlesex, England. Dick and Lily had six children, but two did not survive past childhood. Their six year old son, Ralph, died at Mission Beach when he contracted scrub typhus and could not be saved when a passing ship failed to stop. He was buried near the beach. They lost their daughter, Ethel, at four years of age in 1917 and left Mission Beach. By then, their banana farm was no longer viable as WWI caused all coastal shipping to be seconded. Bill married Margaret Lony in 1902 but lost her in less than a year after they were both hospitalized in Townsville with bubonic plague. They had no children. Bill stayed on, alone, at Mission Beach until 1925.

Dick Porter built a home in 1908 which survived the 1918 cyclone. Bill built a home on the beachfront that was demolished in that cyclone. Dick and his family went to Babinda in 1917, where he worked as a boilermaker at the sugar mill. He died in 1947. Bill went to Wonga Plantation at Rocky Point, north of Mossman, and worked as a copra dryer. He also died in 1947. They did not sell their Mission Beach lots, which were passed onto Dick's descendants.

In 1938/9, two sons of Dick Porter, Whylo (Walter) and Bill (William) came to Mission Beach to build a new home on the original lot Dick owned (4v), but WWII intervened and they enlisted. They survived the war yet did not return to Mission Beach. The strong house they built remains intact beside the Mission Beach Childcare Centre.

Dick Porter's fourth son, Bert (Albert Luther) had two sons Ab (Albert) and Laurie, who came to Mission Beach in the 1950s and, ever since, the family has had descendants living here. Barbara Harle, great granddaughter of Dick, lives today with her family in a home on the lot originally selected. Her brother, Phil Porter, lives here with his family as well and has his tissue culture laboratory built on part of the original Porter land. Laurie's son, Daniel Porter, also lives in Mission Beach today.

While the Porters were among the first European settlers to the district, the original settlers of this district were the Djiru people who arrived eons before any Europeans. Some of their people still live here now, so they are the ultimate links to our past.

The year that Richard and William Berry-Porter arrived to stay permanently at Clump Point is not precisely known. We know with certainty that they were here in 1908 because of a newspaper article speaking of timber to be used for building Richard's house. We also know from Ab that the Porters first came to the district seeking land in 1901 and they lived at Mission Beach on and off before building their homes. They selected three 160-acre lots, one for Dick and two for Bill. Bill's lots were on the Shire boundary near Porters (Wongaling) Creek.

The Porter brothers first looked at land at Carmoo Creek when they rowed up the Hull River in a dinghy, but they found it unsatisfactory due to snakes, mosquitoes and crocodiles and shifted their focus to north Mission Beach. That was confirmed in our chat with Ab. The Porters worked on the Cuttens' farm for a time and they were still working in Townsville and Chillagoe when the farm was starting so came to Clump Point on and off before settling here permanently. They were banana farmers. Initially, they planted rubber trees and these grew well yet were never tapped commercially. A dozen of the trees were tapped a little during WWII when rubber was scarce.

The Porters' closest neighbours were Adam Dewar and Bert Bryant, who farmed the adjoining land, Rupert Fenby, and to the south, there was Charles Morton and the Beamans, Reids and Webbs. Like many Clump Point farmers, the Porters gave their estates a name as seen in this article of 1910:

*Messrs. Porter Bros., of Calbra Clump Point, are also shipping bananas each week, from three and four acres, one of their last shipments being a dozen three-foot cases.*

The minutes of the first meeting of the Clump Point Progress Association in 1912 shows the Porter brothers were active in their community. 12 people were mentioned. Bill Porter proposed one motion and seconded another while Dick Porter proposed another motion. Some insights into the social life of the time are found in a newspaper article, *Clump Point Notes*, 1914:

*A most enjoyable gathering of residents and visitors from Ingham took place at Mr. R. B. Porter's on the 4<sup>th</sup> inst., and the 11<sup>th</sup>. Mr. R. K. Reid gave the visitors and residents the pleasure of a trip in his motor launch. These outings are a decided step forward in the social life of our community. The charming coastline between the Hull River and Maria Creek is rapidly becoming settled and there are now considerable areas of land ... with bananas, coconuts and citrus fruits.*

The small community of fruit farmers at Clump Point grew in numbers in the early 1900s despite the lack of roads for transporting produce. There was no road from Mission Beach to Bingil Bay until after 1940 and the road to Tully was only completed properly in 1940. That was all too late for Dick and Bill Porter. The fruit farmers were entirely dependent on unreliable coastal shipping to call in and take their fruit to Townsville and beyond. Often ships did not come when scheduled and the fruit was wasted.

