

HISTORY OF THE Queensland Ambulance

Charleville

Compiled with the assistance of Ambulance Officer Toby Brown.

Early in 1919 a public meeting was convened for the purpose of establishing a QATB service in Charleville. The well-attended meeting was held in the Murweh Shire Council Chambers with Mr W.C. Wilson, General Secretary of the QATB State Executive Committee present. The meeting was presided over by the local solicitor Mr J.F. Lockett. Others present were Doctors H.C. Shaw and A.W. Fox, H.J. Carter, A.E. Blunt, E.G. Marryatt, R. Thomas, C.E. Search, R.S. Lord, W.T. Hughes, C. Courtney and T.C. Stanley.

On 7 May 1919, the first meeting of the Provisional Committee was held with the following members present: Mr J.F. Lockett (Chairperson), Dr H.C. Shaw, Rev S. Davis, W. Bryant, J.H. McLean and H. Corones. Mr W.C. Wilson, General Secretary, was again present.

Applications were called for the position of Superintendent for the new Branch Centre and Superintendent A.W. Thygesen of the Stanthorpe Centre was appointed. He commenced duty in July 1919 in temporary premises at the Salvation Army Hall in Galatea Street near where the fire station now stands.

At its first meeting the Provisional Committee decided to purchase a fully equipped T Model Ford ambulance vehicle.

Disaster struck the service within a few weeks of its inception when Superintendent Thygesen passed away. He was succeeded by Ambulance Officer C.G. Kempster of the Brisbane Centre who was appointed on 7 August 1919. For reasons unknown Superintendent Kempster resigned in March 1920. Once again applications were called for the position of Superintendent and Deputy Superintendent John Grimstead of the Yarraman Sub-Centre of the Ipswich Centre was appointed. Superintendent Grimstead (known to his peers as 'Gentleman John') served in the position with great distinction for 26 years.



Centre building 1921

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In July 1920 a parcel of land at 75 Galatea Street was purchased from Mrs Dunn. Plans and specifications were prepared and tenders invited for the construction of a two-storey timber building. At its November meeting the Committee accepted the tender of P. & A. Barber at a price of £1,100. This building was completed in May 1921 and officially opened by the Honorable J. Harry Coyne, State Member for Warrego, assisted by the General Secretary Captain E.R.B. Pike on 26 June.

Due to the state of roads and the river system in south-west Queensland, and with the railway lines extending to Quilpie, Cunnamulla and Morven, the Committee decided in 1922 to purchase a rail motor ambulance. This rail unit was delivered in December 1922 and its approximate cost was £395. It proved to be very successful and remained in service until the late 1950s. It is presently housed at the Charleville Historical House and is being fully restored.



Rail ambulance car

The QATB service at Charleville was so well-respected far and wide that subsequently Brigades were established at Blackall and Cunnamulla in 1923. The service at Cunnamulla was absorbed by the Cunnamulla Hospital Board during the 1937-1938 financial year.

Old news items and discussions with pioneers of south-west Queensland reveal that in the early days the ambulance would respond to calls to attend to patients in the Channel country and officers would be away from the Centre for periods of up to four days. Today the Charleville-based Flying Doctor does the round trip in four hours.

Superintendent Grimstead, together with Mr J.F. Lockett as Chairperson, guided the service through to 1940. In 1940, Mr Lockett passed away after serving the Committee as its Chairperson for 21 years. During this period there was a lot of progress. The permanent staff had been increased by two, and a varied array of vehicles had been purchased such as Napiers, Fiats, Austins, Model A Fords, Buicks, Ford V 8s and Chevrolets.

Superintendent Grimstead organised fundraising schemes such as shearing shed lists, annual sports days, rodeos, horse sports, race meetings and many others too numerous to mention.

During 1945 ambulance stretchers and first aid kits were kept at Morven, Cheepie and Wyandra. Kits were supplied to District Representative F.O. Elliot at Boatman, and Mr Power of Bogarella and also

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placed at Babbiloorra and at the Main Roads Department depot and Sewerage Works. First aid material was on the spot and in use pending the arrival of an ambulance.

In 1946 Mr R. O'Neill who had replaced Mr Lockett in 1940 left about the same time as Superintendent Grimstead who had transferred to the Nambour Centre.

Mr E.J. Abbot became Chairperson and Superintendent E.P. Eggleton of Dayboro Centre replaced Superintendent Grimstead.

Superintendent Eric Eggleton was also a progressive person. His first project was to replace all the pre-war vehicles. Looking to the future he convinced the Committee that it should acquire land as a site for a Centre building which would take it into the twenty-first century. Land at 55 Edward Street was eventually purchased from Mrs E. Coorey.



Superintendent J. Grimstead

Over a number of years finance was raised for the new building. In 1955 tenders were invited for the construction of a two-storey brick building. The successful tenderer was Mr W.T. Unsworth, a local builder whose tender price was £29,500. The foundation stone was laid on 7 July 1955 by Mr J.A. Turner MLA who was at that time Deputy President of the QATB State Executive Committee. The building was officially opened and occupied in 1956. Special guest at the opening was Superintendent Grimstead of Nambour.

