

HISTORY OF THE Queensland Ambulance

Mt Larcom

With the advent of the Main Northern Railway through Mount Larcom in 1904, the small settlement mushroomed, and within a few years had become a thriving township. In 1910 a number of small selections in the Hut Creek area were opened and 26 families took up land on these selections. Practically all the families were immigrants from Germany, and this particular area of the district is still known to the older residents as the 'German Settlement'. The abundance of such names as Henicke, Zeimer, Holzheimer, etc. bears testimony to this original settlement.

Still closer settlement came with the opening of the Bracewell and Machine Creek areas. No surveyors' pegs or marks of any kind were in evidence, so the selectors plotted their own boundary posts by map and compass readings. When surveys were finally completed, many years later, it was quite surprising to find just how accurate these early settlers had been in their own calculations.

Mr John Woodward was an early storekeeper of Mount Larcom, having a general store adjacent to the present Royal Hotel. Mr Woodward apparently had some medical knowledge from training gained in the Army Medical Corps and took it entirely upon himself to establish an ambulance service in the area. It must be remembered that at this time the nearest medical aid was situated in Gladstone or Rockhampton - in either case, one a good day's ride in the horse and buggy. He obtained a hand litter (believed to have been locally made to his specifications and still in the possession of the Ambulance Brigade). With a stout heart, and even stouter muscles, he went out to attend to the sick and injured of the district. It is common knowledge that Mr Woodward went out into the Bracewell area with the litter, pulled by horse and sulky owned by T.D. Ferguson and pushed the litter with patient aboard, back into the town. This was certainly no mean feat, when it is remembered that roads were practically non-existent and that the existing roads were mere bush tracks. The distance could be anything up to 22 miles for the return trip.

Once in town, the patient was transferred to a train to be ultimately delivered to medical aid either in Gladstone or Rockhampton - depending on whether the train was a north-bound or a south-bound one. On arrival in the large town, the patient was met by the Ambulance Service and transferred to hospital.

Gladstone Centre, which started as an Honorary Centre of the infant Rockhampton Centre became self-governing in 1917. Following the loss of the Gladstone Centre, Rockhampton quickly opened an Honorary Centre at Mount Larcom, under the supervision of Mr John Woodward who was still equipped with his trusty hand litter. The arrangements between Rockhampton and Mount Larcom appeared to be a very loose one, but nonetheless worked quite well with Rockhampton lending assistance and advice to Mount Larcom.

The Mount Larcom Honorary Brigade became affiliated with the State body through its association with Rockhampton Centre and Mount Larcom was considered quite well-off as far as equipment went. After all, Rockhampton in 1916 had only one motor ambulance, two sulkies, two horses and one hand litter complete with rubber tyres. Gladstone, in 1916, had only a rubber-tyred hand litter, so Mount Larcom had come among the elite of the Ambulance Service.

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In 1916 the Mount Larcom Benefit Committee donated £10,1s 10d to the funds of the Brigade. As well as Mount Larcom, the Rockhampton Centre had Honorary Centres at the railway workshops, Stanley Street Station, Blair Athol, Many Peaks, Broadmount, Port Alma, Iron Islands, Gladstone and Bouldercombe.

In 1919, the Gladstone Centre opened up an Honorary Centre at Ambrose. This area, situated six miles north of Mount Larcom on the railway line, was suddenly developing, and some 80 men were employed there in a sawmill and lime works, two industries with fairly high accident rates. Land was donated to the Brigade by Mr H. Ambrose and substantial premises were erected on the site. The Honorary Centre at Ambrose, under the control of Gladstone, continued to operate until 1923, when Rockhampton decided to establish a full-time Sub-Centre at Mount Larcom. Inevitably, boundary disputes broke out between Gladstone and Rockhampton regarding their respective sub-centres, and unofficial war was declared.

Gladstone maintained that Rockhampton had infiltrated its territory by the establishment of a sub-centre at Mount Larcom, six miles south of their sub-centre at Ambrose. Rockhampton replied that Gladstone had entered their territory by the establishment of Ambrose six miles north of their southern boundary of Mount Larcom. The arguments raged on, each side backed by local opinion and the newspapers. The position seemed irreconcilable. The Ambulance services in Mr Larcom and Ambrose suffered as a result of this bickering, until finally the State body of the Brigade had to step in to prevent the situation deteriorating further.

Captain E.R.B. Pike, General Secretary of the State Executive Committee, arrived in Gladstone in April 1923, in an attempt to sort out the warring factions. A temporary truce was called, and committee men from both Centres conferred in an on-the-spot conference. Captain Pike visited Mount Larcom and Ambrose, but little was achieved from the meeting. Captain Pike gave some indication of his frustration, however, when he quoted headlines in his report from the Gladstone papers as 'invasion by Rockhampton folk'.

Rockhampton went ahead with its plans to establish Mount Larcom Sub-Centre, despite the presence of a Sub-Centre in Ambrose, and Deputy Superintendent Villiers of Rockhampton was appointed acting Officer-in-Charge of Mount Larcom. A model T Ford from Rockhampton was placed at Mount Larcom, and rented premises were obtained as a temporary measure.

It was not long before Mount Larcom, being the larger town, absorbed Ambrose Sub-Centre, but it was not until 1926 that the Chairperson of the Mount Larcom Centre was able to report 'the controversy with the public of Ambrose has been amicably settled, and with the handing over of the Hall to the public, better support can be expected from that end of the district'.

Twelve months after its establishment in 1923, Mount Larcom Centre became a self-governing Centre and Mr Alfred Mearing from Mount Morgan was appointed the first Superintendent. The first Committee comprised C.J. Butcher (Chairperson), R.J. Weston, J. Croisica, P. Harvey, G. Laws, R. Holt, J. Glazebrook and J. Cavanagh.



