

Queensland's proud furniture tradition

Queensland furniture making can be traced back to the first settlement at Moreton Bay, which later became the Colony of Queensland. The outpost was established for the 'subsistence and security' of runaway convicts from Port Macquarie. John Oxley and Lieutenant Miller, the first commandant, left Sydney on the brig *Amity* in 1824 with a group that included 30 volunteers from the prisoners' barracks in Sydney. They formed a settlement at Redcliffe Point, which was moved in the following year to the present site of Brisbane.

One of the 30 volunteers was James Winstanley, a cabinetmaker, sentenced to 14 years, who arrived in Sydney aged 17 years, in 1819. No doubt he had a hand in making the recorded two writing desks, eleven forms, eight tables and two bed stretchers made in the first two years of the colony's life. He returned to Sydney in 1826 and received a ticket of leave for his good and voluntary service.

Moreton Bay remained an isolated penal settlement, governed by a succession of eight commandants who did little to improve it. Patrick Logan was the exception, and between 1826 and 1830 he provided an impressive number of new stone and brick buildings which included a hospital with surgeon's quarters, a prisoners barracks, a chaplain's house and a new commissariat store.

In 1827, Logan established a lumber yard which incorporated a carpenter's workshop. Tom Petrie commented in his *Reminiscences of Early Queensland* that

'the better class of prisoners were not hobbled as the chain gang were, but they worked in a place called the lumber yard... This was a walled enclosure containing different buildings where the prisoners worked at trades of every description.'

Moreton Bay then had 300 convicts and 70 soldiers. Presumably the construction and furnishing of these buildings was drawn from suitably qualified convicts. Records indicate several chair makers and cabinetmakers among them.

So, furniture making in Queensland commenced in the lumber yard with these exiled tradesmen. Convicts would have prepared and used local timber in the yard. An 1841 statistic records that, after supplying local needs, 90,228 feet of cedar and pine was exported.

A lot of the furniture was made for the officers and remained public property, which was listed in inventories. *Regulations for the Penal Settlements, New South Wales*, 1829, authorised the following furniture for officer's quarters:

The Quarters of the Officers of the Settlement shall be furnished according to the following scale:



Cedar chest of drawers, typical of early Queensland furniture, which has been fully restored in the traditional manner to maintain its inherent and increasing value

Commandant's Dining Room – One Side Board, One Dining Table, Twelve Chairs, Fender and Fire Irons.

Sitting Rooms generally – Two Tables, Eight Chairs, One Book Case (with Cupboard underneath), One Sofa (not including Covers), Fender and Fire Irons.

Bed Rooms – One Bedstead, One Table, Two Chairs, One Washing Table, One Wardrobe, or Chest of Drawers.

Kitchen – One Dresser, One Table, Six Common Chairs for Commandant, Four Common Chairs for others, Cupboard and Shelves, One Iron Boiler, Fender and Fire Irons.

Pantry or Store Room to be fitted up with Shelves.

Stretchers to be allowed for the Number of Servants permitted.

Inferior Free Persons – Two Tables, One Cupboard, Four Chairs, One Dresser, One Bedstead, or more should there be a family.

Andrew Petrie (1798–1872), was an immigrant from Scotland who arrived in Sydney, as a free settler, in 1831. He was Clerk of Works in the Government Ordinance Department and he erected Dr Lang's buildings in Jamison Street, Sydney. Petrie was one of the first free settlers to arrive at Brisbane, in 1837, on the *James Watt*, the first steamer to the area. He brought with him a portable writing desk that reputedly had been made in the lumber yard established by Patrick Logan in 1827. He had been sent to superintend the buildings and works of the Crown at Moreton Bay.

Five years after arriving in Moreton Bay, he left the public service to commence his own business at Queen St, Petrie's Bight. His son took over this business in 1848. Petrie built numerous government buildings in Brisbane and Ipswich. He furnished the Colonial Secretary's office, the Attorney General's office, the new Government House, the Post Office, and the Customs House with cedar presses, washstands, bookshelves and bookcases. Other cabinetmakers, including James Bryden, J. Burns, Robert Creyke, John Phillips, William Pauley and R.S. Coley supplied furniture for these buildings.

