

HISTORY OF THE Queensland Ambulance

Proserpine

In the latter part of 1911 a group of interested citizens invited Superintendent W.H. Morse of the Mackay Centre to a meeting in Proserpine to discuss the establishment of an Ambulance facility in the town with the result that it was decided to establish an Honorary Centre.

The encouragement given was sufficient to warrant a litter, collapsible stretcher and all necessary material being ordered. Honorary Bearer J. Stoneham, assisted by Honorary Bearer J. Dempsey, was placed in charge of the new Honorary Centre.

During the first six months of operation the calls totalled 152 and the distance travelled was 227 miles. The receipts totalled £36,12s 8d and the expenditure £44,4s 6d.

The Honorary Centre was closed by the Mackay Committee in 1913 due mainly to its distance from Mackay and the inconvenience of administering a service so far away.

In later years Mr Tom Treacy who was a mill worker sensed the need for some means of first aid and transport. He had been a stretcher bearer during the 1914-18 war. Records show that he had, at the mill, an Ashford litter on wheels which, on more than on occasion, assisted greatly and, with the expert attention of Tom, gave relief to those in need.

Probably the first move for the re-opening of the Honorary Centre was made by Mr W. Worthington who had been a member of the St John Ambulance Brigade in England. At this stage, another staunch supporter came into the picture in the person of Mr Chas Ayton. It would appear that after discussion by those interested a public meeting was called to discuss the possibility of forming a centre in Proserpine. The meeting was held on 19 March 1925 in the Tivoli Theatre. About 30 people were present and Mr Worthington took the chair and explained the reason for the meeting. Also present were Mr F. Bourne (Chairperson), Mr F. Culverhouse (Superintendent) and Ambulance Officer D.L.S. Williams of the Mackay Centre.

It was decided that a provisional committee should be appointed in an endeavour to establish an Honorary Centre which resulted as follows: Chairperson W. Worthington, Treasurer V. Sterry, Secretary B. Burtler, and C. Perry, R. Morrison, O.H. Gray, H. Mills, J.M. Harkness, W. Johnson, A. Nicholson, J. Stoneham, G. Bell, K. Dobbins, C. Boxall, F. Swinger, W. Watts, Roy Ruge, W. Rasmussen and C. Ayton as committee members.

The first public announcement of the Honorary Centre brought forth a bombardment of protests. Opinion was very divided and the benefits of an Ambulance Service were not generally appreciated. The Committee struggled for finance as many residents thought that an ambulance would be detrimental to the Hospital.

The Honorary Centre was established on 3 April 1925, and the officer in charge was Honorary Bearer T. Treacy. Collecting funds commenced and Mr B. Burtler gave valuable assistance. His task was not an envious one as he received many rebuffs as the result of the opposition to the establishment of an ambulance service. However, by the end of May, 98 residents had subscribed.

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Mr Chas Ayton replaced Mr Worthington as Committee Chairperson. The Committee was divided on the matter of whether to continue the service as an Honorary Centre or to establish a Sub-Centre with a permanent officer. The latter idea prevailed with the result that at the request of the State Executive Committee and to comply with the wishes of the Proserpine Committee, the Mackay Committee sanctioned the opening of a Sub-Centre with Senior Bearer D.L.S. Williams in charge.

The local Committee had been very active and sufficient funds had been collected to erect the first ambulance building in the town. Due to the generosity of the sugar mill management, the building was placed on a portion of the mill grounds and consisted of a plant room, casualty room and office. The building was erected by Mr J.P. Muller at a cost of £253 7s 4d.

In June 1926, the first ambulance car arrived. It was an Overland Six and the cost was £381. The Sub-Centre was opened that month.

Senior Bearer Williams resigned his position as Officer-in-Charge in September 1926, and in deference to Proserpine Sub-Committee's wishes the Mackay Committee appointed Senior Bearer J.C. Culverhouse to the vacant position. On 30 October 1927, Senior Bearer Culverhouse died while on duty. His loss was mourned by the whole district.

Bearer E.R.J. MacCarthy of Mackay acted in the position Officer-in-Charge until the appointment of Senior Bearer Bob Bartlett on 21 November 1927.

When the Sub-Centre was established it was understood that it would only remain as such, until sufficient funds enabled it to be self-governing. The local Committee at this stage was of opinion that it would be advisable to remain attached to the Mackay Centre until a more suitable building was erected. A new building was erected and was opened on 30 November 1930. The total cost, excluding the land, was £1306,10s.



Centre building opening 1930

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On 1 July 1933, Proserpine was gazetted as a self-governing Centre and Officer-in-Charge R. Bartlett was appointed as the first Superintendent.

The first Committee of the newly gazetted Centre consisted of Rev J. Kernke (Chairperson), Mr H.T. MacCartney (Deputy Chairperson), Mr E.S. Briggs (Hon Treasurer), W. Borsereni, R.J. Hinschen, W. Leeson and E.D. Wilson.

Bob Bartlett resigned in 1942 to take up the position of Superintendent at Charters Towers.

The successful applicant for the vacant position was Superintendent T. Leach. Tom Leach was the Acting Superintendent of the Ravenshoe Centre following his resignation from the Mackay staff. Superintendent Leach retired from the service in 1953. However, for a few years later he assisted some of the country centres by relieving the Superintendents for holiday periods.



First Superintendent R.F. Bartlett

Since its erection several alterations and additions have been made to the Ambulance building situated in Chapman Street.

The need for a sub-Centre or station in the Airlie Beach-Cannonvale area was discussed in 1969 as a large number of patients were treated and/or transported as the area grew. There was a shortage of doctors in the area at the time and a considerable number of patients were being brought in from the Whitsunday Islands.

Preliminary groundwork for the establishment of a Sub-Centre commenced late in 1977 following a meeting between the Proserpine Committee and representatives of the Lions Club of Whitsunday. The Lions Club commenced raising funds in 1978 and in August 1979 the Proserpine Committee decided to proceed with sketch plans for a Sub-Centre building and residence.

In April 1980, a temporary Sub-Centre was opened at Cannonvale and Ambulance Officer John Lahney was appointed Officer-in-Charge.

Following the preparation of plans and specifications and the calling of tenders new premises were erected at a tender price of \$132,341.

The new Sub-Centre was officially opened on 31 July 1982, by Mr J.S. Stodart KStJ, President of the QATB State Council.

Following the retirement of Superintendent Leach, the following officers have filled the positions of Superintendent and Secretary:

1953-68	F.C. Culverhouse
1968-78	W.J.A. Lamberton
1978-87	J. Klohs
Present occupant Superintendent	P. Denham since 1987.

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Since 1933, the following people have filled the position of Chairperson of the Committee:

1933 – 1935	Rev. T. Kernke
1935 – 1944	E.S. Briggs
1944 – 1950	W.B. Caswell
1950 – 1960	E.D. Wilson
1960 – 1970	A.E. Stevenson
1970 – 1986	J. Jemmett
Present occupant Chairperson	R. Jackson

When the State Council of the QATB was established under the Ambulance Services Act 1967, Mr A.E. (Bert) Stevenson was elected to that body by members of Committees in the Mackay Zone. After serving his first term, Bert Stevenson retired from the State Council and in 1970 was replaced by Mr John Jemmett who represented the Mackay Zone on the Council until 1986 when the Queensland Ambulance Services Board was constituted.