

Regatta Hotel

543 Coronation Drive, Toowong

A gracious landmark building along Coronation Drive, the Regatta Hotel was designed by notable Brisbane architect Richard Gailey during the 1880s economic boom. Built in 1886 to replace a modest single storey timber hotel, the Regatta Hotel is a substantial and resilient building that has since survived every significant flood in Brisbane.

Navigational hint: as you approach the Regatta ferry terminal, look for the 3-storey Regatta Hotel with its highly decorated wrap-around verandahs.

The Telegraph reported that in the early hours of Sunday 14 March 1915, residents of Toowong and Hill End (South Brisbane) were woken by “piercing feminine shrieks, followed by the clanging of the fire bell”, as the back part of the Regatta Hotel was “sheeted in flames” with 7 people inside. The licensee, his wife and 4 children were prevented by intense smoke from escaping via the stairs and jumped from the front balcony. A maid, Grace Leis, was the only one seriously hurt, sustaining back and internal injuries and suffering shock.

In 1926, the Federated Liquor Trade Employees’ Union declared the Regatta Hotel ‘black’ after a bar attendant was unfairly dismissed. During the industrial dispute that lasted only 4 days, the Federated Carters’ Union also refused to make deliveries to the hotel, impacting its beer and spirit supplies.

Another controversy occurred on 31 March 1965 when two women, Merle Thornton and Rosalie Bogner, chained themselves to a footrail in the men-only public bar to protest the exclusion of serving women in public bars. This Queensland liquor law was changed in 1970 and, in 2014, the Regatta Hotel named Merle’s Bar to honour the protest.

Mother of Australian actor Sigrid Thornton, Merle was a strong advocate for women throughout her academic career focused on sociology, gender studies, women's studies, philosophy, and government. She founded the Equal Opportunities for Women Association, and successfully campaigned to remove the ‘marriage bar’ that, until 1966, excluded married women from working in the Australian public service.