

# HISTORY OF THE Queensland Ambulance Townsville

At its monthly meeting held on 14 August 1900, the Superintendent/Secretary of the City Ambulance and Transport Brigade Brisbane was instructed to prepare a report on the prospects and advisability of a Brigade extension to the larger centres of population in Queensland. This report was adopted, and a motion carried on 11 September to the effect that 'the Superintendent, at earliest convenient time shall proceed to Rockhampton, Townsville and Charters Towers, with a view to test the practicability of extending Brigade operations to those towns and to further report'.

In October, Townsville and Charters Towers were visited, and public meetings held, resulting in Branch Centres being formed in each town in December 1900.

The following article appeared in the Townsville Press on 20 December 1900: 'By the 'S.S. Warrego' yesterday, there arrived from Brisbane G.R. King and T.W. Treacy, the officers selected to open the Townsville and Charters Towers Branches of the Ambulance Transport Brigade. Mr King who remains in Townsville, brought with him a complete plant for first aid treatment, together with an Ambulance Litter. Pending securing premises for a central depot, the plant has been stationed at the offices of Mr J.N. Parkes (the Honorary Secretary of the local branch), where Mr King will be in attendance, and can be telephoned to should occasion require. Mr Treacy goes on to Charters Towers tonight, taking with him a complete plant. The first case to engage the attention of the officers occurred yesterday, when one of the vessel's crew was seized with an epileptic fit. Valuable assistance was rendered, and the patient 'brought to'. Prior to leaving Brisbane, King and Treacy were lead to believe that in Townsville they would find the populace physically weak, and of sallow complexion, and were pleasantly surprised to find the residents as robust and energetic as those of the capital.'



*First Superintendent G. King*

When the service commenced, a Provisional Committee was in office. However, in February 1901, in accordance with Brigade rules a committee of seven was elected at the Annual Meeting. Those elected



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were the Mayor Ald A.E. McCreedy (Chairperson) and J.N. Parkes (Hon Treasurer), W.M. Aird, S.J. Hulbert, R.J. Hartley, A.G. Unmack and T.S. Day.

Ambulance operations were conducted from a small shop in Flinders Street opposite the Palace Hotel. These premises were leased for a term of six months. Superintendent King moved into the building on 4 January 1901. One of the honorary members was put on paid duty for a period of eleven days at six shillings per day to assist.

Being unable to procure locally an assistant holding a first aid certificate, it was decided that the Brisbane Centre be requested to send up a qualified officer for appointment to the permanent staff. Honorary Bearer T.W. McIntyre proceeded to Townsville on the 'S.S. Peregrine' on 5 January 1901. He was to meet his own expenses and commence duty in Townsville at a salary of eight shillings per day. In July 1901, the Committee purchased a property suitable for Brigade requirements at the corner of Sturt and Stanley Streets for the sum of £1,250 and a further £100 was expended in building a plant room and stable.



*Sturt Street premises 1901*

Also in July, a sulky and horse for hauling purposes were added to the plant. Their introduction proved beneficial all round, as well as reducing the preliminary fatigue of officers arriving on the scene of an accident and greatly economising on time, enabling officers to render first aid in an efficient manner.

An additional bearer was placed on the permanent staff in December 1902, bringing the paid staff up to four. Members of the staff were Superintendent G. King, Bearers T.W. McIntyre, J.C. Hamilton and J.L. McIntosh.

It is interesting to note the following extract from the Committee's Annual Report of 1903: 'The three Bearers put in during the year, an aggregate of 18 051 hours of duty, being an average of 16 hours 29 minutes per day, for seven days a week, whilst last year with two bearers the average was 20 hours 27.5 minutes per day, for seven days a week, so it will be seen that by the additional man on the staff, the Superintendent has been enabled to reduce the hours of duty somewhat, besides having the Brigade more efficiently managed.'



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By 1904, the work had increased to such an extent as to make more room absolutely necessary to enable the Brigade to function efficiently. On 12 July of that year, the Committee resolved to build a Centre that would meet the requirements of the town for Ambulance work for many years. Tenders were invited for the erection of a new brick Centre building on the site of the existing quarters. The successful tenderer was Mr S.A. Anderson, the contract price being £2,059. The foundation stone was laid on 28 September by Mr J. Johnson, the first life member of the Brigade in Townsville, in the presence of 100 people.



*New premises Sturt Street 1905*

Following the death of Mr R. Nye Stevens in 1906, Superintendent Gus King was appointed to the positions of Superintendent of the Brisbane Centre and General Secretary. The Townsville Committee then appointed Acting Senior Bearer J.L. McIntosh as Superintendent King's successor.

