

# Basic Detail Report

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## ANMS1129[047]

### Title

Menu from SS BARALABA for Christmas 1928.

### Date

December 1928

### Medium

Ink on card

### Dimensions

Overall (closed): 114 x 88 mm

### Name

Menu

### History

Basil Moffitt de Bohun Helm (1903-1996) was born in Sydney and went to sea at the age of 15, in 1919. He

began his apprenticeship with Burns Philp and continued to work for this company for many years. However as World War II escalated and Burns Philp ships began to be requisitioned for naval and military purposes, Helm joined the Queensland Coast and Torres Strait Pilot Service (QCTSPS), piloting ships to New Guinea. By this time he was exceedingly experienced and knowledgeable in the navigation of the eastern coast of Australia, the Barrier Reef, and particularly the ports and waters of the Pacific Islands. Helm, like other Australian merchant seamen with experience in this region, provided valuable help as a pilot to USA naval and military officers, many of whom had very little knowledge of the seas and islands where the most intense campaigns of the war with Japan were taking place. Charts generally did not exist for this difficult region or contained little information for most of the inter-island routes and ports. Burns Philp masters, however, knew the reefs, shoals, tides and climates and made their own charts. Helm continued in the Torres Strait Pilot Service after the war and up until 1954 when he relocated to Braidwood in NSW in order to make a new life as a grazier. Burns Philp, the shipping company that produced this menu, is an important feature in the history of Australian maritime industries. Originating as a trading company in Townsville in the 1870s, Burns Philp developed its own shipping line and trading empire throughout northern Australia, New Guinea and the Pacific Islands, along with a network of plantations in the islands. By the 1920s it was a household name, operating a fleet of large main-line ships in conjunction with a fleet of smaller inter-island ships. Burns Philp passenger liners were well-appointed and well known, with their black and white chequered funnels and the Burns Philp thistle on the house flag. During World War II both ships and personnel were taken into war service, and the company's specialised knowledge of the Pacific was put to use by Allied commanders. Burns Philp resumed operations and commissioned new ships after World War II, but sold its last ship in 1971. In the 1980s the company made vast operating changes which

resulted in an organisation bearing little relation to the past shipping and trading company, and brought it to near-bankruptcy. It continues to exist but has no maritime connection. The QCTSPS originated in the 1890s as an association of pilots licensed by the Queensland Marine Board to pilot ships through the dangerous passages of the Queensland coast and the Torres Strait. In 1993 the Australian Maritime Safety Authority took over administration of the QCTSPS and the name was changed to Torres Pilots. Since 1991, pilotage has been compulsory for all ships longer than 100m, all oil and chemical tankers and liquid gas carriers. Membership of the Torres Strait Pilots has always carried prestige and licenses to join the pilot service were keenly sought after. Only two were accepted in 1942, the year Basil Helm joined.