James Bryden, a cabinetmaker at Bryden's buildings, Queen St, is recorded as supplying furniture to the Legislative Buildings between 1860 and 1864. John Petrie supplied furniture to the Legislative Buildings between 1864 and 1867, and he supplied furniture for the Parliament buildings up to 1871. They included tables for Council and Assembly, yellow wood seats, Council bookcase, Assembly bookcase, and yellow wood chairs.

J.W. Petrie was awarded Highly Commended for a secretaire he exhibited at the Sydney International Exhibition in 1879. He exhibited a silky oak and cypress pine pedestal dressing table with a looking glass in Melbourne in 1880.

Just over 150 years since the *Amity* voyage, as an apprentice with Harvey Brothers, I assisted with manufacturing a Queensland cedar sideboard, extension table and chairs for Bjelke-Petersen's Premier's Department in the Executive Building. Harvey Brothers were also given the honour of producing Queensland's wedding gift to Prince Charles and Princess Diana – a beautifully carved Queensland cedar longcase clock.

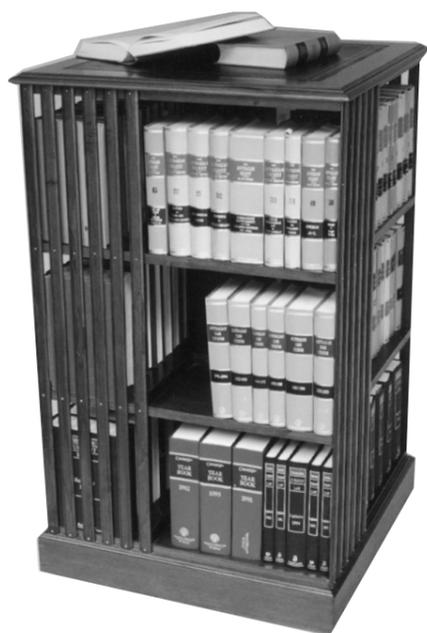
Since establishing my own business, I have crafted and installed 22ct gold embossed leather desk inserts for both the Australian and Queensland Parliaments. The High Court's gold embossed coat of arms chairs were also done at this workshop. At the opening of the Treasury Casino in the restored Treasury Building, the Premier, Leader of the Opposition and Treasurer were each given an authentically reproduced Treasury Box. These were leathered and embossed in 22ct gold at our workshop, as was their splendid boardroom table.

The Queensland cedar and yellow wood, referred to in early furnishing records of the Queensland Legislative Assembly and Parliament Buildings, has been adhered to throughout the years with a major revamp being done in the 1980s. A lot of companies were involved with this refurbishment, including our upholstery master craftsman, Alastair McPherson, and the F.H. Burns company.

Through our commissions and such associations, our firm is now custodian of the original designs for the Queensland coat of arms which sits above the Speaker's Chair, the original yellow wood veneers used in the 1980s and the patterns and sample chair of the Members' offices.

Our G.N. Olsson cabinetmaking workshop at Narangba Rd, Kurwongbah is within three miles of the original Tom Petrie homestead, and the nearby town of Petrie, which was named in his honour, small world ■

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G.N. Olsson reproduction cedar revolving bookcase redesigned for modern requirements. Featuring purpose-built accommodation for manilla folders or books and a 22ct gold embossed leather insert on top. Pullout reading trays are optional, as are the solid brass English castors



G.N. Olsson reproduction three-drawer silky oak filing cabinet, redesigned for modern file sizes. Features a traditional wooden wheel runner system for longevity and ease of drawer movement. Hand dovetailed throughout and solid English brass fittings

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07 3888 1549

393 Narangba Rd, Brisbane
Fax: 07 3888 5330
Email: g nolsson@workin4u.com.au
www.workin4u.com.au/g nolsson