

BIRCH AND CARROLL

(1909-1923) The company cinema chain known as Birch Carroll and Coyle to generations of Queenslanders was formalised as a limited company in 1923. Its origins can be traced back to 1909, however, when Brisbane and Ipswich-based brothers E.J. and Dan Carroll joined with Rockhampton-based theatrical manager and film exhibitor George Birch to form Birch and Carroll. Over the next 14 years the company established a chain of venues in many of the state's principal towns. This period also saw the company invest heavily in live entertainment (including vaudeville) not only as lessees but also as managers and producers and co-producers.

Edward (E.J.) Carroll's career as an entertainment entrepreneur effectively began in 1906 when he succeeded in purchasing the rights to exhibit the Tait brothers'¹ films in Queensland. He and his brother Dan then established themselves as both film exhibition pioneers and live theatre producers in Brisbane and the nearby town of Ipswich, before expanding their operations into the state's regional areas. This period of rapid expansion began in 1909 when the brothers merged their Brisbane-based interests with George H. Birch and his wife Mary in Rockhampton. Birch had previously been associated with the [British Biograph Company](#) [1]. The new partnership established a permanent base of operations in Charters Towers, taking over the lease of the [Olympia Theatre](#), and by 1912 controlled most of the film exhibition halls in the major centres along the Queensland coastline. At the same time, they maintained an active interest in variety theatre. An advertisement in *Australian Variety* in 1913, for example, reads:

Birch and Carroll (Queensland). Theatrical and Picture managers, Playing Pictures and vaudeville in all the Principal Centres from Toowoomba to Charters Towers. Tours of legitimate companies managed over this route appearing in all the principal theatres of which we have the booking control (15 October 1913, n. pag.).

By then, vaudeville managers and firms such as [Ted Holland](#) and [Brennan-Fuller Ltd](#) had also begun leasing their acts to Birch and Carroll, rather than undertaking the tours themselves. [Harry Clay](#) notes in the September 1915 issue of the *Theatre Magazine*, too, that he had built a strong association with the company over the previous five or six years, thereby allowing him to use Birch and Carroll venues in some towns to his advantage:

George Carroll and E.J. Carroll are blanky good fellows. For one thing, they keep their word - which is more than a lot of the blanks do. Despite the fact that the Queensland halls are mostly engaged by Birch and Carroll they allow me to play there just as I had been doing for years. With more profitable results to themselves they could if they wished, close me out altogether (25).

On 19 October 1912 Birch and Carroll amalgamated their picture operations at the Olympia Theatre, Charters Towers with T. V. Coyle, then the lessee of the [Theatre Royal](#). This was the first joint venture between the three men whose company would later become synonymous with Queensland film exhibition.

Following George Birch's death in 1917 his business activities, particularly those located in the Rockhampton region, continued to be run by his widow, Mary. The inclusion of the Birch name in the formation of Birch, Carroll and Coyle Ltd in 1923 was therefore as much an acknowledgement of her involvement in the continued success of the Birch-Carroll firm as her husband's. The move to formalised the company occurred with the inclusion of Virgil Coyle's North Queensland theatres, and was undertaken so that the organisation could better control and modernise what had by then become an extensive theatre and cinema circuit in northern and coastal Queensland.

SEE ALSO

[Birch Carroll & Coyle](#) • [E.J. Carroll](#) • [Dan Carroll](#) • [George H. Birch](#)

FURTHER REFERENCE

Cryle, Denis, Betty Cosgrove and Ray Boyle. "Birch Carroll and Coyle and the Regional Picture Palace: A Case Study." *Transformations* 1 (2000), n. pags.

Cryle, Denis and Grace Johansen. "Maintaining a Tradition of Mixed Entertainments: Birch, Carroll and Coyle's Regional Queensland Wintergarden Theatres." *Screening the Past* 13 Mar. (2006), n. pags.²

¹ See AVTA entry for [J. and N. Tait](#).

² The Cryle/Cosgrove and Boyle, and Cryle/Johansen articles were researched and published before the advent of Trove in 2009. While containing some useful insights and historical background, each should now be considered out of date, particularly in respect of the Birch and Carroll era.