MAGNIFICENT MAKERS

QUEENSLAND INVENTORS AND THEIR CURIOUS CREATIONS

9 Dec 2017 — 3 Jun 2018
Philip Bacon Heritage Gallery, level 4
State Library of Queensland
makers.slq.qld.gov.au | #SLQmakers
I am proud State Library of Queensland is able to showcase some of its rare collection items, and highlight the state’s rich history of invention and innovation through Magnificent Makers.

As custodian of Queensland’s collective memory, State Library’s collections reflect the complexity and diversity of our state’s experience. Queensland has a long and proud tradition of enterprise and experimentation, and this exhibition highlights some of these incredible achievements. It also reminds us that this spirit of entrepreneurialism is still thriving in our state today.

On behalf of State Library, I thank all involved in delivering this intriguing exhibition. I also acknowledge Philip Bacon AM whose generous donations have made this and many other exhibitions possible.

I invite you to explore Magnificent Makers and hope that it helps you to reflect on Queensland’s inventive past, and inspires your own entrepreneurial endeavours.

Vicki McDonald
State Librarian and CEO
State Library of Queensland

We’re familiar with the old adage about necessity being the mother of invention, but necessity only tells part of the story. Great inventors and makers are often driven by a problem to be solved or a circumstance to be overcome, but the fruits of their labour tell their own stories: tales of perseverance and innovation, beating the odds and changing the course of history. Magnificent Makers tells eight stories of curious creators, daring discoverers and imaginative inventors that trace a path through Queensland’s history since the late nineteenth century. Together, they not only help tell the story of our state, but showcase the inspiring achievements of incredible men and women who took a chance on their ideas — resourceful, trail-blazing or altruistic — and transformed them into lasting legacies.

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Queensland’s first inventors and makers were its first people. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and culture is, and always will be, central to Australia’s creative heritage. One contemporary Queenslander dedicated to showcasing Indigenous Australia’s rich culture and creativity is Brisbane-based Wayne Denning, managing director of Carbon Creative, an award-winning creative agency that gives Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people a space and a voice in today’s media landscape.

Denning, a Birra Gubba man from Central Queensland, founded Carbon Creative in 2006. A decade on, the company has produced documentaries, commercial projects and children’s television series, including the first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s game show, and became the first-ever Australian company to work with US television series Sesame Street.

Carbon Creative’s recent initiatives include STEM.I.AM, which enables Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth to undertake robotics and coding. STEM.I.AM was inspired by another great Aboriginal inventor, David Unaipon, who transformed the wool industry by changing the motion of sheep-shearing blades from circular to straight, among many other notable ideas.

In 2017 Denning was awarded a Special Excellence Award at the Queensland University of Technology Outstanding Alumni Awards for his creative vision and worldwide promotion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. Denning’s work not only tells the story of how Queensland’s innovation has shifted and evolved over the last century, but reminds us where that innovation began and suggests exciting possibilities for where it might take us next.

Known as the ‘fairy godfather of blind children’, Richard Frank Tunley played an incredibly influential role in educating Queensland’s vision-impaired children during the twentieth century. But while Tunley’s extraordinary hand-crafted creations, which include braille globes, relief maps, dolls houses and model towns, were vital educational tools, they were also sources of joy, offering vision-impaired children a way to see and experience the world through touch.

Tunley was born partially deaf, which spurred his lifelong desire to help others with similar conditions. He came to Brisbane as a boy in 1884 and, amusingly, ran his own blind-making business as an adult. He was fond of saying that he “made blinds for a living and lived for the blind.”

In 1923 Tunley made his first braille globe. In 1924 he successfully campaigned to make education compulsory for blind and deaf children. For the next 50 years, until his death in 1968, he crafted models, maps, toys and teaching aids from the workshop of his Clayfield home. While he gifted some of these to schools all over the world, from New Zealand to India, Tunley’s legacy is firmly rooted in Brisbane. He became ‘grandfather Tunley’ to the students at what was then Queensland Blind, Deaf and Dumb Institution in Dutton Park (now Narbethong State Special School).

He also had a long-running association with Queensland Braille Writing Association (now known as Braille House), and his fundraising efforts helped the organisation move from its original premises to a beautiful old Queenslander in Annerley where it remains today. Tunley’s compassion and imagination changed the lives of many, and made a lasting contribution to Queensland’s vision-impaired community.

ABOVE: Wayne Denning, Executive Producer and Managing Director, Carbon Creative, 2016
RIGHT: STEM.I.AM - present
As well as providing funding for coding and robotics workshops to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and youth throughout the state, the STEM.I.AM program offers scholarships to help young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders attend university to undertake engineering or information technology studies.
At a time when women had few career opportunities, Sarah Jenyns was a business pioneer. With a medical background and a keen understanding of the health problems associated with wearing whale-bone corsets, she not only created a garment that would smooth women’s figures without causing backache or bad posture, but launched a Queensland-owned and operated business empire that would last almost a century.

Sarah, a trained nurse, married Ebenezer Randolph Jenyns, a surgical instrument maker and evangelical preacher, in 1887. They settled in Brisbane in 1896, but times were tough — they had seven children and little money. Sarah felt a sharp pain one day when she bent over to lift a pail, and found that placing a pad inside her corset fixed the problem, except as soon as she moved, the pad dislodged and the pain returned.

Determined to devise a better solution, and earn enough to support her family, Sarah designed a self-lacing corset with ‘Verterbrella’, intricately woven steel ‘bones’, in the back to support the spine. She also came up with the revolutionary idea of making corsets for 12 different body shapes. By 1909, she had a workshop on George Street and took her design to market, gaining endorsement from the medical profession and a worldwide manufacturing patent.

