

HISTORY OF THE Queensland Ambulance

Babinda

Q ATB services commenced in Babinda in January 1912 when the committee of the Cairns Centre decided to open an Honorary Centre in the town. Honorary Bearer F.H. Browning of Cairns was appointed Officer-in-Charge. Later in the year he was promoted to Deputy Superintendent of the Kidston Sub-Centre.

In order to keep pace with the progress of the Babinda District the Cairns Centre Committee decided in April 1914 to open a Sub-Centre in place of the Honorary Centre. The erection of the new sugar mill and the clearing of a large portion of sugar lands made the opening of a Sub-Centre an urgent necessity.

Sometime previously Mr J. Loth, an honorary member of the Cairns Centre, took up residence at Babinda and attended to a large number of accidents and transports. His services were placed at the disposal of the Brigade by the Manager of the Babinda Central Mill.

Dr A. Grakovich, a graduate from Warsaw University with the rank of Deputy Superintendent, was placed in charge of the Sub-Centre in October 1914.

Dr Grakovich resigned following his appointment in 1915 as Medical Officer at Mount Carbine and Mount Molloy and was replaced by Mr W.T. Johnston of the Cairns staff.

The residents of Babinda felt that it would be in the best interests of the Brigade if a Centre managed by a local Committee could be established. The first move in this direction was taken on 7 November 1915 at a public meeting convened by W.M.

Simmonds, Shire Councillor and President of the Farmers Association. There were about 50 prominent residents present, and among other business a Committee consisting of W.M. Simmonds, M. McMahon, H. Niven, S. McDonnell, L.O. Bailey, F. Gillman and S. Favell was formed to further the objectives of the meeting. The Committee was very energetic in the matter and its efforts were crowned with success on 17 October 1916 when Babinda Sub-Centre was established as a self-governing centre.

Deputy Superintendent W.T. Johnston, Officer-in-Charge of the Sub-Centre, was appointed to the positions of Superintendent and Secretary of the new Centre.

Members of the first Committee were R.G. Kerr (Chairperson), S. Favell (Honorary Treasurer), J. Beattie, N. Bromham, J. Emanuel, A.S. Howie and W.M. Simmonds.

On assuming office, the committee was faced with the urgent necessity of extending the Brigade's usefulness by arranging for a better transport system. Realising that the generous support accorded by



First female Honorary Officers (Appointed during World War II) Mrs E Whittchurch, Mrs E Horsfield

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the residents of the district warranted the very best service obtainable, the committee turned its attention to securing suitable motor transport adaptable to the mill tramlines. (The management of the sugar mill had kindly given permission to use the lines for ambulance purposes.)



Centre building 1942

The rail ambulance, the first of its kind made in Queensland was procured early in 1917 and was used on both the mill tramlines and Government railway lines. The first motor car used by the committee was a Ford that was purchased on 18 April 1920.

Early in 1915, application was made for a parcel of land to be set aside as a reserve for ambulance purposes. On the recommendation of the Director of Central Sugar Mills, the Treasurer of Queensland granted the Brigade an allotment in the town near the Babinda Mill site and the Railway Station. Tenders were called for the first section of the quarters (cost £155). The small house tent in the railway yard was then moved to the new site and used as a casualty room.

Quarters

Included in a report dated 21 August 1916 by Mr R.B. Barrett, the General Secretary, in commenting upon his visit of inspection of various Branch Centres was the following:

“In company with Superintendent Hogan of Cairns, a visit was made to Babinda on 3rd June 1916. Records of finances and work done continue to be kept in full detail, as last year, and are on a satisfactory basis. The year 1915 showed a phenomenal increase in the revenue and work done as compared with 1914.

In this connection, it is to be remembered that the Deputy Superintendent carried out this work under adverse conditions, the quarters consisting of a floored tent serving for casualty room, office and living apartment. A centrally situated reservation having been acquired under the Sugar Boards Act, the tent has now been shifted to the new site, walled up and used as a casualty room and office. Separate living quarters of galvanised iron adjacent thereto having been erected for the Deputy Superintendent and his family. Better accommodation will still be required, and this matter the Committee will no doubt take in hand in due course”.

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Brigade buildings destroyed during the disastrous 1918 cyclone were re-erected and additions were made in subsequent years.

In 1959 the Centre building was demolished and the present building (opened 3 January 1960) erected on the site at a cost of £12,800.

Staff

The first Superintendent, Bill Johnston, who had been in charge of the Babinda Centre for 30 years retired in April 1945. Army Warrant Officer George Inwood, on leave of absence as Superintendent of Clifton Centre, was appointed to fill the vacant position.



First Superintendent WT Johnston

Superintendent Inwood retired in 1968 and Superintendent Bert Toogood of Mount Garnet was appointed in his stead. Superintendent Toogood transferred to the Charters Towers Centre in 1975.

Superintendent R.E. Eagle of the Mount Garnet Centre was then appointed Superintendent at Babinda and served in that capacity until his appointment to the Tully Centre in 1985.

Following the transfer of Superintendent Eagle, Mr James Wright vacated the position of Senior Ambulance Officer at Babinda to take charge of the Centre. Superintendent Wright resigned in 1989 and was replaced by Superintendent Stephen Burns of the Wowan Centre.

Chairpersons

Since its establishment as a self-governing centre, the Babinda Centre has had six Committee Chairpersons:

1916 – 1918	R.G. Kerr
1918 – 1952	S.L. McDonnell
1952 – 1958	A. Campbell
1958 – 1961	F.J. Kruckow
1961 – 1980	K.L. Buttsworth
Present occupant	Chairperson Ray Battle