In 1950 Mr A.J. Commens replaced Mr Abbot as Chairperson. Mr Commens left Charleville on transfer in 1954 and Mr H. Corones was appointed in his stead. Mr Harry Corones was one of the members of the original Committee and ultimately served for 37 years. In 1957 Mr I.E. Watson took the Chair.

After a very successful stay in Charleville Superintendent Eggleton transferred to the Stanthorpe Centre in January 1959. Mr Watson also transferred and in 1958 his position as Chairperson was taken by Mr O.S. Keefer.

In 1957 the residents of Morven felt the need for an ambulance vehicle to be stationed in the town and set about raising funds for that purpose. Land was acquired and a 1942 Chevrolet stationed there. This Chevrolet vehicle was replaced with a 1951 model and later, after a huge fundraising effort, a new 1976 HR Holden was purchased. The Holden was replaced with a 1980 Ford Falcon.

It is interesting to note that in 1917 the Brisbane Centre had established an Honorary QATB Centre in Morven under the control of Mr A. McComb, a local School teacher. At that time the Morven Honorary Centre was the most western QATB facility in the southern division of the State.

With the departure of Superintendent Eggleton in 1959, Superintendent Jack Beckman from St George was appointed in his stead. Quite a large debt had been incurred in building the new Centre. However, this did not deter Superintendent Beckman who set about raising funds to liquidate the building loan. After a long illness, Jack Beckman passed away in 1973 and Station Officer R.J. Pratt of Rockhampton was appointed to the position of Superintendent at Charleville. Bob Pratt had a short stay and did not

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have the chance to make many changes before he left in 1974 to take up his appointment as Superintendent of the Redlands Centre.

As the roads improved and more traffic passed through Augathella, the Committee felt that a vehicle should be stationed there. Both the Morven and Augathella vehicles are operated from the local Hospital and driven by Honorary Drivers appointed by the Charleville Committee.

1974 saw the arrival of Superintendent R. Hay from the Mitchell Centre. Ron Hay was Superintendent of Charleville Centre until 1980. During this period Mr Keefer was replaced as Chairperson in 1976 by Mr B. Schulz and in 1978 Mr G.V. Bently was appointed to the Chair.

In 1976 the Committee received a bequest from the estate of the late J.F. Lockett (the first Chairperson). The sum derived from this bequest with the addition of Government endowment enabled the Committee to purchase a new Ford F100 Lifeguard Ambulance vehicle.

Following the transfer of Superintendent Hay to the Rosewood Centre in 1980 Superintendent Noel Pegg of the Blackall Centre was appointed to the vacant position at Charleville. Noel Pegg served as Superintendent until his appointment to the Boonah Centre in 1986.

During this period the Committee purchased the Codan two-way radio base station and mobile equipment for each vehicle. This purchase was prompted after a serious gliding accident at Wallah when one of the local doctors (Dr D. Herbert) was seriously injured, and the ambulance vehicle became bogged and assistance could not be called. Upon her recovery, Dr Herbert set about assisting in arranging donations for the purchase of radio equipment. Sufficient funds were raised with the added assistance of the QCWA, and Lions, Apex and Rotary Clubs. Superintendent Pegg is owed much credit for the installation of radio equipment and the new look squareline ambulance.

In 1984 Mr R.A. Leeds took over the Chair from Mr G.V. Bentley. After the transfer of Superintendent Pegg in 1986, Officer-in-Charge Geoff Johnstone of the Calliope Sub-Centre took up the position of Superintendent. It would be fair to say that he should be credited with the upgrading of the Centre building as far as the interiors are concerned. He must also be credited with the landscaping of the grounds and surrounds. He was skilled in public relations and well-respected by the community. In July 1989 Geoff Johnstone left Charleville to take up his appointment as Superintendent at Yeppoon.

Superintendent I.J. Halliwell of Inglewood was appointed to the Charleville Centre in August 1989. It is of interest that some officers who commenced their careers with the Charleville Centre and subsequently became Superintendents are Tom Butler (Miriam Vale and Gladstone), Frank Gurney (Dayboro and Stanthorpe), and Jack Ronan (Oakey). Mr Cliff Coddington, the first Supervisor of the QATB Training School, and Mr Joe Pyke, the Queensland Ambulance Service's Coordinator of Public Education in First Aid, both commenced their ambulance careers as Honorary Bearers at the Charleville Centre. There has been quite a large turnover of staff due mainly to the long distances to be travelled and to the hot and dry climate. However, those conditions have not deterred those seeking a challenge. Some officers have been known to remain with the service in Charleville for many years. Officer Toby Brown joined the honorary staff in 1952 and commenced service as a permanent officer in 1978. He retired in 1990.