There was a push by the Cuttens and by the newly formed Clump Point Progress Association in 1912 for roads and a wharf to be built to make transport easier and they were successful in achieving a wharf at Narragon Beach by mid-1917. It was used three times and then destroyed in the March 1918 cyclone.

Edmund Banfield, in his regular newspaper column, *Rural Homilies*, wrote in July 1917 about the wharf being built at Clump Point and how the Minister (Pease) who had come to meet the community earlier had kept his promise to seek funding for the wharf, but it was all too late. He described the district as being deserted and the Progress Association (which had 20 members at one time) now only had a secretary and one member left. Most people had left the district for a lack of shipping to transport fruit.

A comprehensive report on the 1918 cyclone by Edmund Banfield outlined how people were involved. Bill Porter bravely faced the storm alone after his beachfront home was blown away. He was one of the settlers who worked tirelessly rebuilding for others after the cyclone. The use of the family name, 'Berry-Porter' varied. Some used it and some preferred to be known only as 'Porter.' Bill junior used Porter, while Lily used the full name.

Moving to Dick Porter's immediate descendants, three of the surviving sons, Bill, Whylo and John enlisted in WWII. Bert applied but was not accepted. Bill enlisted in May 1940 in Cairns in the Army Ordnance Corps and was discharged in March 1942. Whylo enlisted in June 1940 at Cairns and was a sapper in an artillery regiment. He served in the Middle East (Tobruk) in mid-1940, then in Greece in mid-1941, and then went to Crete. He was discharged in October 1942. John enlisted with the RAAF in July 1940 at Cairns and joined No 21 Squadron. He was a Leading Aircraftman overseas in many campaigns in several different types of aircraft and was discharged in December 1945.

Bert (Albert Luther) Berry-Porter was born in 1909 in Chillagoe where his father, Dick, was a blacksmith in the mines. Bert qualified as an electrician at the Babinda sugar mill and later became the Cairns Regional Electricity Board (CREB) District Superintendent in Atherton. Bert and his wife Ella had two children, Albert (Ab, 1931) and Lawrence (Laurie, 1932 – 2020). Laurie married Joan Schwenke and they had three children, Lynda, Daniel and Maxwell. Ab married Gloria Pearce in 1954 and they had four children, Kevin, Robert, Barbara and Phillip. The family tree is shown in the full version of this story.

Ab qualified as a fitter and worked at the Atherton Maize Board maintaining their large silos. Laurie Porter arrived in Mission Beach in 1952/53 and Ab and Gloria followed in 1956. Ab and Gloria stayed for 35 years and when they retired to Tinaroo in 1991, they left two of their children, Barbara and Phillip, who stayed on and remained in Mission Beach thereafter. Laurie worked for some time in sawmills at Mission Beach before shifting to Cairns but later returned to Mission Beach.

Ab and Laurie inherited the land that had not been sold by Dick and Bill. Bills beachfront lot (3v) was sold to a Greek man named Epaminondas Stathatos (Nonda Street is named after him). The other lot Bill owned was used by Laurie and he had a house there, near the Shire boundary. In Mission Beach, Ab was a banana farmer and at one stage, he leased six acres of land from Jack and Roma Donkin who lived on the hill nearby, north of Lot 4v. Ab has lived on his own at Lake Tinaroo since Gloria died in 2004. He stays in good shape by walking up hills. He walked up the Pyramid a couple of years ago and cannot believe that people run up it. His son, Phil, goes on treks with him on Mt Baldy and Mt Yabby and they walk the mountain bike tracks. Ab has walked them all.

Mission Beach has some splendid, indelible memories etched into its heritage thanks to the Porter family's rich past. The main street bears the family name; Porter Promenade. The stream flowing across the coastal plain is named both Wongaling Creek (its original Djiru name) and Porters Creek. The two *Porter* names stemmed from the first Porters to settle here; Dick and Bill Berry-Porter.

The family name also lingers on informally with many residents using the term, *Porters Straight* to describe the straight section of road between the Mission Beach Aquatic Centre and Wongaling Beach. Laurie Porter lived halfway down that straight and the roof of his home was lost in a small cyclone on Christmas Day. The cyclone carried a mini-tornado within it. A later cyclone destroyed the house and the house is gone, yet Laurie is remembered. The family's love affair with Mission Beach endures. The town's heritage is that much richer for it.

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Top to bottom left to right: Dick and Lily Porter, 1936; Bert Porter, Atherton; Home of the Berry-Porters built in 1939, still there 2022 beside the Mission Beach Child Care Centre; Joan and Laurie Porter, New Year 1966; Ab Porter circa 1950; Ab and Gloria Porter marriage, 1954; Ab 2022.