First Superintendent A.C. Mearing

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The Committee and Superintendent set to with a will, and great hopes were held for the future of the service in Mount Larcom. The Committee began in debt straight away as the Model T from Rockhampton had to be paid for and permanent premises had to be erected.

In its second year of operation, the Committee erected a permanent Centre, moving out of the rented premises. The Centre was no more than a house, architecturally typical of the times, with car accommodation, casualty room and office situated beneath the residence. A loan of £1,000 was secured from the Commercial Banking Company of Sydney and this money was used to finance the building and to repay the outstanding debt on the vehicle. These two payments absorbed £952,8s 2d of the loan. After a year of very successful benefits in the form of a Queen Competition which raised the sum of £589,4s 4d, the Committee was able to report that after only two years of operation the Centre was well-established, with only £227,9s outstanding on the loan. However, it took yet another year of intensive fundraising on the part of the Superintendent and Committee to liquidate the loan.



First vehicle

In the third year of operations it is interesting to note that of the 6778 miles travelled in that year 950 miles were travelled by public conveyance. However, the report of 1927 highlighted a decrease in public support and a fall-off in Government subsidy. The Model T Ford which had served for over five years was showing signs of deterioration - 'in a deplorable condition' to use the Chairperson's words - and in 1928 another Queen competition was held. This competition raised £452,6s 2d. With these proceeds a new Dodge Ambulance Car was purchased and placed into service towards the end of 1928.

During the Depression years, Centres were forced to cope with lean finances and Mount Larcom was no exception. Government subsidy, which since the inception of the Brigade had been on a pound-for-pound basis, was reduced to five shillings in the pound, then dropped altogether, and finally reintroduced at five shillings in the pound, in 1934. A number of Centres were forced to close or to curtail service, but Mount Larcom managed to survive.

In spite of the monetary restrictions, the number of cases treated was steadily growing and this in itself proved a drain on Centre resources. The Mount Larcom committee was in a quandary, caught between increasing costs and decreasing funds, a vehicle that was in a poor condition and no money for its replacement. The Committee moved a motion in 1936 instructing the Superintendent to convey patients only as far as the railway station, except in extreme emergencies. This drastic measure was intended to curtail expenses but it appears that the move did not prove popular with the public and subsequently tended to reduce support and reduce finances.

Mr John Woodward, storekeeper and Honorary Bearer for so many years died on 7 May 1935, and is buried in the Mount Larcom Cemetery. It may be truly said that Mr Woodward pioneered the service in Mount Larcom.

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Mr Alfred Mearing resigned in October 1936, after 13 years of faithful service, and Mr W.H. Miller from the Bundaberg Centre was appointed to fill the position of Superintendent/Secretary, and commenced duty on 1 December 1936.

An Honorary Centre was established at Raglan in 1940 under the care of Honorary Bearers H.C. Burrows and C.H. Hall. In 1943, with these two gentlemen away at the war, the Honorary Centre was placed under the care of Miss I.J. Houston and Mrs E.M. Ferris. In 1945 Honorary Bearer R.C. Barram was appointed a Bearer on the permanent staff, relieving some of the heavy burden placed on the Superintendent.



First Centre building

It was also in 1945 that the Committee took positive steps to carry out building additions. A firm of architects was engaged and tenders for the work were called in 1946. Due to the high cost of building materials occasioned by wartime shortages, the Committee was forced to defer the proposal. Tenders were called again in 1947, and the tender of Mr E.L. Murphy was accepted for £1,916,15s. Work commenced on 10 June 1947.

The renovated and extended building was officially opened on 26 November 1947 by C.H. Buss. Total cost of the building, including architect's fees, supervision fees, contract price and contingencies amounted to £2,219,8s 8d. In 1949 Superintendent Miller was appointed to the Nambour Centre and Mr H.J. Trenaman from Gordonvale was appointed and took up duties in November of that year. Mr A.E. Nielsen, who had been Chairperson of the Committee since 1938, retired to Brisbane and resigned from the Committee. Mr Nielsen was appointed as the Centre's representative on the Queensland Executive Committee in Brisbane and held that position until 1966 when he passed away. Mr Nielsen served the Mount Larcom Centre for a total of 30 years. On the retirement of Mr Nielsen the position of Chairperson of the Committee was taken over by Mr Thomas Capstick.

In 1960, after ten years as Superintendent, Mr Trenaman was appointed to Goondiwindi and Mr Keith Howarth of Cairns took up the appointment of Superintendent in May of that year. On 16 January 1964, Mr Thomas Capstick passed away after 25 years of Committee service, 14 years of which he had served as Chairperson.

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Mr W.J.S. Rideout was elected Chairperson, having served on the Committee since April 1945. After serving for 21 years as Chairperson Mr Rideout resigned from the position and was succeeded by Mr R.G. Streeter, the present Chairperson.

In May of 1967, Superintendent Howarth was appointed to the Gordonvale Centre, and the vacancy created at Mt. Larcom was filled by Mr Bob Tuttle. Mr Tuttle was appointed to Clermont Centre in January 1974 and was succeeded by Deputy Superintendent T.R. Boyd of Southport. Since the appointment of Superintendent Boyd to the Gordonvale Centre in 1975 other officers who have filled the positions of Superintendent and Secretary at Mount Larcom are:

1975 – 1980	R.K. Trenaman (son of Superintendent H.J. Trenaman)
1980 – 1984	G.E. Schmierer
1984 – 1985	R.K. Dawe
1985 – 1986	P.W. Fox
1986 – 1988	G.G. Sealey
1988 – 1990	G. Hardy
Present occupant Superintendent	David Black