Although Sarah passed away in 1952, her business outlived her by another 40 years, becoming one of Queensland’s longest running fashion companies. By 1964, it had seven factories; by 1970, workers were producing 45,000 garments a day. Jenyns didn’t cease operating until 1992, when corsets were no longer a fixture of women’s wardrobes.

In 2014, Sarah was inducted into the Queensland Business Leaders Hall of Fame.
Queensland almost met its match with the prickly pear, an invasive weed introduced to Australia in 1833. But the persistent efforts of Queensland researchers — and the incredible pear-destroying capabilities of the Cactoblastis moth — soon turned this near-disaster into the most successful example of biological weed control in history.

After spreading to Queensland from Scone in New South Wales, the prickly pear began a hostile takeover of the landscape, and was declared a noxious weed by 1883. Described as a ‘monster’, a ‘curse’ and a ‘green octopus’, its spiky pads and shoots rendered huge tracts of land unusable. By 1925, it covered 60 million acres, 80% of that in Queensland, and was increasing at an alarming rate of one million acres per year. The pear seemed unstoppable (it could even sprout on fence posts) and early attempts to halt its path ranged from smothering and crushing to poisoning and burning. The government established various prickly pear commissions and boards and an experimental research station at Dulacca, where Australia’s first government-appointed female scientist, Dr Jean White, researched the pear from 1912–16.

By 1912, the Prickly Pear Travelling Commission was focused on finding a biological control agent, and began importing specimens of insect species — these included the Cactoblastis moth, although their larvae initially failed to mature. It wasn’t until 1925 that Alan Dodd, a member of the Commonwealth Prickly Pear Board, successfully imported new specimens from Argentina. The Cactoblastis surprised everyone: eggs were released in 1926 and, by 1932, the moths had destroyed most of the original prickly pear stands. Queensland was revitalised, with settlers reclaiming almost seven million hectares of previously infested land, reviving dying towns and erecting new infrastructure.
HARRIET BRIMS

As a female commercial photographer in the early twentieth century, Harriet Brims was a trail blazer. With her adventurous spirit and creative vision — abetted by her husband’s beautiful handmade cameras, carrying cases and camera shutters — Harriet captured the realities of life across regional Queensland in the 1900s.

Harriet was born in Yandilla in 1864 and married her husband Donald, an engineer, at Blackall in 1881. For many years the couple and their five children travelled extensively throughout North Queensland, and were even said to be the first white settlers in the state’s Herbert River district. They moved to Ingham in 1894 where Harriet established the Britannia Studio and began a photography career that would last 16 years.

In 1903 she moved her business to Mareeba, where she worked for the next decade, although her business was portable and she would often travel to other Queensland towns. Her portraits offer a fascinating record of people and places, from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and Melanesian labourers to cane fields and copper smelters.

While Harriet had the independent drive and aesthetic sensibility, Donald’s exceptional handiwork gave her the equipment she needed to take these further: he made her maple-wood cameras and cow-hide carrying cases, and even crafted shutters from discarded opium tins.

The Brims family moved to Brisbane in 1914, where Harriet ceased her photography work, although she continued taking family photographs. Despite a relatively short career, Harriet remains a significant figure in Queensland history, both for what her work reveals about life in Queensland at the time and for her notable achievements as a female business owner.

AJ HUNTING

During the Second World War, Hunting spent years petitioning the military to approve various inventions for the troops, including a portable flamethrower, an unsinkable canoe and an automatic parachute-opening device. While his efforts were unsuccessful, he did manage to sell his cooling crystals to the dairy industry.

Hunting died suddenly in 1946 and despite expressing remorse about his many failed business attempts, his enterprising and entertaining creations have rendered him one of Queensland’s most memorable figures.
Beloved snake showman Ram Chandra was more than an entertainer. His daring feats and tireless investigations were central to developing the first taipan antivenom which has saved more than 73 lives, including Ram’s own. Born Edward Royce Ramsamy in New South Wales in 1921, Ram moved to Mackay as a young man where he developed a lifelong obsession with taipans.

By the 1940s, he was working with the ‘Carnival of Horror’, a travelling show that had Ram dicing with death by handling venomous snakes in the dressing room ‘ PIT OF DEATH’. Ram used his showmanship to learn as much as he could about snake habits. He thought to only live in Far North Queensland, but in the 1950s, several mysterious deaths following bites from brown snakes had the medical profession perplexed. Ram identified the victim as the taipan and established that the species did indeed exist elsewhere in Queensland. He began milking taipans for their venom, a notoriously risky procedure, and sent it to the Commonwealth Serum Laboratory enabling them to develop the first taipan antivenom. It was first used on a unidentified victim from Bruce Stringer, saving his life. The following year the antivenne saved Ram’s life after he was bitten by a taipan in the ‘ PIT OF DEATH’.

During his lifetime, Ram survived numerous deadly snake bites and raised thousands of pounds for ambulance services in Queensland. He was awarded a British Empire Medal in 1970. He was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in 1995, but he’ll always be Mackay’s beloved son. In 1999, the year after Ram’s death, Ram Chandra Park was opened in his hometown.
I hope you’ve enjoyed this exhibition at State Library of Queensland, which has been made possible by the generosity of our donors.

With your support State Library can continue to acquire, conserve and make Queensland’s treasures freely available for everyone to enjoy.

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Thank you.

Anne Tunnecliffe
Director, Queensland Library Foundation