

LOCAL ARTIST ▶

DOUG RATTRAY



Doug Rattray was a Councillor with the Bundaberg City Council for over 25 years, but is best known by his nickname 'Mr Motion Pictures'. In 1926, he bought the lease for the Paramount Picture Palace in Tantitha Street, then purchased the theatre outright from owners Walters Bros. the following year. The theatre was refitted for the new talking pictures which were becoming popular, and plans were made for the construction of an open-air theatre. In 1930, the first talking picture was screened at the Paramount – *The Vagabond Lover*, starring Rudy Vallee.

Not content with just buying and screening films, Doug Rattray made several trips to Hollywood to meet producers and movie stars who had the same passion for films. As well as screening movies, Doug was a keen amateur cameraman, and was a regular sight around town filming processions, Railway Picnics, and other major events in Bundaberg. Many of his documentaries were screened at the Paramount Theatre before the main feature, including one of his earliest films of Bert Hinkler returning to Bundaberg after his successful flight from England to Australia.

Over the years, Doug Rattray became a familiar sight at local events, recording anything and everything to do with Bundaberg and surrounding areas. He filmed the buildings in Bourbong Street,

Sugar Festivals, Car Rallies from Bargara to Bundaberg, Rowing Regattas and even went up in a biplane to capture the coastline near Bundaberg. Much of this historic footage has been passed on to the National Film Archives in Canberra, but many thousand feet of film remain in Bundaberg.

Several years ago, a relative of Doug Rattray living on the North Coast found boxes of film stored under his house. These surviving Rattray films are in the care of a local film historian, and he has managed to transfer several hours of footage onto video and DVD format. He is passionate about his desire to see more of the film digitised before it deteriorates any further. Various





venues around Bundaberg over the last few years have been host to Rattray film nights, to enable people to see and appreciate Doug Rattray's images of Bundaberg from the 1930s through to the 1950s, and his commitment to preserving the visual history of Bundaberg.

In 2007, the Bundaberg Library and Bundaberg City Council sent the remaining films to a conservator to have them assessed, and approximately 25 film reels are of good enough quality to be converted to digital format. The costs involved in digitisation and preservation of these reels are very significant, but so is their historical value. The remainder of the reels are either too brittle or degraded to be digitised, and their images cannot be preserved.

The Rattray films are of historical importance to Bundaberg and surrounding districts. With so much of our history disappearing over the years, we hope that the films will not become just a memory, but will be able to be digitised and preserved for future generations.

Many thanks to Picture Bundaberg contributors for images in this article.

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- Bundaberg Library