In June 1910, an Honorary Centre was opened at Kalamia Mill (Ayr), in charge of Honorary Bearer L. Dempsey.

In May 1912, the Committee added a motorcycle to its plant and between May and December it was used on 219 occasions.

After giving much time and thought to the inauguration of motor transport in place of the grey horse, the Committee purchased its first ambulance car in 1914.

In 1921, a Sub-Centre was established at Ingham and Bearer A. Dawson was appointed Officer-in-Charge. This Sub-Centre became a self-governing Centre in 1925, and the then Officer-in-Charge (E. Von Alpen) was appointed Superintendent.

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Superintendent McIntosh vacated his position in 1933 and Deputy Superintendent J.A. Weston became his successor.

Superintendent Weston died in office in 1948 and Superintendent H.J. Baty of Hughenden was appointed to the vacant position. Mr Baty held the position until 1961, when Superintendent J.A.C. Stibbs of the Gordonvale Centre was appointed as Townsville's fifth Superintendent.

In the 1960's, the city of Townsville was experiencing rapid growth and a more modern and bigger ambulance Centre was required if the service was to keep pace with this growth. Investigations were made for suitable land in the city area, and the Committee was offered a parcel of land in the suburb of Currajong. At that time the suburb was very small. However, the Town Planner advised that the growth of the city would be in this region.

Planning for a new Centre commenced in 1965, and the ambulance building on the corner of Sturt and Stanley Streets was put up for sale. The property was subsequently purchased by the M.L.C. Insurance Company for the sum of \$80,000.

New premises were constructed at Hugh Street, Currajong at a cost of \$110,000 and officially opened on 3 June 1967, by Mr J.A. Turner, President of the QATB State Executive. The Townsville Committee at that time consisted of G.E. Fleming (Chairperson), F. Bell (Deputy Chairperson), H.J. Treacy (Hon Treasurer), H.E. Strike, W.A. Woods, N.J. Conn, R. Cali, H.W.S. Orrow and J.C. Knoble. Superintendent Stibbs worked very hard in establishing the new building and maintaining the service. He played a large part in increasing the size of the staff and the number of vehicles.

Following representations to the Committee by local residents, an Honorary Centre was established on Magnetic Island in 1974.

Through a long period of ill health, Superintendent John Stibbs was forced to retire in 1976. His Deputy Superintendent Mr J.D. (Des) Condon was appointed to the vacant position.

With the rapid growth, it soon became obvious to the Committee that it would have to establish a permanent service on Magnetic Island and to the west of the city. Acquisition of land became imminent resulting in the setting aside of an area of crown land for ambulance purposes at Nelly Bay and the purchase of a block at Kirwan.

The Sub-Centre building on Magnetic Island which was constructed at a cost of \$69,000 was officially opened by Sir Douglas Fraser ISO (President of the QATB State Council) on 19 May 1979.

At Kirwan, the Ambulance Station and residence were constructed at a contract price of \$122,440. This facility was officially opened by Sir William Knox, Minister for Health on 20 May 1979.

In 1988, the Committee recognised that the upgrading of the facilities for staff training would be necessary, as the existing area was too small and underdeveloped.

In presenting a submission to the Queensland Ambulance Services Board for permission to construct a Training Complex in Hugh Street, the following reasons for its existence were given:

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1. To deliver the training programmes that were needed to develop the skills of officers in the district, and if necessary the Region.
2. To have the facilities that were required for any type of course that may be required in the future for decentralised training.
3. To provide motel-type accommodation for ambulance officers who may be required to come to the Head Centre for remedial teaching, and also to provide accommodation for female staff.

Construction work on this project commenced in July 1991, the contract price being \$295,000. The complex was officially opened by Mr Noel Gillard, Commissioner of Ambulance Services on 13 December 1991.

In 1985, the Committee commenced monitoring the workload of the Northern Beach areas of Townsville for a six-month period. The decision was made to secure a parcel of land as a site for a future ambulance station. Contact was made with the Department of Lands through the Mayor of Thuringowa, Mr Dan Gleeson, resulting in the present area being set aside as an Ambulance Reserve. In its preliminary budget for 1988/89, the Committee foreshadowed the provision in the 1990/91 budget for the construction of an Ambulance Station and residence.

Ministerial approval was granted in May 1991 and construction commenced.

The total cost of the project, including two vehicles and equipment was \$500,000. The Ambulance building, which cost \$381,000, was officially opened by the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Hon Terry Mackenroth on 6 November 1991.